

THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CEREMONY OF SACRIFICE (Concluded)

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IV. HOW THE SCHEME VARIES ACCORDING TO THE SPECIAL FUNCTIONS OF SACRIFICE

Sacrifice cannot be the same when it is made for the special benefit of the sacrificer or some object in which he is interested. The functions which it fills must then be specialized.

We have designated as personal sacrifices those which concern directly the person of the sacrificer. In these sacrifices the sacrificer is the origin and end of the rite, the act beginning and ending with him. The act, accomplished, profits him directly.

In the second place, in all these types of personal sacrifices, the sacrificer at the conclusion of the ceremony has bettered his condition, through the suppression of some sickness or other means, or through the acquisition of grace. There were a great number of rituals where a special formula is recited expressing this change either at the conclusion of the ceremony or during the solemn moments of the killing. In either type of sacrifice the sacrificer was supposed to be regenerated. This regeneration by personal sacrifice has given birth to certain religious beliefs. The first one was that of rebirth through the medium of sacrifice—witness the Hindu *diksita* where the sacrificer made himself into an embryo, then a god. The doctrines of rebirth were very important in Greek mysteries, Scandinavian and Celtic mythologies, cults of Osiris, Hindu and Persian theology, even in Christian dogma.

Often a change in name marks this recreation of the individual. We know that in religious beliefs the name is intimately connected with the personality of the owner. It contains part of his spirit. A change of name often accompanies the sacrifice. In certain cases

this change is reduced to the addition of an epithet, like *diksita* in India. But sometimes the name is completely changed. In the ancient Church, neophytes were baptised on the day of Easter; after baptism, they put them through communion and gave them their new names. In the Jewish practises even to this day the same rite is used when life is in danger. In the latter case, perhaps an expiatory sacrifice used to accompany the rite, so that the change of name and the expiatory sacrifice were part of the same ritual, expressing the profound change which was produced in the person of the sacrificer. The reviving power of sacrifice extended to future life. In the course of religious evolution the notion of sacrifice was linked with the notions concerning the immortality of the soul. The sacrifice assured the deathlessness of the spirit. But the notion of personal immortality was evolved only after a philosophical elaboration and moreover the notion of another life did not originate in the institution of sacrifice.

The number, variety and complexity of objective sacrifices are such that they can be treated only in a summary fashion.

The characteristic trait of objective sacrifice is that the principal effect of the rite (as we have already defined) is directed toward an object other than the sacrificer. The latter is secondary and hence all the preliminaries and final rites are simple, the death of the victim being the vital part of the ceremony. The principal thing is to create a spirit. In building something, for instance, the idea is to create spirit which will act as a guardian of the house, or altar, or the town that is being built, and so the skull of the human victim or some part of some other victim, was immured.

In sacrifices of request, if the sacrifice is the accomplishment of a promise already made, if it is performed to wipe out any moral and religious obligation, the victim in some degree has an expiatory character. If on the contrary a contract is desired with the divinity, the sacrifice takes the form of an attribution. Again, the importance of the victim is in direct relation to the seriousness of the vow. Also, special features of the victim depend on the nature of the thing desired: if rain is wanted, they sacrifice black cows or black horses.

Agrarian sacrifices serve as excellent examples of where all the elements of different sacrifices come together in a kind of unified whole, for, essentially objective, they also have their influence for the sacrificer. They have two ends in view: first, to break the laws which protect the fields from cultivation; secondly, to fertilize the

fields before cultivation and to preserve their life after the harvest when they seem dead. The fields and their products are looked upon as living. In them there is a religious power which sleeps during the winter and reappears in the spring. Sometimes the power is conceived of as watching over the fields and products and must be eliminated by the process of desacralization. However, this power must be recreated and fixed in the earth again to give it fertility, by a process of sacralization.

The Athenian Bouphonia was a celebrated festival sacrifice to Zeus. Mommsen thinks it is a feast of threshing. Three elements of sacrifice stand out prominently in the ceremony: the death of the victim; communion; resurrection of the victim. Cakes and grain are put on the altar, perhaps the first fruits of the fields. All the sanctity of the wheat is lodged in the cakes. Then a cow is led to the altar to eat the cakes. Just as she touches them, she is struck with the axe. The suddenness of the blow means that the sanctity has passed from the cakes to the animal. The latter herself is now the spirit of the fields and products. In some agrarian sacrifices in Greece, the sacrificers would engage in fistie combat, the blows tending to sanctify them, purify them and redeem them.

In the Bouphonia, the next step was the eating of the flesh of the victim. This gave each participant the sanctity necessary to work in the fields. Similar agrarian rites obtained among the Kaffirs of Natal and Zululand—they would cook the meat with various fruits, grains and vegetables; then the chief passed around and put a piece in the mouth of each man, thus sanctifying him for the rest of the year. In sacrifices tending to fertilize the soil, we have again an example of sacralization. Some primitive people, like the Khonds, sacrificed human beings, the flesh of whom were buried in the soil. Elsewhere only the blood was sprinkled over the earth. In the Bouphonia, we have these two procedures: sacralization, or the elimination of sanctity from the first fruits, fused into one.

To continue with the third phase of the Bouphonia: After communion, the skin of the cow is stuffed with straw, signifying that it is now revived or resurrected. Then it is fastened to a cart and drawn through the fields, its effect being the same as that of the human flesh which was distributed by the Khonds over the fields, and infused its sanctity into the fields. The field spirit, in other words, was now returning to its natural abode. In ancient Mexico, we find a rite similar to this. To represent the rebirth of the agrarian spirit the skin of the victim was peeled off and put over the next

year's victim. To summarize this part of the treatment, we now see that just as personal sacrifice assured the life of the person, so did the object of the sacrifice in general and the agrarian sacrifice in particular assure the real and healthy life of things.

The Sacrifice of the God.

The singular value of the victim appears clearly in one of the most finished forms of the historical evolution of the sacrificial system: that is, the sacrifice of the god. It is indeed in the sacrifice of a divine person that the notion of sacrifice reaches its highest expression. In this form it has penetrated into the greatest religions and given birth to beliefs and practices which still live.

For a god to play the role of victim there must be some affinity between his nature and that of the victim. However, we must not confuse the divine victim with a god victim, the sacred character with the definite personalities which are the objects of myths and rites and which are called gods. These mythical gods had definite form in the agrarian sacrifices. We have seen how the cow, for instance, was apotheosized before and after the communal meal.

But in order that the sacrifice of the god become a reality, it was not sufficient that he leave the victim only; he had to possess his divine nature at the moment when he entered the sacrifice to become the victim itself. That is to say, the personification which resulted must become lasting and necessary. This indissoluble association between beings or a species of beings and a supernatural virtue is the fruit of the periodical occurrences of the agrarian sacrifices. The repetition of these ceremonies in which, by virtue of custom or other reasons, the same victim appeared at the regular intervals created a kind of continuous personality. The sacrifice conserving its secondary effects, the creation of the divinity is the work of anterior sacrifices. But this is not an accidental fact, since in a religion as metaphysical as Christianity, the figure of the lamb, habitual victim of an agrarian or pastoral sacrifice, has persisted and serves even today to designate Christ, that is to say, God. The sacrifice has furnished the elements of a divine symbol.

It is the imagination of the myth-creator which put the finishing touches to the elaboration of the sacrifice of the god. One can follow in the myth the different phases of this progressive divinisation. For instance, the great Dorian feast celebrated in honor of Apollo of Karnos had been instituted, we are told, to expiate the murder of

the divine Karnos by the Heraclidean, Hippotates. Now Apollo of Karnos is none other than the divine Karnos whose sacrifice is accomplished and expiated like the one in the Bouphonia of Athens.

The history of the agrarian gods is based on a foundation of agrarian rites. To illustrate, we shall group together some types of Greek and Semitic legends. Some are myths which explain the institution of certain ceremonies, others are tales generally growing out of myths similar to the first. Often the commemorative rites which correspond to these legends (sacred dramas, processions, etc.) have no features of the sacrifice. But the theme of the sacrifice of the god is a motif which the myth-creating imagination liberally used.

On an Assyrian tablet there is an inscription which reads: "From the earth two gods disappeared: that is why I am in mourning. Who are these two gods? They are Du-mu-zu and Gish-zi-da." The death of Du-mu-zu is a mythical sacrifice. The proof of this is offered by the fact that Ishtar, his mother and wife wish to resuscitate him by throwing on his corpse some water from the stream of life, imitating by that the rites of certain agrarian festivals. When the spirit of the field is dead its body is thrown into the water or is sprinkled with water. It is the water thrown on the corpse and the resurrection which leads us to say that the dead god has been assimilated in the victim.

The death of the god is often suicidal. Hercules, Melkarth in Tyre, Dido in Carthage, burned themselves. The death of the Phœnician god, Melkarth, was celebrated by a festival each summer, the festival of the harvest. In many other legends built around agrarian festivals, the gods or goddesses concerned were said to have inflicted self injuries from which they sometimes died.

Often it was the founder of a cult or the first priest of the god whose death was narrated in the myth. In this case, the priest and the god are the one and the same being. We know, in fact, that the priest as well as the victim may be an incarnation of the god, often disguised in his image.

Combats between a god and a monster, or between two gods, is one of the mythological forms of the sacrifice of the god. Such, for instance, is the fight between Marduk and Chaos in Babylonian mythology; Perseus and the Gorgon; Bellerophon and the Chimera; Saint George and the dragon. Included with these are the labors of Hercules. In these combats the vanquished is just as divine as the conqueror. The combats are equivalent to the death of a single

god. They alternate in the same festivals. The Isthmian games, celebrated in spring, commemorate the death of Melicarte or the victory of Theseus. The Nemean games celebrate the victory of Hercules over the Nemean lion, or the death of Archemoros. They are sometimes accompanied by the same incidents. The defeat of the monster is followed by the marriage of the god; of Perseus with Andromeda; Hercules with Hesione. The *fiancée* exposed to the monster and delivered by the hero, is none other than the May bride of the German legends pursued by the spirits of the savage chase. In the cult of Attis the sacred marriage follows the death and resurrection of the god. The victory of a young god against an old monster is a rite of spring. The feast of Marduk came in the spring; the feast of St. George, celebrating the victory over the dragon, took place on April 23rd.

Sometimes it happens that the god dies after his victory. In one of Grimm's fairy tales the hero, having fallen asleep after his struggle with the dragon, is murdered; the animals that accompany him recall him to life. The legend of Hercules presents the same adventure: after killing the Typhon and being asphyxiated by the breath of the monster, he lies down lifeless. He is brought back to life by Iolus with the help of a quail.

These combatants are duplicates of the same spirit. The origin of the myths of this form are generally forgotten: they are presented as meteorological conflicts between the gods of light and those of darkness: the gods of heaven and of hell. The combatants are beings of the same nature whose differentiation, accidental and unstable, belongs to the religious imagination. In Assyrian, Persian, Greek and Roman mythology these great conflicts are between related beings: fathers and sons—story of Titans—between brothers, or uncles and nephews, etc. There is another illustration of the fundamental identity between participants: the crab and the scorpion are sometimes the allies, sometimes the enemy, of the sun god; in short, they are forms of the same god. Again, Perseus after slaying the gorgon, mounts the horse Pegasus, born from the blood of the gorgon, and rides away.

Thus the sacrifice had produced in mythology a multitude of offshoots. It had become one of the fundamental themes of the divine legends. But it is precisely the introduction of this event in the legend of a god which has determined the ritual formation of the sacrifice of the god. Priest or victim, priest and victim, both are a god already formed who acts and suffers at one and the same time

in the sacrifice. Now the divinity of the victim is not limited to the mythological sacrifice, but it belongs equally to the real sacrifice which corresponds to it. The myth, once formed, reacts upon the rite whence it has come. So the sacrifice of the god is not simply the subject of a beautiful myth. Whatever may have become of the personality of the god in the syncretism of the pagan myths, it is always the god who submits to the sacrifice. He is not merely a symbol. There is, at least in the beginning, a real presence of the god, as in the Catholic mass. As we have noted, in all sacrifices the victim possesses some degree of divinity, but in the sacrifice of the god, the victim most often given the name of the god, is the god himself.

We know that the sacrifice is repeated periodically because the rhythm of nature requires this periodicity. The god comes and goes, comes and goes, a continuous personality, existing by himself and possessed of multiple qualities and powers. It follows that the sacrifice appears as a repetition and a commemoration of the original sacrifice of the god. To the legend which accompanies it, is generally added some circumstance which assures its perpetuity. So, for instance, when a god dies, an oracle prescribes an expiatory sacrifice which reproduces the death of this god. When one god vanquishes another, he perpetuates the memory of his victory through the institution of a cult.

The types of sacrifice of the god which have just been reviewed are realized concretely and unifiedly in one Hindu rite: the sacrifice of the soma. This was a real sacrifice of the god. The plant, called soma, was placed on an altar, worshipped, crushed and then killed. From the crushed branches the god, reborn, disengages himself and expands over the earth to the various domains of nature. He is now soma the god, not soma the plant. He is the sun and moon, clouds, lightning, rain, king of plants, all centered in the plant before its killing. The latter is the depositary of all the nutritive and fecundating properties of nature. It is simultaneously the food of the gods and the intoxicating drink of men, creator of the immortality of the former and the transient life of the others. All these forces are concentrated, created, and distributed again by the sacrifice.

Theology borrowed its notions of the structure of the universe from the sacrificial myths. It explained creation, as the popular imagination explained the annual life of nature, as brought about

by sacrifice. The origin of the world it ascribed to the sacrifice of the god.

In Assyrian cosmogony, the blood of the vanquished Tiamat gave birth to human beings. The separation of other elements from chaos was conceived as the sacrifice or the suicide of the demi-urge. We believe that the same conception was existent in the popular Hebrew beliefs. It appears in the Norse mythology. It is also at the base of the Mithraic cult. It was in the Hindu legend of creation. The offensive reversions of chaos and evil require ceaselessly new sacrifices, creators and redeemers. Thus transformed, and to say sublimated, the sacrifice has been preserved by Christian theology. Its efficacy has been transported from the physical world to the moral world. The redemptive sacrifice of the god is perpetuated in the daily mass. We shall not attempt to seek out how the Christian ritual of the sacrifice was formed, nor how it is attached to anterior rites. Let it suffice to recall simply the astonishing similarity between the sacrificial rites just examined and the Christian sacrifice and to indicate how the development of the rites, so similar to those of the agrarian sacrifice, could give birth to the conception of sacrifice, redemptive and communal, of the unique and transcendental god. The Christian sacrifice in this respect is one of the most instructive that we encounter in history. Our priests seek by the same ritualistic procedure almost the same effects as did our distant ancestors. The mechanism of consecration in the catholic mass is, along general lines, the same as that of the Hindu sacrifices. It presents us with a clearness that leaves nothing to be desired, the alternative rhythm of expiation and communion. The Christian imagination has built on the plans of the ancients.

Conclusion.

It can now be seen of what in our opinion the unity of the sacrificial system consists. It does not come from all possible sorts of sacrifices springing from a primitive and simple form, as Robertson Smith held. Such a sacrifice does not exist. Of all sacrificial procedures, the most general, the least rich in elements, are those of sacralization and desacralization. Now, in reality, in every sacrifice of desacralization, however pure it may be, we always find a sacralization of the victim. Conversely, in every sacrifice of sacralization a desacralization is necessarily implied; for otherwise the remains of the victim could never be utilized. These two elements are so interdependent that one can not exist without the other.

But, furthermore, these two sorts of sacrifices are yet only abstract types. Every sacrifice takes place under certain circumstances and with determined ends in view; from the diversity of these ends are born the diverse forms which have been described. Now, on the one hand, there is no religion where these forms do not exist in great numbers more or less; all the sacrificial rituals that we know are very complex. On the other hand, there is no particular rite which is not complex in itself; for it either seeks several ends at once, or else to attain one end, it sets in motion several forces.

In the Hindu animal sacrifice, this complexity is very potent. We saw how expiatory parts were offered up to bad spirits, divine parts were reserved, parts were set aside for the communal feast, sacred parts were eaten by priests. The victim serves equally in imprecations against the enemy, in divinations, in vows.

If the sacrifice is so complex, whence comes its unity? The fact is that beneath the diversity of forms which it embraces, the process is always the same, and can be used for the most varied ends. "This operation consists in establishing a communication between the sacred world and the profane world through the intermediary of a victim, that is to say, through a sacred victim destroyed in the course of the ceremony." Now contrary to what Robertson Smith believed, the victim does not come to the sacrifice necessarily with a sacred nature, complete and definite; it is the sacrifice itself which confers it upon him. It may endow the victim with the most varied powers, and thus make him apt to fulfill the different functions whether in different rites or during the same rite. It can transmit equally a sacred character from the religious world to the profane world or conversely. It is indifferent to the meaning of the current which passes through it.

There is no room to explain at length why the profane thus enters into relations with the divine; the fact is that the profane finds in the divine the very source of life. Why does it approach the divine at a distance? Why does it communicate with it through an intermediary? The destructive effects of the rite explain in part this strange procedure. If religious forces are the very principle of living forces, in themselves, they are such that contact with them is dangerous to the vulgar. Hence insertion of the victim is an intermediary, the victim itself succumbing to the potent force of the divine. "It redeems him." Moses had not circumcised his son; therefore Jehovah came to have it out with him in a hostelry. Moses was dying when his wife violently cut off the foreskin of the child

and threw it at the feet of Jehovah exclaiming: "You are a husband of blood to me." The destruction of the foreskin satisfied the god who did not destroy Moses redeemed. There is no sacrifice where some idea of redemption does not enter.

But this first explanation is not general enough, for in the case of an offering, the communication is likewise effected through an intermediary, and yet there is no destruction. The fact is that a sacred condition that is too strong, has serious disadvantages, even though it is not destructive. It isolates him who is affected with it from all things profane and the sacrifice must provide means of freeing him from it in due time. Hence the ceremonies of leaving the place of sacrifice that I described last time.

There is another aspect of sacrifice: abnegation and its consequent profit. The abnegation is imposed upon the sacrificer as an obligation: the gods require it. On the other hand, if the sacrificer gives something of himself, he does not give himself completely; he prudently reserves some of himself. That is to say, if he gives, he puts himself in a position to receive. The sacrifice is therefore a thing of usefulness to the sacrificer as well as an obligation. That is why it has often been conceived of as a contract. At bottom, perhaps, there is no sacrifice which is not contractual. The two parties exchange their services and each receives his due. For the gods themselves need the profane as the profane needs the divine. If nothing was preserved from the harvest, the god of grain died; it was the soma which men gave the gods to drink which made them fit to resist the evil spirits.

There is, however, one case where all selfish calculation is absent. That is in the sacrifice of the god: for the god who sacrifices himself gets nothing in return. There is no intermediary. He is at once the victim and the sacrificer. All the various elements which figure in ordinary sacrifices enter here and become fused. But such fusion is possible only with mythical, imaginary, ideal beings. That is how the conception of a god sacrificing himself for the world arose, and became even for the most civilized people the highest expression of abnegation without reward.

But just as the sacrifice of the god does not leave the sphere of the religious imagination, so may we believe that the entire system is nothing but a play of fantastic images. The powers to whom the faithful one sacrifices his most precious belongings, seem to have nothing positive about them. He who does not believe, sees in the rites naught but vain and costly illusions and is astounded that all

mankind was engaged in dissipating his strength on phantom gods. There are, however, some realities to which it is possible to attach the institution in its entirety. Religious ideas, because they are believed, *are*: they exist objectively as social facts. Sacred things, gods included, are social things. In order, therefore, that the sacrifice be well founded, two conditions are necessary. In the first place, there must be, outside the sacrificer, things which make him depart from himself and to whom he owes what he sacrifices. In the second place, these things must be near him so that he may enter into communication with them, find in them the strength and assurance which he needs and extract from their contact the benefit which is forthcoming in the rites. The sacrifice, then, has its social uses.

Viewed from one aspect, this personal renunciation of goods by individuals or by groups gives strength to the social forces. Expiations and purifications, communions, sacralizations of groups, creations of city spirits give periodically to the group, represented by its gods, this good, strong, grave, terrible character which is one of the essential traits of all social personality. From another aspect the individuals find profit in this same act. They confer upon themselves and upon the things which are closest to them the full social force. They clothe with a social authority their vows, their sermons, their marriages. They surround, as with a circle of sanctity which protects them, the fields which they work, the houses which they build. At the same time they find in the sacrifice the means of re-establishing equilibrium: through expiation, they wipe out a social curse, and return to the fold: through the deductions which they make from things which society uses, they acquire the right to enjoy them. The social norm is thus maintained without danger to them. Thus the social use of sacrifice is fulfilled, as much for the individual as for the group.

As for the rest, we have seen how many beliefs and social practices which are not properly religious are in harmony with the sacrifice. It has been concerned with contract redemption, pain, gifts, abnegation, relative ideas of the soul and immortality which still are at the basis of society, morale, etc. Hence, the great importance of the notion of sacrifice for sociology.