

Cambridge University Press

0521340330 - Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology

Edited by S. W. Sykes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

S. W. SYKES

It is a characteristic of contemporary ecumenical theology to refer to the 'sacrifice of Christ' without further elaboration. Doubtless the wholly understandable reason for this is the need to find a commonly agreed point of reference from which to tackle the hotly disputed question of the eucharistic sacrifice. All the major Christian traditions have affirmed that Christ's death is sacrificial in character; a typical ecumenical statement can accordingly be framed in the following terms:

The eucharist is the sacrament of the unique sacrifice of Christ, who ever lives to make intercession for us. (From the Lima Document of the World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111, p. 11)

But the truth of the matter is that in modern times there has been no agreement about the nature of sacrifice, and thus no agreement about the sense in which the interpretation of Christ's 'sacrificial' death is to be understood. The statements constitute, in effect, a consensus that this language should remain in circulation. But as a point of departure for further terminological qualification, for example in the phrase 'sacrament of a sacrifice', they are necessarily unstable.

The controversial and wide-ranging work of René Girard, much of which has been appearing during the period of the gestation of this book, will ensure the continued currency of sacrifice as a theological issue in the next decades. Although biblical study and theology have been in fruitful conversation for a century with social anthropology, there is some evidence that its revival will catch theology unprepared (McKenna 1985). The reason for this seems to be that while contemporary Protestant theology has been growing progressively disenchanted with sacrificial language, it has apparently not been a vibrant part of those theological traditions with a continuing investment in it. The theology of the atonement has not recently been a lively aspect of the discipline.

The essays in this volume, which represent explorations of the theme of sacrifice from a number of contributors, most but not all of whom are

Cambridge University Press

0521340330 - Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology

Edited by S. W. Sykes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

members of one British Department of Theology, suggest that there is a good deal here yet to resolve. One could not attribute this discovery to any remarkable degree of internal theological disagreement. Indeed Durham has been singularly fortunate in the recent past in combining a coherent programme of theological study of the Christian tradition with a remarkable variety of denominational allegiance. The essays, which were commissioned in 1981, and which have been gathered together in batches since that time, are not the product of a prolonged process of discussion. The circumstances of departmental life, and not least the acute trials of British universities in recent years, have precluded the pursuit of any self-conscious programme of synthesis. And yet, at the same time, what is remarkable about this exceedingly diverse collection of essays on a common theme is the fruitfulness and coherence of the outcome.

First, a word must be said about the fate of sacrifice in recent theology. As Professor Dalferth, whom the Department welcomed for two all-too-brief terms from the University of Tübingen, explains, Anglican theologians have been conspicuous in their emphasis upon the importance, and even centrality, of the sacrificial understanding of the death of Christ (see below, pp. 299–325). As long ago as 1930 the cause of inter-Anglican ecumenism was being championed by a theologian who sought to make fruitful for eucharistic theology some newer ideas, deriving from anthropology, on cultic sacrifice in the Old Testament (see Hicks 1930).

The sacrificial interpretation of the eucharist, controversial but sustainable in Anglicanism from the seventeenth century, has remained largely foreign to Lutherans and Calvinists into our own century. For Anglicans it became an almost untouchably sensitive point of contention. An earlier and remarkable focussing of spiritual and theological writing upon the high priesthood of Jesus broke apart on the offence of a sacerdotal interpretation of Christian priesthood popular in the later nineteenth-century ritualist phase of Anglo-Catholicism. At the same time the high christological 'orthodoxy' of the Epistle to the Hebrews yielded ground to the quest of the historical Jesus, and atonement theology registered a sharp reaction away from substitutionary theologies, especially those of a penal character (see Hancock 1985).

The final blow to the assumed acceptability and currency of sacrificial language was the discovery of its secular potential when enlisted in the cause of European nationalisms. In this collection the essays of Dr Gilley and Dr Suggate both illustrate the twentieth-century misuse, or rather the equivocal use, of the slogan of sacrifice in the rhetoric of Irish nationalism and the British First World War effort. But precisely the same language was subsequently deployed by Adolf Hitler in his persuasion of the German people to accept economic deprivation and loss of civil liberties as the cost of national revival (Stern 1975). It is openly acknowledged by contemporary

Cambridge University Press

0521340330 - Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology

Edited by S. W. Sykes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

3

German theologians that the rhetoric of sacrifice has been defiled to the point where it is unusable in normal Christian preaching; and it cannot be an accident that opposition to the idea of its centrality as a theme of Christian theology is commonest amongst German Protestants.

Given the fact that such painful experience is not the common property of the whole Christian Church, the questions which are posed are nevertheless radical enough, not least in this collection. Conservatism is also well represented. Some authors assume, upon the basis of long-standing Christian tradition, that not merely is the death of Christ properly spoken of as 'the atoning sacrifice', but the ritual commemoration of that death in the eucharist must constitute one of the ways in which Christian theology construes the place which sacrifice occupies in the Christian world of meaning. Sacrifice, in other words, is in some sense a *datum* of Christian theology: doubtless a *datum* in the sense of a problem to be wrestled with, and elucidated in connection with contemporary aids, but on no account to be given up or despaired of.

Not so, say some of the more radical authors of this collection. There is even, from the pen of a New Testament scholar, Dr Chester, a serious argument against the assumption that the Epistle to the Hebrews can be enlisted as evidence for understanding Christ's death as a sacrifice. The document is rather, he urges, a means whereby, for essentially practical purposes, a lesson could be taught to certain early Christian groups who were not persuaded that the whole Jewish cultus had been made redundant. Admittedly, says Chester, this provokes a question about the status of the Old Testament in Christian thought. The two chapters on the patristic tradition, by Dr Dragas and Mr Bonner, show the classic solution to this dilemma. For the great fourth-century Greek theologian, Athanasius, the Old Testament sacrificial tradition, though right for its time, has been utterly replaced. The shadow and the type have yielded to the spirit and the truth. This standard argument enabled patristic theology as a whole to redeploy sacrificial language, making the sacrifice of the cross the central norm. By the third century, Latin theology had restored explicitly cultic language to Christian theology, and Bonner shows how, with Augustine, the unbreakable connection was made between the sacrifice on the cross and the 'daily sacrifice' of the Church.

But why should we hesitate to subject this venerable tradition also to critical scrutiny? So demands the challenging essay from Dr FitzPatrick. Although writing in highly original vein upon the eucharistic sacrifice in the middle ages, he treats his subject against the wider background of atonement theology and developments in the understanding of eucharistic presence. The fundamental problem, according to FitzPatrick, lies in the notion of satisfaction which, from whatever ultimate source, became inseparably linked with that of sacrifice after the creative but flawed work of

Cambridge University Press

0521340330 - Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology

Edited by S. W. Sykes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

St Anselm. FitzPatrick's contribution to ecumenism consists not in reconciling Luther and the Council of Trent, but in undermining both to take a sharper and more critical look at the premisses which both took for granted, especially those concerning the equity of God's dealings with humanity and the transmission of inherited guilt.

Radical, but in a gentler if more insidious vein, are the group of contributions gathered in Part III from the history and thought of the modern Church. The very success and popularity of certain uses of the concept of sacrifice raise fundamental questions about that tradition. It is one thing to demonstrate the impeccable pedigree of the sacrificial understanding of the death of Christ; it is quite another matter to observe, with Gilley, the disastrous ease with which the violence of the Gaelic inheritance was grandiloquently idealized as Christian chivalry, and the bloodshed of violent revolution identified as cleansing and sanctifying on the pattern of Christ. It is sobering, with Suggate, to acknowledge the popularity of vacuous chatter about 'corporate self-sacrifice', and to wrestle realistically with the tension between love and the demands of justice in human affairs. Or again in the cases of Kierkegaard, as expounded by Dr Pattison, and Simone Weil, by Dr Loades, there are profound objections to the impact which the tradition of the sacrifice of the cross may have upon certain persons in certain circumstances. It emerges that there is a very narrow ridge between optimistic waffle about sacrifice being the 'law of the universe', and a deeply Manichaean alternative which hates and despises the demands of the body and human sociality. As Suggate, Pattison and Loades all show, a theology of sacrifice cannot be isolated from other elements in a theological system, especially not from those of creation, incarnation and eschatology.

What, then, is the unity of this collection of essays? It is the discovery of the complexity and plurality of themes concealed in this metaphor of sacrifice: its ambiguity. Professor Jones in the opening essay reminds us of the fact that there is no one word, in Hebrew or in Greek, to correspond to the English word 'sacrifice'. To discuss the nature of sacrifice, as he does, is a synthetic and constructive task. Jones, much as FitzPatrick, sees it as dealing with the fundamental human situation of the perceived gulf between desire and achievement, in the sense of separation, exclusion or defilement. The strength of such a view is the explanation it provides not merely for the durability of the concept of sacrifice long after sacrificial cultus has any overt currency, but also for the hospitality of both rites and concept to different degrees and intensities of rationalization. The shift from the external perspective to the disposition of the heart is a common theme in many of the essays, and Professor Hulmes shows how this movement can be seen in Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim theologies as well as in Christianity.

It clearly emerges from these essays that there has never been within

Cambridge University Press

0521340330 - Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology

Edited by S. W. Sykes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

5

Christianity one rational explanation of sacrifice. Dr Hayward's suggestive interpretation of ben Sira's view of sacrifice demonstrates the plasticity of the ritual to conceptual reformulation, in his case to the belief that the cultic order is part of the divine order of the universe, and revelatory of divine wisdom. Hence it is open for St Paul to argue that the Wisdom of God has been made plain in the sacrificial death of Jesus, whose offering embraces and redeems the whole created order (see pp. 35–43, below). Dr Gelston, likewise, in expounding the sacrificial language of one of the earliest eucharistic liturgies, points to the lack of precision in the thought of the text. This lack, as the investigations of FitzPatrick and Dr McHugh demonstrate, was abundantly exploited in the era of theology which demanded articulation and precision. Thus FitzPatrick warmly commends St Thomas Aquinas' good sense, moderation and lack of desire to evacuate belief of its elusiveness, and his sensitive treatment of the eucharistic sacrifice (though not the eucharistic presence) in explicit relation to its *ritual* commemoration of the death of Christ. So, too, McHugh can commend the openness of the decisions taken at Trent to further theological explanation and exploration.

The continuing constructive potential of the theme of sacrifice is exemplified in many essays. In Professor Dunn's treatment of St Paul's theology of the atonement a two-fold polemic is mounted against fellow New Testament scholars, who either with Käsemann and some of his successors seek (perhaps for reasons already mentioned) to downgrade or eliminate the cultic references, or, with Leon Morris, link them exclusively to substitutionary patterns of thought. Although here, of course, we are dealing with differences of historical interpretation, we have every ground for observing the openness of the Pauline material to differing interpretations.

In two overtly constructive essays Dalferth and I take alternative but by no means contradictory courses in the construing of the available evidence. I urge that a theology which takes the theme of sacrifice as one central concept is a possibility; Dalferth, with justice and not a little *ad hominem* argumentation, contends that such a course is by no means a necessity. Both essays are evidence for the justice of FitzPatrick's strictures against what he calls 'the scenario of tit-for-tat', and the need not to disguise disbelief as deeper understanding.

One final introductory remark suggests itself. Study of these essays will leave the reader in no doubt that there are still living representatives of the traditional Reformation divisions to be found in Durham's Theological Department, those who believe, despite the efforts of contemporary ecumenism, that there is continuing substance in either Luther's position on the eucharistic sacrifice, or in Trent's reply. It is also the case that this collection contains genuinely traditional Anglican counterclaims. The essay which contains the most unequivocal descriptions of Protestantism's

Cambridge University Press

0521340330 - Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology

Edited by S. W. Sykes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

non-eucharistic spirituality, Dr Hardman Moore's painstaking research into the sacrificial rhetoric of Puritanism, also makes abundantly clear that Protestantism, too, had a problem of formalism to overcome. The protest of Luther against the turning of the eucharist into a good work, had to be made later against the turning of the *language* of sacrifice into a formula. St Augustine would have understood the point. The fact that what God desires is the invisible sacrifice, the offering of a broken heart, makes redundant neither the visible sacrifices of the Church, nor the words of the Christian. The cult of the heart, she shows, could acquire its own rationalizations as fantastic as anything that the medieval period could produce in relation to ritual practices. But the hallmark of Christian insight into sacrifice at every period and in every tradition appears to be the realization of the contemporaneity of the crucified and risen Christ.

## REFERENCES

- Hancock, C.D. (1985). *The Priesthood of Christ in Anglican Doctrine and Devotion, 1827-1900*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Durham
- Hicks, F. C. N. (1930). *The Fullness of Sacrifice. An Essay in Reconciliation*. London: Macmillan
- McKenna, A.J. (ed.) (1985). *Semeia* 33. Decatur, Georgia: Scholars Press
- Stern, J.P. (1975). *Hitler. The Führer and the People*. London: Collins

Cambridge University Press

0521340330 - Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology

Edited by S. W. Sykes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

---

# I

---

Cambridge University Press

0521340330 - Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology

Edited by S. W. Sykes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## I

## SACRIFICE AND HOLINESS

D. R. JONES

When in English we speak of the institution of sacrifice, we commonly refer to the system of worship which has its most characteristic and effective action in the slaughter of a victim. Sacrifice is pre-eminently bloody sacrifice. But the word has a wider connotation and comprehends the surrender to the deity of some object or possession which may be other than a beast or a bird, for the purpose of propitiation or homage. 'Sacrifice' may also denote the victim itself or anything else that is offered. A derivative usage is its application to human self-giving. A man may sacrifice comfort or income for the sake of some higher goal, or in war may, as we say, pay the supreme sacrifice.

The picture however becomes progressively less clear as we examine the use of the word 'sacrifice' in the English Versions of the Bible, the Vulgate, the Septuagint, the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew of the Old Testament. Neither in the Old Testament nor in the New is there any word for the institution as a whole. Yet in the Authorized Version and the English Versions dependent upon it the noun is used up to two hundred times. In the majority of cases in the Old Testament, 'sacrifice' renders the Hebrew word *zebah*. Although the verb means 'to kill', this is the term for a particular sacrifice to be distinguished from the *'olāh* or holocaust. When the two terms occur together, the English Versions, including the New English Bible and Revised English Bible (which for example in Leviticus, carefully distinguishes the *zebah* as 'shared-offering') render them as 'sacrifice and burnt-offering', or, in the case of the NEB 'sacrifice and whole-offering'. This is confusing. The whole-offering is as much, generally, a sacrifice as the shared-offering. S. R. Driver (in Sanday 1901, 14) concluded not only that the definition of sacrifice is difficult, but also that 'it is doubtful whether the Hebrews have any term exactly co-extensive with our sacrifice'.

None of the translators of the versions has distinguished the particular character of the *zebah* in such passages. But the Vulgate, with apparently better resources than English, most frequently translates it as either *hostia* (an animal sacrificed, a victim) or *victima* (a beast for sacrifice, also a



Cambridge University Press

0521340330 - Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology

Edited by S. W. Sykes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

sacrificial term and often synonymous with *hostia*). *Sacrificium* on the other hand is used, in the Latin authors, principally of the whole rite. They refer frequently to the public and private sacrifices. The victims are supplied for the sacrifice ('*hostias ad sacrificium praebere*'). Sacrifice is offered (*facere*) or prepared (*parare*). There is, however, little sign that the Vulgate consistently makes a nice or precise distinction. There are cases where it is not clear why *sacrificium*, *hostia* or *victima* is preferred, all rendering the Hebrew *zebah*. For example, 1 Sam. 15:22 ('to obey is better than sacrifice') is rendered '*meliora est obedientia quam victimae*'. One would suppose that *sacrificium* would be more appropriate to state the general principle. The often repeated combination of 'shared-offerings and holocausts' is '*hostias et holocausta*'. At the same time one sees a certain appropriateness in 'in domum sacrificii' in 2 Chron. 7:12 for 'they have chosen this for a house of sacrifice'. In general the use of *sacrificium* in the Vulgate is comparatively rare. Ps. 4:5 has 'sacrificate *sacrificium iustitiae*', splendid, one would think, in poetry. In Ps. 50:5, 8 the covenant made by sacrifice is 'in sacrificio'. But 'sacrifice and offering' in Ps. 40:6, a context which shows the whole system is in mind, is '*victima et oblatione*'. Again Proverbs, referring to sacrifice in principle (15:8; 21:3) has *victimae*. Hos. 3:4 sounds right: '*sine sacrificio et sine altari*'. The translator of this book seems to prefer the word (compare 6:6; 9:4; though *hostia* in 8:13). In Jer. 7:26 *sacrificium* is listed with *holocausta* and *victima*. In several cases *sacrificium* is the rendering of the Hebrew *minhah* (gift-offering) which, in the pre-exilic period, was the nearest equivalent for sacrifice in general (Isa. 1:11; Hos. 10:6). It also translated the evening sacrifice in 1 Kgs. 18:29, 36; Ps. 141:2 and Ezra 9:4, 5.

A not dissimilar picture emerges from examination of the translation of the verb *zabah*. *Sacrificare* is used rarely. 'To sacrifice to the LORD' is 'sacrificemus' in Exod. 5:3 (cf. 8:8). But much more frequently it is *immolare*. Sometimes one sees a special suitability in this word (as for example in Zech. 14:21 or Ps. 106:37), but often not.

In the LXX *thusia* is used indiscriminately for *zebah* and the corresponding verb accordingly. The LXX does not anticipate the distinctions of the Vulgate.

The requirements of the Hebrew text can be approached more satisfactorily from the more comprehensive view of context. A number of passages, employing the word *zebah* and in the first instance referring to the shared-offering, nevertheless refer to it in such a way as to show that the principle of sacrifice is in mind – *pars pro toto*. Some of these have been quoted above (1 Sam. 15:22; 2 Chron. 7:12; Ps. 40:6 and 50:5, 8; Prov. 15:8 and 21:3, 27; Isa. 1:11; Hos. 6:6; Ps. 4:5). These include the most important passages in which the Vulgate employs *sacrificium*. But it has to be admitted that the most characteristic Vulgate equivalent of 'to offer

Cambridge University Press

0521340330 - Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology

Edited by S. W. Sykes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## SACRIFICE AND HOLINESS

II

sacrifice' is 'immolare victimas'. We can however conclude that the Hebrew, having no obvious word for the institution as a whole, made its meaning clear by the context. The 'shared-offering and the holocaust', when, as so often, they occurred together in pre-exilic passages, comprehended sacrifice as a whole. There are also passages where the *zebah* is referred to typically of sacrifice as a whole. When therefore, in such a context, the English translators rendered *zebah* by 'sacrifice', they were not wholly untrue to the intention of the author, confusing as their lack of finesse may be.

In the New Testament the English translators' use of the word 'sacrifice' has a similar background. In the Greek it is universally *thusia*. In the Vulgate *sacrificium* is rare, occurring in those quotations from the Old Testament where it already stands (such as Matt. 9:13 and 12:7, and in Heb. 5:1, 'dona et sacrificia'). The preferred word is *hostia* (Heb. 7:26; 8:3; 9:9, 23, 26; 10:1, 5; 8:11, 12, 26; 11:4; 13:15, 16). 'A living sacrifice' in Rom. 12:1 is 'hostiam viventem'. 'A sacrifice to God' in Eph. 5:2 is 'hostiam Deo'. 'An acceptable sacrifice' in Phil. 4:18 is 'hostiam acceptam'. 'Spiritual sacrifice' in 1 Peter 2:5 is 'spirituales hostias'. 'Christ our passover is sacrificed for us' in 1 Cor. 5:7 is 'etenim Pascha nostra immolatus est, Christus'.

All this shows beyond a doubt that the use of the word 'sacrifice' in the English versions was not based on the use of its Latin equivalent *sacrificium*. Only occasionally is 'sacrifice' the best rendering of the Hebrew *zebah* and the Greek *thusia*, though clearly there is more to be said for it in the New Testament than in the Old. Its importance lies in its intrinsic capacity to indicate a many-sided concept, in the light of its empirical usage in the English language.

Intrinsic capacity is best tested by a study of usage. But there are two considerations which make the word 'sacrifice' specially significant. The first is etymology. *Sacrificium* is *sacrum-facere* – to make sacred. Sacrifice involves consecration. Because the word has in English developed such a cluster of meanings and because its use in the English Bible is so much wider than its restricted use in the Vulgate, it is not possible to argue that etymology is therefore a powerful pointer to the meaning of sacrifice as indicated in either the Latin or the English tradition. But the second consideration happens to confirm the first, perhaps to show that the etymology is thus significant, perhaps not, but certainly to reaffirm it. The second consideration is the nature of sacrifice as elucidated by the examination of the pattern or structure of sacrifice generally.

Here we encounter a problem of methodology. When sacrifice is so widespread in time and space, and the documentary evidence rarely answers our questions directly, how is it possible to speak of the nature of sacrifice? Is there some sort of unity behind the diversity? In attending to