THIS IS MY BODY: SACRIFICIAL PRESENTATION AND THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIAN RITUAL

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> Qu'est-ce qui constitue le culte dans une religion quelconque? C'est le sacrifice. Une religion qui n'a pas de sacrifice, n'a pas de culte proprement dit. Cette vérité est incontestable, puisque, chez les divers peuples de la terre, les cérémonies religieuses sont nées du sacrifice.[1]
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> François-René de Chateaubriand, 1802

In this paper we will argue that the Eucharist as instituted by Jesus and celebrated by his early followers belongs to the category of sacrifice or, more precisely, represents an alternative to animal sacrifice.[2] Jesus does not seem to have invented the ritual handling and consumption of a token piece of bread and the drinking of wine; arguably, what he did was transform a well-known and often practiced form of sacrifice celebrated at the Jerusalem Temple in his period. We will develop our argument in three stages. 1 First, we will offer a detailed description of a standard private sacrifice as it was celebrated at the Jerusalem Temple. 2 Then we will show how Jesus and his movement designed the Eucharist on the basis of some of the elements

[1] "What constitutes the ritual of any religion? Sacrifice! A religion without sacrifice has no proper ritual. This truth cannot be denied, for, among all the peoples of the earth, religious ceremonies derive from sacrifice." François-René de Chateaubriand, *Génie du Christianisme* [1802], in: *Oeuvres complètes* Paris: Pourrat, 1836, vol. 16, 60 (part IV, "Explication de la Messe").

[2] Our fresh and to some readers no doubt rather daring and surprising reconstruction rests on earlier historical scholarship, especially on the solid work of H. Gese and B. Chilton. These two biblical scholars were the first to explain the Lord's Supper in terms of sacrifice. In so doing, they demonstrated that the origins of one of the central acts of Christian worship are not lost in the darkness of legendary accounts. See Hartmut Gese, *Essays on Biblical Theology* Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981 117–40; Bruce D. Chilton, *The Temple of Jesus: His Sacrificial Program within a Cultural History of Sacrifice* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992 and *A Feast of Meanings: Eucharistic Theologies from Jesus through Johannine Circles* Leiden: Brill, 1994. We have developed the argument in Bernhard Lang, *Sacred Games: A History of Christian Worship* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997 which includes a chapter on sacrificial notions in Christian interpretations of worship "The Fourth Game: Sacrifice," 205–81.

of this Temple ritual. 3. A third section will present a hypothetical account of the reasons why Jesus designed a new ritual.

1. *Private sacrifice in Jesus' time*

In order to thank God for benefits received—recovering from illness, returning home safely from a long journey, and the like—Jews took a lamb or a goat, went to the Jerusalem Temple, and presented themselves to a priest who then saw to it that the animal was slaughtered, and certain parts burned on the altar. A feast was then arranged for the sacrificer and the latter's guests. While this description may give a first idea of what happens when a sacrifice is offered, it remains too sketchy for our purposes. There are many more acts involved, and biblical as well as some other sources can help us to reconstruct some of the procedures and their arrangement as a sequence of sacred acts. The insert that follows lists the most important acts referred to in the ancient sources and tries to reconstruct the "ideal type" of a private sacrifice. In order to sketch the full picture, we also make an effort to fill some of the gaps in the historical record.

THE SIX STEPS OF SACRIFICIAL PROCEDURE
PRIVATELY OFFERED SACRIFICE

STEP I *Preparation.* The sacrificer brings the animal and some other gifts, including bread and wine, to the Temple and presents them to a priest.

STEP II *Slaughtering.* The priest slaughters the animal and separates "blood" and "body."

STEP III *Offering of the blood at the altar.* The priest tosses the blood against all sides of the altar. We conjecture that before the blood is tossed, the priest presents it to God, pronouncing a formula: "This is N's blood," N being the name of the sacrificer.

STEP IV *Presentation of the body and the bread at the altar.* The sacrificial material brought before the altar is presented and dedicated to God with a gesture of elevation. We conjecture that at the presentation at the altar, the priest pronounces these words: "This is N's body," N being the name of the sacrificer.

STEP V *Disposal of the wine.* The priest presents the wine at the altar, elevating the cup and invoking the name of God. The concluding ritual act is the pouring out of the wine at the foot of the altar.

STEP VI *Communal meal.* The sacrificer receives the body of the slaughtered animal back and prepares a feast to which guests are invited.

Sacrifice must be thought of as a costly meal in whose preparation priests are involved and which requires a particular sequence of acts taking place in the Temple. In the first stage, which we may term the preparation, someone takes an animal to the Temple and presents it to a priest.[3] The sacrificer declares which kind of sacrifice he or she wants to offer. The sacrificer also puts his hand (with force) on the head of the animal. Slaves and women were not allowed to perform the hand-leaning rite. In addition to the animal, the sacrificer also brings wine and four kinds of unleavened and leavened bread.[4]

The slaughtering of the animal (step II) follows immediately.[5] The priest or the priest's attendant slaughters the animal and separates "blood" and "body." The blood is collected in a bowl. The sacrificer watches from the "court of the Israelites," while the priest does the slaughtering in the sacrificial court. During the following steps, the sacrificer stays in the court of the Israelites.

The following two steps seem to be the culmination of the ritual. First comes the offering of the blood at the altar (step III).[6] The priest tosses the blood against all sides of the altar. We conjecture that before the blood is tossed, the priest presents it to God at the altar, pronouncing a formula: "This is N's blood," N being the name of the sacrificer. The sacrificer still watches. Then, the victim's body and some bread are presented at the altar (step IV).[7] The sacrificial material brought before the altar consists of part of the bread, the slaughtered animal's breast, and certain parts of the entrails (essentially the kidneys and the fat covering the entrails). All of this is presented at the altar and dedicated to God with a gesture of elevation. Then the entrail parts are thrown onto the pyre that burns on the altar, whereas the breast and the bread remain with the officiating priest who consumes them later. We conjecture that at the presentation at the altar, the priest pronounces these words: "This is N's body," N being the name of the sacrificer. The sacrificer watches.

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[3] Lev 3:2; 7:12–13; Mishna Pesahim 5:2; Mishna Menahot 9:8.

[4] Bread is referred to in Lev 7:12–13, and wine in Num 15:10.

[5] Lev 1:11; Mishna Zebahim 2:1 and Mishna Pesahim 5:5.

[6] Lev 3:2.

[7] Lev 3:3–4; 7:12–14.30; 8:25–29; Num 15:8. The presentation of a live animal before God (i.e., before the altar) is referred to as an exception (Lev 16:10). On the correct understanding of the "elevation" gesture (Hebrew, *tenûpâ*), see Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers: The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990) 425–26.

After the offering of blood, meat, and bread, the priest takes a cup of wine, elevates it, utters an invocation to God, and then pours it at the foot of the alter (step V).[8] The sacrificer still watches.

After the priest has poured out the wine, he returns the slaughtered animal to the sacrificer for consumption. The communal meal that follows (step VI) no longer takes place at the altar, but nonetheless near the Temple. Since the meat has to be consumed on the day of sacrifice,[9] the sacrificer immediately prepares a feast to which guests are invited (people who had been present all along, together with the sacrificer watching the priest officiate). Bread and wine are also consumed.

The ritual as we have reconstructed it has a beautiful, symmetrical design with a beginning, a middle, and a conclusion. The preparatory stages (I and II) are followed by the offering of bread and the animal's body (IV), which is framed by two libations, first of blood (III) and then of wine (V). A joyous meal forms the conclusion (VI). The main sacrificial material is the slaughtered animal's blood and body, but this material is doubled in unbloody form with bread and wine.

For the words with which the priest presents the sacrificial gifts at the altar, no ancient sources are available.[10] Here our reconstruction relies on the words that Jesus used in his redesigned ritual: "This is my body" and "This is my blood."[11] Placed in a concrete ritual situation, these words lose their enigmatic quality and sound quite natural. In an earlier period, when the sacrificer, and not the priest, officiated at the altar, these could have been the formulae of sacrificial presentation. When the sacrificer approached the altar with his slaughtered animal, he uttered the words: "This is my body," i.e., here I bring my sacrificial body; it belongs to me and I place it on your altar. Similarly, when offering the victim's blood, he would say, "This is my blood," i.e., here I offer the blood of my sacrificial victim. Unfortunately, this interpretation must remain conjectural. Yet, we can point to three sacrificial formulae found or alluded to

Num 15:10; Ps 116:13; Sir 50:15. Ps 116 implies that sacrificers, not priests, present the wine, but by New Testament times, this apparently had changed.

Lev 7:15.

The Old Testament does not include any prayer texts or words of offering recited at sacrifices, but 2 Chr 30:21–22 implies the existence of such prayers.

Matt 26:26,28 and parallel passages. For "body" Greek *sôma* and "blood" *haîma* as belonging to the sacrificial vocabulary, see Hebr 13:11.

in the Old Testament. The book of Deuteronomy prescribes a text to be pronounced by the peasant as he presents his harvest gifts to the Temple. It includes a presentation formula, to be said at the handing over of the basket to the deity, represented by a priest: "Now I bring here the first fruits of the land which you, Yahweh, have given me" (Deut 26:11). This example shows that the bringing of a gift to the temple involved a formal act of presentation in which it was customary to use certain prescribed words. Formulae pronounced by priests and related to the ritual use of blood bring us closer to "eucharistic" language. In the book of Exodus, there is an expression that Moses used when applying sacrificial blood to people: "Behold the blood of the covenant that Yahweh has made with you" (Exod 24:8). A third example comes again closer to the words spoken by Jesus. An Old Testament legend recounts how King David, during a war, makes a sacrifice to Yahweh in the abbreviated, substitute form of a libation. As no animal could be slaughtered, water serves as a substitute for blood. David pours out the water in the name of the men who in a daring act have fetched it from a cistern under the enemy's control. In the absence of an altar he pours the water out onto the ground and says: "This is the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives" (2 Sam 23:17). Priests may have used similar expressions when tossing sacrificial blood at the altar, presenting the victim's breast or bread and wine, or when throwing parts of the victim into the fire burning on the altar. A sacrifice must be formally presented and the sacrificer identified. Actually, the presentation, and not the killing of the victim, seems to have been the central ritual act.

2. *Jesus' new sacrifice*

The earliest form of the Eucharist, as far as we can reconstruct it, consisted of three simple parts. First, a communal meal was eaten by a small number of people; here we may of course think of Jesus and his narrower circle of the twelve as mentioned in the gospels. Then, the presider presented some bread to God in a gesture of elevation, saying, "This is my body." Those present shared the token piece of bread offered to God. The third and concluding act repeated the bread rite with a cup of wine. Here again, the words of presentation were pronounced, "This is my blood," and the cup was

shared by those taking part in the celebration. What we have here is patterned on private sacrifice as celebrated at the Temple. We can best understand Jesus' new sacrifice as an abbreviated form of the six-step ritual described above. One item remained essentially unchanged: as in the Temple ritual, bread was presented to God with the formula, "This is my body," and was then eaten (without being burned on the altar). Other features were changed. Jesus introduced two main alterations: 1. He transferred the ritual to the realm outside the Temple; as a consequence, every act involving the cooperation of a priest had to be omitted. Since no priest was involved, no animal could be slaughtered, no blood could be sprinkled, and nothing could be burned on the altar. 2. Jesus reduced the Temple ritual to its unbloody part,[12] and here he reversed the order of the various ritual acts: the meal no longer formed the conclusion, but was now placed at the beginning and was followed by ritual gestures with bread and wine. There is some ambiguity as to the sequence of these gestures. The gospel of Luke places the wine rite first, whereas Mark and Matthew place it after the bread rite.[13] Both sequences make sense. The sequence wine rite—bread rite may be seen as replicating the original sequence of the animal sacrifice which required the quick disposal of the victim's blood (which had to be tossed against the altar before congealing). Those placing the wine rite last no doubt simply imitated the priests who concluded sacrificial celebrations with a libation of wine.

The new, unbloody ritual, while completely redesigned, still served the same purpose of honoring God with a present and giving him thanks for benefits received. Therefore Christians often called it by

[12] An interesting parallel to the Jesuanic omission of the "bloody" part of sacrifice comes from India, where grain, originally a gift accompanying the sacrifice of a goat, came to stand for the entire ritual. The Indianist Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty compares this development with the eucharistic sacrifice in Christianity: "The Eucharist thus stands at precisely the same remove from human sacrifice as the 'suffocated' rice cake in Hindu ritual stands at its own remove from the sacrifice of a goat. Indeed, in both instances we have what is more precisely not the replacing of flesh by grain but the supercession of flesh by grain. That is, in the earliest records of both the ancient Hebrew sacrifice and the ancient Vedic sacrifice, the killing of the animal was accompanied by an offering of grain (rice and barley in the Vedic sacrifice or, in the case of the Vedic stallion, balls of rice). These sacrifices were thus ambivalent from the very start: they involved not only an animal surrogate for a human victim but the substance that first complemented and [eventually, B.L.] replaced that surrogate." Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Other People's Myths* (New York: Macmillan, 1988) 118. I owe this reference to Lawrence Zalcman.

[13] Wine—bread: Luke 21:17–19; bread—wine: Mark 14:22–23 and Matt 26:26–28.

its old name of *eucharistia*, the Greek term for thanksgiving.[14] The central rite by which God was honored consisted of a gesture of elevating bread and wine and presenting these gifts to God saying, "This is my body—This is my blood." Neither an accompanying prayer (as in later Christian worship) nor the eating and drinking formed the core. The sacrifice of Jesus consisted exclusively in the very rite of presentation, i.e., the elevation and the words accompanying this gesture.

Why should the abbreviated, unbloody sacrifice replace the elaborate, expensive, and time-consuming priestly celebration at the Temple? The idea of replacing a standard sacrifice by something else is not entirely new, but has precedents in actual ritual practice. In anthropological literature, the classical example of sacrificial lenience comes from the Nuer, a black cattle-herding people living in the Sudan.[15] When someone cannot afford to slaughter an ox, a tiny little cucumber will do as well, at least as a temporary expedient. The Nuer treat the cucumber as though it were an animal victim: it is presented and consecrated, an invocation said over it, and eventually slain by the spear. A similarly striking instance of sacrificial substitution can be quoted from ancient Egypt.[16] A priest or a scribe could honor a deity or a deceased person by pouring some water and uttering the formula: "A thousand loaves of bread, a thousand jugs of beer for N." The water replaced the large amount of bread and beer evoked by the sacrificer. In Israel, private sacrifice, like its public counterpart, normally required the killing and offering of a domestic animal. Frequently, the entire animal was burned "for the deity," so that the sacrificing individual or community did not have the benefit of a joyous meal. Only the well-to-do could afford frequent sacrifices. One Old Testament story contrasts the poor man, who owned only one little ewe lamb, with a rich person, who had very many flocks and herds.[17] We can see why the lower classes were excluded from frequent participation in private sacrificial worship.

[14] For an early reference to the Christian sacrifice as *eucharistia* "thanksgiving," see Didache 9 (ca. 110/160 CE). See also the verb "to give thanks" Greek *eucharistein*, in the New Testament report on the Last Supper, Matt 26:27.

[15] Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956) 203.

[16] Hans Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1952) 425.

[17] 2 Sam 12:3.

In certain cases, they were allowed to offer a pair of pigeons or turtledoves instead of a lamb; and if they could not afford to buy these, an offering of some flour (about 4 kg – still a substantial gift) would do as well.[18] The most common substitute for sacrifice, however, was prayer, which ranked as a kind of "offering of the poor." Visitors to the Temple were ideally expected to bring an offering to the Lord, but if they came empty-handed they were at least supposed to prostrate and utter a prayer. Such an understanding of prayer is reflected in the book of Psalms, the collection of Jerusalem Temple prayers.[19] Thus we find a supplicant asking that his prayer "be taken like incense" before the Lord, and his "upraised hands" (that is, the palms raised upward in a customary gesture of prayer) be accepted "like an evening grain-offering" of the public cult. When the psalmist says, "accept, O Lord, the free-will offering of my mouth," the poor person actually expects his words to be as acceptable as an animal sacrifice. When he declares that "a broken spirit is a sacrifice acceptable to God" and proclaims that God "will not despise a broken and contrite heart," he has no intention of renouncing sacrifices as such, but merely indicates the fact that a broken spirit, expressed in song or prayer, is all he can offer. He expresses the hope that this spirit will count for him as if it were a "real" sacrifice. A post-biblical Jewish text sums the matter up quite succinctly: "If a man has a bullock, let him offer a bullock; if not, let him offer a ram, or a lamb, or a pigeon; and, if he cannot afford even a pigeon, let him bring a handful of flour. And if he has not even any flour, let him bring nothing at all, but come with words of prayer."[20]

The last quotation seems to imply that an animal constitutes the original and real sacrificial material, whereas everything else counts as a substitute. However, not all Jews may have looked at it this

[18] Lev 5:11; 12:8.

[19] Ps 141:2; 119:108; 51:19. Our interpretation is indebted to Menahem Haran, "Temple and Community in Ancient Israel," in M.V. Fox, ed., *Temple in Society* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1988) 17–25, see 22.

[20] Midrash Tanhumah Buber, Tsaw 8:9b, as quoted in G.C. Montefiore et al., *A Rabbinic Anthology* (New York: Schocken, 1974) 346. Lenience in Jewish sacrificial practice is discussed in Gershon Brin, *Studies in Biblical Law* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 74–81. For alternatives to sacrifice among Second Temple Essenes, Pharisees, and Christians, see also Dennis Green, "To '... send up, like the smoke of incense, the works of the Law.' The Similarity of Views on an Alternative to Temple Sacrifice by Three Jewish Sectarian Movements of the Late Second Temple Period," in Matthew Dillon (ed.), *Religion in the Ancient World. New Themes and Approaches* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1996) 165–175.

way. The French scholar Alfred Marx has suggested that in early Judaism there was an emphasis on the unbloody part of the sacrifice, and possibly certain circles saw it as more important than the actual animal sacrifice.[21] In the cultural world in which early Judaism developed, a certain opposition to animal sacrifice and its replacement by offering of bread and drink was known. This was the ritual option of some of the ancient Zoroastrians whose god Ahura Mazda was recognized as the state god of the Achaemenid empire. According to inscriptional evidence dating from ca. 500 BCE, Ahura Mazda was honored with daily gifts of bread and wine.[22] At least some Jews admired and emulated Zoroastrian monotheistic belief, insistence on ritual purity, and expectation of resurrection after death. They would even go as far as adopting a vegetarian diet. While the Zoroastrian connection with Jewish Temple ritual and its understanding by those who practiced it remains conjectural, there is evidence for the prominence of the libation rite that formed the conclusion to both the public and the private sacrifices. The oldest description we have of public sacrificial worship at the Temple refers to the high priest who "held out his hand for the cup and poured a drink offering of the blood of the grape; he poured it out at the foot of the altar" (Sir 50:15). The description seems to imply that the gesture of pouring out "the blood of the grape" was more visible and more solemn than the sprinkling of the animal blood (not mentioned at all in this source). One of the psalms refers to a private sacrifice of thanksgiving as follows: "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord . . . I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice" (Ps 116:13.17). Here, the gesture of presenting the cup of wine can sum up the entire celebration.

3. *Why did Jesus design this new form of sacrifice?*

It is tempting to see Jesus as the prophet who wanted to bring the Temple ritual and its spiritual benefits within the reach of the poor who could not afford to buy and sacrifice a lamb. It is also tempting

[21] Alfred Marx, *Les offrandes végétales dans l'Ancien Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1994) 113–65.

[22] Heidemarie Koch, "Zur Religion der Achämeniden," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 100 (1988) 393–405. The once popular idea that the prophet Zarathustra rejected animal sacrifice altogether is no longer maintained by scholarship.

to see Jesus as the legislator who abolished animal sacrifice, replacing it by simpler, unbloody gifts, thus (perhaps unknowingly) adopting Zarathustra's attitude and promoting the Persian prophet's ritual reform. However attractive these interpretations may be, they are based on ideas foreign to the mentality of Jesus and his early followers. We have to look for different reasons why Jesus felt he should design a new program of sacrifice.

While the well-known gospel legend places Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, a small town near Jerusalem, Jesus was a Galilean, born and raised in the northern part of Palestine. To be a Galilean meant being recognized by one's particular dialect, and by one's lack of interest in the priestly worship celebrated at the far-away Jerusalem Temple. Jesus seems to have belonged to those Galileans who refused to conform to the priestly demands. Horrified at the thought of expressing the relationship to God in a monetary transaction, he opposed the way public sacrifice was organized.[23]

Private sacrifices, by contrast, meant much for Jesus. During his lifetime, his followers, or at least those who listened to him, went to the Temple to offer their sacrifices. In one instance, after a healing, Jesus sent the healed person to the Temple: he did not tell him not to bother about sacrificing. Rather, he would instruct him: "Go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded" (Matt 8:4). Jesus respected the law that prescribed a series of offerings that reintegrate a formerly "leprous" and "unclean" person into full membership of the community (Lev 14). He addressed all those who wished to sacrifice and insisted on a very particular preparation: the restoration of social harmony among people. This injunction is contained in a well-known passage from the Sermon on the Mount: "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt 5:24–25). Disharmony would spoil the sacrifice, make it ineffective, and presumably offend God, provoking his wrath. Here the attitude of Jesus echoes the psalmist's conviction that only someone "who has clean hands and a pure heart" can legitimately sacrifice in the Temple (Ps 24:4).[24]

[23] This seem to be the implication of Matt 17:24–27; see Chilton, *The Temple of Jesus*, 129.

[24] In Ps 24:3, to "stand in the Lord's holy place" seems to be a technical expression for the sacrificing layman's presence in the Temple.

Jesus, as we saw, accepted the institution of animal sacrifice. He also endorsed the biblical legislation regulating it. But he had his own ideas about the personal situation of the sacrificer. He criticized the procedures involved with the actual offering at the Temple. His critical stance culminated in a dramatic action generally referred to as his "cleansing" of the Temple.

All four gospels report how Jesus, in an angry demonstration, disrupted the transactions at the Temple.[25] Mark's report is believed to be the oldest one:

> Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the Temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the Temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry a vessel through the Temple. He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spell-bound by his teaching. And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city. (Mark 11:15–19)

While historians would generally agree that the report reflects a historical event, they are less sure about what actually happened and what Jesus' intention may have been. For readers unfamiliar with the cultural and religious world of ancient Judaism, the incident suggests that the market place had spilled over into the Temple in the way it often invaded the interiors of medieval cathedrals. In his dramatic action, Jesus restored the original function of the Temple, making it a house of prayer again. However, this reading ignores the cultural setting of the report. The "buying and selling" does not refer to just any transaction done in a market place; rather, we have to think of the buying and selling of sacrificial animals which include the pigeons mentioned in the passage. Does the report indicate, then, Jesus' rejection of sacrifice (for which animals had to be bought) and his preference for the more spiritual act of prayer?

Two facts militate against this interpretation, making us aware of quite different implications. As we have seen, Jesus was far from condemning private sacrifice as such; in fact, he endorsed and even recommended it. It also seems that the selling of animals had been introduced into the Temple precinct only recently and did not meet

[25] The four reports: Matt 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–19; Luke 19:45–48; John 2:13–17.

with general approval.[26] Caiaphas, high priest between ca. 18 and 36 CE, was apparently the first to authorize the sale of sacrificial animals within the Temple precincts, presumably within the outer court. What Jesus wanted, then, was to change what went on in the Temple, to bring it closer to the ideal of unmediated, direct worship of God. He invoked a passage found in the prophecy of Zechariah: "There shall no longer be traders in the house of the Lord of hosts" (Zech 14:21). His bold action may have appealed to popular sentiment, even among the Temple personnel, so that no one bothered or dared to take action against him. If they had indeed been offended, one would expect the Temple police to have taken immediate action, and Jesus would have been challenged and arrested on the spot.

We could stop here and admit that any further interpretation borders on mere speculation. Recent scholarship, however, seems to permit at least tentative suggestions about what Jesus had in mind when "cleansing" or "occupying" the Temple.[27] Although some details of our reconstruction may seem unusual, they can be put forward as at least plausible.

By Jesus' day, laypeople wishing to present a private sacrifice seem to have been reduced to the role of paying sponsors. They would pay, in the court of the Gentiles, for a sacrificial animal which was then handed over to the Temple personnel. Sponsors would probably wait for some time until they got certain parts of the slaughtered victim (in the case of so-called peace offerings and thank offerings). Paying, laying a hand on the animal's head, and receiving part of a slaughtered animal: this was all that happened in the foreground. Slaves and women sacrificers were not allowed to perform the laying-on of a hand.[28] The actual sacrificing—the slaughter, the collection of the blood, the ritual disposal of blood and fat, sometimes even the laying-on of a hand—happened far away, hardly visible to the sponsor. Not being permitted to enter the Temple's court of the priests (where the animals were slaughtered and where the altar was located), he or she stood in the "court of the Israelites" and simply watched: this was all that a sacrificing man or woman[29]

[26] Victor Eppstein, "The Historicity of the Gospel Account of the Cleansing of the Temple," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 55 (1964) 42–58 reconstructs how the selling of animals was introduced into the Temple.

[27] Chilton, *The Temple of Jesus*, 91–111, and *A Feast of Meanings*, 57–63.

[28] Mishna, Menahot 9:8.

[29] When a woman's sacrifice was performed, she had access to the "court of the

could do. This reduced, minimal involvement of lay people naturally made sense: it facilitated the performance of a large number of sacrifices by priestly specialists, especially on festival days when the Temple became crowded. The practice also kept non-Jews out of the sacred areas, while allowing their sacrificial gifts, simplified to payment or the handing-over of an animal, to be accepted. Now, Jesus objected to reducing the sacrificial procedure to a financial transaction in which someone would pay for a sheep and then have little to do with the actual sacrifice. In ancient times the actual slaughtering had been the task of the offering person himself; a priest would step in only if the offerer found himself in a state of ritual impurity.[30] For Jesus, God's people were pure,[31] and thus should have had more involvement with the sacrificial procedure than the Temple establishment granted them. People should first of all buy their animals on the Mount of Olives, where the market was located prior to its transferral to the Temple area itself. They should actually own their victim.

Sacrificers should also be present at the actual slaughtering and the ensuing ritual acts. Tradition acknowledges that someone's offering cannot be made "while he is not standing by its side."[32] But mere presence, in the eyes of Jesus and other teachers, would not suffice. We can invoke the Talmudic tradition of Rabbi Hillel, almost a contemporary of Jesus, who also objected to the impersonal, clericalized manner of sacrifice.[33] According to Hillel, offerings should not simply and informally be given to the priests for slaughtering. Rather, the owners should always, even during busy festival days, lay their hand on their animals' heads prior to handing them over to the officiating priest. This ritual gesture, prescribed by law Lev 3:2, apparently indicated both the ownership of the lamb and served as a gesture of offering. Hillel's suggestion made such an impact on

Israelites": Tosefta, Arakhin 2:1—"A women would not be seen in the court [of the Israelites] except during the offering of her sacrifice."

[30] Lay slaughtering of sacrificial animal: Lev 3:2; priestly slaughtering in case of lay impurity: 2 Chron 30:17. While the Mishna Zebahim 3:1 and Josephus' account of sacrificial practice in *Jewish Antiquities* 3:226–27 seem to imply that in the first century CE the layman killed his victim, Philo in *Special Laws* 2:145–46 denies this; presumably, practice varied.

[31] Mark 7:14–23.

[32] Mishna, Taanit 4:2.

[33] Babylonian Talmud, Betsah/Yom Tob 20a. As Jacob Milgrom pointed out to the author, this text implies the omission of the laying-on of a hand only in the case of private mandatory sacrifices offered during festivals.

one Baba ben Butha that he had large numbers of animals brought to the Temple and gave them to those willing to lay a hand on them in advance of sacrifice.

Jesus, like Hillel, wanted people to participate more in their offering. As a theurgist involved with arcane sacramental procedures,[34] he had a strong sense of the need to perform a ritual in the proper way. If people bought their animals on the Mount of Olives (rather than in the Temple area), they would actually own them and bring them to the Temple themselves. Jesus may have been aware of the strict rule governing the foremost private sacrifice, that of Passover. The law prescribed that prior to offering the Passover lamb, the sacrificer must own it for four days.[35] Owning the victim, then, must have been important for Jesus. While we do not know anything about Jesus' view of the laying-on of a hand on the animal's head, we can at least speculate about a formula with which he wanted people to designate a sacrifice as their own. Perhaps they should offer the various parts of the slaughtered and cut-up animal using the formula, "This is my body," i.e., here I bring my sacrificial body; it belongs to me and I place it onto your altar. Similarly, they should offer their blood saying, "This is my blood," i.e., here I offer the blood of my sacrificial victim.

The rest of the story about Jesus and the Temple is quickly told. Jesus' occupation of the Temple did not lead to any changes in the traditional ritual procedures. Everything stayed the way the priestly establishment had determined. His action had no immediate impact; like Hillel's, it remained an episode remembered by his disciples, passed on orally, and eventually recorded in a few puzzling lines of literature.

Although the priestly establishment may have disagreed with Rabbi Hillel's view on the hand-leaning, we hear of no action against him. Why, then, were the priests so enraged with Jesus that they wished to kill him? The reason must be sought in another offense and not in this one—an act that threatened their very existence.

Historians of early Christianity have long since argued that Jesus was killed for having committed an act of provocative disobedience to Israel's sacred law, an act of blasphemy punishable by death.

[34] I.e., baptism (John 4:1, v. 2 being a gloss) and initiation into meeting dead prophets (Mark 9:2–6; see Lang, *Sacred Games*, 105–6, 294–95).

[35] Exod 12:3, 6.

Bruce Chilton has persuasively argued that this act had to do with Jesus' disillusionment with Temple sacrifice.[36] After realizing the impossibility of reforming the sacrificial procedure at the Temple, he came to oppose private sacrifice. He thought of it as procedurally deficient and hence ineffective and invalid. He was not the only one to protest against ritual abuses surrounding sacrifice: the Essenes rejected Temple worship as then practiced (though for reasons different from those of Jesus: they held the contemporary high priesthood to be illegitimate).

Unlike the Essenes, Jesus did not consider sacrificial worship as impossible to perform. Rather, he created his own substitute for it. He continued the already well-established tradition of joyous meals. These he shared with large crowds, with "publicans and sinners," with his wealthy sponsors, and with the narrower circle of his disciples. He began to introduce into these meals a new and unprecedented ritual action, one that involved the use of sacrificial language. Jesus declared the eating of bread and wine a new sacrifice. Bread would stand for the sacrificial body of the slaughtered animal and wine for the blood tossed at the foot of the altar. The declarative formulae, "This is my body" and "This is my blood," designate bread and wine as unbloody substitutes for private sacrifice. We must beware of reading any hidden meanings into this symbolic gesture. Bread and wine neither take on special, magical qualities, nor is there any link to the (sacrificial) death of Jesus. A simple and straightforward declaration said over bread and wine had, in the minds of Jesus and his followers, *replaced* private sacrifice as performed at the Temple.

The priestly establishment could have ignored a Galilean rabbi's private cult. Yet, they vented their anger at him and were successful in their plan to have him killed.

The rest of the story is known. Jesus introduced his new ritual in secret among the most intimate of his friends. He practiced it occasionally if not frequently, and the new ritual meal demonstrated his decision not to live in compromise with the Temple establishment of his day. The authorities got wind of it. Wishing to be sure about what was going on, they looked for a witness. A man called Judas betrayed his master's "sacrifice." Jesus had added to and indeed surpassed his earlier extravagant behavior, which had already led to accusations

[36] Chilton, *The Temple of Jesus*, 154, and "The Trial of Jesus Reconsidered," in Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, *Jesus in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 481–500.

of blasphemy.[37] Now that the crime of blasphemy had been established definitively, the Temple authorities had little difficulty having Jesus executed by order of the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate.

Our tentative reconstruction visibly departs from what we find in the gospels. This departure can hardly be avoided if what we are looking for is the true course of events. The account in the gospels blends reliable information with legendary accretions and shapes them so that they speak meaningfully to Christians of the second or third generation. Yet, there are enough historical facts that can be discerned in the gospel account of a "Last Supper" to suggest some kind of introduction of a new ritual. Viewed against the background of Jesus' original endorsement and eventual rejection of private sacrifice, his ritual of bread and wine makes sense.

In the early nineteenth century, Chateaubriand in his celebrated *Génie du christianisme* argued that "among all the peoples of the earth, religious ceremonies derive from sacrifice."[38] Stated in this very general way, Chateaubriand's claim will not convince contemporary specialists. As far as Christianity is concerned, however, he has made a valid point. In Christianity, "les cérémonies religieuses sont nées du sacrifice."

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[37] Mark 2:7; 14:64.

[38] See above, n. 1.

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