

The preparation of the gifts in the eucharistic liturgy¹

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1. Introduction: the state of the question

Over the course of the centuries, what we today call ‘the preparation of the eucharistic gifts’ has given rise to vehement debates and polemics, above all between Catholics and Protestants. The former insisted and occasionally continue to insist on the sacrificial character or aspect of this rite, and it is precisely for this reason that the Protestant reformers banished the celebration of Lord’s Supper or at least reduced it to a minimum, and that the majority of Protestants were ‘allergic’ to it (and some still are).

I have the impression that, today, the debates and polemics have lost much of their topical interest, or at least that the tone in which they continue to be conducted has become much less acerbic. This is due to the fact that in the last few decades ecumenical discussions on the sacrificial character of the Eucharist have made considerable progress, as is shown, for example, by the ‘Lima’ document.² It almost goes without saying that the liturgical reforms that have taken place in several Churches have also considerably contributed to this development. The reform which deserves mention here in pride of place is without any doubt the revision of the ‘preparation of the gifts’ in the Roman liturgy as finally fixed in the 1970 Roman Missal.

However, this is not to say that all the possible problems posed by this rite have been resolved. In preparing this paper and in reading and consulting the relevant literature on this topic, and in comparing it with what I witness regularly in Sunday celebrations, I could not escape the conclusion that, although on one side the polemics have diminished or have become less vehement, on the other side the confusion on the meaning of this rite has only grown. What is the meaning of this rite? Many competent liturgical scholars insist that it involves above all, if not exclusively, a preparation of the gifts, bread and wine, over which the priest will pronounce the Eucharistic Prayer and which will then be received during Communion.³ Nevertheless, certain terms used in the Missal and certain rubrics

¹ The text of this article is a slightly adapted version of a paper that was presented at the International Conference of Universa Laus, held in Soesterberg, Netherlands, August 15-19, 2000. The author wishes to thank Paul Inwood for translating the French text into English.

² *Baptism, eucharist, ministry*, World Council of Churches (Geneva 1982).

³ See for instance R. CABIÉ: Le nouvel Ordo missae, in *La Maison Dieu* 100(1969) 21-35, especially 28-30; N.-K. RASMUSSEN: Les rite de présentation du pain et du vin, in *La Maison Dieu* 100(1969) 44-58; A. ROGUET: *Table ouverte* (Paris 1969²) 117-135; Dutch translation:

prescribed there suggest a different interpretation, or at least reveal a certain ambiguity on this point. They rather give the impression that it is not just a question of a preparation but also of a kind of offering or even a sacrifice. What should we understand by the term *offertorium* that we encounter in the rubrics? A number of liturgists tell us that the word only refers to the fact that the faithful offer or bring up the bread and the wine, but they hasten to add that it is better to avoid this word because it could easily give rise to false interpretations!⁴ Also of significance is a ritual detail in the rubrics, where we read that the priest should hold the bread and wine that he has blessed *aliquantulum elevatum*. What is the meaning of this gesture? Isn't it a gesture of offering? Once again the liturgists tell us that this was not the intention of those who prepared the *Ordo Missae*.⁵ On the other hand, I am convinced that rather a lot of laity and priests interpret it in this way. Regarding this, it is very striking that the bilingual missal (Latin/Flemish) published by the Association for Latin Liturgy has suppressed the word *aliquantulum*, thus inviting the celebrant to lift the bread and wine 'on high'.⁶ It is equally apparent that not a few expressions used in the 'offertory prayers' contained in the Missal have a clear sacrificial connotation. Thus, it so happens that we ask God to kindly accept the 'oblations' or even the 'sacrifice' of the faithful. When are the oblations/sacrifices of the faithful offered to God? Later, during the anamnesis after the Institution Narrative, or now already, at the moment of the preparation of the gifts? Certainly liturgists will tell you that only the former interpretation is the correct one and that the second is to be discarded, but is this as clear for the faithful, ordained or not, who have not taken courses in sacramental theology? In any case this confusion is certainly not confined to the faithful who have not received special theological or liturgical formation. To judge from the way in which certain priests and even bishops celebrate the Eucharist or speak about it, this confusion is to be found equally among the clergy. I remember a discussion between a bishop and a priest in the course of which the bishop was reproaching the priest that his behaviour during the preparation of the gifts did not sufficiently bring out the sacrificial character of the Mass. Another indication of the perplexity caused by the preparation of the gifts is the fact that in many parishes the ritualization of this moment is reduced to a minimum and often takes on the character of a change of scene, a pause during which the collection is taken that will go to the upkeep of the church (building or community or both of them), a pause that the choir takes advantage of in order to sing something that the rest of the community cannot take part in – at last, now is their chance! – and which has no relationship to what is going on at the altar, a pause which functions for the

Genodigd aan de maaltijd des Heren (Haarlem 1979) 86-99; J. LAMBERTS: *De vernieuwde liturgie van de eucharistieviering en de actieve deelneming* (Leuven/Amersfoort 1985) 134-156; H.-B. MEYER: *Eucharistie. Geschiede, Theologie, Pastoral* (= Gottesdienst der Kirche 4) (Regensburg 1989) 341-344.

⁴ Thus for instance ROGUET: *Table ouverte* 118-119; Dutch translation: *Genodigd aan de maaltijd des Heren* 86-87. Cf. LAMBERTS: *De vernieuwde liturgie* 136-137.

⁵ See for instance LAMBERTS: *De vernieuwde liturgie* 144.

⁶ *Romeins Missaal. Latijns en Nederlands voor zondagen en feesten* (Utrecht 1985³) 334-335.

faithful in the church like a moment of repose which one feels that one needs after the liturgy of the word.

This rather generalized confusion is due to several factors, in my opinion. To start off with, over the course of the centuries the rite of the preparation of the gifts has taken on different forms and, furthermore, has been the object of interpretations that have sometimes been divergent. The members of the Commission which prepared the *Ordo Missae* of the 1970 Missal tried to insert some clarity into this question.⁷ They attempted to take up a clear and coherent position on the subject and to compose the basis of a coherent rite, in conformity to the principle of the Constitution according to which the rites “must manifest a noble simplicity”, be “adapted to the capacity of the faithful”, and in general “there will be no need of numerous explanations in order to understand them” (par. 34; cf. par. 50). However, it is obvious that at the end of the day they were not always able to escape certain compromises, and this has resulted in a certain ambiguity in the texts and rubrics of the 1970 Missal. Moreover, we should not exclude the possibility that certain older ideas and concepts, though abandoned by the Missal, had continued to play a part in the perception of this rite by laity and priests, even a number of years after the publication of the Missal. The Latin/Flemish missal that I cited earlier is probably evidence of this. However, I believe that more important than this ambiguity in the Missal is the lack of clarity which exists for many modern Christians, ordained or not, with theological/liturgical formation or not, over a more fundamental question: the character of the Eucharist itself. In discussions on this topic, the key words most often used are ‘meal’ and ‘sacrifice’. Perhaps in this connection we might recall the debate that Romano Guardini and Josef Jungmann had half a century ago on the *Grundgestalt* (fundamental form) of the Eucharist, one starting from the idea that the Eucharist is a meal and the other emphasizing the sacrificial aspect.⁸ What these two terms have in common is that they pose problems as soon as we try and apply them to the Eucharist. Everyone is in agreement that the Eucharist is in some way a meal, but which meal? It is a very ritualized meal that many modern non-initiated people would scarcely recognize as such! The word ‘sacrifice’ raises even more problems. The first question is: what is a sacrifice? In the days of antiquity, at the time when Christianity was born and starting to grow, this question posed no problems at all. Sacrifice was counted among the most widespread rituals that Greeks and Romans as well as Jews were familiar with. Today, it is completely the contrary. Unless we have studied at least a little of the history of religions, we have no real idea about this. We don’t know how a sacrificial rite unfolds, let alone anything of its specific ritual dynamic. What complicates matters even more is the fact that the eucharistic celebration is not a sacrifice like those that the Greeks knew, or the Jews who visited the Temple in

⁷ See for the following especially A. FRANQUESA: *Hoe is de nieuwe Ordo missae tot stand gekomen?*, in *Tijdschrift voor liturgie* 55(1971) 5-24; LAMBERTIS: *De vernieuwde liturgie* 138-156.

⁸ See especially R. GUARDINI: *Besinnung vor der Feier der heiligen Messe II* (Mainz 1939) 73vv; J. JUNGSMANN: *Accipit panem. Liturgiegeschichtliches zur Eucharistie als Opfer im Abendmahlssaale*, in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 67 (1943) 162-165; J. JUNGSMANN: *Missarum sollemnia I* (Wien 1952³) 27-28. See also MEYER: *Eucharistie* 449-452.

Jerusalem. It is a 'spiritual' sacrifice. If the palaeo-Christian authors apply the word 'sacrifice' – or one of its synonyms, or one of the terms that are linked to it – to the eucharistic celebration, they use them as metaphors. They designate this celebration with the help of an existing vocabulary which is current and does not need supplementary explanations, but adding that the Eucharist is not actually a sacrifice, strictly speaking. In the final analysis, theologians are in agreement that these two approaches are not mutually exclusive, and that each of them contains a part of the truth;⁹ but, having said that, we still need to know what is the exact relationship between the ritualized meal and the metaphor of sacrifice.¹⁰ All these questions have important repercussions on the way in which we look at the preparation of the eucharistic gifts. With what aim in mind are they prepared? Is it (above all) a preparation of gifts, offerings destined to be offered to God? Or does the idea that there is a preparation of food that we will be eating and drinking also come into play? How far you prefer one or other of these options will proportionately affect the meaning that you give to the preparation of the gifts. After that, in the case where you consider the Eucharist as a sacrifice in one way or another, the question which arises is how far it is necessary or even possible to make a distinction between the preparation for this sacrifice and the sacrifice itself.

In order to bring more clarity into this confusion, in this paper I will do two things. First of all, I want to spend some time on three rituals which are often associated with the celebration of the Eucharist, each of which have their own energy, their own structure and their own logic: meal and sacrifice. In speaking about sacrifice, I want to make a distinction between on the one hand animal sacrifice, which includes the cutting of throats, the fact of actually killing an animal, and on the other hand the oblation, the unbloody offering of the produce of the land, as for example the offering of the first-fruits of the harvest that the book of Leviticus speaks about. In examining these three cases, I am going to concentrate on what transpires at the beginning, in the opening rites and the rites of preparation which precede the ritual act strictly speaking. Next, I will map out the main lines of the history of the preparation of the eucharistic gifts in the great liturgical traditions, those of the East and those of the West (including those of the Reformation) with the aim of uncovering some structures, some basic models. I hope that this approach will help us to see the rite in the 1970 Missal in 'a clearer light of day' and help us to better understand the specific character and the function of the preparation of the eucharistic gifts and its place in the overall form of the Eucharist. By doing this, I hope to facilitate the task of the musician searching for musical forms that are appropriate to the spirit of this rite and in conformity with it.

⁹ See MEYER: *Eucharistie* 450-451.

¹⁰ See for the complicated relation between the idea of sacrifice and liturgy, in particular the Eucharist: A. GERHARDS & K. RICHTER (eds.): *Das Opfer. Biblischer Anspruch und liturgische Gestalt* (= Quaestiones disputatae 186) (Freiburg 2000). See further K. STEVENSON: *Eucharist and offering* (New York 1986).

2. Examination of three rituals

2.1. The rite of the meal

You will perhaps be amazed that I place the meal, pure and simple, among the rites. The objection could be raised that most meals have an almost purely functional character. Aren't they simply one way to feed oneself and thus to survive? We must admit that this is sometimes the case, above all with very busy people. On the other hand, even in the case of very simple meals there can be more ritual characteristics than one would have believed at first sight. To be convinced of this you have only to read the analysis of the English meal carried out by the famous anthropologist Mary Douglas.¹¹ She draws attention to the importance of the rules concerning the number and combination of dishes, the alternating of drinks, hot and cold dishes, rules which vary as a function of the time of day (breakfast, lunch, dinner), the character of the day (festival or ordinary day) and the status of those who are eating (family members, guests), rules which are not functional in character, nor biological, but which represent social codes above all.

How do we begin this rite that the meal is? As one might expect, in different societies and cultures you find a great variety of traditions and practices which it would be impossible to list here. Right at the beginning, the simple act of laying and preparing the table and arranging the plates tends to be ritualized. Universally one also finds opening rites, such as a word of welcome or the custom of raising one's glass to drink someone's health. In this regard, we might note especially a typically Jewish custom – it seems that there are no direct parallels in Graeco-Roman circles¹² – which has left clear traces in early Christianity and above all in the Christian liturgy. This custom consists in saying or reciting one or several prayers at the beginning of the meal before beginning to eat.¹³ These prayers have the character of blessings, of *berakoth*, in which God is blessed, praised as the Creator from whom the food comes. Here we must mention in first place the blessing pronounced over the bread which is broken before the beginning of the meal. Also very important was, when wine was being drunk, the *berakab* pronounced over the wine. These are opening rites typical of Jewish meals and equally of Christian meals: they are linked in a very natural way to the beginning of a meal and moreover place the meal into a typically Jewish or Christian religious perspective.

¹¹ M. DOUGLAS: Deciphering a meal, in *Daedalus* (1972, winter) 68-81. Reprinted in M. DOUGLAS: *Implicit meanings. Selected essays in anthropology* (London/New York 1999²) 231-251.

¹² Cf. M. KLINGHARDT: *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft* (Tübingen 1996) 58: "Ein Mahleingangsgebet hat es in der paganen Antike als fest verankerte Institution nicht gegeben."

¹³ Cf. for the following, for instance, G. ROUWHORST: Bread and cup in early Christian eucharistic celebrations, in C. CASPERS, G. LUKKEN & G. ROUWHORST: *Bread of heaven. Customs and practices surrounding holy communion* (= Liturgia condenda 3) (Kampen 1995) 11-40, especially 13-15.

2.2. Animal sacrifice

Basically this rite comprises two principal parts. First of all the animal is killed, its throat is cut, the victim, on the altar. Usually this task is fulfilled by a priest. This was the case with the Greeks and the Romans, but also in the Jewish Temple (with the possible exception of the immolation of paschal lambs). Then, in the case where it is not a 'holocaust' which is entirely burnt, throat-cutting and immolation are followed by a meal in common during which the parts which were not immolated – i.e. burned in the fire or placed on the altar – are eaten.

For our purposes it is above all relevant to look at how this rite was prepared and set in motion. To give us an image, I'd like to quote a part of the description of Greek sacrifice that Walter Burkert gives in his famous book *Homo necans*:

The preparations include bathing and dressing in clean clothes, putting on ornaments and wreaths, often sexual abstinence is a requirement. At the start, a procession (*pompè*), even if a small one, is formed. The festival participants depart from the everyday world, moving to a single rhythm and singing. The sacrificial animal is led along with them, likewise decorated and transformed – bound with fillets, its horns covered with gold. Generally it is hoped that the animal will follow the procession compliantly or even willingly. Legends often tell of animals that offered themselves up for sacrifice, apparent evidence of a higher will that commands assent. The final goal is the sacrificial stone, the altar 'set up' long ago which is to be sprinkled with blood. Usually a fire is already ablaze on top of it. Often a censer is used to impregnate the atmosphere with the scent of the extraordinary, and there is music, usually that of the flute.¹⁴

In the literature on this subject it is this type of bloody sacrifice which has received the most attention. It is also on this type of sacrifice that are founded the majority of the anthropological, psychological and philosophical theories on the origin and function of sacrifice (especially on the pretended aggression which is contained therein), such as those of Sigmund Freud,¹⁵ Walter Burkert¹⁶ and René Girard,¹⁷ etc.¹⁸ However we need to point out that there also exists another type of sacrifice which is very much linked to the world of agriculture and which also has an important place among the sacrifices described in the Old Testament, in particular in the book of Leviticus. These are the sacrifices of bread, cakes, corn, the first-fruits.

¹⁴ See W. BURKERT: *Homo necans. The anthropology of ancient Greek sacrificial ritual and myth* (Berkeley 1983) 3-4. See also W. BURKERT: *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Periode* (= Die Religionen der Menschheit 15) (Stuttgart 1977) 101-105.

¹⁵ S. FREUD: *Totem und Tabu. Einige Übereinstimmungen im Seelenleben der Wilden und der Neurotiker*, in S. FREUD: *Gesammelte Werke IX* (Frankfurt 1973) 287-444.

¹⁶ BURKERT: *Homo necans*.

¹⁷ R. GIRARD: *La violence et le sacré* (Paris 1972).

¹⁸ For different views on the meaning and function of animal sacrifice and their possible relationship with Christian liturgy, see M. JOSUTTIS: *Der Weg in das Leben. Eine Einführung in den Gottesdienst auf verhaltenswissenschaftlicher Grundlage* (München 1991) 260-270.

2.3. Offering produce of the land

This oblation also has its own structure. A description is to be found in chapter 2 of the book of Leviticus. The basic essential is that the person who is to sacrifice should carry the oblation or have it brought, and offer it to a priest, sometimes with oil and incense. The priest will turn a part of the oblation to smoke through burning. The part which is not burnt on the altar will be eaten by the priests.

When comparing these three classic and more or less universal rites, we observe that they have a number of characteristics in common. The most striking is that each has its own structure – one might say its own logic. The parts form a whole that is more or less coherent. Also very striking is the concrete character of these rites. They appeal directly to the senses: to the eyes, the ears, the sense of smell. No long cerebral, theological instruction or catechism course is needed in order to be able to understand them – or better, to be able to undergo them or participate in them. Apart from these characteristics proper to all true rituals, they also have in common certain elements that are even more concrete. We could think here, for example, about certain acts of purification, washing of certain parts of the body (e.g. the hands), etc.

On the other hand, the three rites have their own distinguishing characteristics, and this is certainly also true of the way in which they are prepared and the way in which they begin. A sacrifice starts off with a solemn procession which is normally accompanied by instrumental music and singing and sometimes by dance. These elements are normally lacking in an oblation offered by an individual to a priest, and do not appear at the beginning of a meal. A typical element of an oblation is the handing-over of the gift to the priest, and this ritual gesture in its turn is normally missing or at least takes on another form in the case of animal sacrifice. It is also missing in the meal, if one puts to one side the very widespread custom of offering gifts to the host or hostess (but this custom has a different function, in the sense that the gifts are not sacrificed to God). Lastly, there are certain elements which are above all characteristic of the beginning of a meal. Among these I include the act of laying and preparing the table. Closely linked to the meal, it seems to me, is the custom both Jewish and Christian of thanking and praising God on account of the food which ultimately comes from him and which is going to be eaten and drunk.

3. The preparation of the gifts in the major liturgical traditions

Next we must look at the history of the liturgy in order to find out what the relationship has been between these three rites and the eucharistic celebration, and more especially the preparation of the eucharistic gifts. How has this opening of the eucharistic part of the Mass actually functioned? As the preparation or opening of a meal, or rather as an introduction or a prelude to a sacrifice? Or is it the oblation model which has dominated? And if, in effect, one of these models has

been followed, to what extent is this true (taking into account that the eucharistic celebration is not a meal strictly speaking, nor simply a sacrifice or an oblation) ?

In what follows, I want to distinguish between five periods: (a) A period which was only brief (about a century) during which eucharistic celebrations unfolded according to models inspired by Jewish meals and which therefore presented the characteristics of communal meals. (b) The period during which, little by little, the classic structure of Christian liturgy in both East and West was being formed. A typical characteristic of this structure is the eucharistic prayer which precedes a communion of the eucharistic gifts which less and less comes to resemble a meal, properly speaking, whose goal is to satisfy the physical hunger of those who participate in it. Another very influential evolutionary point is the insertion of an institution narrative into the eucharistic prayer and the way that this narrative eventually became the culminating point in the prayer. (c) The Middle Ages (in the West) from the 9th/10th century onwards. Typical of this period are progressive ritualization and sacralization which go hand in hand with an increasing gulf between priest and people. (d) The time of the Reformation which includes amongst other things a rejection of anything in the eucharistic celebration that remotely smacks of the concept of an (expiatory) sacrifice offered by the Church. (e) The period since the 1970 Missal, during which the notion of sacrifice has continued to play a role but in a sometimes less explicit and in any case revised form, and also during which, whether implicitly or explicitly, the idea of the eucharist as a meal has reappeared.

3.1. The earliest: blessings before meals

Let us begin with the first period, the beginnings of Christianity. Research during past few decades has led us almost unanimously to the conclusion that the earliest eucharistic celebrations must have unfolded according to models borrowed from the (it is to be noted) pluriform world of Judaism, and that the rites linked to these celebrations derive from the rites customary at Jewish meals.¹⁹ We have to admit that it is difficult and dangerous to attempt to give ourselves a precise idea of what these rites were, but it appears almost certain that before beginning the meal itself, strictly speaking, it was common practice to break a loaf of bread and pronouncing a blessing over it. In the same way, if wine was to be drunk, it was usual to say a blessing over a cup of wine. It appears most probable that the first Christians followed these customs. One proof that is to my mind quite convincing is provided by chapters 9 and 10 of the *Didache*²⁰ where it is a question of a ritual meal which, so a great many historians believe (and I would include myself among them), can have been nothing other than a celebration of the Eucharist.²¹ Now, it is striking

¹⁹ For what follows, see ROUWHORST: Bread and cup, especially 13-17; 23-29.

²⁰ See, for instance, the edition of K. WENGST: *Didache (Apostellehre). Barnabasbrief. Zweiter Klemensbrief. Schrift an Diognet* (= Schriften des Urchristentums 2) (Darmstadt 1984) 3-100, especially 78-83.

²¹ See, for instance, WENGST: *Didache* 43-53; G. ROUWHORST: La célébration de l'Eucharistique dans l'Eglise primitive, in *Questions liturgiques* 89-112, especially 93-96.

that this meal was followed by a long act of thanksgiving, as is the case in the Jewish tradition, and was preceded by two acts of thanksgiving, one over the cup of wine and the other over the loaf of bread (that would later be broken). For the rest, we find no allusion to any form of preparation of the (eucharistic) gifts which must surely have been completely absent.

As we know, this type of celebration disappeared quite rapidly, at least as eucharistic celebration (we know that for quite a long time non-eucharistic *agapès* continued to preserve very clear vestiges of this kind of celebration). However, it is worth mentioning this type of celebration not only because of its great age but also because it enables us to glimpse the most natural context of two rites that we will meet later on, still in the context of the preparation of the eucharistic gifts: the blessing of the bread and the wine.

3.2. Preparation of the gifts preceding the eucharistic prayer and communion

The model that I have just described was rapidly replaced by another which much more closely resembles the celebrations with which the great majority of the Christian Churches have been familiar for centuries, right down to today. This second model evidences several fundamental differences from the model in the earliest period, which I'd like to refer to as the 'meal' model. First of all, we need to notice that the eucharistic celebration quickly lost its character of a meal serving to satisfy physical hunger and thirst. It became a ritual meal which consisted in a ritualized and highly stylized consumption of a little bit of bread and wine. I am not sure if this is already the case in Justin's famous *Apologia* (ch. 65 and 67), but if this transition had not been achieved during the 2nd century there is no doubt that during the 3rd and 4th centuries the change had been accomplished. What is perhaps still more important for the development of the preparation of the gifts is what happened to the prayers of blessing and the acts of thanksgiving. At a point in time the prayer of thanksgiving after the meal was placed before the ritualized meal-communion. What is essential is that the content of this prayer differed from that of the Jewish and primitive Christian *berakoth* which praised God as creator of the bread and wine and indeed all creation (a typical characteristic of a prayer introducing a meal, properly speaking). In the act of thanksgiving preceding communion the emphasis was placed more and more on the commemoration of Christ, especially his passion, death and resurrection. This development led to the introduction of the institution narrative and the anamnesis into the eucharistic prayer. These two elements were considered as the culminating point of the anaphora and – even more important for our purposes – as a representation of the sacrifice of Christ immolating himself (this perspective is clearly present in, for example, the works of John Chrysostom, to give only one instance among many others).²² In other words, the meal was preceded by a sacrifice – i.e. a spiritual

²² Cf. F. VAN DE PAVERD: *Zur Geschichte der Messliturgie in Antiocheia und Konstantinopel gegen Ende des vierten Jahrhunderts* (= *Orientalia Christiana analecta* 187) (Roma 1970) 287-340.

sacrifice, very different from the bloody sacrifices that everyone living around the Mediterranean was used to.

What does this mean for the preparation of the gifts? In a certain sense, we could say that the gifts were prepared by the eucharistic prayer with a view to the communion which would follow. The preparation of the gifts consisted of this: they were brought quite simply, without prayers or ritual gestures, and then the bishop pronounced the eucharistic prayer over the bread and the wine which were, to use a term borrowed from Justin, 'eucharistified' (*Apology* ch. 66). But from the 4th century onward we see a clear tendency to develop the preparation of the gifts rather more, this time not only with a view to the communion which would follow but also with a view to the sacrifice which would be commemorated and celebrated during the eucharistic prayer, above all at the moment when the celebrant said the institution narrative, the anamnesis and, in the East, the epiclesis. This means that the preparation of the gifts began to be orientated towards this spiritual sacrifice and that the bread and wine were increasingly treated as offerings, or as if they were a victim that was to be immolated.

This trend is common to all the liturgical traditions of East and West, at least from the 4th/5th centuries onwards. Everywhere we can see a ritualization of the preparation of the eucharistic gifts, based on the principle that the Eucharist is a spiritual sacrifice followed by a (ritual) meal. At the same time, we have to make it clear that this process of ritualization did not unfold in all liturgical traditions in the same way. Already from the 4th/5th centuries – i.e. right at the beginning – we can distinguish two models, two different types. The factor which played a decisive role in this respect was the actual moment when the faithful brought forward and placed or handed over their gifts. It could be either right at the beginning of the celebration, before the liturgy of the word, or it could be after this first part of the Eucharist, in other words after the dismissal of the catechumens and the litany of the faithful and just before the beginning of the anaphora, the eucharistic prayer. In the case where the second solution was adopted, we need to distinguish the different manners of bringing forward the gifts. There are two basic possibilities: either the people stay where they are and members of the clergy – bishop or deacons – leave their places and go to receive ('collect') the gifts; or the members of the clergy stay in their seats, near the altar, and the people leave their places to form a sort of procession in the course of which they present and offer the bread and wine – and sometimes other 'offerings' too. The choice of model considerably affects not only the form that the entire rite of preparation of the gifts actually takes, but above all the symbolic and theological interpretation of the rite; and this interpretation in turn tends to determine the direction in which ritualization will eventually go.

3.2.1. The Eastern and Gallican model: the great entrance of Christ as victim

Let us begin with the first model, where the people place their gifts before the beginning of the celebration. From the earliest stages in the development of the

preparation of the gifts, this model was followed by the Byzantine liturgy whose roots go back to the traditions of Antioch and Constantinople. In the past, liturgists asked themselves at what period the offertory procession of the people – or their participation in this procession – had disappeared in the Byzantine tradition. Thanks to Robert Taft's fundamental and incontrovertible study of the great entrance in the Byzantine liturgy, we now know that the reply to this question has to be "Never", since such a procession never actually existed either in Antioch or in Constantinople. The practice followed was that "the faithful gave their gifts to the deacon in the sacristy as they arrived for the liturgy; the deacons selected as much bread and wine as was needed and brought it to the altar before the anaphora".²³ The Byzantine rite was not the only one to adopt this model. It was also followed by other Eastern liturgical traditions (Armenian, Coptic, Syrian, etc). Furthermore, we need to note that for a certain length of time it was also practised in the West (before the great Romanization of the 7th and 8th centuries). For example, we find clear traces in Gregory of Tours²⁴ and in the Ancient Exposition of the Gallican Mass²⁵ (sometimes attributed to Germanus of Paris).²⁶

The fact that in all these traditions the people placed their gifts before the beginning of the celebration, before the Liturgy of the Word, had a considerable effect on the later development of the structure of the eucharistic celebration. First and foremost, it resulted in the separation of, on the one hand, the preparation and what we call the offering of the gifts and, on the other hand, the transferring of these gifts, already prepared, from the sacristy to the altar by the deacons or other members of the clergy, and the placing of the gifts on the altar. The preparation and offertory, which sometimes constituted a quite elaborate rite, took place before the beginning of the Mass proper, as is the case for example with the Byzantine *proskomide* or in what it is convenient to call the 'Fore-Mass' of the Maronites and Syrians (which is actually a relatively late development).²⁷ The transference of the prepared gifts tended to become solemnized, a tendency which was strongest and most obvious in the Byzantine liturgy. It came too late for John Chrysostom to speak about it, but Theodore of Mopsuestia devotes a lot of space to it in his commentary on the celebration.²⁸ At the time of Theodore there was still no processional chant. The transference of the gifts took place "in complete silence".²⁹ We know how in the 6th century at Constantinople the custom was developed of

²³ R. TAFT: *The great entrance* (Rome 1978) 17.

²⁴ *Liber miraculorum in gloria martyrum*, ch. 85 (ed. B. KRUSCH: *MGH, SRM* 1 (1885) 545-546. Cf. *PL* 71, 781vv).

²⁵ E. RATCLIFF (ed.): *Expositio antiquae liturgiae gallicanae* (= Henry Bradshaw Society 98) (London 1971) 10-11 (§ 18).

²⁶ See also JUNGSMANN: *Missarum sollemnia* II, 8; R. CABIÉ: *L'Eucharistie* (= *L'Eglise en prière* 2) (Paris 1983) 95-96

²⁷ See especially for the Maronite rite P. GEMAYEL: *Avant-messe maronite* (= *Orientalia Christiana analecta* 174) (Roma 1965).

²⁸ See Catechetical homily 15, ch. 24- 30 (ed. R. TONNEAU & R. DEVRESSE: *Les homélies catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste* (= *Studi e testi* 145) (Roma 1949)

²⁹ Homily 15, ch. 28.

singing Ps 24, in which the sanctuary doors are called on to be raised up, to be lifted higher so that God, the king of glory, may enter. To this psalm was added the famous Cherubic Hymn (*Cherubicon*) in which the deacons are compared to the cherubim celebrating the heavenly liturgy.³⁰

Also very significant in the solemnization of the transference of the gifts was the theological interpretation – which became classic in the Byzantine and Slavonic traditions – given by Theodore of Mopsuestia in his commentary on the eucharistic celebration. He associates this rite with the moment when Christ goes forth to be led to his passion, and moreover compares the covering of the gifts which takes place afterwards with the wrapping of Christ in his shroud.³¹

A few remarks on these developments. Firstly, it seems to me that if any single one of the three basic rites that we examined earlier has a role to play, it is not the rite of the meal nor the rite of oblation, but rather the rite of animal sacrifice. At the very least, we can say that the notion of a victim that is led to the altar resonates with great regularity in Theodore's commentary, and we can easily imagine that the transference of the gifts gave rise to this association for a good number of the faithful, who were still very familiar with the phenomenon of animal sacrifice. However, what is even more important and at any rate is not a subject for debate is the fact that the transference of the gifts presents all the characteristics of an 'epiphany', of the 'entry of a king' or other divine personage – in this case, Christ. We might perhaps be rather surprised that this epiphany-type entrance takes place before the eucharistic prayer has even been said, the institution narrative read, and the Holy Spirit invoked. We could also ask if all this is justifiable from the point of view of sacramental theology. I am happy to leave questions like these to theologians who specialize in the theology of the sacraments, and will content myself with saying here that for centuries the majority of the Eastern faithful do not seem to have been embarrassed by this sort of theological problem, nor by the fact that they have undergone the eucharistic liturgy as a whole without being troubled by the precise chronological order of ritual elements. I would also like to add that this development is more or less intrinsic to the chosen model. When it is not actually the people who bring forward and offer the gifts during the celebration itself at the beginning of the eucharistic section, strictly speaking, but members of the clergy who have prepared the gifts elsewhere, it is hardly surprising that the transference takes on the style of an epiphanic procession. Indeed, it flows from the logic of what is (ritually) going on.

3.2.2. The Western model (African and Roman): the oblation of the faithful

Up to now we have been dealing with an 'Eastern' (with some reservations) model. Alongside this model there developed another 'Western' type, for which there is particularly strong evidence in Northern Africa, Rome and Milan, and all from the end of the 4th century onwards. The principle on which this model was based is

³⁰ See TAIT: *The great entrance* 116-118.

³¹ Homily 15, ch. 25-26.

very simple: the people do not bring forward their gifts before the Liturgy of the Word but after it, just before the 'eucharistic' or 'sacrificial' part begins. At first sight this may seem a banal difference and one of a purely practical nature. However, it had serious consequences for the direction in which the 'offering' of the eucharistic gifts developed, and for the symbolic and theological interpretation which this gave rise to.

Let us begin in Africa at the time of Augustine. His work gives us a good idea of how the offering and preparation of the gifts took place, and moreover he gives us a theological interpretation of this well-developed and coherent rite.

Augustine several times refers to the custom of bringing forward the gifts to the altar during the eucharistic celebration. The most well-known passage is probably Chapter 5 of the *Confessions* where we read that his mother Monica would not let a day go by without bearing an offering to the altar.³² Other passages in Augustine's work reveal that this offering took place at the beginning of the liturgy of the Eucharist, that then the people approached the bishops and his ministers, and moreover that meanwhile a psalm was sung which indeed was a novelty.³³

What is at least just as interesting as these ritual details that we can glean from Augustine's works is the theology of the Eucharist developed by him which concords admirably with the rite. Bernard Lang³⁴ mentions three key ideas which are of particular importance for the interpretation of the ritual that we have just mentioned and which could provide it with, so to speak, a theological justification: (a) The bread and the wine for the Eucharist do not represent solely the individual body of Christ who lived on the earth and died on the cross, but also his mystical Body, in other words the community of the faithful. (b) In several of his sermons, Augustine compares the bread and wine with the faithful and their lives of toil and pain. (c) There is a very strong link between the self-immolating sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifices that Christians offer to God through their sufferings, etc. Needless to say, these theological ideas go perfectly together with an offering of gifts by the faithful.

It is possible that in Rome the offering of the faithful was carried out in a somewhat different way. The famous *Ordo Romanus I* seems to suppose that there was no procession of the people in the proper sense of the word.³⁵ Rather, it was members of the clergy who went to the part of the church where the people were to be found in order to gather up, to 'collect' the gifts. Aside from this ritual detail, we have to say that it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the offering of the gifts. To be aware of it, we have only to remind ourselves of the unfolding of the second part of the Eucharist, at a period where only a single

³² *Confessiones* 5, 9 (CSEL 33, 104)

³³ Cf. JUNGSMANN: *Missarum sollemnia* II, 9; CABIÉ: *L'Eucharistie* 95.

³⁴ B. LANG: *Sacred games. A history of Christian worship* (New Haven/London 1997) 264.

³⁵ JUNGSMANN: *Missarum sollemnia* II, 9-11. See for the ritual as described in *Ordo Romanus I* also M. METZGER: *The history of the eucharistic liturgy in Rome*, in A. CHUPUNGO (ed.), *Handbook for liturgical studies. Vol. III. The eucharist* (Collegeville 1999) 103-131, especially 121.

eucharistic prayer was known – the Roman Canon, which, furthermore, was recited, or even chanted, aloud, from the beginning to the end, in such a way that everyone could hear it and understand it. First of all, there was the act of offering that we have just talked about. During this rite the choir sang the *offertorium* which was certainly not reduced to a single antiphon (besides, it is far from certain that there was any kind of close connection between the act of offering and the content of the text that was being sung: as we know, later on, when the *offertorium* had been reduced to just the antiphon, this was only very rarely the case).³⁶ Next, the pope or the presbyter said the *oratio super oblata*. What however we must not forget is that the theme of the offering of the gifts runs like a thin red line through the Roman Canon.³⁷ The *Te igitur* is nothing other than a prayer addressed to God, asking him to be pleased to accept the gifts, the sacrifices which constitute the sacrifice of praise that, according to the *Memento*, is offered by the family of *circumstantes* – and not in the first place by the priest. The theme returns in the *Hanc oblationem* and the *Quam oblatio*, and continues again after the institution narrative, notably in the section beginning with the words *Unde et memores* which asks God to be pleased to accept the bread of eternal life and the cup of eternal salvation.

How should we characterize this ritual? We can agree that generally speaking the gestures and texts do not evoke associations with the preparation of a meal, whether sacred or profane (even though certain echoes of the original meal context still resonate therein). It is also clear that the notion of animal sacrifice, obviously as metaphor, is (practically) absent. In fact, if there is a rite with which this ‘offering’ offers points in common and which could have determined the structure of this way of opening the eucharistic celebration, it is that of the oblation which was very current in the Graeco-Roman world and with which Christians moreover could familiarize themselves by reading the Old Testament.

Having said that, two further points need to be made. Firstly, it is important to underline the social dimension of this rite. Unlike the hosts we use today, the bread and wine brought up were immediately usable in everyday life and thus for diaconal purposes, and they were indeed effectively used in this way: the greater part of these gifts was not consecrated and consumed during communion but was distributed to the poor (and to members of the clergy).³⁸ Furthermore, it is well known that the people also brought up gifts other than bread and wine: oil, fruits, cheese, honey, poultry.³⁹ It is true that very quickly synods and individual bishops began to oppose this custom and tried to make a clear distinction between the gifts which were brought to the altar – above all, bread and wine – and the others which

³⁶ Cf. JUNGSMANN: *Missarum sollemnia* II, 37-38.

³⁷ See for the structure and the content of the Roman Canon for instance E. MAZZA: *The eucharistic prayers of the Roman rite* (New York 1986) 49-87; E. MAZZA: *L'anafora eucaristica. Studi sulle origini* (Bibliotheca Ephemerides liturgicae subsidia 62) (Roma 1992) 263-307. Cf. also R. MESSNER: Unterschiedliche Konzeptionen des Meßopfers im Spiegel von Bedeutung und Deutung der Intezessionen des römischen Canon missae, in GERHARDS & RICHTER: *Das Opfer* 128-184.

³⁸ JUNGSMANN: *Missarum sollemnia* II, 11-12.

³⁹ JUNGSMANN: *Missarum sollemnia* II, 13-19.

were ostensibly placed elsewhere – for example, the bishop’s house⁴⁰ – but the fact that official edicts continued to oppose this practice for a long time proves that it continued to exist for a long time. Moreover, it is well known – and in any case Jungmann gives many examples of it – that at least on certain occasions and on certain feastdays this custom survived into the Middle Ages⁴¹ and even later still, the offertory collection being a later manifestation that few parishes were disposed to abolish, for purely financial reasons of course. Whatever the case with these later developments, in the early Church there was a relationship between ‘offering’ and almsgiving and thus between Eucharist and *diakonia*.⁴²

Secondly, during the period just before and just after the reform of the eucharistic celebration and the publication of the 1970 Missal, a good number of liturgists were insisting on the distinction that should be made between, on the one hand, the preparation of the gifts and, on the other hand, the offering – i.e. the true offering that is only made in the course of the eucharistic prayer. A number of them even went so far as to avoid terms such as ‘offerings’, ‘offertory’, etc. – still met with in the Missal – because they lent themselves to misunderstanding. Without wanting to contest the well-founded principle that Christians cannot make an oblation except by participating in Christ’s self-immolating sacrifice which is commemorated during the eucharistic prayer, I must admit that sometimes the distinction which liturgists try to make between the two gives me the impression of being a bit artificial. In my opinion it is too rigid in any case for the Western tradition of the early Church. Here at least a further distinction has to be made. On the one hand there are the people who bring forward the gifts and hand them over to a priest, and on the other hand there is the offering, properly, speaking, which the priests makes. It seems to me evident that, applied to the model of the Mass, the second stage corresponds to the eucharistic prayer and not to the preparation of the gifts which, in this sense, indeed should not be anything other than a preparation, and perhaps no more than a preparation for the sacrifice and an invitation to participate in it. It is however inevitable that the people bringing forward the gifts will interpret their action in a sacrificial sense – i.e. they will consider it as an expression of their willingness to participate in the offering made by the priest and will therefore interpret it to be an offering in itself.

Having spent a lot of time on the development of the preparation of the gifts and the offering in the early Church, East as well as West, I will be much more brief for the centuries which followed from the age of antiquity up to the liturgical reforms of Vatican II; and I will moreover limit myself to the Western tradition.

3.3. The Middle Ages (from the 9th century onwards)

Regarding the mediaeval period, there are two developments above all which to a certain extent are linked to each other and both of which played a part in the

⁴⁰ JUNGSMANN: *Missarum sollemnia* II, 14-15.

⁴¹ JUNGSMANN: *Missarum sollemnia* II, 21-25.

⁴² This point has been rightly emphasized by RASMUSSEN: *Les rites de présentation* 46-47.

progressive disintegration of the ancient rite of oblation and the preparation of the gifts:

- (1) The idea that it is the people bringing up the gifts who offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving during the celebration gives way more and more clearly to a different view of the Eucharist in which it is the priest who offers the eucharistic sacrifice on behalf of the community of the faithful whose role, in turn, is reduced to simply assisting at Mass.⁴³ A very revealing sign of this tendency is the small change to the text of the commemoration of the living which took place in the 8th/9th centuries. Although the original text says clearly that it is the *circumstantes* – who have just brought up the gifts – who offer the ‘sacrifice of praise’, in the Carolingian era a small phrase was added which presupposes a quite different concept and which speaks of the priest as the one who offers the sacrifice on behalf of the *circumstantes*.⁴⁴ Now, this new concept, accentuating the active role of the celebrant, is also at the root of the texts which, from the 9th century onwards, were inserted into the rite of the ‘offertory’. In this regard we need to point particularly to the *Suscipe, sancte Pater* that the celebrant prays in the first person singular, the *Orate, fratres* which makes the distinction between “my sacrifice” (that of the priest) and “yours” (that of those assisting?) and then asks quite specifically for the acceptance (by God) of the sacrifice offered by the hands of the priest for the good of the Church.⁴⁵
- (2) This development brought about an accentuation of the role of the celebrant to the detriment of the role of the community. There is another implication which runs the risk of being overlooked. The fact that the role of the celebrant and that of the community tended to become merged – or that the role of the community tended to be stamped out – contributed to the erasure of the difference between the preparation of the offering and the offering itself.⁴⁶ In my view, at least a clear distribution of roles between the people whose role it is to hand over the gifts and the celebrant whose role it is to offer the gifts during the recitation of the Canon would be a very simple and natural means that could be used to make this difference in roles visible.
- (3) Besides this tendency to give greater prominence to the role of the celebrant, there is another factor which probably had even more serious consequences for the development of the rite of the offering: the substitution of unleavened bread for the ordinary bread used in everyday life.⁴⁷ The effect of this change was that the people had more and more difficulty in recognizing the host – baked somewhere else in a convent – as food that was needed to survive physically and for which it was necessary to toil by the sweat of one’s brow, and which was considered as a gift of the Creator for which it was natural to praise Him, food which could be lived and seen as a concrete and sensory

⁴³ See for what follows for instance RASMUSSEN: *La présentation* 47-51.

⁴⁴ Cf. for this small, but revealing change for instance MAZZA: *The eucharistic prayer* 64-65.

⁴⁵ See JUNGSMANN: *Missarum sollemnia* I, 51-88; 103-112.

⁴⁶ See for this question JUNGSMANN: *Missarum sollemnia* II, 121-125.

⁴⁷ See JUNGSMANN: *Missarum sollemnia* II, 43-47.

symbol of all of creation (as is also the case in the Jewish *berakoth*). At any rate, one of the implications of this change was the erosion of the procession of the offerings. In places where it continued in use, bread and wine were not brought up but candles and especially money which, generally, was not destined for *diakonia* properly speaking but for the upkeep of the church and above all of the clergy. This means that the link between the gifts brought forward by the people and the eucharistic celebration was relaxed or, at the very least, became much less visible and more obscure.

3.4. The period of the Reformation

As far as the Churches of the Reform are concerned, it is well known that Luther and the other reformers were vigorously opposed to the idea that the Mass was a sacrifice offered by the Church (in the person of the priest).⁴⁸ Given that this was precisely one of the key ideas at the basis of the offertory as known in the Middle Ages, it is not surprising that at the dawn of the Reformation this rite had already completely disappeared, including the procession of the offerings or what was left of it at the end of the Middle Ages, and that the preparation of the gifts had been reduced to a minimum.⁴⁹ Right up until today, the Reformed Churches often show themselves to be allergic to anything in the bringing forward or preparation of the gifts that could suggest the participation of the people or the clergy in the sacrifice offered by Christ. Very typical in this respect are, for example, the suspicions that are aroused by any tendency to ritualize or 'sacralize' the offertory collection. No less revealing is the discussion about the place of the collection during the service which has been going on for a long time, especially in the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, and is reflected in some official and less official service-books that have been published during the second part of the twentieth century. In the draft of the Service-Book (*Dienstboek in ontwerp*) which appeared in 1955 the collection was located between the Scripture reading(s) and the sermon.⁵⁰ In an experimental liturgical edition published in 1978 it was placed immediately after the general intercessions but the lay-out made it clear that the collection along with the general intercession constituted an independent part of the liturgy or, alternatively, the conclusion of the liturgy of the word, but in any case was not the beginning of the eucharistic section or 'Lord's Supper'.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See for instance H.-B. MEYER: *Luther und die Messe* (Paderborn 1965) 156-166; R. MESSNER: *Die Meßreform Martin Luthers und die Eucharistie der Alten Kirche. Ein Beitrag zu einer systematischen Liturgiewissenschaft* (= Innsbrucker theologische Studien 25) (Innsbruck-Wien 1989).

⁴⁹ See MEYER: *Luther und die Messe* 167-172.

⁵⁰ *Dienstboek voor de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* ('s-Gravenhage 1955).

⁵¹ 'Onze Hulp.' *Een gemeenteboekje uitgegeven op verzoek van de Gereformeerde Deputaten voor de Eredienst en de Commissie-Dienstboek van de Hervormde Raad voor de Eredienst door de Prof.dr. G. van der Leeuw-stichting* (Amsterdam 1978). See for the discussion about the place of the collection in Dutch protestant churches: W. VAN DER ZEE: *Van alle tijden en plaatsen. Voor gesprek en onderricht over de liturgie* (Zoetermeer 1992) 90-98; P. OSKAMP: *Gebeden en gaven,*

3.5. The genesis of the rite of the preparation of the gifts in the Missal of Paul VI

In the Missal of Paul VI the rite of the preparation of the gifts has undergone a radical and fundamental revision. The aim of this reform was above all to render the rite more transparent than it had been; to put an end to the confusion, the misunderstandings and the false theological interpretations to which it regularly gave rise; and to restore it to its original place in the overall eucharistic celebration, especially in relation to the eucharistic prayer of which certain offertory prayers were more or less a duplication.

I have no intention of examining in detail all the changes which took place, but will limit myself here to the most notable points. In my opinion they are as follows:⁵²

- (1) There was a desire to re-establish a link with the ancient tradition of the procession of the offerings which had fallen into disuse. From now on there would be the possibility for the people to make manifest their participation in the oblation by bringing up the bread and wine or other gifts destined for the needs of the Church or the poor.
- (2) In general, there was an elimination of texts and gestures which expressed or at least suggested the idea of sacrifice offered by the priest before the eucharistic prayer had actually begun. There was a clear tendency to transform the old 'offertory', with all the notions of sacrifice and oblation that this term includes, into a simple 'placing' of the gifts and a preparation of the gifts, and nothing more.
- (3) One of the most remarkable innovations realized in the rite of preparation of the gifts was the introduction of the two new prayers which were inspired by the Jewish blessings (*berakoth*) of bread and wine. This innovation is remarkable for two reasons. Firstly, the two texts consider the bread and wine as gifts created, coming from God, as much as earthly realities, and in this they give prominence to the theme of creation, a motif which had been practically absent in the Roman tradition up to that point (it is noteworthy that in the Roman prefaces this theme [almost] never appears, as compared with the Eastern anaphoras). Secondly, it is striking that the chosen texts recall in the first place the context of a meal rather than that of a sacrifice or even that of

in P. OSKAMP & N. SCHUMAN (EDS.): *De weg van de liturgie. Tradities, achtergronden, praktijk* (Zoetermeer 1998) 217-225. In the draft of the Service-Book which was published in 1998 (*Dienstboek. Een proeve. Schrift-maaltijd-gebed* (Zoetermeer 1998)) the collection may take place before as well as after the prayers of intercession. It is remarkable that in both cases the gifts of the people are gathered while bread and wine are prepared by the pastor and the deacons. Moreover, in one of the two orders provided (Order B) the gifts of the people are brought to the table along with bread and wine. All this means that the new Service-Book establishes a clear link between the collection and the eucharistic section or Lord's Supper.

⁵² Cf. RASMUSSEN: La préparation; MEYER: *Eucharistie* 341-344; J. LAMBERTS: *De vernieuwde liturgie* 134-156; CABIÉ: *L'Eucharistie* 219-223; M. WITZCACK: The sacramentary of Paul VI, in CHIUNPUNGO: *The eucharist* 133-175, especially 151-154.

an oblation.⁵³ In my opinion, this means that, consciously or unconsciously, we have re-established a link with an ancient tradition that since the 2nd/3rd centuries had been pushed further and further into the background (with the exception, of course, of the Reformed Churches, which had always emphasized this aspect of what they explicitly call the ‘Supper’).

4. New perspectives

These innovations open up new perspectives for the rite of the preparation of the gifts, for its ritual presentation. At the same time, we need to point out that its realization does not happen without raising certain questions, and that in itself it breeds a certain number of difficulties. Given the relationship between the liturgy and singing and instrumental music, it is clear that these problems and questions also indirectly (and even directly) involve the possible place for music in the larger sense of the word, whether vocal or instrumental.

4.1. Questions and difficulties

I want to begin with the questions raised by the procession of the offerings. In my view, the carrying-out of this rite poses two problems, one theological in character, the other practical. From the point of view of theology, we can object that the rite could give rise to false interpretations concerning the sacrificial character of the liturgy by suggesting that the sacrifice of the Church precedes that of Christ commemorated in the eucharistic prayer, an argument to which Protestant Christians above all have shown themselves to be sensitive. By emphasizing the bringing-forward of the gifts by the people, we could say that there is risk of falling into the old error which consists in considering the offering as a duplication of the ‘canon’, the eucharistic prayer, and seeing in the gesture of offering an anticipation of the institution narrative and anamnesis. Is this a real danger today? Is it really to be feared that in our modern Western world Christians would return to a quasi-magical interpretation of the Mass that the Reformers were opposed to? I scarcely think so. Obviously much will depend on the form chosen for this procession and above all the behaviour of the celebrant once the gifts have been brought forward. Will he be suggesting by the texts that he says and the gestures that he makes that he thinks he is offering a sacrifice? Naturally it would be essential that he does everything possible to avoid giving this impression. Apart from this problem, in

⁵³ *Footnote of the translator (Paul Inwood)*: The texts as originally drafted read “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread/wine, which earth has given..../fruit of the vine....” A reactionary but high-placed official in the Vatican, not understanding that the offering takes place later in the eucharistic prayer, insisted on the insertion of the phrases *quem tibi offerimus* and *quod tibi offerimus* [literally (bread/wine) “which we offer to you”] before the texts were finally published. The ICEL translation cleverly gets round this by saying “we have this bread/wine to offer”, thus remaining faithful to the Latin but at the same time implying that the offering is yet to come.

principle the procession of the offerings could be the legitimate expression of the willingness of the people to participate actively and worthily in the commemoration of the sacrifice offered by Christ, which demands a sacrificial and social commitment on the part of Christians.

The principal problem, though, is not theological in nature but practical. The primary question is to find a form which makes sense today, which is convincing. In the early Church the ritualization of the bringing-forward, the offering of the gifts was based on two things. Firstly, the bread and wine brought forward were the normal food and drink that were used in everyday life outside the liturgy. Since the introduction of unleavened bread, this is no longer the case. The link between the bread that we eat normally and the bread we use in the Eucharist has become much less clear. In the early Church, the bread and wine were immediately usable afterwards for the purposes of *diakonia*. What was left over could be distributed among the poor. Today, this is no longer realistically possible.

What, then, should we bring forward? Bread and wine? But what is the meaning of an offering of unleavened bread, a host which one has not purchased oneself and which in reality has already been prepared by someone else? On this last point, the Byzantine tradition teaches us that the entrance with bread already prepared easily takes on the character of a kind of epiphany and so could easily cause the people to treat it as if it were already consecrated, as if it were Christ who was entering under the form of unleavened bread. The risk of confusion seems to me to be even greater in churches where one is used to the phenomenon of a service of the word, without a priest, which is followed by the distribution of communion; and that distribution often begins with a kind of procession with the consecrated hosts.

There exists the possibility of bringing forward something other than just bread and wine – the money taken during the collection, for example. But for what purpose is this money going to be used? If it is clearly to be used for diaconal purposes, I would say that in principle a procession could have meaning. But a procession of money destined for the upkeep of the church would certainly not fit in here. I do not know what we should be most afraid of here: the sacralization of the collection that some Protestants dread or making the procession of the offerings appear ridiculous.

Having said that, the conclusion can only be that it is better to reserve the procession of the offerings for certain special occasions in which the diaconal purpose of the collection is obvious. Moreover, we could ask if a collection destined for church upkeep is really in the right place here, just before the preparation of the gifts. The reasons for keeping it at this point in the service are, all things considered, principally financial and practical.

In this connection the custom which exists in many Dutch Protestant churches, where a link is made between the collection and the prayers at the end of the Liturgy of the Word, seems to me to open up interesting perspectives and especially so where there is a clear relationship of both the prayers of intercession and the gathering of the gifts with *diakonia*. In that case, an intention for prayer can be composed that has a direct relationship with the purposes of the collection

which will follow immediately the prayers. Prayers and collection can function simultaneously as a preparation for the eucharistic part of the service and make it clear that participation in the Eucharist and in communion demands of the participants not just a profession of orthodox faith but also a commitment in concrete terms.

The part which follows the procession of the offerings (assuming that this happens) – i.e. the preparation of the gifts, properly speaking – has provoked mixed reactions among those liturgists who have written on the subject. On one side, the attempt to eliminate elements which duplicated certain parts of the eucharistic prayer and which had a sacrificial connotation has been well received. On the other side, most are agreed that it is unfortunate that this aspect of the reform has not been totally coherently carried out. In effect, as I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, it is indisputable that there still remain some elements which are to a large extent linked to the notion of ‘offertory’ or which at any rate could easily be interpreted in this sense. We need only mention here the *Orate, fratres* and the rubric prescribing that the paten and the cup be held *aliquantulum elevatum super altare*. At the end of the day, the rite of preparation of the gifts still retains a rather ambiguous character which could be held responsible for the existing confusion. Another point which has certainly been criticized is the rather curious functioning of the prayers said by the celebrant during the preparation of the bread and the cup. If the offertory chant is to be sung, the celebrant is supposed to say these *berakoth* prayers in a low voice (while the schola is singing the offertory chant). In cases where the offertory is not sung, it is permitted (*licet!*) to the priest to say these prayers aloud and then the people can respond with a brief acclamation. All this means that the rich content of these prayers can be somewhat lost, and we could ask what impression the people receive from the prayers said in a low voice, accompanied by the gestures.

Lastly, concerning the creation theme and the earthly provenance of the gifts as in a real meal, we fear that too often this aspect does not really impact on the people – the message just doesn’t get through. This is almost certain if these two blessings are said in a low voice; but even if they are enunciated in an audible and comprehensible manner, we can ask what power these texts have if they are said over unleavened bread, over hosts that most of the faithful would not immediately recognize as real bread and a genuine product of the land. From this point of view, the notions of creation and meal fit more easily and naturally into the ritual practice of the Protestant Supper, where the use of leavened bread is the rule.

4.2. What are the implications for singing and instrumental music?

Not being especially competent in the field of liturgical music – or at any rate much less competent than you are – I would limit myself to a few suggestions which do not relate to musical aspects in the strict sense of the word but rather to the relationship between singing/instrumental music and the ritual context in which they have to function, namely the preparation of the gifts. Furthermore, I have no intention of proposing more complex solutions which it would merely be a

question of putting into practice. I just want to make a few suggestions with the sole aim of provoking discussion.

One of the questions that we need to talk about and discuss is certainly the offertory chant. Apart from the choice of musical formula which I willingly leave to the experts, there are two points which call for attention: the moment at which it is sung, and the content of the text. As for the first point, according to the Missal the offertory chant coincides with the procession of the offerings and also with the preparation of the gifts by the ministers, including the blessings and prayers said by the celebrant who in this case says them in a low voice. I would certainly not be alone in having problems with the synchronization of the singing of the choir with semi-silent prayers said by the celebrant. It would be better to have the preparation of the gifts preceded by the offertory chant. In cases where there is a procession with the offerings, this chant would be performed by the schola at the same time as this action. In cases where there is no procession, it would function as an introduction, not just for the preparation of the gifts as such but for the whole eucharistic part of the liturgy, both memorial of the sacrifice and meal/communion. Concerning the content of the text, it is well known that the content of the traditional offertory chants is rather general in character. Normally there is no direct link with the bringing-forward of the gifts by the people, one of the rare exceptions being on the feast of the Epiphany when the offertory chant puts the offerings of the three kings in parallel with those of the people. Given this, we might wonder if in new chants it might be more appropriate to tie the text in with the liturgical action that is taking place at that moment. In my view there are several arguments for keeping to traditional practice on this point. It goes without saying that if there is no procession or no normal collection being taken, an offertory chant that develops the theme of the participation of the people in the sacrifice is simply out of place. But even in the case where the bringing-forward by the people is ritualized and might take the form of a kind of procession, there would still be reason to be cautious on this point, given that otherwise we run the risk of overemphasizing the sacrifice of the faithful at the expense of the sacrifice of Christ (and thus fall into the same error as the 'mediaeval' offertory, but with this difference, that it would no longer be the sacrifice offered by the priest which would erroneously be put in pole position but the oblation or sacrifice of the people). In my opinion, the offertory chant should either be an introduction to the whole liturgy of the Eucharist or else take the form of a transition from the liturgy of the word to the liturgy of the Eucharist. If we opted for the latter solution, it would not be necessary to allude explicitly to the preparation of the gifts, nor even to the Eucharist. The principal theme could, for example, be that of the Sunday or feast, as was often the case with the classic offertory chants of the past.

If the offertory chant does not serve to accompany the preparation of the gifts by the ministers, the obvious question is whether this liturgical action should remain without musical forms. In principle, such forms should not be necessary. Nevertheless, if there is a chant, several conditions must be fulfilled. First, we must not lose sight of the fact that the principal ritual actors are the celebrant and the people. If, then, we introduce sung elements, it must be these actors that sing

them, and we must take this into account when selecting these elements. Next, we must avoid the music putting too much emphasis on the preparation of the gifts which is, after all, only a preparation. Lastly, if there is singing during the preparation of the gifts – even if only during the prayer over the offerings – then singing must take an equally important place in the eucharistic prayer, to avoid having this prayer appears as an anticlimax in comparison with the preparation of the gifts, rather than a culminating point in the eucharistic celebration.

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