

of the ritual proceeding is to be reversed. At its very heart, the sacrament is not a sacrifice from the human side to God in any way, but rather a gift from God to us. This is, of course, quite consonant with what we have said in the section on atonement. Christ was sacrificed for us, not for God. Thus the supper is the body and blood of Christ given for you, not for God. The only possible sacrifice one could talk about as a result would be our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for such a gift. One might even, if one wished, say that in receiving this absolutely free gift we are sacrificed in such receiving. The old is put to death with Christ so the new can be raised. But it can be such only because in the supper the completely free gift is given to us.

The objection to the idea that sacraments work just by being done (*ex opera operato*) was therefore leveled not against the idea that the sacrament worked “magically” on us, but rather against the idea that it worked magically on God. The objection was to the idea that the ritual gives the priest, in pagan fashion, some means for manipulating God. That is, there was certainly no objection to the objectivity and from-withoutness of the sacrament, and certainly not against the idea that it works powerfully on us. Indeed, the charge of “magic” is reprehensible only when it is understood as a means placed in human hands for manipulating the gods. It is quite another matter when it is understood, so to speak, as God’s “magic,” God’s way of getting to us to end the old and begin the new.

It is quite consequent, therefore, that the conceptuality which Luther liked to use to interpret the Last Supper was not sacrifice or even covenant but, leaning on Heb. 9:15-22, that of testament. What was established on the night when Jesus was betrayed was his last will and testament, promised to his heirs. When the testator dies, the will goes into effect and so is to be distributed as promised. Thus what is to go on in the church repeatedly and throughout all time is the distribution of the testament to the heirs according to the will of the one who has died. Therefore, what is to be remembered and repeated in this sacrament is not primarily what occurred on Calvary, but what occurred on the night in which he was betrayed, the Last Supper.¹⁰ Thus the preferred terminology for this sacrament is just that: “the Last Supper” or “the Holy Communion” rather than “Eucharist,” “Sacrifice,” and the like. The idea that the event of Christ’s death is to be repeated or even re-presented in the ritual action results from a too

hasty and unquestioned conflation of what happened on the night in which he was betrayed with what happened on Calvary. The whole is then subsequently interpreted in terms of the rather obscure conceptuality of sacrifice with its attendant problems. The net result is that the reality of the sacrament as gift (*beneficium*), tends to disappear behind the facade of analogies, ritualism, and ecclesiastical pretension.

The conceptuality of testament, however, provides a more simple and straightforward understanding that supports and drives directly to the proclamation and distribution of the sheer gift. The sacrament is not a ritualistic analogy of what happened long ago on Calvary. The sacrament is what it claims to be, the distribution of the last will and testament of our Lord and Savior, the body and blood of Christ given to his heirs. We meet to remember and receive the promised inheritance, not to “play Calvary.” We are making a reality claim in this event: “This is. . .” The conceptuality of testament enhances that reality claim. The theology of eucharistic sacrifice does not.

But this claim puts all the more pressure on the question of the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the supper. How is it so that the body and blood are here given and received? It is important to stress that the specific benefit of this sacrament is the body and blood as the words promise and declare. That is, the question is not that of the more general or what one might call “spiritual” presence of Christ in our gatherings. No one disputes that. Every Christian communion believes that where two or three are gathered in Christ’s name, he is there. But that is not at question here and that is not what the argument was about at the time of the Reformation or subsequently. The question is that of the presence of the body and blood “in, with, and under” the bread and wine so that there is not only “spiritual” participation but oral and physical eating according to the promise. How is this to be conceived?

The Western tradition prior to the Reformation, as we have seen, tried to solve this problem ecclesiastically, that is, by claiming that the church through its holy orders, its ordained priesthood, had the power to make the body and blood present again in the Eucharist. This opened the way to much nonsense about the church being the “extension of the incarnation,” or “the true sacrament” through the Holy Orders and so forth. Reformed Protestantism simply denied this ecclesiastical claim