

Certain revealed doctrines, though occupying their own distinct and important places in the body of divine truths and in our theological system, are so fundamental and central to all the other truths that we look upon them as summaries or compendia of Catholic teaching and practice. The doctrine of the Eucharist is rightly considered such a "master" doctrine; the Eucharist is the center and synthesis of Christian faith and Christian life. The theologian, as well as the preacher and catechist, will find no task more congenial and illuminating than the exposition of Christian teaching and Christian life in the light of the Eucharist. Any handbook of theology will offer the sources ready made. The same work has been done by theologians in expounding the theology of the Incarnation, the Trinity, the Church. The theology of the Precious Blood, however, has not met with the same interest, although theologians like Scheeben and spiritual writers, like Faber, have shed much light on the doctrine, and revealed its surpassing beauty.

Basic to the revealed message as found in both Old and New Testament is the truth of Redemption by blood. It is the essential prophetic message of the dealings of God with His chosen people, the source of their hope, and the essential message of the good tidings of the Gospel and the source of faith and supernatural life in the new and eternal testament. It will become clear, says a Protestant divine,

1 that there is no single scriptural idea, from Genesis to Revelation, more constantly and more prominently kept in view, than that expressed by the words "The Blood."

The doctrine of Redemption by blood may be briefly expressed thus: Man, fallen into sin, original and actual, is restored to divine friendship by the God-man's bloody death. This thesis rests on two facts: the sin of man, involving all mankind, and the act of atonement by Christ, the loss of supernatural life and the regaining thereof. Both must be studied in the light of the meaning of blood in human life.

Man was raised to a supernatural state and enjoyed preternatural gifts in the beginning of his earthly existence. The supernatural state essentially consisted in the possession of supernatural life, the participation in God's own intimate life. This higher gift was bound up with man's natural life; in fact man's natural life depended on his continuation in the supernatural state. If by sin he lost the divine life he was doomed to suffer death on earth. If he remained free from sin he was destined to depart this life without undergoing death and to be admitted to divine glory in heaven. All the divine gifts bestowed upon man in the Garden of Eden were to be transmitted to all mankind by a process of natural generation. These favors were the gift bestowed upon all those of Adam's blood. Likewise the loss of them, should Adam be deprived by his own sin, was to be transmitted to all human beings descending naturally from Adam. Supernatural death or sin and natural death were to be the heritage, the blood-heritage, of the race.

We cannot fail to note in this teaching that the loss of supernatural life, symbolized and penalized by earthly death, is intimately associated with the race as a whole, with blood-relationship and descent from Adam. We might say that either supernatural life or supernatural death, as well as natural life or death, was to be placed in the very blood-stream of

the race by the First Parent of mankind. The doctrine of original sin reveals how Adam's tragic choice brought tainture of blood, death instead of life to all his progeny. Instead of life there was death in the blood of mankind. To the heritage of that first melancholy fall innumerable actual sins have been added by the sons of that first offender.

Since the forfeiture is complete, carrying with it even death as punishment, atonement by fallen man is impossible. Nor can atonement be made by any other creature, even though he be freely endowed by God with the most exalted gifts of nature and grace, for sin is derogatory to infinite dignity and majesty. It follows that man must forever be excluded from his supernatural destiny and suffer eternal death unless atonement be made by One who can offer to God acts of atonement, infinite in value. In order that the atonement be equal to the offense one of the divine persons must assume created nature, for only in virtue of that inferior nature can supplication, submission, obedience, be offered for man's disobedience. Such a One, because He is creature, can offer acts of atonement. Because He is God, His acts have infinite value.

It is true that God was not obliged to accept any atonement. The result of such rejection would have been no injustice to man. It is likewise true that God could have condoned the sin and demanded no atonement whatever. The result of such condonation would have meant pardon for man, but not true atonement or redemption. God might have been satisfied with partial atonement and granted partial condonation. In all of this God was free, nor would either His justice or His mercy have been impaired by His choice. But God decided that man should be shown mercy and be pardoned. His mercy was to be above all His works; and He also decreed that this mercy and pardon were to be granted because of the full satisfaction of justice by adequate atonement. Hence it became necessary that One of the Trinity assume created nature and in that nature offer reparation to God for man's great sin. It is most important to note that God's demand for adequate reparation followed His decree of mercy and pardon. In the order of dependence, or the logical order, mercy was first. We insist on this point because some have misunderstood the whole Catholic doctrine of Redemption as though it were based on a cruel and vindictive concept of divine justice.

2 The divine decree went beyond both justice and mercy: a divine person could have taken on angelic nature and in it offered reparation fully adequate. He could have assumed human nature but not of Adam's blood and in it have offered full satisfaction for sin. Likewise, any act of the God-man, even though free from all pain, would have been more than sufficient for man's redemption, because every act of His has infinite value. But God decreed that the Second Person was to become man, taking human nature as a son of Adam, and offer in atonement for sin all His Blood to be shed in painful passion and death. He decreed the Redemption by Blood.

3 Though God freely decreed Redemption by Blood, even unto the details of the Passion and Death, there is singular becomingness in the Redemption by Blood. It is most befitting that reparation be made in that nature and through that very race which had fallen.

4 It is also befitting that a life which is divine-human be offered for a life which was forfeit. The lost supernatural life which was a sharing of God's life was to be restored by the offering of a divine-human life, — that of the God-man. But why was it to be by means of blood-shedding?

The answer — always inadequate because we are dealing with God's own mysterious ways — must be sought in a deeper understanding of the significance of the blood in the light of revealed truth. The result should be a revelation of the great beauty and dignity of the theology of the Precious Blood.

We have said that the Second Person of the Trinity assumed human nature as a son of Adam. From the very blood-stream which bore the dread cargo of ruin and death there was to flow salvation and life. From the all-pure blood of a virgin in whom there was not the slightest taint was the Redeemer to take His blood and flesh. Thus was Christ linked by blood with Adam and made the Head of the race. As a descendant of Adam He became our Blood-brother who was to purge the evil blood of its taint and restore the race to its pristine dignity as of the blood-royal. As descent from Adam originally, according to God's plan, was to bring life to all the human race, so now Blood-union with Christ, the New Adam, was to restore the lost supernatural life. Life and blood of Adam's race had been forfeited; the life and blood of the new Head of the race were offered to God in atonement for the lives of men. There was to be a new race of the purest blood. A new life was given to men more rich and abundant than that which was lost.

Blood was important because it is the source of life. Definitely do the Scriptures teach that the "life is in the blood." The expression is more than a human convention, more than a metaphorical form of speech. On this point all the teaching of our science of biology and medicine agree with the plain word of the Scriptures. Some passages in Leviticus are particularly pertinent:

If he offer a lamb before the Lord, he shall put his hand upon the head of the victim: and it shall be slain in the entry of the tabernacle of the testimony: and the sons of Aaron shall pour the blood thereof round about upon the altar (III, 7-8).

And forthwith Aaron, approaching to the altar, immolated the calf for his sin: and his sons brought him the blood of it: and he dipped his finger therein, and touched the horns of the altar, and poured the rest at the foot thereof (IX, 8-9).

The reason for the use of blood appears in the prohibition of the eating of blood:

Because the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you, that you may make atonement with it upon the altar for your souls, and the blood may be for an expiation of the soul . . . for the life of all flesh is in the blood: therefore I said to the children of Israel: you shall not eat the blood of any flesh at all, because the life of the flesh is in the blood, and whosoever eateth it, shall be cut off (XVII, 11-14).

Equally significant are the Old Testament types, especially if they are studied in the light of New Testament exposition and fulfillment. The relation between blood and life is especially marked in the case of the Paschal Lamb, for its blood saved the Jews from the sword of God's avenging angel which brought death to the Egyptians. The blood-sprinkling marked the First Covenant between the Chosen People and Jahweh. The parallel between this blood-sprinkling and the words of Christ at the Last Supper has been repeatedly pointed out. In all of these

instances the connection between blood and life, between blood and forgiveness, is quite plain, so that St. Paul could say: "with blood almost everything is cleansed according to the Law, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebr. IX, 22). It is likewise plain that the significance of the Old Testament blood shedding lies in its relation to that bleeding unto death by which the God-man brought life to the world.⁵

The New Testament explains and perfects the Old. The texts are too numerous to quote in entirety, but the doctrine can be shown from the following: The fifth chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Romans gives very clearly the doctrine of the sin of Adam and its effects on the human race, together with the teaching on Christ's death: "Therefore . . . through one man sin entered into the world and through sin death, and thus death passed into all men because all have sinned . . . therefore as from the offense of the one man the result was unto condemnation to all men, so from the justice of the one the result is unto justification of life to all men. For just as by the disobedience of the one man the many were constituted sinners, so also by the obedience of the one the many will be constituted just." The source of this redemption is the love of God, the means is the bloody death of Christ: "But God commends his charity towards us, because when as yet we were sinners, Christ died for us . . . we are justified by his blood . . . when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son . . ." The constant reference to the blood, as the price of our redemption, as the source of our justification and sanctification, as the foundation of our hope, all make clear the point that we are redeemed by blood. And the reason for the shedding of blood is plain from the references to the Old Testament and from the parallel use of the term "death" for blood. The divine-human life of the Savior lay in His blood; shedding this blood meant the loss of life which was offered to God for our sins.

The theology of the Precious Blood cannot rest satisfied with the mere exposition of the teaching that Christ gave His life through blood, because "life is in the blood". The Blood of Christ and the Death of Christ must mean far more to us than a sacrificial giving of life. We know that the divine motive was loving mercy. For this reason the Father sent His Son into the world: "In this has the love of God been shown in our case, that God has sent his only-begotten Son into the world that we may live through him. In this is the love, not that we have loved God, but that he has first loved us, and sent his Son a propitiation for our sins" (I John IV, 10-11). Because of His loving mercy God sent His Son to redeem us by His blood. The best gift of God to man is this same Blood, for it is the source of our salvation, of all the life of grace given to man since Adam's fall. We must also look upon the Blood as the best gift of man to God, for only with the Blood and by the Blood was God's justice satisfied. Surely we cannot deny that only the most precious gift was acceptable to God. Truly of infinite value was every act of Christ, truly all that He did in life was offered to His Father and accepted for our Redemption; and yet, without the Blood we would not have been redeemed. Such is the teaching of Scripture: "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebr. IX, 22).

The bond uniting us to the triune God is the Precious Blood, the instrumental and meritorious cause of all grace and supernatural gifts. It is sacred because it is united to the all-holy person of God the Son, the manifestation of the Father's love for the whole human race of which Christ is the Head, the manifestation of the love of the Son for the Father, of His submission to Him,

the chosen instrument of the most holy of all acts, the supreme sacrifice of Calvary.

We hold that the Blood is the instrumental cause of our salvation and of all grace given to man since Adam's fall, for by means of His blood Christ offered Himself and merited salvation for us. We may go a step further and defend the doctrine of St. Thomas according to which the Blessed Humanity is the instrumentum conjunctum divinitatis,⁶ the physical instrument of both the meriting and the granting of all grace. If we hold this latter teaching we must look upon the Precious Blood as the partial instrument of the very conferring of grace. Thus the Blessed Humanity, and specifically the Precious Blood, continues in a physical instrumentality to bring to man all the vast abundance of grace which once was merited by the bloody death. The Blood becomes the most intimate bond between man and God in all the supernatural life.

Though the Blessed Humanity of Christ, body, blood, and soul are the work of all three divine persons, we ascribe the fruitfulness of the Redemption to the Holy Spirit. Wherefore we look upon Him as most intimately united with the Blood of Redemption, vivifying it, pouring it forth in Sacrifice, giving it to the souls of men. In one breath St. Paul speaks of the "charity of God" as "poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us," and of Christ who died "for the wicked when as yet we were weak" (Rom. V, 5-6). In words of great mystic beauty the theologian Scheeben treats the point: "By means of this Blood the Holy Spirit vivified the Blessed Humanity and adorned it with every grace and favor. He filled the Blood with His own loveableness, for He is the Spirit of love, the pledge of love between Father and Son, making it sweet with fragrance as it ascended to God in sacrifice. The Holy Spirit led the Blessed Victim to the altar of sacrifice. We might well speak of the Holy Spirit as the amor sacerdos leading the God-man to sacrifice and placing it before the Father in so far as He unites it with the infinite homage of love, which is Himself. We might say that the Holy Spirit is transfused over the whole world through the Son.

Most befitting is it therefore, that the Son who is the Head of all creatures should set forth and effect in the shedding of His Blood this pouring forth of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love. The shedding of Blood becomes the sacrament (or visible sign) of the giving of the Holy Ghost. The sacraments are visible signs of grace, but the shedding of the Blood of the God-Man signifies and effects the giving to men of the Holy Spirit Himself. The shedding of the Heart-blood of Christ is the most real pledge that He and His Father will communicate also to us the inner-most mark of their divinity. Likewise the blood is a purifying, warming, vivifying force. As such it is a picture or sign of the working of the Holy Spirit. Wherefore we may call the shedding of the Blood the Sacrament of the Holy Spirit, signifying, representing, pledging, effecting the Spirit of the Father and the Son, the Spirit of Love given to men."

7 The bond which unites man to God also unites all men as a new and purified race. The solidarity of mankind disrupted by the sin of Adam is restored by the Precious Blood. In the Church, which is the Bride of Christ and His mystic Body, are gathered all those who are redeemed. At least potentially all mankind is included, because the Blood was shed for all, and all are obliged to belong to her. In the fullest sense, however, only those belong who are united with her both internally and externally. The bond of union is the source of all grace and supernatural favor, the Precious Blood. Wherefore the Church has been spoken of as the Kingdom of Christ's Blood. "You . . . are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,

a purchased people; that you may proclaim the perfections of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. You who in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God.” Such is the thought of St. Peter (I Peter II, 9-10). Even more striking are the words of St. John as found in the Apocalypse: “To him who has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us to be a kingdom, and priests to God his Father — to him belong glory and dominion forever” (Apoc. I, 6).

In the mystic Body of Christ, the Church, the Blood vivified by the Holy Spirit, gives life. From the Blood is all power and authority to rule, to teach, to sanctify. The center of worship and grace is the Eucharistic shedding of the Blood in the Mass, an unending renewal of Calvary's shedding. Toward the Eucharistic Body and Blood are all the other sacraments directed. But even the Eucharistic Sacrament and Sacrifice have their power through the Blood which once was shed. From the same source come all extra-sacramental graces, all answer to prayer, public and private, all acts of virtue. As there is no grace save through the Blood, so there is no sin save through some rejection of the Blood, at least when a member of the Church violates God's law. Wherefore sin may be viewed as a frustration of Christ's Blood, even as virtue is its fruition in the individual soul. Since the Church deals with weak and frail man she exercises the ministry of forgiveness through the Precious Blood.

The graces given in the Church through the Blood far excel those given to mankind before the fall: then one sin corrupted the whole race and left it without hope. In the Church only the individual is accounted guilty of his sin and even it may be forgiven. Nevertheless, the solidarity of man redeemed is greater than before the fall, at least among the faithful, because the bonds of grace are greater. All are united under the Vicar of Christ and the bishops. All are marked by an indelible mark as members of the Church, as soldiers of Christ. All worship the same Body and Blood which are given as food for their souls. A chosen group is empowered to administer to others the fruits of salvation, the distinct and special priesthood which has power to offer the Body and Blood in the Church. Corresponding to all the needs of life, the Sacraments give, increase, restore the life of grace. Human parenthood is made sacred by the mystic bond of matrimony and rendered as inviolable as the union of Christ and His Church. Throughout all man's natural life his supernatural life is preserved and enriched by means of the Precious Blood. And even in eternity, the prayers of the faithful and the suffrages of the Church shorten and lessen the pains of purgatory.

The ultimate term of the Precious Blood is eternal glory. The grace in the individual soul blossoms forth into the fruition of heavenly vision. One of the joys of that blessed state is union with those who have triumphed over sin especially Mary Immaculate who shares in all the merits of the Precious Blood. The Lamb that was slain shall be the object of eternal bliss for all those who have washed their robes in Its Blood. In the Heavenly Jerusalem, which John saw in prophetic vision, all the Church shall reign triumphant; from every tribe and tongue and people and nation all who are saved shall proclaim the glory of the Precious Blood: “Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals; For thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us for God with thy blood.”

The Precious Blood of Jesus Christ

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