Sacrifice, Grace, and Contemplative Prayer in Maurice de la Taille, S.J.

Author: Marie Matthiesen Michon

Persistent link: http://hdl.handle.net/2345/1371

This work is posted on eScholarship@BC, Boston College University Libraries.

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2008

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.
Boston College

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Department of Theology

SACRIFICE, GRACE, AND CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER IN MAURICE DE LA TAILLE, S.J.

A Dissertation

by

MICHON MARIE MATTHIESEN

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2008
In memory of my father,

Jerry A. Matthiesen
† 14 September 2006

and friend,

Gregor Goethals
† 1 February 2008
ABSTRACT
Sacrifice, Grace, and Contemplative Prayer in Maurice de la Taille, S.J.
by
Michon Marie Matthiesen
Director: John F. Baldovin, S.J.

This study retrieves the long-abandoned thought of an early twentieth-century Jesuit theologian, Maurice de la Taille (1872-1933), reassessing his theory of eucharistic sacrifice in light of his theology of grace and contemplation. His major work, the three-volume Mysterium Fidei (1921), provides an integrated account of sacrifice, one which responsively embraces the multiple and often controversial aspects of the topic of sacrifice. De la Taille rejects a supercessionist treatment of Hebrew ritual sacrifice; he incorporates a sophisticated theory of sacrifice as sign and gift; and he allows the fullness of theological tradition—scripture, the Fathers (East and West), Thomistic thought, conciliar and papal teaching, and the witness of liturgical prayer and mystical theology—to inform his theory of Christian sacrifice. In surprising ways, de la Taille's magisterial work on eucharistic sacrifice forestalls the post-Vatican II liberal anxieties about sacrifice. He decidedly challenges the formidable heritage of sixteenth and seventeenth-century immolation-focused eucharistic theology by providing a patristically-rich theology of sacrifice, one that stands rooted in a spirituality of prayer and ascetic practice which cannot be segregated from the ecclesial oblation of Christ's sacrifice. With his focus on the affect and desire of the offerer of sacrifice, de la Taille anticipates the 'subjective turn' that emerged in mid-twentieth century eucharistic theology, and in a way that revitalizes the critical rôle of ecclesial ritual sacrifice in the transformation of that desire.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part I: de sacrificio</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: the nature of sacrifice</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: Christ’s sacrifice</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: the ecclesial sacrifice</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part II: de gratia</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Eucharistic union and divinization</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five: the grace of the Redeemer</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six: ‘created actuation by uncreated Act’</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part III: de contemplatione et baptismo</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Seven: contemplative prayer</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Eight: baptismal mortification and the eucharist</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

In ten years from now, it is unlikely that I will recall with any fine precision the details of these many written pages, the intricate movements of de la Taille's impressive mind. However, I will remember with great clarity the people whose lives fruitfully intersected with mine as I experienced the pleasure of reading de la Taille's *Mysterium Fidei*, the agony of endless months of translating Book III from the Latin, and the hard labor of writing page after page of this study.

For instance, I will remember my gifted friend, Frances Millican (now a Cistercian novice) who would graciously suffer all my excited 'And listen to what de la Taille says about _______!', as we studied together over coffee at the Harvard Square Peet's. Often she lent her time and linguistic expertise to those Latin passages which seemed impossible to unscramble. Our shared conversation and prayer no doubt 'saved' me from that unhealthy isolation that preys upon those entrenched in academic pursuits.

I will recall with deep gratitude the many hours that Professor Sarah Coakley liberally expended in discussing this project, in prodding me to go more deeply into the central questions and to be more lucid in my thinking, in renewing my enthusiasm when it waned, and, in guiding me over the numerous pitfalls of thesis writing. More, her commitment to the integration of rigorous theological thought and contemplative prayer, and her modeling of this, will long remain a central icon in my mental terrain.

I will also readily call to mind that 'trinity' of men (sorry, Mary Daly) who shaped and sustained me through this long doctoral process—in quiet and faithful ways.
It is surely one of life's great blessings to know someone who perpetually (and inexplicably) demonstrates belief in you. Father David Burrell, CSC, longtime friend and mentor, has been such a gift to me. More, he is likely a significant secondary cause in my taking on this project: long ago he planted the seed of my affection for St Thomas, and he continues yet to hone my capacity for reading and comprehending someone of de la Taille's philosophical and theological acumen. A footnote or two in the pages ahead will manifest specific points where his prescient comments have been illuminating for me in this study; however, his presence runs much more deeply.

If it had not been for Professor Peter Hawkins's (Boston University) Dante Seminar in the Spring Semester of my first-year coursework, I might have packed my bags and returned to the poetic life of growing grapes and winemaking in Northern California. His expert and theologically-attuned teaching of the Commedia reminded me that the goal of my studies was nothing less than the transformation of desire (not simply of my own, but of those I might one day teach), nothing short, that is, of the eternal dance of the Paradiso. He also reminded me that theology can—indeed ought—to be a bella lingua. Peter tutored my own efforts at teaching undergraduates; gently ushered me through the untimely deaths of my father and our mutual friend, the marvelous Gregor Goethals; and, when lost mid-course in woods of dissertation writing, he has turned me again and again toward the light, through the potency of words and images (often from scripture). When plagued with doubt that the writing ever would be completed, his simple refrain 'You will finish' was le mot juste. A Vergil—but so much more.
Thirdly, I count it proof of beneficent providence that I landed under the liturgical formation of Fr. James Savage, Parochial Vicar at St Paul’s Parish in Cambridge. His love of the liturgy (Eastern and Western) and of the Word, or rather his saturation in these realities, make him a most splendid mystagogue of the eucharist. That my study of Maurice de la Taille proceeded in joy and reached a profound spiritual depth is largely because of Father Savage who, at weekday and Sunday masses, mirrored and thereby animated what I was absorbing intellectually. I am (impossibly) indebted to him for the food of inspiration and insight that so frequently I took away from his preaching and prayer. Some days in our academic work we crawl and limp and moan about; he taught me that I could continue to sail gently forward with trust, even when the winds were quiet. And when the demons of anxiety would strike, he was often enough the bridge (pontifex) to that exquisite peace which the world cannot give.

I want to express thanks to my family for providing good rest and joyful holidays in these past six years. Just the idea of a family ‘nest’—however physically distant from Boston—was often comfort enough. Not to be overlooked, many treats to my elegant and athletic Standard Poodle, Phanneuf, whose affection and enthusiasm was constant regardless of how many quality paragraphs I wrote in a given day, or how many hours I devoted to a few incorrigible lines of Latin. He always knew when it was time to bring me back to the joy of the present moment.

Finally, I extend my gratitude to the Ernest Fortin, S.J., Memorial Foundation for providing me with research grant funds to visit the Jesuit Archives located just outside of Paris. The trip initiated a more intimate acquaintance with Maurice de la Taille, as I
poured over his letters and spent time at his humble gravesite. Along the arduous way of writing this study, that relationship has been a sustaining one.

25 April 2008
St Mark the Evangelist
Introduction

This study reconsiders the question of sacrifice for contemporary eucharistic theology through the work of Maurice de la Taille, S.J. (1872-1933), whose masterwork, *Mysterium Fidei*, has been largely forgotten. To be sure, the topic of sacrifice is inevitably controversial. In the first place, sacrifice tends to be emblematic of a certain neo-conservatism that ostensibly desires to restore a pre-Vatican II eucharistic piety and worship style. Whereas, a large and eminent body of liberal theologians, inspired by the liturgical revisions and renewal of Vatican II, has laboured to re-work the concept eucharistic sacrifice, eager to remove from the concept any lingering suggestion of immolation, destruction, or violence. A more radical liberal minority argues that the Church ought to consider, for pastoral and theological reasons, removing sacrificial language entirely from eucharistic liturgy, often proposing in its stead, the language of gift. Pressure to transform sacrifice has also emerged from scholarly work in the fields of socio-anthropology and feminist studies. For instance, the immensely influential thought of René Girard has ‘unveiled’ sacrifice as a mechanism for the maintenance of social order: a victim becomes necessary for diffusing the violence which mounts with rampant mimetic desire among humans. The feminist critique, on the other hand, contends that the sacrificial system is unavoidably patriarchal and violent.\(^1\) In short, any ‘positive’

\(^1\) For a feminist like Nancy Jay, for example, Christian sacrifice is a ritual tool to shore-up an all-male Roman hierarchy; sacrifice, she memorably writes, is ‘childbirth done better’—no women need apply. Indeed, for Jay and most feminists, women ought to refuse—tout court—to participate in a liturgy of
theologising about sacrifice will likely be caught, as it were, on the horns of this problematic situation.

Still, I submit that the work of de la Taille on eucharistic sacrifice effectively destabilses the unfruitful divide which seems to have emerged between the objectivist language frequently found in official Church teaching on sacrifice (to which the neo-conservative can appeal) and the 'anti-sacrifice' concerns of contemporary liturgical and sacramental theology. In surprising ways, de la Taille's magisterial work on eucharistic sacrifice forestalls the post-Vatican II liberal anxieties, by decidedly challenging the formidable heritage of sixteenth and seventeenth-century immolation-focused eucharistic theology and by providing a patristically-rich theology of sacrifice which stands rooted in a spirituality of prayer and ascetic practice that cannot be segregated from the ecclesial offering of the Christ's sacrifice. Granted, these initial, broadly-painted statements about the *status quaestionis* need to be substantiated and nuanced. However, before providing a current, detailed theological account of sacrifice, I want to introduce Maurice de la Taille, the Jesuit whose impressive work on eucharistic sacrifice, *Mysterium Fidei*...
Maurice de la Taille, S.J. (1872-1933): His life, his methodology, his sources

Maurice de la Taille, one of eleven boys in a family of nobility from Indre-et-Loire, belongs to that rather eminent group of French Jesuits whose education and formation was disrupted by the secularist laws exiling religious orders from France. For example, among his exiled confrères at St. Mary’s in Canterbury were Jules Lebreton, who would be a longtime friend, and Adhémar d’Alès, each of whom is well-known for their careful theological and historical retrieval of the scripture and the Fathers. More, it is almost sure that de la Taille and Pierre Rousselot were classmates at some point on British soils, and at the very least, were both taught by the renowned Léonce Grandmaison, for whom de la Taille had a life-long strong affection. Because of weak health, de la Taille spent a year of his early Jesuit formation (plus later intervals) at the Benedictine Monastery of Ramsgate. I mention this biographical point because he seems to have ‘picked up’ there a profound appreciation for the Church’s liturgy. His friend Lebreton comments that de la Taille would willing preside at the later Sunday eucharist,

---

2 This accusation was based upon an argument that de la Taille’s thought flagrantly denied the Council of Trent’s teaching on sacrifice (Session 22). We shall turn in full to this matter in Chapter Three.

3 Bernard Leeming, ‘A Master Theologian’ Father Maurice de la Taille’. The Month 163 (1934): 31-32. Jules Lebreton would write on the history and doctrine of the Trinity, and d’Alès is remembered for his historical work on the sacrament of penance and baptism, as well as for editing the Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi Catholique.

4 Jules Lebreton, ‘In memoriam: Le Père Maurice de la Taille’, Recherches de sciences religieuse 24 (1934), 7: ‘[I]l faut en rapprocher l’influence du P. de Grandmaison; il avait été le condisciple du P. de la Taille à son arrivée en théologie, puis son maître; il fut toujours son ami; il a été par lui aimé et compris comme par bien peu d’hommes, et de cette intuition fleurissait une vénération qui resta toujours discrète, même après la mort du P. Léonce, mais que les plus intimes amis de P. Maurice connaissaient bien’. 

5 (1921), elicited both praise as a veritable ‘événement théologique’ and the accusation of ‘heresy’.
merely for the ‘joy of celebrating solemnly’. Others have also remarked that he seemed to preside at the eucharist as if he were an Abbot leading a community of monks. As we shall also note in examining de la Taille’s thought on contemplation, he would retain a deep sympathy with the Benedictine religious order throughout his later life.

With the (temporary) easing of anti-clerical measures in the mid-to late 1890’s, de la Taille was able to return to France where he studied theology at the L’Institut catholique and earned a Licentiate in philosophy at the Sorbonne. He was ordained at Tours, in 1901, and then again sent back to England (with the passing of the Associations Law, in 1902) to continue studies at Canterbury. During this second sojourn at St. Mary’s, de la Taille followed the counsel of a spiritual director, P. Mazoyer, and began to study the Epistle to the Hebrews. He frequently recounted that his study of this New Testament text was as a bright beacon of light across his intellectual and spiritual terrain, a study absolutely seminal to his thought.

De la Taille’s tertianship year (1904-05) at Mold, in Wales, seems to have been a generative one. It was here that he came under the direction of Réné de Maumigny, who enflamed and shaped his interest in contemplative prayer. It was also in Wales that he composed a Lenten series of sermons on ‘The Sacrifice of the Mass’, in which he gives

---

6 Ibid., 6. Lebreton also notes that while at the monastery, de la Taille grew fond of English literature and acquired a rare command of the language. This is borne out in his personal correspondences later in life with English friends.
7 Ibid. Apparently, the volume of his voice and his grand gestures were apparently not appreciated by those celebrating mass at private altars nearby.
8 Lebreton comments that Hebrews was a fountain for de la Taille’s theological work: ‘toute sa construction théologique en sortit’ (ibid, 7).
9 R. de Maumigny was well-known as spiritual director, and wrote a two-volume work entitled *Le pratique d'oraison mentale: l'oraison ordinaire* (vol. I); *L'oraison extraordinaire* (vol. II), first published in 1905. Cf. Chapter 7 for a further discussion of de la Taille’s relationship to Maumigny.
an initial articulation of his insight on eucharistic sacrifice. In 1905, he returned to
France as professor at the School of Theology at Angers, where he developed lectures on
eucharistic theology and, over a ten-year period, wrote the major work of his life,
*Mysterium Fidei: de Augustissimo corporis et sanguinis Christi sacrificio atque
sacramento, Elucidationes L in tres libros distinctae.* Though completed in 1915, it did
not see publication until 1921, after he returned from serving as a chaplain in the First
World War. Immediately following the war, de la Taille was invited to become a
professor at the Gregorian University in Rome, participating in a newly-inaugurated
‘*cursus magistri*’, designed for those who would themselves become teachers of
theology. Until his health declined in 1930, de la Taille taught at the Gregorianum
alongside of such eminent theologians as Cardinals Louis Billot and Francis Ehrle and is
reported to have been a vivid and dynamic teacher, with a ‘challenging’ and ‘oratorical’
style. His lectures on the philosophy and theology of Thomas at the Angelicum drew
audiences of over two hundred, and from ‘all orders and ranks’. Early in his studies, de
la Taille had been ‘seduced’ by the luminous and wide horizons of Thomas’s thought,
and would ever remain a faithful disciple of Thomas throughout his own theological
writing. Even so, as will become apparent in the course of this thesis, de la Taille does
not fall easily into a neo-scholastic school, such as the one represented by the Dominican
Garrigou-Lagrange, a leading figure of the ‘rigorissimi’ interpreters of the Angelic
Doctor. In fact, since Garrigou-Lagrange was professor at the Angelicum from 1909

---

11 Leeming, op. cit., 38.
12 Ibid., 39.
until his death in 1965, it is interesting to speculate how they would have assessed one another's lectures on Thomas. In the first few decades of the twentieth-century, there may well have been a mutual respect between these two Thomists—one a Jesuit, the other a Dominican. However, the connection mentioned above between Rousselot and de la Taille is not without incident; as I will suggest below, both of these thinkers share a desire, and a capacity, to read Thomas afresh—escaping from the standing influence of Suarez in Thomistic seminary teaching, an interpretive lens which synthesized Thomas and Scotus. As will be apparent in our chapters on grace and contemplation, de la Taille attempts to retrieve an authentic Thomist vision that refuses to sharply oppose nature and grace, or the intellect and will.

De la Taille was a keen reader of Thomas and knew well the tradition of Thomist interpretation: John of Thomas, Cajetan, de Lugo, Suarez, and Franzelin appear frequently in his work—and with both words of appreciation and critique. His own interaction with Thomas might be described best as loyal and independent. Though an acute philosopher, he abhorred a strictly philosophical approach to Thomas, one eager to establish a 'grand system' of Thomas's thought. Rather, de la Taille saw the vitality of

---

14 Without doubt, these two thinkers have deep common interest in spiritual theology—and particularly in synthesizing the work on Thomas and John of the Cross. De la Taille's first publication on the topic of contemplative prayer in 1919 (see Chapter Seven) already reveals the influence of John of the Cross. In 1923, Garrigou-Lagrange published Le perfection chrétienne et contemplation selon S. Thomas d'Aquin et S. Jean de la Croix (Var: Saint-Maximin), based upon lectures he had been delivering at the Angelicum in Rome. Cf. Richard Peddicord, O.P., The Sacred Monster of Thomism: An Introduction to the Life and Legacy of Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. (South Bend: St Augustine's Press, 2005), 190-191.

15 I am indebted here to the prescient comments of David Burrell, C.S.C., who suggested that the brighter Jesuits of the early twentieth-century (including Rousselot, de la Taille, Maréchal, de Lubac, and Lonergan) could be understood as challenging the Suarezian seminarian curriculum in which they were trained. Suarez's work melded Scotus and Thomas, thus giving a skewed teaching of Thomas's thought.

16 Lebreton, op. cit., p. 10.
Thomistic theology in the way it spoke meaningfully to the very real encounter of God’s saving creation and redemption in the historical, liturgical, and spiritual life of human beings. Particularly, I would argue, de la Taille seems to have taken profound inspiration from Thomas’s illuminating thought on the mysteries of the life of grace and prayer, and on the sacraments as the human being’s way to union with the creator. It could be said that de la Taille, like his classmate Rousselot, was concerned to promote an ‘interiorised’ scholasticism.

Furthermore, de la Taille’s expertise—in the lecture hall and in journals—covered a broad spectrum of topics: e.g., grace, incarnation and the hypostatic union, the act of faith, contemplation, sacrifice, the sacraments, human and divine knowledge, and moral theology—specifically, sin and the virtues. A historian of the Gregorianum has observed that the ‘brilliant’ de la Taille was one of the last of the ‘old order’ theologians at the University: in the early 1920’s a number of specialized chairs in the faculty of religious sciences were established, only to grow into faculties in the last part of that decade. The era of great teachers whose erudition covered a wide range of topics was giving way to field-specialists. De la Taille’s competency was indeed immense, and the varied subject matter and style of his writings reveals him as a singular thinker, and one

17 Cf. the ‘Bibliography’ for a list of de la Taille’s published essays which appeared predominantly, though not exclusively, in Études, and Récherches de science religieuse.
difficult to classify neatly—much like the ‘liberal-conservative’ Cardinal Newman, a short generation before de la Taille.

In the first decade of the 20th-century, when Modernism and Combism were the chief theological crises facing the Catholic Church and the Jesuits in France, de la Taille’s earliest publications in the Jesuit journal Études show a passionate intellectual engagement with these ecclesial concerns. In 1904, he wrote a piece on revelation and dogma, directed obviously against Loisy and Tyrrell—though in the (sometimes annoying-to-us-later-readers) literary style of the day, no names are mentioned. In the following year, he addressed the nature of religious belief (in opposition to M. Brunetière) and also wrote a ‘list of errors’ that could be discerned in Fogazzaro’s Il Santo.19 De la Taille’s voice against Modernism was clear and trustworthy enough that he was asked by the Catholic Faculties of the West to give an opening-term address in support of the recently issued Encyclical Pascendi gregis (1907); the audience would have included bishops and dignitaries.20 In a word, he joined many of his confrères in battling some of intellectual threats to the faith tradition, threats which seemed to crystalise in the first decade of the twentieth-century.

With regard to the political situation facing the Church in France, de la Taille vitally advocated the formation of a Catholic Party. His writings on the subject (1907-1908) must have been impressive, as they were later collected and printed under the title

---

19 ‘Quelque précisions sur la Révélation et le dogme dans leurs relations avec le progrès’, v.101 (1904): 507ff. Il Santo was a novel published in 1905; its author, Fogazzaro, was sympathetic to positivist and evolutionary theories, and argued that the Church ought to be open to these theories.

20 Leeming, op. cit., 32-33. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find a copy of this lecture.
En face du pouvoir (1925). Still, as his biographer and friend Jules Lebreton insists, de la Taille was much more interested in theological study than in the controversies of the day—which must be the case if he was able to research, write, and complete his massive and erudite study on the eucharist (Mysterium Fidei) by 1915. This ‘secondary’ status of his interest in political Catholicism is also evident in the fact that he willingly retreated from his more impassioned position when Pius XI condemned the monarchist movement Action Française and its journal of the same name. This movement had a large base of intellectual and clerical support, and the Pope’s condemnation became a divisive one not only for the French Jesuits, but also for Catholic intellectuals across Europe. Cardinal Louis Billot, for whom de la Taille had great respect, voluntarily resigned from the Gregorianum over this issue.

If in the early writings of de la Taille we glimpse a robust and energetic thinker, attentive to the theological and political defence of the Catholicism, his post-War publication of Mysterium Fidei and essays on contemplation and grace give us a fuller, more serene picture of his intellectual and spiritual character. I want to focus now on the theological method and reception of de la Taille’s major work, for the two questions are related and help us to see what was so striking and new about Mysterium Fidei. I want to argue that both the positive and negative reaction to his work is as much a consequence of his method as it is a reaction to the theses he proposes therein.

---

21 Ibid. It is also worth noting that de la Taille wrote a dense and lengthy article for the Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi Catholique on the topic ‘Insurrection’ (Beauchesne, 1915), cc. 1056-1066. This essay was later translated and reprinted as, ‘Una opinión teológica’, part of a book entitled Catolicismo y república (Madrid: Gráfica Universal, 1932), pp. 140-160.

John Milbank has written that de Lubac and the *ressourcement* movement aimed at a new speculative theology that would be carried out ‘with a closeness to the exegetical, mystical and liturgical reading of the revealed signs’. De la Taille’s *Mysterium Fidei* unquestionably stands as an early prototype of this new theology. More accurately, perhaps, we can say that de la Taille is implementing the pedagogical and scholarly style promoted by his teacher Léonce Grandmaison. Grandmaison urged that lectures and written studies be grounded in a presentation of the historical sources: scripture, the Fathers, conciliar teaching. This, he argued, was the more helpful methodology for assessing truth in teaching than a nakedly scholastic or speculative approach. *Mysterium Fidei* exemplifies such a pedagogy and method, embracing, in fact, a more extensive list of the sources of tradition. Beyond scripture and patristic authors, de la Taille consults and collects for his readers the testimony of the Church’s liturgies; the witness of Thomas and his (often conflicting) commentators; the writings of both medieval and contemporary theologians and spiritual writers; and, both ancient and contemporary preaching. Indeed, he casts of the net of tradition *in altum*. De la Taille possessed that charity and generosity of ear for listening deeply to and perceiving the conceptual vision of a particular text, allowing its illuminating voice to enrich the truth of a doctrine. Perhaps one of the highest compliments paid to de la Taille’s work comes

---

from Karl Rahner, who appreciated his keen sensibility and integrity in approaching the
texts of the tradition:

What is it that makes the properly historical in studies like those
of de Lubac or de la Taille so stimulating and to the point? Surely
it is the art of reading texts in such a way that they become not
just votes cast in favour of or against our current positions (positions
taken up long ago), but say something to us which we in our time
have not considered at all or not closely enough, about reality itself.25

De la Taille’s sensitivity to the liturgies of the Church as a source for doing
theology caught the attention and fervent adulation of Dom Lambert Beauduin, the
Belgian Benedictine considered by many to be the ‘father’ of the liturgical movement in
Europe. Beauduin hails Mysterium Fidei as a ‘new point of departure’ for the explication
of doctrine, noting that the title alone announces a new spirit and ‘program’ for theology.
In particular, Beauduin praises de la Taille for recognising that the liturgy ‘constitue un
lieu théologie de grande valeur’.26 Yet, beyond this approbation of the method de la
Taille employs, Beauduin also acknowledges that this study of the eucharist marks a
major turning point in theology. He claims that Mysterium Fidei is a ‘release
(soulangement)’ and ‘deliverance (délibérance)’27 from the web of immolationist theories

Helicon Press), 9-10. Cf. also another significant compliment paid by Rahner to de la Taille’s Mysterium
Fidei: ‘If I were asked which theological work written in Latin within the past generation ought to have
been read by every theologian in the field of the new and actively researching theology, then I know of
only one really indisputable example, viz. Mysterium fidei by M. de la Taille’. Idem, ‘Latin as a Church
26. Le Saint Sacrifice de la Messe: A propos d’un livre récent Les questions liturgiques et paroissiales VI
(1921), 197-198. I think it worth noting that, like Beauduin, de la Taille shows no interest in reforming the
liturgy, but rather only a deep interest in renewing the liturgy. Beauduin’s approach, to restore Christian
spirituality through the restoration of the high mass on Sunday—with full participation—likely would have
been de la Taille’s as well. Still, neither theologian openly advocates changing the received liturgical
27 Ibid., 202.
propounded since Council of Trent, theories that located the ‘true and proper’ sacrificial aspect the eucharistic sacrifice in the destruction of the victim.

Beauduin’s review of Mysterium Fidei is a springboard for assessing de la Taille’s significance in the liturgical movement, a significance inexplicably overlooked by historians of the movement and contemporary eucharistic theologians. Mysterium Fidei witnesses to—indeed advocates for—several concerns linked with early project of liturgical renewal: e.g., an attentiveness to liturgical prayer texts, the renewal of a biblical fluency along with the retrieval of patristic sources; a desire for fuller lay participation in the offering of the sacrifice and in the reception of communion; and, in a deepening of liturgical prayer and spiritual practices tout court. Given de la Taille’s rich argument for the frequent sacramental reception of communion (cf. Chapter 7), it is hardly surprising that he would dedicate his work to Pius X. Julio Jimenez, S.J., in his lengthy article celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Mysterium Fidei, suggests that de la Taille’s great work was seen by some as a ‘guide or teacher’, by others as a kind of ‘catalyst’ of the liturgical movement, and by almost all as a ‘determining’ factor in the blossoming of liturgical studies.28

28 Julio Jimenez, S.J., ‘En el cincuentenario del Mysterium Fidei de Maurice de la Taille (1921-1971), Anales de la Facultad de Teologia, Vol. 3 (Santiago: Universidad Catolica de Chile, 1971), p. 168, n. 27. Jimenez also suggests that de la Taille was ‘ahead of his time’ in his thinking on ecclesiology and the sacrament of penance (154-157, 158). The only recent study of de la Taille is a German dissertation by Maria Magdalena Elbl (Eucharistie als Opfer der Kirche bei Maurice de la Taille, Regensburg: Pustet, 2003), which focuses on de la Taille’s ecclesiology, specifically, on the question of the ‘offering Church’. Elbl’s work is valuable for situating, historically and dogmatically, de la Taille’s contribution on this topic. Elbl questions whether de la Taille’s theology of sacrifice adequately illuminates the connection between the action of Christ and the action of the Church in the eucharist. Her retrieval, generally speaking, is positive one, yet she ultimately critiques de la Taille’s construal of Christ’s heavenly action in the eucharist, i.e., his argument that, in the eucharist, the power is all Christ’s, while the new action belongs to the Church—virtus tota ex parte Christi—novitas tota ex parte Ecclesiae. Cf. Eucharistie als Opfer der Kirche bei Maurice de la Taille, Regensburg: Pustet, 2003, 233.
Apart from investing the budding liturgical movement with momentum, de la Taille participated in another distinctive feature of ressourcement: his retrieval of the Fathers, patristic and medieval, was significantly inclusive of the Eastern tradition. Here again, we could say that de la Taille was 'ahead of his time'. It is quite likely that his turning to Greek and Syriac authors was spurred by his reading and admiration of the work of Matthias Joseph Scheeben, the German scholar of the nineteenth-century whose work pioneered a retrieval of Eastern theologians. At the turn of the century, certainly it was still a novum to be using the Eastern tradition with the depth and confidence that de la Taille exhibits in Mysterium Fidei. That he is aware of doing something 'bold' surfaces at several points, when, for instance, he expresses 'surprise' at discovering harmony between certain Eastern and Western Fathers on a particular teaching, or when he defends his frequent use of Cabasils, whose Commentary on the Divine Liturgy de la Taille finds most appealing. Further, beyond his methodological retrieval of Eastern theologians, de la Taille took an interest in the ecumenical movement—as would many

---

29 De la Taille references Scheeben's seven-volume Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik (1873-1887) with obvious appreciation in Mysterium Fidei (cf. MF, 156, 179, 265). See Hocedez's treatment of Scheeben in Histoire théologie aux XIXe siècle, Vol III, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1947), pp. 377-384. Apart from a shared interest in Eastern theologians, I want to suggest that de la Taille was attracted to Scheeben's sense of theology as an organic knowledge directed to the spiritual life of humans, to Scheeben's focus on Uncreated grace and God's indwelling, and, to this German theologian's mystical temperament.

30 Cf. MF, 602. De la Taille does not suggest that Nicholas Cabasalis and the other medieval Eastern thinkers he cites are without the 'taint' of upholding schism. However, he argues that these figures have witnessed accurately to the theology handed-on to them by earlier thinkers. In regard to Cabasils he laments that he did not devote the same 'care and skill' in dealing with church unity as he did with the 'sacraments of the faith'. In fact, de la Taille goes even further in his advocacy of Cabasils, exonerating theologians of earlier centuries who praised what they found in his writings: '...they are to be commended, according to the phrase of Moses: O that the people might prophesy, provided, as St Paul says, Christ is announced' (MF I, viii).
later associated with *nouvelle théologie*. In 1926, the Pontifical Institute for Eastern Studies published an essay de la Taille wrote on the fruits of the eucharistic sacrifice for the separated Eastern Churches. In a footnote at the beginning of the text, de la Taille expresses gratitude for the warm reception of his ‘fraternal and sincere’ essay by the Russian Orthodox, who heard him deliver it at The Week for the Union of Churches in Brussels (1925).

This ecclesial and intellectual generosity extended to developments in the field of the history-of-religions. In the explication of his theory of sacrifice, de la Taille's shows his familiarity with the relatively new tide of anthropological and historical studies on the phenomenon of sacrifice in diverse human communities and cultures. He does not hesitate, especially in Book I of his work, to cite such history-of-religion scholars as E.B. Taylor, J. Wellhausen, Robertson Smith, the Dominican M.J. Lagrange and Hubert and Mauss. Likewise, in discussing the supposed ‘mythic’ origins of the last supper in Book II, de la Taille exhibits a wise familiarity with the cultic theories of religious studies, including a reference to the Third International Congress for the History of Religions, 1908 (cf. *MF II*, 14). Clearly, de la Taille (like Rousselot and Grandmaison) attended to the findings of secular studies without a sense of fear or threat. But such an openness is

---

31 This term does not seem to have been ‘in place’ at the time of de la Taille’s death. It was likely first introduced in public writing by Henri de Lubac in his 1941 *Surnaturel*, and then picked up and employed pejoratively by Garrigou-Lagrange, in 1946. Cf. Aidan Nichols, O.P., ‘Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie’, *The Thomist* 64 (2000), pp. 7-11. Nichols speculates that the phrase ‘the new theology’ was likely ‘fed’ to Pope Pius XII by Garrigou-Lagrange. In any case, Garrigou-Lagrange’s *Anglicum* (1946: 126-145) article, ‘La nouvelle théologie, où va-t-elle?’ determined its negative associations, at least until the far side of Vatican II.

32 ‘L’œcuménicité du fruit de la messe’, *Orientalia Christiana* Vol. 8, num. 30 (Roma: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1926). This piece draws heavily upon his research presented in Book II of *Mysterium Fidei*. 
well-balanced by a firm hierarchy of knowledge in de la Taille’s thought—both for theology in general and for his theory of eucharistic sacrifice (cf. MF I, 7, n. 9). In the highest place is revelation, found in scripture and explicated in the sacred writings of the tradition: this dictates his method, which can best be described as ‘positive’ theology, though undertaken by a thinker with both a keen sense for speculative argument and a mystical sensitivity. Also, in spite of this openness and keen awareness of the intellectual discussions of his day, de la Taille’s written work manifests a unique consistency of thought. We do not find him altering his positions in later work; rather, only a more finely-tuned and penetrating articulation of his fundamental insights.33

Finally, before we return to the topic of sacrifice, I want to grant de la Taille the ultimate word on his theological method, purpose, and sources. Theology, he rather pointedly describes in the ‘Preface’ to Mysterium Fidei, is ‘for believers’, and thus has ‘no place for anything which does not foster piety’. He thereby envisions his own work as directed to the augmenting of ‘the knowledge of faith’, so that believers are better able ‘to appreciate the full benefit of the gift of God’ (‘Preface’, MF I, viii). It is partly to this end that he defends his choice of sources and his ‘prolix’ quotations from both scripture and tradition. A theologian’s task is not to promote his own ‘special findings’, but rather that which has been gathered from tradition: ‘His purpose is to record them [the Fathers and the Doctors] honestly, co-ordinate and refine them, and, where necessary, set them down in detail’ (ibid.). With these words, de la Taille aptly

33 That said, I am yet curious to pursue a cryptic remark by Bernard Leeming, who, while acknowledging de la Taille’s independent thinking, nonetheless records that he ‘owned to having changed his opinion on reading an article by P. Guy de Broglie’. ‘A Master Theologian’, op. cit., 39.
depicts the experience and pleasure of reading *Mysterium Fidei*: it is indeed a valuable, encyclopedic collection of the writings on sacrifice from scripture and tradition. More distinctively, he also reveals a sharp distaste for ‘systems of theology’ and proposes instead that theology is an organic science, ‘resting on its own principles’, with all its parts ‘connected and coherent among themselves’. No single part of theology can be explored fully without reference to ‘its corresponding part and corresponding member (sua comparte ac commembro)’ (ibid., ix; *MF*, viii). I emphasize this point for two reasons. De la Taille’s work, firstly, is a marvelously complex body of integrated ‘Elucidations’, and he himself cautions the reader about the organic articulation of his theology: ‘...in my opinion, no part of the book could be completely understood (*plene perspectam*) by one who had not read the whole’ (ibid., ix-x; *MF*, ix). I suspect that much of the consternation that followed the publication of *Mysterium Fidei* was a resistance to his method of reading Thomas and ‘doing theology’ which pushed beyond (or rather, behind) a narrowly-defined scholastic system, and a failure, as well, to see how the work hangs together organically—a complex treatise on the eucharist inclusive of a number of interconnected topics: incarnation, sacrifice and gift theory, sin and redemption, grace and the virtues, mass stipends and Mariology, prayer and the ascetic life.

I also wonder, secondly, if de la Taille’s dismissal in later twentieth-century theology stems precisely from a curtailed reading of the whole. In particular, this study argues that de la Taille’s thought on eucharistic sacrifice has been misrepresentated because read and rehearsed in isolation from his teaching on grace and the life of prayer, most of which appears in Book III. To fully appreciate his understanding of the Church’s ritual sacrifice, this plainly-announced cumulative and interconnected method must be taken with due seriousness. I propose to show-forth the synthetic exigency of his thought, even though his fundamental intuition linking sacrifice to grace and prayer is often more mystically-suggested than lucidly spelled-out in Mysterium Fidei. The task of this study, drawing upon the full scope of his writings, will be to bring into sharp focus the connections de la Taille envisions between ecclesial oblation, grace, and prayer.

We have portrayed de la Taille as a theological figure who loosely ‘fits’ into a number of twentieth-century characterisations: a defender of the faith against Modernism and a political activist against secular repression in France; an early ressourcement figure who gave full ear to the Eastern tradition; a scholar who provided a methodological and spiritual spark to the liturgical movement; a thinker who lent his support to ecumenical


36 De la Taille refers to his method of gathering numerous testimonies from tradition as an example of ‘cumulative probability’, a phrase used by Newman to identify a knowing that transcends opinion and is capable of begetting certainty (MF I, 58).
issues and was attentive to the findings of history-of-religions; a philosophical Thomist with a distaste for the systems of earlier neo-scholasticism; and, finally, an intellectual with a wide expertise and an attraction to mystical theology and contemplation. What does a theologian of this stature and temperament have to offer to a contemporary Christian doctrine of sacrifice?

Sacrifice: status questionae, and de la Taille’s definition

As a signpost of the current theological mindset on the subject of sacrifice, we can attend to the recent work by Kevin Seasoltz, O.S.B., entitled God’s Gift Giving (Continuum, 2007). Favorably rehearsing the positions of major post-Vatican II thinkers on eucharistic sacrifice—Robert Daly, S.J., Edward Kilmartin, S.J., David Powers, and Louis-Marie Chauvet—Seasoltz clarifies the issues and crystalises the case against sacrifice, i.e., sacrifice understood in any way except as a metaphor of a relational self-gift or self-limitation—and this both in terms of divine and human ‘sacrifice’. This

---

37 De Lubac reads Mysterium Fidei as a ‘liquidation of the over-complicated systems worked out’ since Trent on regard to the sacrifice of the Mass (The Mystery of the Supernatural, op. cit., 4). The same may be said of de la Taille’s position on God’s knowledge and the freedom of the will. In his essay ‘Sur diverses classifications de la science divine’ (Rêcherches de science religieuse 13 [1922]: 7-23), de la Taille prescinds from the Molinist theory of ‘middle knowledge’ and proposes a learned sort of agnosticism on the question. Cf. Henri Rondet, Essais sur la théologie de la grâce (Paris: Beauchesne, 1964), p. 220-221, n. 51.

38 A recent exception ought to be noted. Matthew Levering’s book Sacrifice and Community (Blackwell, 2005) studies eucharistic sacrifice in the light of Hebrew sacrifice, suggesting that the sacrifice of the mass achieves the end desired by the sacrifices of Israel, namely, perfect union with God. Levering’s book, which relies upon Thomas’s theology of the eucharist, marks a step towards the regeneration of the notion of sacrifice in eucharistic theology.

39 K. Seasoltz, God’s Gift Giving: In Christ and Through the Spirit (New York: Continuum, 2007), 48ff. For the sake of clarity, let me specify that I will be using the word sacrifice, without scare-quotes, when I intend the word to be taken in a manner inclusive of its wide-ranging denotative, connotative, and metaphorical meanings. The reader will see ‘sacrifice’, when the word is being employed in a manner that
theological position on sacrifice seems problematic on at least two accounts: first, in that its ‘spiritualization’ of sacrifice too frequently (and occasionally unapologetically) manifests an anti-sacrifice polemic—bracketing or rejecting any cultic sense of the word; and secondly, in its portrayal of sacrifice as originating in the Godhead—a position with definite soteriological consequences. Before I address these concerns at some length, the views of key theologians like Robert Daly, S.J., and Louis-Marie Chauvet need fuller explication. Arguably, these two theologians set the context for theological discussion of eucharistic sacrifice today.

The writings of eucharistic theologian Robert Daly, himself influenced by the work of Edward Kilmartin and Réne Girard, have defined the contours of Catholic thought on sacrifice in the decades following the Second Vatican Council.¹⁰ In his Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice (1978), Daly develops an intricate argument from New Testament texts, from the self-understanding of Qumran community-as-temple, and from a close reading of early Greek and Latin Fathers that, in the first centuries of Christianity, language and understanding of sacrifice was essentially ethical, not ritual:

[Christian sacrifice] was centered not in a formal act of cultic or external ceremonial worship but rather in the everyday practical life of Christian virtue, in the apostolic and charitable work of being a

---

good Christian, of being 'for others' as Christ was 'for us'.

Daly underscores that this 'spiritualization' process reached a summit 'incarnational' and practical phase, one that went beyond focusing on internal dispositions and promoted 'down-to-earth, practical' activities that reflected the self-giving ethic of Christianity.

Daly’s more recent work reveals the direct influence of Girard’s work and therefore proposes a more trenchant critique of any 'history-of-religion' remnants in regard to the eucharistic sacrifice. Daly argues that the Christ-event 'did away with sacrifice in the history-of-religions sense'. Put differently, he asserts that it is a 'methodological mistake' to theologize about Jesus’s death on the cross and about the eucharistic liturgy through the lens of Hebrew sacrifice or ancient ritual practices of sacrifice. Instead, Daly promotes a concept of sacrifice as self-offering or self-gift—an event not God-directed, but rather originating in the initiative of the Father in the gift of

---

41 R. Daly, *The Origins of Christian Sacrifice*, op. cit., 140. Note that Daly does not deny that the last supper is interpreted as having a sacrificial meaning and context, whether that be located in the Passover context, or in the language of 'the new covenant' or of 'the blood poured out for many [you]' for the forgiveness of sins. However, he contends that the primary interpretative key for the synoptic accounts and for 1 Cor. 11 is not the atoning sacrifice of Hebrew cultic system, but rather the thematic of the Suffering Servant of God, from the Servant Songs of Isaiah (especially the Fourth). The early Christians were using 'Servant Christology' to interpret Christ’s death and the eucharist (ibid., 57-58). Daly likewise judges that the 'slain Lamb' in Revelation (5.6, 9, 12; 13.8) is best interpreted in terms of this Servant Christology, as opposed to a sin-offering sacrificial context (ibid., 80-81).

42 Ibid., 138.

43 'Sacrifice Unveiled or Sacrifice Revisited', op. cit., 25-26. Daly roughly defines this 'history-of-religions sense' in the following way: 'Sacrifice is a gift presented to God in a ceremony in which the gift is destroyed or consumed. It symbolizes the internal offering of commitment and surrender to God. The purpose is primarily for the offerers to acknowledge the dominion of God, but also to bring about the reconciliation of themselves (and possibly others) with God, to render thanks for blessings received, and to petition for further blessings for oneself and others'. To apply such a definition to the eucharist, Daly argues, is 'disastrously inadequate' (ibid.). De la Taille, on the other hand, will nuance and expand this definition, finding sacrifice the central category for understanding the eucharist and our ongoing baptismal transformation.
his Son, 'whose “response” is also a self-offering'. Consequently, it is not that a gift is being given to God in the eucharistic sacrifice, but rather that 'persons, in full freedom are giving/communicating themselves to one another'. Authentic Christian sacrifice, according to Daly, is defined as 'a self-offering response'. Moreover, he identifies this vision of eucharistic sacrifice as the 'consensus position' of contemporary liturgical theology and sharply regrets the persistent and 'alarming divide' between this view and the current line of magisterial teaching. In sum, Daly's insistence, first, on the spiritualization of sacrifice as ethical activity, and second, on the re-scoping of 'sacrifice' as Trinitarian-based dynamic of self-offering, seems effectively to dismiss the ritual-sacrificial context of the eucharist.

Louis-Marie Chauvet's Symbol and Sacrament, in some ways more boldly anti-sacrifice and ethically-driven than Daly’s work, has further transformed contemporary thought on the eucharist, shifting theological language away from 'sacrifice' to 'gift'. In fact, in Seasoltz's new book, Chauvet stands as the principle theologian of the eucharist as gift. Chauvet, who like Daly endorses the work of Girard, poses a complete 'tear' between the ritual sacrifices of the Hebrew people and the Christian eucharistic rite. The

---

44 Ibid., 28
46 Robert Daly, S.J., 'Robert Bellarmine and Post-Tridentine Eucharistic Theology', op. cit., especially 239-243. In brief, Daly finds the official teaching of the magisterium out-of-step with current theology on such issues as: 1) in persona Christi (the magisterium still considering the axiom far too narrowly); 2) a sacrificial and consecratory understanding of the eucharist (the legacy of an erroneous history-of-religions approach to the eucharist, as well as an over emphasis on the Words of Institution); 3) the ecclesiological and Trinitarian dynamic of the eucharist (still overshadowed by an overly Christological and scholastic approach); and 4) the central goal of the eucharist—transformation in Christ (which is muted by concerns about real presence and the Mass as sacrifice). Daly argues that the 'embarrassing dichotomy' between 'sound' eucharistic theology and magisterial teaching can be best broached by exposing the shortcomings of Tridentine theology (still plaguing official doctrine) and by explicating a more adequate understanding of the eucharist—and one that accents a 'continuity with the fullness of the Catholic tradition' (ibid., 260).
death and resurrection of Jesus, he writes, definitively breaks with sacrifice and priestly, cultic worship. Briefly, Chauvet argues for an understanding of the eucharist based upon an anthropological notion of gift-exchange. The Christian receives the gift of God in the eucharist and offers a ‘return-gift’ in his or her concrete ethical action in the world—which Chauvet also and intriguingly calls giving Christ a body in the world.

Without a doubt, the work of Daly and Chauvet has animated the late twentieth-century shift in theology away from eucharistic sacrifice understood in any history-of-religions sense, to ‘sacrifice’ re-cast, or re-placed, by gift—often parsed as self-offering, or self-limitation. Most theologians who follow this lead claim to want to retain ‘sacrifice’ in some metaphorical sense, but I submit that such a domesticated or sanitised concept of ‘sacrifice’ is questionable—and certainly not fully inclusive of the Catholic tradition. For it seems clear that with thinkers like Daly, Chauvet, and now Seasoltz, a metaphorical or spiritualized understanding of ‘sacrifice’ is inherently anti-sacrifice.

Jonathan Klawans, scripture scholar and Jewish historian, provides an additional angle on this anti-sacrifice question. He offers an illuminating critique of the recent tendency among some biblical and liturgical historians to cast the last supper (as well as Jesus’s overturning of the temple tables) as a rejection of the temple cult, or as anti-sacrifice. In brief, Klawans challenges a view of the early eucharist as a rejection of

---

47 Louis-Marie Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), cf. especially, 260; also 240-244; 248-249; 256-260; 298-299; 310-311 et passim.
48 Ibid., 509.
49 Jonathan Klawans, Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple (Oxford University Press, 2006), 7-8, 213-220. Klawans notes that there are some scholars of the last supper who are clearly more sympathetic to the ancient Jewish sacrificial context, e.g., Bruce Chilton, The Temple of Jesus (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002) and N.T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, Vol. 2. (Minneapolis: Fortress
cult, focusing both on the comportment of Jesus's early disciples towards the temple cult and sacrificial worship and on the problematic way that New Testament sacrificial metaphors have been interpreted as a negative assessment of ritual sacrifice, even to the point of supersessionism. Klawans's argument warrants attention, for it reminds us that the 'spiritualization' of sacrifice in Paul and the early Fathers could be seen more fruitfully in another light. Indeed, he argues that sacrificial language in early Christianity is best understood in terms of metaphor: these metaphors of sacrifice, attend to the context of temple sacrifice in a 'positive and constructive' way, operating 'on the assumption of the efficacy and meaning of sacrificial rituals'. In other words, the early Christians desired to 'draw on' and 'channel' the temple's sanctity and efficacy into their everyday practices. It is a 'flawed exercise', writes Klawans, to 'group sacrificial metaphors along with cultic critiques, leaving temple ritual alone as the only thing that is not a "spiritual" sacrifice'.

I invoke Klawans's stimulating critique because I think it goes some way to revealing the problematic ubiquity of 'gift' over sacrifice (again, understood in the cultic-ritual sense) in contemporary eucharistic theology. Granted, it may or may not be the specific aim of many post-Vatican II eucharistic theology to entirely dismiss the cultic


Ibid., 220-221 (italics mine).

Ibid. Klawans does address the Epistle to the Hebrews as revealing a distinctly anti-temple polemic, showing the temple to be 'inherently inferior' to the true sanctuary and high priest, Jesus. Interestingly enough, it is this same New Testament text which inspired de la Taille's theory of eucharistic sacrifice, which, as we shall see, is not dismissive of cultic sacrifice and its history. Perhaps de la Taille has something to teach biblical scholarship on the reading of Hebrews in light of Jesus's sacrifice and the ecclesial sacrifice. (In a conversation with Klawans, he admitted that he had not been as precise as he could have been in his assessment of Hebrews.)
and sacrificial context of the mass—though the more Girardian, the more this is true—but, in fact, this largely has been accomplished, and so much so that the polarization of sacrifice and gift, rooted in the Luther’s diatribe against the mass as sacrifice, seems to be standard. Klawans’s scholarship challenges this at its foundation in biblical sources. More to the point, Klawans’s critique clears the way to retrieving a theory such as de la Taille’s, which, I shall argue, distinctly ‘spiritualises’ sacrifice, if you will, without casting a negative interpretation on sacrificial ritual, without that is, ‘cutting off’ the history-of-religions approach to sacrifice as somehow inimical to Jesus’s actions at the last supper and to the ecclesial participation in that sacrifice. As we shall see, de la Taille interprets New Testament (and much patristic) use of sacrifice-metaphors as boldly referring to the temple ritual context—and in a theologically positive and heuristic manner.

There is a second theological problematic posed by a ‘spiritualization’ of sacrifice, related to the attempt to make sacrifice synonymous with gift. When theologians begin to speak of sacrifice as a ‘universal law’, found even at the heart of the Trinity, it seems that 1) we have lost sight of a basic linguistic principle that some language is inappropriately used of the divine and 2) that we are ‘fixing’ upon a particular soteriology, namely exemplarist. First, to say that sacrifice originates in God is not at all identical to proclaiming that God is the original Gift-Giver: Gift originates in the triune God; sacrifice is a response to, or a consequence of, the refusal of the presence and caritas of God.
Ian Bradley’s poetically seductive book, *The Power of Sacrifice* (1995), is perhaps the most complete theological expression of the attempt to speak of sacrifice as divinely ordained. Indeed, Bradley stridently depicts sacrifice as a ‘cosmic law issuing from God’, and even more, as an integral part of the Godhead. In a way that recalls the thought of Daly, Bradley contends that we misunderstand sacrifice when we look at it anthropocentrically—rather than seeing it as ‘at the heart and center of the life of the Holy Trinity’. What does Bradley intend by such ‘sacrifice’ in the Godhead? How is the language being used? He suggests that sacrifice in God means that the very being of God is patterned upon ‘costly self-giving and the bringing about of life through the agency of death’: sacrifice is the ‘supreme opus Dei’, Bradley asserts, ‘a universal principle of self-limitation and self-surrender that emanates from the very being of God’. When sacrifice is seen as a ‘distinct characteristic of God’, as a pattern of surrender and self-limitation at the foundation of created life, then sacrifice becomes ‘life-affirming’, and ‘life-enhancing’. Certainly such a position has its pastoral attraction: the suffering of creation and the pattern of self-surrender now becomes a reflection of the Godhead, and part of a universal law in which death is the agency of life. Seasoltz finds Bradley’s vision of sacrifice highly persuasive—and in tune, so to speak, with modern science in physics and biology.

But is there not something very ‘confused’ and ultimately *anthropocentric* about Bradley’s thesis? His reasoning seems to evolve this way: because there is a death-into-

---

53 Ibid., 10-11
54 Seasoltz, op. cit., 50-51.
life dynamic all about us in the created world, because self-limitation (always?) results in an enhancement of life, and because Jesus of Nazareth was put to death so that all might live, ‘sacrifice’ must be thereby at the very heart and center of God. On the contrary, is it not rather the case that God (in se) is Gift, and ex se also only Gift—abundant and ecstatic? Is it not the case, in fact, that sacrifice originates in the human context of sin, of misdirected desire, of a failure in love? Perhaps no one has put this with greater insight and precision than Sarah Coakley, who articulates that it is only when the Gift of God ‘hits the time-line of sin’ that we can speak of the origin of sacrifice. Coakley writes that ‘the demanding effects of the reception of divine, Trinitarian Gift, while sin still reigns in the order of the world, are inevitably “sacrificial”, morally and spiritually’. I would add, then, that sacrifice does not belong properly to the divine realm, to the inner-Trinitarian life. There, all is Gift. There, desire is pure. There, worship is spirit and truth. This is the Gift-reality that John of the Cross so marvelously describes in The Living Flame of Love (III. 78-79)—a passage to which we shall return later: only the perfectly purified soul, in and through the Spirit, receives the divine Gift and offers the Gift without sacrifice.

Not surprisingly, the view of ‘sacrifice’ as a principle of self-limitation in God and in creation correlates with a soteriology that links Jesus’s sacrificial death not with

---


56 Cf. Catherine Pickstock [After Writing: The Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 243] strikingly describes the self-giving flow between the persons of the Trinity: ‘As the Father gives Himself and glorifies the Son, and the Son glorifies and gives Himself to the Father, all by the Spirit, without lack, the Father “gains” something from the Son “gains” something from the Father, but the “gain” in the donee does not correspond to any diminution or loss in the donor’. In other words, in the Trinitarian exchange, there is no ‘sacrifice’ in terms of self-limitation and lack; for there is only the excess of Gift.
propitiation or expiation, but with a kind of exemplarism. Bradley, for instance, de-emphasizes the voluntary and willing character of Jesus’s death, in order to underscore Jesus’s *passivity*—as opposed to a willing, priestly ‘self-immolation’. Jesus obediently bears his death, as ‘a submission to the dark and mysterious power of sacrifice...which the Son of God is destined to reveal and release’. 57 A certain inevitability marks the passion and death of Jesus; Jesus dies to reveal that the way to the Father is through a surrender to the law of sacrifice.

Those influenced by Girard also tend to view the sacrifice of Jesus as essentially revelatory: the cross and resurrection reveals a God who ‘works by way of example, not substitution’. 58 According to Seasoltz, the Girardian-understood exemplum in the victimal death of Jesus empowers and inspires the believer ‘to overcome both violence and victimization’. In the gift of the eucharist, the Christian becomes like God inasmuch he ‘implements’ the gift which Jesus came to reveal: namely, the saving Love of God. 59 Seasoltz also praises Stephen Finlan’s sharp critique of atonement theory in Finlan’s recent *Problems with Atonement* (2005). Finlan’s study is radically and unapologetically anti-sacrifice and anti-temple. Jesus, he writes, ‘rejected the whole mythology of sacrifice’. 60 He argues that atonement is not an ‘essential doctrine’ of the Christian faith; rather what is revelatory about God and God’s generosity, what is significant for redemption, is found in the doctrine on the incarnation. Redemption is fundamentally

57 Ibid., 112-113.
58 Seasoltz, op., cit. 108.
59 Ibid., 112.
about *theōsis*, Finlan argues, about ‘restoration and re-enabled participation in divinity’, and such re-divinisation is precisely the goal of the incarnation.\(^6^1\) Whilst Finlan’s retrieval and underscoring of *theōsis* is attractive (and patristically-rooted), he speaks as if such ‘spiritual maturation’ is simply a gift to be received, as if such reception is viable without undergoing a *passio*, as if sinful human desire could be corrected by a moral lesson that remains outside the gates of the garden of Gethsemane.

My intention here has been to outline the soteriological correlates of recent efforts to either ‘translate’ ‘sacrifice’ into the Godhead, or, on the contrary, to reject ‘sacrifice’ altogether and to speak only of the cross and eucharist in terms of gift. To summarise, we have seen that for Bradley and, differently, for Girard (as interpreted by Seasoltz), the voluntary character of Jesus’s death on the cross is replaced by a kind of surrender to the inevitable law of sacrifice, a passive acceptance of death (and violence). In that very surrender, they argue, lies the revelatory key to redemption. Finally, for Seasoltz and Finlan, when sacrifice is ‘corrected’ by a notion of gift and God’s generosity, the gift of the incarnation and eucharist *saves* by being received, by being coöperated with and implemented. To be sure, this is one approach to a theology of eucharistic ‘sacrifice’, and, perhaps, it even enjoys a ‘consensus’ position. But I want to contend that it is neither the only possibility nor the most complete theological option, that is, one that both does justice to the language in which the Church prays, and to the long and full tradition of reflection upon the liturgy of the eucharist.

We begin now to spell out de la Taille’s theory of eucharistic sacrifice and to point to the ways that it suggestively engages the positions and concerns of the contemporary liturgical theology. In short, de la Taille’s thought provides a discourse that can defuse—and positively so—what Daly portrays the as the divide between magisterial teaching and the current sacrifice-translated consensus. First, de la Taille eschews any facile dichotomy between sacrifice and gift; yet, at the same time, neither does he conflate the two in such a way that ‘sacrifice’ is subsumed by ‘gift’, indistinguishable from self-gift, or self-limitation. Nor again does he see sacrifice as a universal natural law—having its origin in the Uncreated. Unlike most current attempts to ‘cleanse’ the eucharist of any history-of-religions understanding of sacrifice, de la Taille embraces this context and its multiple associations, mining them for theological import and truth. In doing so, he is retrieving and imitating an approach found in much patristic material, and then bringing forward the corroborating voices of medieval theologians.

Indeed, de la Taille’s receptivity to the ritual and temple context of sacrifice provides him with his central insight—a neat distinction between sacrificial oblation and immolation. In striking contrast to most post-Tridentine eucharistic theology, he places the essence of sacrifice in the act of oblation. Hence: the supper and the cross are a single sacrifice, with Jesus acting as priest of his death on the cross in the ritual offering of the last supper. The will, the love, the devotio underlying this oblation is central to Christ’s redemptive sacrifice; and, it is into this dynamic of offering that the Church intimately and mystically enters when ritually offering the sacrifice at the mass.
This oblatio-devotio dynamic stands at the heart of de la Taille’s thought on eucharistic sacrifice, and, as I shall argue, it points to a theology of desire pulsating throughout the pages of his monumental opus, Mysterium Fidei. Surprisingly, this aspect of his work has not been given attention. In addition, the full scope of what de la Taille intends by eucharistic sacrifice is frequently lost when his theory of sacrifice is isolated from both his dense thought on grace and his treatment of prayer and baptism. De la Taille possesses a sure instinct (one gleaned from his reading of the tradition) that sacrifice is essential to growth in the life of grace: the Christian must ritually offer the ecclesial sacrifice and receive the deifying grace which flows from the eternal victim. Further, he understands that oblation and the movement of desire in eucharistic sacrifice is not simply cognate to, but is, in fact, continuous with ascetic practice, including the practice of contemplative prayer. In the Church’s sacrifice, de la Taille sees a rite pregnant with transformational potency: in the eucharistic oblation—as in contemplation—human desire is made vulnerable both to purification and intensification.

I have shown above that the supplanting of sacrifice by gift proffers a concomitant rejection of any propitiatory or expiatory understanding of Jesus’s death on the cross. De la Taille, to the contrary, does not sidestep the propitiatory aspect of sacrifice. His theory of sacrifice-as-gift affirms that any gift directed to God by humans will have, of necessity, a propitiatory character. The nature of this ‘necessity’ becomes even more evident when we attend to his discussion of contemplation, in which the soul longing for union with the divine ‘learns’, in the light of contemplation, its own impurity before the all-pure love and holy goodness of God. Succinctly, the ecclesial offering of
sacrifice, the mortification symbolically expressed in baptism (which allows—and indeed—obligates one to participate in the Church’s sacrifice), and the contemplative’s willing vulnerability to God are analogous oblations, each manifesting a love that knows its sin and is animated by a desire for union to Christ and for a share in the divine life. In de la Taille’s thought, the eucharist is the fruit of the sacrificial banquet, it is God’s return-gift, a Gift bestowing grace according to the measure of the worshipper’s devotion and his or her participation in the sacrificial offering; it is the inflow of sanctifying grace and the delightful union between ‘bride’ and ‘bridegroom’.

Hence, this study will attempt to demonstrate how de la Taille’s theory of eucharistic sacrifice negotiates with subtlety the ‘sacrifice’ / ‘gift’ divide—and does so without sacrificing, so to speak, the historical-ritual aspects of sacrifice. Through his thought, we can imagine a third alternative to the contemporary impasse between liturgical theology and the Church’s magisterial teaching. Part I is devoted to a careful exposition of de la Taille’s theory of eucharistic sacrifice. The first chapter provides a detailed analysis of de la Taille’s concept of sacrifice-as-gift, defining its central features (latria, propitiation, oblatio and immolatio, devotio, and acceptance) and bringing them into conversation with current philosophy and theology regarding the dynamic of gift-giving. In Chapter Two, we shall explore de la Taille’s controversial understanding of the sacrificial unicity of the last supper and the cross. The congruency of this last supper-cross unity to his oblation-focused theory of sacrifice will be evident, but we shall show that de la Taille grounds his thesis in the strong testimony of Scripture, of the Church’s liturgies, and of the early Fathers. Chapter Three looks at the ramifications of this
supper-cross sacrifice to a theology of the Church's ecclesial sacrifice in the mass. De la Taille explores the centrality of Christ's priesthood and argues for a nuanced concept of the celestial Victim, to the end of providing full and accurate answers to the questions: *who offers the sacrifice of the mass? and how the mass is properly thought to be a true sacrifice?* Throughout these initial three chapters, it will be clear that the concept of oblation and of the offerer's *intentio*—the involvement of her love and will—are absolutely central to the ecclesial eucharistic sacrifice.

Part II of our study turns to de la Taille's theology of grace. Chapters Four and Five, based on the untranslated Liber III of *Mysterium Fidei*, focus on eucharistic grace, or the sanctifying grace of intimate and deifying union to Christ. In particular, Chapter Four reveals de la Taille's strong preference for Greek and Syriac thought on eucharistic grace, which accentuates the divine life flowing from the flesh of Christ. Chapter Five involves a more technical discussion of the grace of Christ, and the necessity of the eucharist. Taken together, these two chapters provide vital indications of the topics de la Taille intended to explore at greater length in the unfinished (and apparently unrecoverable) treatise *de gratia*: the initiative of Uncreated grace to be intimately present to the created soul; Christ's grace as the source of deifying life within the believer; the analogy of the hypostatic union to sanctifying grace; and the necessity of eucharistic grace for the life of the Christian. We shall again note how desire figures centrally in the reception of the sacrificial food. For the eucharist attracts desire, 'straightens' it, and finally, excites it further. Chapter Six moves beyond the scriptural and patristic witness of *Mysterium Fidei* to an articulation of de la Taille's theological
insight into a metaphysical understanding of the union between Uncreated grace and the created soul. Here I explicate his provocative phrase ‘created actuation by Uncreated Act’, both demonstrating its significance for twentieth-century discourse on grace, and pointing to the way it illuminates de la Taille’s thought on the grace of eucharistic union.

In Part III, we spell out the scope of de la Taille’s theology of sacrifice and grace for the spiritual life. Chapter Seven takes up de la Taille’s impressive work on contemplation and questions concerning mystical theology. Contemplation, or passive prayer, is that purgative ‘exercise’ through which all souls pass on their way to union with the divine. I shall argue that John of the Cross’s influence is vitally manifest in the way that de la Taille sees contemplation in terms of sacrifice and the purification of desire. More, what surfaces is a strong analogy between contemplative union and the grace of the eucharist—both the food of the sacrificial victim.

Chapter Eight gathers the various pieces of this study under the rubric of baptism, and the ongoing purification and transformation which that rite signifies. For de la Taille, the oblation of our mystical death in baptism is crucial to eucharistic sacrifice. Baptism is the image of Christ’s willing oblation of his death, an oblation to which the believer is conformed in baptism and which she is henceforth obliged to offer in the ecclesial community. Ongoing baptismal mortification—ascetic discipline, works of caritas, practices of liturgical and passive prayer—is oriented to and authenticate the ecclesial offering of the eucharistic sacrifice. All such purificatory practice has the same end: the grace of union to Christ and the influx of his divine life.
PART I:

de sacrificio
Chapter One: the nature of sacrifice

A first indication that *Mysterium Fidei* offers an approach to eucharistic theology decidedly different from that of eucharistic treatises since the early medieval period—up to and including the theology manuals of de la Taille’s own time, is his decision to treat ‘sacrifice’ before ‘sacrament’, thereby inverting the traditional structure of explicating the eucharist. De la Taille defends this ‘bouleversement’ as a rightful attending to the ‘natural order’ or sequence of events: that is, dealing with what came first—the sacrifice offered by Christ—before considering the daily sacrifice of the Church (*MF I*, ‘Preface’, vii). However, without accusing de la Taille of being disingenuous, ‘sacrifice’ is much more than a temporal ‘first’ in his eucharistic theology. Sacrifice, in fact, is the principle, governing intellectual category in the whole of de la Taille’s *Mysterium Fidei*—always implicit, and frequently coming rather explicitly to the surface, throughout the various questions he treats. De la Taille likewise acknowledges that some readers will be disconcerted by the fact that a proof of ‘real presence’ was not a ‘set purpose’ of his work (also indicated, I would submit, by the reverse structuring of *Mysterium Fidei*). Yet, if he professes not to address this apologetic question with direct intention, real presence is demonstrated none the less in the course of his focus upon sacrifice. We commence,

---

1 Three stylistic clarifications are needed here. First, my use of the English translation of *Mysterium Fidei* will be indicated by ‘*MF*’, followed by the volume number. My citations from the original Latin text (1921) will be indicated by ‘*MF*’ alone. If using both texts, the Latin text page numbers will be distinguished by the ‘1921’ date. Secondly, I will be following the Latin text in making ‘capitalisation’ decisions; thus, for the sake of consistency, I will be ‘correcting’ (as it were) the English translation when quoting from it directly. Thirdly, de la Taille is profuse in his use of italics. Unless I claim the emphasis as my own, all other italics are directly from de la Taille’s manuscript.
then, with a detailed presentation of de la Taille’s definition of sacrifice, precisely to the end of tracing the ways that this notion of sacrifice shapes and illuminates his treatment of Christ’s sacrifice and the sacrifice of the ecclesia.²

I shall not attempt an ‘apologia’ for de la Taille’s starting point in ‘sacrifice’, despite the protest of modern eucharistic theology. He forthrightly maintains that a Christian theology of the eucharist will, of necessity, attend to sacrifice ‘in genere’. Scripture and tradition give ample evidence that the event of Christ’s passion was interpreted in terms of sacrifice, and de la Taille would be puzzled indeed by the suggestion of some late twentieth-century theologians (R. Daly, E. Kilmartin, and L-M. Chauvet) that beginning with sacrifice is a ‘methodological mistake’. Of course, it is another question altogether to ask whether or not elements from his initial discussion of sacrifice in genere govern his eucharistic theology in too-heavily-handed a way, to the point of straining revelation and official Church tradition; or, alternatively, whether these elements in fact enhance our understanding of the eucharist in ways that in fact corroborate Church tradition and truths of Christian practice and formation. I am inclined to see the latter in de la Taille’s work. In any event, de la Taille is not unaware that his theological approach leaves some angles on the eucharist unexplored, or, at least, underexplored.³ However, his express purpose is to shed greater light on the mystery of

² Because, de la Taille proves to be a consistent thinker, I will almost exclusively be drawing upon the 1921 edition of Mysterium Fidei, the edition most widely available and which establishes the pagination for succeeding editions (1924 and 1931). In the 1931 edition, de la Taille has appended responses to critics; this material is found, in substance, in the English collection of his work, The Mystery of Faith and Human Opinion Contrasted and Defined (London: Sheed & Ward, 1930). I will refer to this material only when de la Taille’s argument appears more transparent than the initial articulation in Mysterium Fidei.
the eucharist, striving for a systematic, coherent understanding that is both congruent with the truth of scripture and tradition and concerned to 'foster piety' \(MF I\), 'Preface', vii-ix). The genus of sacrifice is precisely that archê which allows for an 'organic articulation' of theological complexus of the eucharist: sacrifice responds to the central theological questions about the eucharist, namely, 'What properly is this?', and 'what in its intrinsic essence is this matter with which our faith concerns itself?' ('Preface', ix).\(^4\)

For de la Taille, sacrifice is the theological key to a hermeneutics of the eucharist. This chapter begins to outline the reasons why this is the case, and, begins to reveal how sacrifice is intrinsically related to its frequently segregated relative, gift.

**Sacrifice in genere**

De la Taille stipulates that his definition of sacrifice is founded upon 'revelation' (contained in 'sacred writings') and upon 'reason'—for instance, reason which, in the Thomistic sense understands that human nature demands ('exigit') sacrifice. As de la Taille lays out his theory of sacrifice at the opening of *Mysterium Fidei*, it becomes immediately apparent that his definition relies upon an amalgam of sources: scripture; theological tradition (the Fathers, mediaeval theologians, conciliar documents, and liturgical texts); and, history-of-religion studies—though he acknowledges that this latter research fluctuates and contains more conjecture than well-established fact.\(^5\) Even so, de la Taille demonstrates not only an intellectual delight in correlating the findings of comparative religious studies with his more strictly theological witness to 'sacrifice', but

\(^4\) 'proprie quacritur quid sit, vel quomodo se habeat secundum se, illud circa quod est fides', ix.

\(^5\) *MF I*, 7, n.9.
also admits the illuminating power that comes from such an approach. One may quibble with such a methodological approach, and suggest that de la Taille has cast his net too widely in considering sacrifice in genere, even if there is an evident hierarchy among those materials. But I would argue that de la Taille’s creative synthesis is both theologically responsible and valuable. One of de la Taille’s strongest supporters, Francis Wengier, has labeled de la Taille’s approach to sacrifice ‘historical-rational’. The terminology is a helpful one, provided one understands it as inclusive of the revelation of scripture.

The central features of de la Taille’s definition of sacrifice will be identified and discussed in the following order: 1) a traditional, but presciently stipulated, doctrine of sacrifice as latria and propitiation; 2) a categorisation of sacrifice as belonging to the species of sign and gift; 3) an instructive parsing of oblation and immolation in sacrifice; and 4) an understanding of sacrifice as gift and moral pactum, thereby involving divine acceptance and the flow of gifts ‘touched’ by the divine (sacrificial banquet). As de la Taille’s thesis on sacrifice is put forward, I urge that three questions or issues remain close to surface. The prevailing sentiment against ‘sacrifice’ in contemporary circles frequently contends that the only appropriate response toward a God who requires destructive blood sacrifice from human beings is repulsion. Thus the question ‘what picture of God emerges from de la Taille’s definition of sacrifice?’ needs to hold some place in the context of this discussion. Precisely, what kind of a God is suggested in his treatment of sacrifice and the gift-dynamic imbedded within it? Secondly, the

---

unrelenting tension between external sign and interior reality in his construal of sacrifice is worth drawing attention to in advance. One can ask whether or not de la Taille successfully negotiates this tension in the course of his eucharistic theology, without thereby demanding that such a tension need be resolved. At the very least, acknowledging such a tension in his definition of sacrifice forestalls any quick dismissal of de la Taille as a mere objectivist. Thirdly, and certainly related to the exterior/interior question of sacrifice, de la Taille’s theory is marked by an emphasis upon the rôle of will (intentio) and devotion in the act of sacrifice, which emphasis, if overlooked, contributes both to a misconceiving of his unicist position on the supper and cross, and to a blatant oversight in regard to the spirituality behind his eucharistic theology. In short, I argue that de la Taille’s understanding of sacrifice as laid out in the first Elucidation of Mysterium Fidei bears within it a theology that is neither crass in its concept of the divinity nor overly simplistic in its portrayal of the human act of oblation.

Sacrifice as ‘latria’ and propitiation

De la Taille’s exposition of sacrifice as latreutic and propitiatory follows Thomas fairly closely, but holds out a few theological surprises, particularly in regard to his portrayal of latria and propitiation as dual sources of the obligation to offer sacrifice. While arguing that latria is central to the act of sacrifice, de la Taille also demonstrates that the ‘second source’ of obligation to offer sacrifice, namely propitiation, cannot, given the condition of sin, be absolutely divorced from that of latria. This overlapping or conjoining of the reasons for offering sacrifice goes some way toward precluding a
construal of de la Taille’s position on sacrifice as either purely ethical offering or as an offering made only to placate—or change the disposition—of a justly angry God.

Let us attempt a careful defining of latria—the ‘first and highest’ duty of the human creature. Latria includes an obligation to surrender to, to submit to, and to entirely ‘hand oneself over’ to God, who is the source and the creator of all things.\(^7\) De la Taille, following Thomas (SCG III, 120, §7), argues that sacrifice is the singular exterior representation of that interior, latreutic dedication of the mind and will to God; more, it is a worship that cannot be directed to any other being without the grave sin of idolatry. We will return shortly to the emphasis on the necessity of the outward, sensible sign of latria, but I want first to underscore how de la Taille characterises the God to whom this sacrifice is offered, and, how he delineates the elements peculiar to latreutic sacrifice.

In opposition to theologians like Cardinal de Lugo, who hold that latreutic sacrifice worships God as the omnipotent ‘lord of life and death’, thereby demanding a destruction of the self (or a substitute), de la Taille insists that latreutic sacrifice honors God ‘as our end, or as the highest Good, the perfecting of all things (ut finis nostra, seu ut summa Bonitas, perfectiva rerum omnium)’. As such, latreutic sacrifice must signify the perfecting of the creature; it cannot be a diminution (‘inimicam’) but only an enrichment (‘amicam’) to the life of a human being.\(^8\) Even more, de la Taille stipulates that this office of latria is referred not to God’s omnipotence, by which he holds all things in

\(^7\) ‘Quod igitur se totum Deo dedat, manicipet atque submittat, primum est hominis maximumque officium, cui nomen imponitur latria’ (MF, 4, 1921).

\(^8\) MF I, 1, n.1; 3, n.1, 1921. De la Taille cites St. Thomas (SCG III, 119, §3), arguing that sensible worship is required not that by loss of life one is further removed from God, but rather, that through sacrifice we come nearer to God (‘quia per hujusmodi actus proficimus in Deum’).
being, but to his 'goodness and lovableness (bonitatem seu amibilitatem)' — by which he calls all beings to himself ('quae omnia vocat ad se') (MF I, 2, n.2; 2, n. 1, 1921). God moves and draws human beings to participate in God, and it is in accordance with this Supreme Good that the believer offers latreutic sacrifice to the creator and provider of beatitude. In other words, it is God's 'loveableness' — which is love itself ('ipse amor') and which alone moves and inclines the rational will — that elicits from humans the cult of latria (MF I, 2; 4, 1921).

Latreutic sacrifice likewise includes both eucharistia and impetratio. As God is the diffusive origin of all goods, it is fitting that latria explicitly acknowledge these gifts by thanksgiving. Concomitantly, as God will not be outdone in generosity, the securing of divine favors by petition is also involved in latreutic sacrifice. What can be rightly expected by the worshipper who devotes himself or herself to the first Good, to the fons from which every created thing comes forth and to which every good leads? Quoting Ignatius of Loyola, de la Taille suggests that the more generous one is in latria, the closer one is to God and the more generous will be the response of the divine majesty. Between God and the worshipper there is robust intimacy and mutual generosity. Latria thus appropriately gives expression to a desire for God in asking for help and specific goods (MF I, 3).

If latreutic sacrifice is a submission to God, God as attracting love and the end of human happiness, how does de la Taille reconcile to this the second source of obligation for offering sacrifice — propitiation? In a word, de la Taille weaves propitiation into latria without a seam; in fact, propitiation becomes a form of latria that best accords with
the fallen state of humankind. This move may be de la Taille’s *novum* in regard to Christian sacrifice. His argument unfolds by questioning, first, what relationally ought to obtain in sacrifice between the worshipper and God, and then by more precisely demonstrating that propitiation and *latria* inherently coalesce as twin obligations in the genuine offering of sacrifice. Does de la Taille here too readily unite two distinct forms of Hebrew sacrifice? Perhaps; but some scholars have noted that issues of purity and impurity, harmony and disorder, underlie the entire sacrificial system in ancient Israel. In other words, as far as the history of Hebrew sacrifice is concerned, it is certainly not clear that the peace or communion sacrifice (sometimes translated as ‘completion’ offering), which typically ends in a shared meal among participants, is ever offered without an accompanying recognition of human impurity before an all-holy Lord. In fact, the communion meal or feasting of the peace sacrifice is often the final ritual moment after a purification sacrifice has removed what could hinder harmony with the divine. Once one admits that sin or impurity is inevitably involved whenever the creature comes before the creator in the worship of sacrifice, de la Taille’s logic is difficult to controvert. However, even if the two obligations of *latria* and expiation are

---

9 Cf. how McGuckian parses the holocaust, the communion sacrifice, and the sin-offering as different forms of sacrifice in Levitical tradition (*The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, op. cit., pp. 28-31). But it is likely that McGuckian’s distinctions are far too tidy. In any event, McGuckian is less interested in the different types of sacrifice than in discerning a general Temple model that contains the three movements of *offering*, *priestly mediation*, and *meal*. Philip Jenson’s essay on Old Testament sacrifices suggests greater overlapping between not three, but five different kinds of sacrifice: the holocaust, the sin offering, the reparation or guilt offering, the grain offering, and the peace or communion offering. Jenson, ‘The Levitical Sacrificial System’, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. R. Beckwith and M. Selman (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), pp. 25-32.


11 *MF I*, 31.
always conjoined in a single liturgy of sacrifice, there is no difficulty in acknowledging that, most frequently, one of the two aspects will predominate (MF I, 11-13).

De la Taille construes the propitiatory aspect of sacrifice in the following way. Because human beings are sinners, every honor or gift given to God must also (‘prior’) give testimony of sorrow and exhibit some kind of compensation or reparation. This requirement is based on the sacrificial dynamic of gift-giving that calls for genuine goodwill and friendship. Without the element of penitential acknowledgement, along with an expression of the desire to make reparation, the offering in sacrifice of gifts or thanksgiving to God would bear the ‘savour’ of coming from one ‘both unworthy and unfriendly (ab indirgo et inimico)’ (MF I, 10; 9, 1921). To be a friend of God, to be one who offers gifts to God—be it in praise, thanksgiving, impetration, or all three—necessarily involves a testimony to sorrow for sin. Note that de la Taille does not refer here to some process of penance and purification necessary before offering sacrifice to God. Rather, he insists that an element of propitiation pertains to the act of sacrificial oblation proper (such that the purification is embedded in the offering—a reality we will return later). More forcibly still, de la Taille asks us to see the inherent overlapping religious posture in the two obligations. If propitiation includes the concept of ‘compensation’ for the injured ‘right’ of God, then that very acknowledgment of divine excellence reveals an unmistakably latreutic attitude toward the majesty of God (MF I, 12). The latreutic friend of God offers sacrifice knowing the need and desire for reconciliation; and the repentant offerer of sacrifice acknowledges that the one to be ‘compensated’ is the creator and lord of the universe.
This conflation of the double obligation to offer sacrifice can be promoted from yet another angle: de la Taille posits that propitiation, like latria, includes eucharistia and impetratio. Thanksgiving is inherent in propitiatory offering because it expresses gratitude for mercy shown to the unworthy and undeserving. On a similar note, the propitiatory aspect of sacrifice includes not only the obvious petition for forgiveness and reconciliation, but also, pardon being granted and 'obstacles' removed, petitions for other benefits flowing from divine goodness (MF I, 12). De la Taille so parses propitiation as to argue that latria and propitiation, cannot, in genere sacrificii, be absolutely distinct.

Two final observations about propitiatory sacrifice may curtail later confusion. De la Taille does not hesitate to show that real or metaphorical death/mortification is convenienter to propitiatory sacrifice; at the same time, however, he argues that love plays an essential rôle in propitiatory oblation (as it does in lateutic sacrifice). Invoking scripture, and particularly Paul, de la Taille draws his conclusions about the appropriate 'death' involved in propitiation. Because the subjection of the spirit to the flesh is a 'natural consequence' of sin, mortification of the flesh is fitting in the 'undoing' of sin (MF I, 11). In Chapters Seven and Eight, we shall have occasion to look precisely at how this 'mortification' is entwined with baptismal life and the practice of prayer. For now, I want merely to highlight de la Taille's unflinching recognition of 'death' as a fitting component to propitiatory sacrifice. He acknowledges with Paul that eternal death is 'the wage' of sin, and that this death begins with a temporal dying. 'Sine sanguinis effusione non fit remissio...' (Heb. 9.22). Here quoting the author of the epistle which so penetrates his eucharistic theology, de la Taille argues that when a propitiatory end is pre-
eminent, sacrificial action most congruently exhibits the reality of alienating sin through some *sensible* sign of death. Significantly, however, this sign of blood and death is *not* efficacious without *amor*. Indeed, love is and must be the central motive in the pain and death that accompanies sacrifice. Suffering and death is so naturally repugnant to the human appetite that love must lead the way in any propitiatory offering: there is no *ampliorem aut nobliorem* `field of victory open to love’ than that of propitiatory sacrifice (cf. John 5.13; Phil. 2.8) (*MF* I, 10; 9, 1921). De la Taille states frankly the law of efficacy in propitiatory sacrifice: ‘The greater the intensity of love in the person converted to God and turned away from sin, the more adequate (*condignior*) will be the compensation be’ (*MF* I, 10). This principle, which will be crucially important in its application to the Church’s sacrifice, clearly announces the key issue in de la Taille’s doctrine of sacrifice, namely, the relationship between the external sign and the internal reality of *devotio*, to which we now turn.

**Sacrifice as belonging to the genus of ‘signum’ and ‘donum’**

Sacrifice, de la Taille defines, is that exclusive form of worship, which, in a sensible way, shows reverence, obedience, and the natural inclination (*tendentiam*) of human beings towards God (*MF* I, 5). The final clause of this definition ought not to be too quickly overlooked, for sacrifice is being set within a broader context of the creature’s return to God. Sacrifice, then, is a form of worship that moves the human toward his and her final end. Still, should the duty of *latria* (and as we have shown, concomitantly propitiation)—the submission of the mind and will to God—demand an
external manifestation? Is it not possible for the worshipper to ‘hand himself over to God’ without displaying some outward sign of that oblation? Why offer this gift of self in sacrificio, i.e., in signo, in sacramento? And what is the relationship between the ‘sign’ and the interior dedication to which this sign points? Such are the questions which de la Taille’s definition of sacrifice invite, the answers to which take us more deeply into the heart of his theory.

Acknowledging the teaching of Augustine and Thomas, de la Taille concurs that sacrifice would not have been needed in the integral state of human being, that is, in the innocence and ‘primeval elevation’ before the Fall. Unfallen humanity could offer themselves to God as pure, guiltless victims, ‘without the assistance of signs (sine signorum ope)’, (MF I, 5, n. 6; 5, n. 2, 1921). The spirit yet held sway over the flesh.

However, in postlapsarian creation, sensible signs are a provision to human knowing and worship: sacrifice is a divinely-provided means for the human mind to be elevated to God. With Thomas, de la Taille argues that it is through external signs that “‘the will of man is more greatly recalled to the divine (hominis intentio magis revocatur ad divina)” (MF, 5; SCG III, 119 §1). Visible sacrifice is divinely-instituted to meet the epistemological and psychological needs of fallen human creatures. In a second way, the sensible aspect of sacrifice is traced to the social nature of worship: our latria ought to bear the social impress of being manifest, publicly, by external ‘testimony’ and witness. (MF I, 4). In short, given the parameters of human sinfulness, the mode of human knowing that moves through the sensible, and the essentially social character of worship, sacrifice does not exist properly without an external sign. Sacrifice is not a gnostic
exercise; body and soul together share in the fallen condition. An ‘incarnate’ sign is demanded in sacrificial worship in order to signify the internal surrender and devotio of the offerer. This sign is the gift made sacred in being handed over to God.

Precisely how restricted an interpretation ought we to give to de la Taille’s definition of sacrifice here? A community of Quakers gathered in silent prayer in a spare house certainly might be said to be manifesting a ‘sign’ of internal devotion to God. But could such a worship scenario be called sacrifice? De la Taille would answer negatively, because sacrifice belongs properly to the category of ‘gift’—or, more precisely, gift-giving. This placement of sacrifice under the genus of gift is a critical feature de la Taille’s theory, which we shall be unpacking in the course of this chapter and the next.

At present, however, I want merely to underscore the sharp riposte which this coalescing of sacrifice and gift proffers\(^\text{12}\): de la Taille reverses the prevailing tendency, inaugurated theologically by Luther, to segregate ‘sacrifice’ and ‘gift’, aligning them on different conceptual and phenomenological axes. To return to our example of the Quaker meeting, for de la Taille such worship could not be called sacrifice, properly speaking, for it lacks that external sign which is determinative of sacrifice—namely, the handing over of a gift to God, an action that occurs ritually over, with, or about that which is to be made sacred.

‘Since sacrifice belongs to the category of gift, it is necessary that some action be sensibly enacted in the presentation or rendering of the gift (Cum sit sacrificium in

\(^{12}\) De la Taille offers a list of New Testament passages in which sacrifice is the clear reference, although the word or words used to indicate that reality connote ‘gift’—\textit{donum} or \textit{munus} in the Latin, \textit{doron} in the Greek. E.g., Matthew 5.23 (‘If therefore thou offerest thy gift at the altar’, etc.); Matthew 8.4 (‘Offer the gift which Moses commanded’); Hebrews 6.1 (‘Every high priest is ordained …that he may offer up gifts…’). \textit{(MF I, 6, n.1)}
**genere donationis**, necesse est ut sensibiliter peragitur aliqua activa doni praeentatio seu reddito)’ (MF, 11, 1921, italics mine). It is the gift-giving action which, in sacrifice, signifies ‘internal surrender’. De la Taille ‘translates’ this dynamic of sacrifice into the classical language of sacramental theology. The ritual handing over of the gift is *res et signum*: it is real giving, and it is sign of internal devotion and obedience. But it does not constitute the *res tantum*—the reality itself of the interior gift (MF I, 9). For reasons which will be most evident when we consider the supper and mass oblation, de la Taille absolutely insists that the ritual *donatio* of the gift in sacrifice be regarded as a *real* giving.

We can press de la Taille further. In this delineating of the sign and reality of sacrifice, which takes precedence—the external ritual sign (real giving which signifies), or the interior reality (what is signified)? This is no trivial question, and the careless reader may be tempted misread de la Taille. Both elements, de la Taille argues, are necessary for the *integrity* of true sacrifice. For, without the internal surrender, the sacrifice offered is ‘fictitious (*ficte*)’—an empty show; whilst without the external *signum*, the sacrifice is *improprie*, for the essential exterior element is absent (MF I, 8; 7, 1921). Put otherwise, there is no *res tantum* without the *res et signum*.

If both elements are needed for sacrifice, de la Taille none the less summons a number of witnesses from tradition to indicate that, within this dual aspect of genuine sacrifice, the aspect of ‘interior immolation’ ought to be underlined. He offers a rich array of citations from Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory the Great, Leo the Great, Procopius, Eusebius of Caesarea and William of Paris, all of which suggest that no
sacrifice is pleasing to God without the invisible, interior offering of the self which gives authenticity to the ritual sacrifice of the eucharist (MF I, 7-9). In each of these passages, de la Taille highlights that the offering of the gift to God must be imaged in the oblation of our hearts. I shall let Cyril of Alexandria’s vivid voice stand as representative for the others, and as expository of de la Taille’s own thought. In this passage, Cyril links the exterior rite of sacrifice to interior, spiritual mortification and a surrender to God’s will:

‘For in our sacrifices, we to a certain extent immolate and offer our own soul, as in an image, to God, when we die to the world and to the wisdom of the flesh, when we mortify our vices and are, so to speak, crucified with Christ; and thus we spend our days in holy submission to his holy will’ (De adoratione in spiritu et veritate, 1. 11; MF I, 8-9).

Indeed, ‘our sacrifices’, the sacrifice of the Church, is intended as signum of an interior handing-over. De la Taille is reluctant to include as sacrifice proper those acts of devotion unaccompanied by the visible, ritual sign of giving something unto God; yet he stands with that voice of tradition (and indeed, with the voice of Jesus in the synoptic gospels—an echo of the prophets) which accentuates the invisible element in the sacrifice pleasing to God.

Sacrifice: ‘oblatio et immolatio’

We now have before us two essential features of de la Taille’s understanding of sacrifice: namely, that sacrifice is a sensible sign of interior to devotion to God, and that this sign is visible action of gift-giving to God. These defining characteristics ground the more complex features of de la Taille’s theory of sacrifice, and most particularly his careful and constant distinction between oblation and immolation. It is hardly
exaggeration to say that much theological entanglement over sacrifice has been caused by a failure to attend adequately to the difference between oblation and immolation. In the course of tradition—in the writings of the Fathers and subsequent theologians, in the liturgies and even in conciliar documents (*vide* Trent!)—the conflation of the two terms, both linguistically and conceptually, has generated significant confusion. De la Taille readily admits that writers have often employed the words ‘offering’ and ‘immolation’ rather ‘indiscriminately’, substituting one for the other, and often simply using one to encompass the whole action of sacrifice (*MF I*, 14). While forgiving of this rather ‘natural’ occurrence in theology, ‘natural’ because oblation and immolation are so integral one to the other, de la Taille announces that he will be relentless in his distinct use of *oblatio* and *immolatio*. Strictly speaking, immolation refers to the destruction of a victim—even though it must have some reference to the act of offering that victim as well. Oblation, though it cannot suffice of itself to confer victimhood, is the central, gift-oriented action of ‘sacrifice’. De la Taille constructs his argument for the centrality of offering largely from history-of-religions materials. His proposal, moreover, sharply separates his project from that of sixteenth and seventeenth-century efforts to cast *immolation* as determinative of ritual sacrifice.\(^{14}\)

\(^{13}\) De la Taille’s critics frequently challenge him on his interpretation of sources fraught with ambiguity on the meaning of immolation and oblation. We shall address this in question in Chapter 3.

\(^{14}\) At the same time, however, de la Taille’s emphasis on oblation has often led to his being too quickly associated with the French Oblationist School (Bérulle, de Condren, Olier, Lepin). As we shall see in chapter two, de la Taille is careful to distinguish his theory from that school of thought.
De la Taille points to evidence in anthropological research that humans, from 'the dawn of creation', have been led 'by natural law'—or taught by God—to offer gifts or presents to God/gods, and for 'this one end only': 'as a witness and sign of one's interior dedication (testificationem atque significationem internae suae dedicationis)' (MF, 6). De la Taille here confirms that the primary end of sacrifice is to signify internal devotio—and not to influence or change God's mind. More, he also underscores, relying largely on the work of M.J. Lagrange (Études sur les religions sémitique, 1903), that it is the concept of offering that unites a myriad of ancient sacrifices—bloody and unbloody (MF I, 6, n.7). He suggests that even in the Egyptian sacrifices, some 4,000 years before Christ, the practice of preparing banquets for the gods, however realistic, likely had a signifying meaning beyond the wish to feed the divinity. Further, drawing upon sacrifices described in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, de la Taille points to scriptural evidence for distinguishing oblation and immolation. The actual rite of slaying the victim could not only be carried out by someone beside the priest, but it is was frequently an action prior to the more significant act of the priest offering that victim

---

15 De la Taille does not think it necessary to settle the question whether the human inclination to offer gifts to a divinity derives from natural or revealed law. Tradition has not settled the issue definitively (e.g., Cassian thought that ancient peoples were led by nature to offer sacrifices; Chrysostom argues that it was both natural law and the authority of revelation that prompted humans to offer their gifts to God) (MF I, 6, n. 8).

16 De la Taille's insistence upon this 'one end only' is in direct response to the controversy unleashed by Loisy's book, Essai historique sur la sacrifice (Paris, 1920). Loisy argues that the origins of religious worship are tied to the more or less 'magical' practices which attempt to influence invisible, impersonal powers. De la Taille takes issues with Loisy's interpretation of 'historical' research—and particularly with his conclusion that Jesus did not offer up his death (Loisy thinks this to be St. Paul's fabrication) (MF I, 22-3, n. 34).

17 For de la Taille, it is purely an interpretive matter—and not one of fact—as to whether or not any symbolic meaning can be denied to these banquets. Such 'uncertainty' is largely why de la Taille approaches the 'findings' of history-of-religion research only tentatively (MF, 7, n.9).
to God—particularly identified as the sprinkling of the victim’s blood upon and around the altar (MF I, 13).\textsuperscript{18}

Thus, when de la Taille sets forth the defining sacrificial actions of immolation and oblation, he argues that immolation—destruction or change in the gift—cannot be the integrating element of sacrifice. Immolation \textit{in itself} neither signifies internal devotion nor ritually represents the dedication of the gift; rather, an \textit{offering} to God of the thing changed or destroyed constitutes the essential act of sacrifice. De la Taille delimits this offering as ritual gesture, and one that requires a ‘liturgus’: without a publicly-recognised ‘sacrificer’ and some action indicating the transference of the gift into the hands of God, there is no sacrifice (MF I, 13). The verb \textit{sacrificare} specifically highlights the activity of the liturgus, as it indicates a ‘making sacred’ and the transference of a gift to God. As such, ‘sacrifice’ suggests ritual oblation directly (‘\textit{in recto}’) and the immolation only indirectly (‘\textit{in obliquo}’) (MF, 12). In sum, de la Taille concludes in the following way: ‘It will suffice, then, for true sacrifice, that something be offered \textit{either as to be immobilated, or as immolated}’ (MF I, 15).

De la Taille’s position on the relationship between immolation and oblation can be further illuminated by attending to two distinctions that surface at a later point in Volume I of \textit{Mysterium Fidei}. The first distinction underscores the difference between a ‘vow’ and a sacrificial offering, with the offering of sacrifice constituting an obligation of much greater magnitude. Making a vow to God, de la Taille suggests, is more

\textsuperscript{18} De la Taille invokes evidence from Wellhausen, Robertson Smith, and J.A. McCullagh to show that similar rites involving the blood of victims were prevalent in semitic, Egyptian, and ancient Celtic sacrifice (cf. MF I, 13, n. 19).
intrinsically related to the genus of verbal prayer: it is the offering and enunciation of a promise to God, and one which refers to the future. In the oblation of sacrifice, however, what is offered in ritual action is now handed over to God, requiring that the victim be consecrated by immolation—either in the past or subsequently. The obligation of sacrificial oblation is thus ‘far more sacred’: ‘...for what is not only promised but actually given over into the ownership of God, cannot be withdrawn from his altars without dreadful sacrilege’ (MF I, 135). In thus showing the magnitude of sacrifice in comparison to vow-making, de la Taille shows that the actions of oblatio and immolatio are inextricably bound together, even if he insists upon their distinction, and, in fact, elevates the former over the latter.

This tight correlation, or union-in-distinction, can be measured, secondly, by de la Taille’s analogy to form and matter. He aligns oblatio with ‘determining form’, and immolatio with ‘matter’. The offering-and-immolation of sacrifice cannot be construed as ‘integrating parts’, after the manner of parts of the body which together make a whole. Rather, they are ‘constitutive parts’: ‘one of which, the oblation, is akin to the mode of a determining form, whilst the other, immolation, is related to the material element, which carries and underlies the formal reality (quarum una, oblatio scilicet, se habet per modum formae determinantis, altera autem, scilicet immolatio, per modum materiae se habet, portans atque subjectans rationem formalis)” (MF, 102). In other words, in an action which we call ‘sacrifice’, it is through the offering that the ‘sacrificial essence (esse sacrificiale)’ is determined; the immolation sustains it and is the subject of that
The context of this form/matter discussion in Volume I is not insignificant: de la Taille is in the midst of proving his central thesis about the unity of the supper-cross sacrifice, the question which we shall address shortly. My immediate purpose in presenting his scholastic analogy is to more fully elucidate how the dynamic of oblation-immolation in sacrifice is perceived in de la Taille’s theory. We can and must consider offering and immolation as essential, constitutive elements of sacrifice. This double aspect granted, de la Taille stresses 1) that oblation is central to recognising sacrifice, and 2) that in the substantial reality of sacrificial action, the separation of immolation and oblation is rather more notional than real—just as the human is a substantial reality of soul and body.

Divine acceptance of the ‘gift’: moral *pactum*; and sacrificial banquet

Three aspects of de la Taille’s definition of sacrifice remain to be set forth, all of which are explicated against the background of ‘sacrifice’ belonging to the genus of gift. Apart from oblation and immolation (when there is one), sacrifice involves a further two-fold ‘consummation’. The first consummation depends upon the divine, namely, it depends upon God’s acceptance of the sacrifice; the second pertains to those offering the sacrifice, focusing upon a participation in that sacrifice through the ‘return’ of the gift offered (*MF I*, 15). De la Taille lays considerable emphasis upon the rôle that divine acceptance holds in the concept of sacrifice, reiterating the dynamic of gift-giving and its

---

19 Lest it be thought that de la Taille sounds far too Platonic is giving precedence to the form over matter/subject, he later notes that whilst the formal element of sacrifice is most apparent in the offering, the immolation gives that form its absolute, ‘substantial reality’ (*MF I*, 141-2).
moral implications. To the post-modern ear, de la Taille’s discussion here will be no doubt theologically surprising, if not offensive. Thus I want to provide both description and analysis of his thought on acceptance, before turning to a more abbreviated discussion of partaking in the sacrificial banquet.

In construing the transaction that occurs in sacrifice between humans and the divine, de la Taille unapologetically employs the category of gift-giving. We offer a gift to another in the hope that it might be accepted; in the phenomenology of gift-giving, the finis is acceptance (MF I, 15). When a community of worshippers offers a gift, a victim, to God, the intended end is divine acceptance. A gift rejected by God is null and void: it does not pass into divine ‘ownership’ and thereby remains ‘profane’. (It is not for nothing then that the Church fervently prays for the acceptance of its eucharistic victim—even though, as we shall explore in Chapter 2, that victim has been eternally accepted.) Only when God accepts a gift does it pass into the ‘condition and dignity of things divine’ (MF I, 15). We do not, as it were, ‘hurl’ victims into heaven. The ratification of a sacrificial victim is only achieved at the moment when it is ‘a Deo suscepta’. Yet, if acceptance is what we intend in offering sacrifice, we also recognise, implicitly or explicitly, that divine acceptance secures a kind of bilateral contract (‘pactum’) between the offerer and God. If, for example, a sacrifice is offered as propitiatory or impetratory, God’s acceptance morally ‘obliges’ God to grant pardon or confer benefits (MF I, 16; 13, 1921). Divine acceptance indicates the intervention of a ‘pactum’, and the offerer will ‘certainly and necessarily (certo necessarioque) obtain that for which the sacrifice was ordained’ (ibid.).
De la Taille takes this sacrificial 'contract' a step further by arguing that such a bi-lateral engagement must exhibit itself in some sign of mutual giving and receiving (just as in 'ordinary' social contracts). The more perfect signification comes through a divine act, such as fire sent down from heaven upon the victim (cf. the Old Testament narratives of sacrifice in Genesis 15.17, Judges 6.19-20; Kings III, 18.38) (MF I, 17). A second, though clearly deficient sign of divine acceptance is expressed by a human action, a ritual act such as the pouring of victimial blood on an altar, the altar representing divine presence. What the altar 'receives', is accepted or 'taken up' by God. Or, in the case of a holocaust fire, the fire signals God's consuming of the victim. De la Taille acknowledges that human-generated signs of divine acceptance could be false—signs lacking reality, for the divine may in fact have found the gift loathsome (MF I, 16-17). Yet, even in the Hebrew sacrifices where 'fire' descends from God, the acceptance remains 'only figurative'. De la Taille argues that the 'perfect victim', Christ, was alone 'truly borne into the sanctuary of divine holiness', becoming, as it were, 'food for the divine glory' (MF I, 17). Christ's sacrifice and the Father's acceptance: this divine pactum is the perfection of gift-giving.

Whilst de la Taille does not shrink from insisting on the divine obligation incurred by the acceptance of sacrifice, I suspect that most contemporary readers would. Is it not presumptuous (at best) to suggest that, on account of a human action, God is 'bound' to give in return? Certainly, the thrust of much recent philosophical and theological interest in 'gift' militates against such a proposal. For example, Derrida and Levinas have promoted a notion of 'pure' gift as unilateral, a giving in which the giver expects nothing
in return and in which the receiver incurs no obligation (the offering of one’s own death stands as the optimum—and perhaps only—pure gift). Jean-Luc Marion (God Without Being, Chicago, 1991), on the other hand, argues for a phenomenological understanding of God as *gift* precisely to shatter the idols constructed by classical onto-theology and to leave God utterly free to give—and often in ways that shock (apocalyptically) and defy human measure. Similarly, we could point also to the work of Louis-Marie Chauvet, for whom the gift-exchange theory seems only to *oblige humans* who have already received from God. God gives and thereby implicates the one who receives to offer a return-gift. Chauvet, who excludes sacrifice from the Christian dispensation, could not allow a gift coming from the human that would somehow implicate or oblige God.

Why forge such a divinely-implicating notion of sacrifice? First, de la Taille obviously envisions God as a ‘real player’, so to speak, in the ‘marvelous exchange (commercium)’ of sacrifice. If the offering of a sacrifice does indeed entail desire, an act of *devotio*, is it not fitting that the acceptance of this true sign include a response from the God who himself so inclines the human soul to offer latria, indeed, from the God who enflames that very *devotio* which accompanies the sacrifice? As de la Taille specifies later, and perhaps in more palatable terms, offering sacrifice ‘opens’ the fountain of divine giving: ‘...when by sacrifice we give praise to God, or offer Him just compensation, *the way is opened for the mercy of God towards us*, either to justify us or to keep us good and make us better’ (*MF II*, 226). In other words, the giving of an

---

21 *...dum, pia laude Deo reddita, vel justa compensatione exhibita, misericordiae divinae recluditur aditus ad nos, sive justificandos, sive custodiendos in bono atque in melius promovendos* (*MF*, 320-321).
acceptable sacrifice to God establishes a way for God to shower his gifts upon worshippers, according as they are individually ‘fit’ to receive these gifts (*MF II*, 226).22 At one point, while providing ‘evidence’ from the early Fathers, de la Taille favorably cites a passage from Origen’s Commentary on Luke 19.24, which I repeat here for the light it sheds on de la Taille’s concept of the gift-dynamic of sacrifice:

‘And in this manner those things which we shall have given to God (*dederimus Deo*), He will give back to us (*nobis ea ipsa restituet*), and with them other things which we did not have before. God asks and requires gifts from us, *so to have an occasion of giving to us*, to give to the one who gave to him (*Exigit et postulat a nobis Deus, ut habeat occasionem donandi, ut ipsi tribuat qui erogavit.*)’ (*In Luc. hom.* 39).23

Eliciting sacrifices from human beings, God freely ‘obliges’ himself, as it were, in the dynamic of gift-exchange. What is striking in Origen and in de la Taille’s vision of sacrifice is that both human and divine giving is *real giving*, though clearly giving which is not symmetrical.24

Perhaps we could say further that de la Taille’s theory sacrifice is cognate to what John Milbank has called ‘asymmetrical giving’. In Milbank’s riposte to the Derridean ethical paradigm of the ‘pure gift’ of death, he counters that the *good* which marks giving is not essentially unilateral, but rather mutual; *not* essentially indifferent, but rather a kind of *interested* interaction. More, Milbank argues that genuine gift-exchange is most frequently reciprocal—if however, asymmetrical, and with a significant period of time

---

22 To this subject we will return at length in Chapter 3.
23 *MF II*, 52-5; 215, 1921 (italics mine).
24 Some will no doubt want to press here what they perceive as *the* pertinent question: who gives *first*? De la Taille does not address such a question because, in his Thomist framework, it is not a question. The non-negotiable, taken-for-granted, first principle of Christian theology is that God is Giver: we but participate in that perfection, and do so incompletely. The point to underscore is that in sacrifice human beings can truly *give* to the divine.
intervening. Consider, for example, the 'returned' dinner invitation: the menu, the time of year and atmosphere will likely be—and even predictably be—quite different. The contractual-sounding nature of gift-exchange is precisely overridden by this asymmetry of the gift and 'non-identical repetition'. Such asymmetry provides for an element of 'freedom' not found in the 'contract'. Additionally, Milbank demonstrates that the gift given inevitably alters once it passes into the hands of the recipient: it will come to reflect the character and being of its new owner/user, even as the degree of mutuality between the givers must shift in the exchange (trust, love, and understanding either augmenting or falling-off). Granted, Milbank is not considering here interaction between creatures and God; none the less, I argue that his model of gift-exchange elucidates what de la Taille is driving at in the dynamic of gift operative in sacrifice. The reciprocal exchange set in motion by sacrifice does morally bind, but the 'pact', as it were, is between two free agents: the gift offered and accepted will, therefore, be returned, though differently and perhaps surprisingly, and always bearing the 'mark' of the divinity. Arguably, the ecstatic devotio of the giver is most significant. It can never be discounted, and, in fact, is the element that gages the fittingness of the worshipper, who looks expectantly for a return-gift.

Finally, if sacrifice aims maxime at opening a path to give to and receive from God, de la Taille sees the perfection of sacrifice achieved in the partaking of the gift

---

25 John Milbank 'The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice', First Things 91 (March 1999), 35
26 Ibid., 35, 36.
returned by the divinity.27 This aspect of sacrifice especially reveals de la Taille’s rich interweaving of history-of-religion materials, scripture, and theological tradition. Three features of his sacrificial ‘banquet’ discussion are noteworthy: familiarity or communion with the divinity; present and future sanctification through the gift received; and, the necessity of sacrifice to get to the banquet. First, de la Taille argues that the communication of divine goods is ‘appropriately’ signified by a ‘banquet’. God, pleased with the victim offered in sacrifice becomes host, feasting human beings and granting them communion with himself and one another (MF I, 17-18).28 De la Taille here draws upon William of Paris’s ‘fifth cause’ of sacrifice to explicate the familial effect of convivium at the sacred banquet, an effect that construes God’s presence at the feast under the symbol of fire:

The fifth cause [of sacrifice] is familiarity and nearness to God. For the offering of gifts and the partaking of the sacred table beget the greatest confidence of nearness to God, and make us partakers with the family of God, for one is a member of the family of the person from whom he receives nutriment, and by whose table he lives. Clearly, then, these sacrifices impressed on the partakers the sense of familiarity and nearness to God, since by partaking of the same table they became in a manner sitters at the table with God. Now apart from the union of the father and mother as cause of our being, this is the most effective bond of familiarity. For this reason, seeing that God could not be in their presence to eat with them, he sometimes sent fire from heaven to consume his share of the

---

27 Those sacrifices not ending with the banquet (e.g., the pouring of oil on a altar, burning incense, a holocaust) are real sacrifices. De la Taille insists that the communication of divine gifts is ‘merited and secured’ by the ‘actual offering of the sacrifice accepted by God’, even lacking the sign of divine bestowal of gifts (MF I, 18, n. 26). Still, a certain perfection accrues to sacrifices which end in the consuming of divine favours.

28 Here de la Taille offers a series of references to studies on feasting, union of common table, the divinity as host, etc., found in Wellhausen (Skizzen und Vorarbeiten, 1887), Lagrange, Smend and Döllinger cf. (MF I, 18-19).
sacrifice, and, so to speak, to take his place.  

This symbol of divine familiarity points to a both a future and a present  
sanctification—a second aspect of sacrificial banquet explored by de la Taille’s. The  
banquet figures a future attaining of divine favours, since the eating of a victim  
consecrated to God ‘initiates’ and ‘prepares’ one for the reception of celestial gifts, just  
as the prior offering of the ‘sacrifice of justice’ readies the worshipper for a more  
intimate union with God (MF I, 19). But if partaking of the sacrificial banquet is  
preparation for a heavenly one, it is likewise present sanctification. Here de la Taille cuts  
a creative path through traditional sources and contemporary history—or-religions studies  
in order to demonstrate how the banquet signifies sanctification in the present.  
Participating in the sacrificial meal is an immediate ‘making holy’ through the contagion  
of the sacrificed gift, which has been sanctified by being taken into the hand of God. In  
considering the gift offered, the sacrificial action itself is a sanctification: what passes  
into the property of God, passes into the nature of a divine thing, becoming ‘clothed as it  
were with the sanction and the unction of divinity itself’ (MF I, 19). Therefore, among  
those assembled at the banquet table, the gift returned by God diffuses its sacredness.  
Even before the banquet table, this contagion (‘invadere’) of holiness, as it were, may be  
cast in terms of union with the victim. I quote the following in full, as it reveals vividly  
the mindset of de la Taille concerning a spiritual participation in the sacrifice (a subject to  
which we will return in a later chapter):

---

29 William of Paris, De Legibus, c.2, cited in MF I, 18-19. De la Taille draws attention to I Cor. 10. 18-22  
as a Pauline understanding of what partaking of a sacrifice entails—union with the one who accepted the  
sacrificed gift (ibid.).
For the man who ate of the sacrifice, by communion with the victim sacrificed to God, became himself, so to speak, a victim sacrificed to God; and the signification was in the highest degree perfected by the fact that nothing else was indicated but that man consecrated and dedicated himself interiorly to God, and consequently became united to him also (MF I, 19).

De la Taille points here to the reality that the sacrifice offered, as sign of the internal devotio of the worshipper, reaches its perfection in the achievement of desired union, of which the banquet is sacrament.

In a third assertion about the 'sacrificial banquet', de la Taille accentuates the priority of sacrifice over banquet—a point which vitally addresses contemporary eucharistic theology as well. The trend evident in post-Vatican II eucharistic theology to underscore commensality as opposed to sacrifice, has been critiqued in rather reactionary and (often) shallow terms, i.e., with little depth of thought in regard to the nature of sacrifice itself. In the early twentieth-century, de la Taille found himself in a position of giving answer to theologians of his own day (e.g., Renz in Die Geschichte des Messopfer-Begriffs [1901], and Bishop J. Bellord in 'The Sacrifice of the New Law', [Ecclesiastical Review, July, 1905, 258-273]) who were proposing that the eucharist is essentially a banquet—food placed before us without the sacrificial offering of the body and blood of Christ. De la Taille refuses a Christian supercessionist presumption that would consider Christian sacrifice as sui generis, a sacrifice explicable apart from the reality of sacrifice in Hebrew scripture and in the history-of-religions. Such an 'approach', he thinks, is not only counter-factual but elusive of natural reason. Put simply, 'sacred banquet' cannot be delineated apart from sacrifice, any more than sacrifice can be captured entirely by the notion of a sacred feast: 'The banquet is not
sacred unless it is consecrated to God by the *sacrificial offering* and the *divine acceptance* (MF I, 20-21, italics mine). Any assertion that the Church ‘possesses’ the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ in the eucharistic banquet, *without* also presupposing that she *offers* that sacrifice, simply lacks sense. Citing Döllinger’s study of sacrifice in Greek and Persian cultures, de la Taille shows that the feast and the sacrifice were so intimately connected that the names were often ‘interchangeable’.30 Whilst de la Taille admits that it is through ‘one’ ecclesial action that the sacrifice is offered to God and given back to the worshippers, still, oblation and banquet are *formally* distinct. The sacrifice and banquet have opposite subject-references: the sacrifice is offered to God, the banquet is prepared for us (MF I, 21). We could say this more straight-forwardly in terms of the directionality of the *donum*: the gift offered to God in sacrifice is returned in the banquet. The ‘preparation’ of the banquet proceeds only *per modum oblationis*.

I have outlined in this first chapter the central features of de la Taille’s definition of sacrifice. To summarise, we have noted that sacrifice is first and foremost the *sensible oblation* of a gift to God, a gift which is sign of the worshipper’s internal devotion to a God whose creative and attractive love sustains the universe. The gift offered is a manifestation of the desire—and the duty of nature—to give praise and thanksgiving to God. At the same time, the worshipper may, legitimately, petition for favours of God, without adulterating the gift. For de la Taille, this movement of the (fallen) will toward God is simultaneously propelled by propitiation, or a sense of sorrow for one’s own lack

of genuine friendship with the Holy One. Thus the oblation manifests a desire for reconciliation, a desire for one's gift to be found pleasing. Because the dynamic of sacrifice is that of gift-giving, divine acceptance 'morally' binds God to distribute his gifts, though in a time and (asymmetrical) measure which, as we will soon address, is limited only by the capax of the one receiving. The perfection of sacrifice is achieved when the gift/victim,\textsuperscript{31} sanctified by the receiving hand of God, is partaken of by the worshippers, thereby indicating union with the divine and the communication of holiness. Such are the salient features of de la Taille's understanding of sacrifice in genere. How these components of sacrifice shape de la Taille's eucharistic theology will occupy the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{31} I should note that in the Latin text de la Taille shows consistency in using the word 'hostia' for victim, and 'donum', and 'munus' for gift. I have attempted to maintain his linguistic precision throughout the course of this study.
Chapter Two: Christ’s sacrifice

Having explicated the key components of Maurice de la Taille’s theory of sacrifice, we will now trace how these defining aspects operate in his eucharistic theology. Much of the controversy surrounding the publication of Mysterium Fidei, and which perpetrated its later dismissal, stems from a failure to accurately see these shaping nuances of sacrifice in his depiction of both of Christ’s passion and of the Church’s offering of this sacrifice. This chapter will look at the events of the last supper and the passion, attending to the way that de la Taille illuminates them in terms of the theory of sacrifice outlined above. Two crucial and controversial aspects of de la Taille’s work will be our focus: 1) the connection between the supper and the cross, construed as a single sacrifice; and 2) the concept of an eternal and celestial victim. These two theological points are the pillars of de la Taille’s understanding of the sacrifice of the mass, and when we turn to that topic in Chapter 3 it will be evident how tightly-structured and interrelated is his thought on the eucharistic sacrifice. For, in answering questions about how the mass-sacrifice is ‘the same’ as that of the cross, about who offers the mass, and about the devotio of the offerers in relation to the fruits of the mass, de la Taille’s inner eye is focused on the last supper and the victim there offered to Father.
The supper-cross: a unified sacrifice

At the heart of de la Taille’s eucharistic theology stands the controversial claim that the supper and cross together comprise the sacrifice of Christ’s passion. As I hope to show, this assertion resonates with de la Taille’s concept of sacrificial oblation and is found in scripture and the Fathers. De la Taille’s position on the supper-cross sacrifice was attacked from various angles: by those who argued that connecting the supper and cross in such a way was contrary to—even an heretical interpretation of—Trent; by thinkers who faulted his ‘confusion’ of the sacramental and real; and by other ‘oblationists’ who argued that Christ’s offering could not be relegated only to the last supper. The scope of this first part of the chapter will be to explicate de la Taille’s theory of the unicity of the sacrifice and to show how he responds to his critics.

No space will be devoted here to rehearsing ‘evidence’ that the early Church understood the passion of Christ as a ‘true sacrifice’. But two distinct features can be noted in de la Taille’s amassing of scriptural passages and citations from the early Fathers: a perception of Christ as priest (largely taken from Hebrews) figures prominently in the ‘witness’ he brings forth; and a preference for Eastern Fathers (especially Ephraem and Cyril of Alexandria) comes to the fore rather quickly. De la Taille is less concerned with establishing that Christ’s passion is understood as sacrifice

---

1 De la Taille does appear intent to dismiss any implication that the early tradition viewed Christ’s sacrifice only in a ‘metaphorical’, ‘wide’, or ‘improper’ sense. To this end he brings forth a number of passages from Augustine (cf. MF I, 30-31). He concludes with asserting that Christ’s passion and death gathers ‘in plenitude all the latreutic and propitiatory signification and efficacy of all sacrifice’ (MF I, 32). Note that he does not intimate (even slightly) that Christ’s sacrifice was thereby a dismissal or condemnation of all previous sacrifices. Interestingly, at the time of his writing, de la Taille can boldly claim that no one—‘apart from the Socinians, a few Protestants and rationalists’—has ‘called into question’ the dogma that Christ’s death was an ‘expiatory sacrifice’ (ibid.).
(to deny this, he argues is 'to deny or doubt the Catholic faith')\(^2\), than with the theological task of giving reasons for that faith (\textit{MF I}, 33, n. 6). If Christ’s passion is a sacrifice—and the superlative sacrifice, then it is incumbent upon the eucharistic theologian to show in what way all the central elements of sacrifice are found and perfected in that salvific event. De la Taille thereby purposes in \textit{Elucidatio II} to show that Christ’s sacrifice is a sacrifice \textit{proprie dictum}, for it lacks no aspect of a true sacrifice, ‘\textit{aut invisibili aut visibili}’. Before turning in detail to the supper, where de la Taille locates the crucial moment of sacrificial oblation, I want to delineate briefly his telling discussion of the \textit{invisible} element in Christ’s Passion—from which, I think, is discerned both de la Taille’s soteriological bent, as well as his peculiar urgency in regard to sacrifice and the purgation of desire.

When de la Taille pursues the question of the \textit{invisible} element in Christ’s sacrifice, he first—and at greater length—considers the signification \textit{ad nos}. What is signified by the Lord’s Passion? De la Taille’s answer echoes both Gregory the Great (\textit{Sermo 55}) and St. Thomas (3 \textit{ST}, q. 48 , 3, 2m), but is most strikingly rooted in I Peter 3 and 4. The passion of Christ is a sign of the dedication—even the \textit{oblation}—of human beings to the worship of God, along with an indication of our ‘alienation’ from sin (‘\textit{est humani generis dedicatio in cultum Dei et ab alienatio a peccatis}’) (\textit{MF}, 23). De la Taille finds appealing the language of Gregory the Great, who sees the cross as ‘sacrament’ of that altar ‘on which the offering of human nature should be celebrated’. And, just so, I Peter 3.18 attests that Christ died, ‘‘the just for the unjust, \textit{that he might offer us to God}’’

\(^2\)\textit{MF I}, 27.
(MF I, 34). For Thomas, the ‘sign’ of the passion is to be understood in terms of I Peter 4.1: “Christ therefore having suffered in the flesh, be you also armed with the same
thought: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sins, that now he may live
the rest of his time in the flesh, not after the desire of men, but according to the will of
God” (italics mine). More to the point, then, Christ’s sacrifice is sign to Christians of
their own intended mortification, the conversion of desire from the worldly to the godly.
Christ’s oblation and suffering points to the ‘death’ involved in turning away from sin
and in the ‘immolation’ of sinful human nature.3 De la Taille’s choice of sources and
texts is a telling indication—early in Mysterium Fidei—of what I argue is an implicit
theology of desire running throughout his thought on sacrifice. As we shall see in the
course of this thesis, this passage from I Peter punctuates key movements in de la Taille’s
thinking.

Shifting to a consideration of the invisible and visible element of the sacrifice as it
pertains to Christ himself, de la Taille addresses the latreutric, eucharistic and the
propitiatory aspects of sacrifice. Obviously, the passion and death signify Christ’s
’dedicatio interna’, his praise and worship of God the Father, and his willingness to
‘compensate’ the divine honor violated by human sin. De la Taille’s language has an
Anselmian ring here. Still, the fuller picture of his soteriology situates itself in a nuanced
reading of Thomas’s treatise on Christ in the Tertia Pars of the Summa. With Thomas,

---

3 We can note, following de la Taille, a significant difference between ancient sacrifices and Christ’s: in
ancient sacrifices, the invisible element—human obedience and inclination to God—was signified by the
visible, but not effected. In other words, the invisible was a kind of praeambula to the visible sacrifice.
With Christ’s sacrifice, however, the invisible is achieved, not presupposed: human alienation from sin is a
consequence—not a ‘precondition’—of Christ’s sacrifice (MF I, 34; 24, 1921).
de la Taille stresses Christ’s sacrifice as originating in love. Let us explore this briefly, to clear away any ambiguities about de la Taille’s theology of sacrifice and salvation.⁴

When he addresses the ‘visible’ element of Christ’s sacrifice, de la Taille underscores that victim of the sacrifice was ‘rational’, which he parses as meaning ‘a willing and loving victim, in heart’s desire one with the priest’ and thereby one ‘in value and acceptability’ (MF I, 37). This union of desire in the victim and priest is critical to understanding the perfection of Christ’s sacrifice. Christ might have offered something other than himself to the Father—which, because of his divinity and the power of his love would have sufficed to atone for sin; but, the oblation of himself exhibited more potently his love and desire to ‘make satisfaction’ to the Father (cf. ST 3, 46, 6). Put differently, the visible element in Christ’s sacrifice is without doubt a ‘sacrament’ of his love and dedication to Father. In this ‘vicarious satisfaction’ offered to the Father, any ‘penal’ understanding is assiduously avoided. De la Taille argues that Christ, ‘under the impulse of love’, willingly took the burden of human sin to the cross (it was not placed upon him by the Father): Christ desired to act as ‘our priest’ and to ‘surrender’ himself as our victim (MF I, 39).⁵

This emphasis on the willingness of Christ to suffer leads to the question inevitably posed by de la Taille’s notion of sacrifice: ‘ubi et quando’. Where and when does Christ give clear sign of his intention to offer sacrifice? Where and when does he

---

⁴ Equally revealing in this discussion is de la Taille’s theology of human sin, sharply articulated as the incapacity to offer adequate love to God, to order human desires in a holy way (cf. n. 12, MF I, 37). We will return to this below, in Chapter 4, where we treat of de la Taille’s theology of sin and grace.

⁵ De la Taille stands by St. Bernard’s ‘splendidly traditional formula’: Deus filii sanguinem non requisivit, sed acceptavit oblatum (MFHO, 45).
offer his death to the Father? If internal *devotio* is essential to sacrifice, it is, none the less, *incomplete* without the exterior, ritual sign of that affect and desire: willingness alone does not suffice. Specifically, as we have noted, the *ratio* of sacrifice requires that the *direction* of the gift to God be ‘outwardly manifested (*manifestata externe*)’, for oblation is ‘the active tender of a gift’ (*MF I*, 42; 29, 1921).6 According to de la Taille, that external sign of Christ’s interior will occurs at the supper in the ritual offering of his body and blood. The supper is the *oblation of passion*. I shall chart how this is argued and defended, and then delineate the more significant ramifications of such a thesis.

De la Taille first attests that the voluntariety of Christ’s sacrifice, an ‘all-embracing and continuous’ willingness that extended through his death on the cross, is solidly founded in tradition: Christ could have prevented his passion and death—had he willed it otherwise (*MF I*, 41-2). Here there is no argument. De la Taille goes on to praise ‘modern theologians’ (e.g., Franzelin, C. Pesch, and Gihr) for ‘very wisely’ laying stress on the necessity of an ‘outward act’ manifesting this internal will and desire of Christ.7 However, de la Taille parts company with these theologians in determining where Christ performs (‘*peracta*’) the ‘active dedication of himself to the worship of God as victim’.8 He carefully entertains other ‘solutions’ propounded by thinkers who have looked for sacrificial indications in the words and actions of Christ from Gethsemane to

6 ‘At voluntarietas...non sufficit qualiscumque, sed requiritur involvens directionem doni in Deum, et quidem, ut talis, manifestata externe. Oblatio enim est quaedam activa doni exhibitio; oblatio autem sacrificalis oportet ut sit sensibilis’ (*MF*, 29).
7 De la Taille appreciates Pesch’s explicit language in *De Verbo Incarnato* (2, n. 545): ‘“In the sacrifice of Christ we have a sensible offering made to God...For Christ offered himself immaculate. This offering is not merely an inward intention, it is also external and sensible”’ (*MF I*, 42-43).
8 ‘By what *external act,*’ de la Taille asks, ‘did Christ *assume the bearing of a priest* towards his passion, by what *rite* did he offer the sacrifice?’ (*MF I*, 43).
the cross. Though he concedes that the complexus of actions and words *ab horto ad crucem* reveals signs of Christ's self-surrender to the passion, what remains lacking is a definitive indication of Christ as a victim, handed over to God's ownership as latreutic and propitiatory gift. In unambiguous terms, de la Taille reiterates that sacrifice must be 'plainly evident as sacrifice':

*Now sacrifice in itself must be plainly evident as sacrifice, because sacrifice is in the nature of a sign—a pragmatic locution signifying an invisible thing; before all else therefore it should be self-evident.*

(Porro *sacrificium debet ex sese clarere ut tale: cujus ratio est, quia sacrificium est in genere signi, tanquam locutio quaedam pragmatica notificans rem invisibilem; prindeque debet esse per se notum primo.*)

(MF I, 46; 31, 1921)

To those who would argue that the whole of Christ's life—indeed his very incarnation (cf. Hebrews 10.5-7)—constitutes a sacerdotal, sacrificial offering, de la Taille responds by underscoring that whatever the will and affect of Jesus's mind from his birth to the cross, the sacrificial dedication remained 'invisible' until the gift was given 'in actual fact *(in re)*': 'No actual contract *(foedus)* was made with God for the expiation of sin, it was desired merely, and (if an outward intimation was at any time given) foretold' (MF I, 46, n. 20; 31, n. 2, 1921). De la Taille seems to be responding here to the French School oblationists and to the prevalent *libelli pii* of his day, which proclaimed the entire earthly life of Jesus to be sacrificial. Some contemporary eucharistic theologians, L-M. Chauvet

---

9 The gift-character intrinsic to sacrifice is absolutely determinative for de la Taille. In a footnote, he distinguishes between the 'giving of oneself to death' of, say, soldiers and martyrs, from that giving of oneself to death 'by way of sacrifice to God'. Whilst the former may be called 'sacrifice' in a metaphorical way, only the latter, which demands a gift be presented to God (as sign of internal *devotio*), can be properly called sacrifice (MF I, 46, n.19).
for example, have argued in a similar vein.\textsuperscript{10} Whilst de la Taille does not reject that the incarnate life of the Son can be considered as a ‘sacrifice’ in a broad or metaphorical way, he is seeking for a true and proper sacrifice, one in which ‘an actual giving \textit{de praesenti} is required...and not in words only but in action’ (\textit{MF I}, 46, n. 20).

Having dismissed inadequate suggestions about ‘sacrificial dedication’ of Christ’s death to the Father, de la Taille re-examines Scripture and ‘the early theologians’ and locates that dedication in the \textit{coena}. In a cumulatively convincing argument, he demonstrates that Christ sacerdotally, on confecting the image (\textit{effigiem}) of his passion at the supper, offered to God ‘the reality (\textit{veritatem}) of his death’ (\textit{MF I}, 49; 33, 1921). I will outline the central steps in de la Taille’s thesis, focusing particularly on his portrayal of the oblation of the supper as a ‘real and present’ giving, sacrificially continuous with the immolation on the cross. For it is here that his opponents took him to task both for ‘confusing the sacramental and the real’ and for ‘misinterpreting’ the Council of Trent.

\textbf{The last supper: Scripture, the Fathers, and liturgical witness}

The gospel accounts of the supper, as well as John 6 and 17 and the Epistle to the Hebrews, figure strongly in de la Taille’s theological explication of Christ’s words and actions in the upper room; secondarily, but rather more persuasively, the early Fathers and liturgical sources give credence to his interpretation of those events. These sources allow him to make the following mutually-implicating assertions, which we shall unpack:

1) Christ offers himself really in the ‘representative immolation’ of the bread and wine;

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Symbol and Sacrament}, op. cit., 310-315. For Chauvet, ‘sacrifice’ means obedience to God and mercy towards others.
2] at the supper, Christ becomes victim—hic et nunc, and the new covenant is made; 3] Christ is here ‘obligated’ to death—and, offering in the eternal Spirit, God’s pledge is likewise secured; and 4] the supper is causally important to redemption, thereby precluding any sharp division between the supper and the cross.

It is perhaps prudent to treat here a question likely to arise against de la Taille thesis: does it not stand or fall upon the assumption that the supper actually, historically occurred? And is not such an assumption a shaky foundation for an entire theology of eucharistic sacrifice. First, I call attention to the fact that de la Taille was not unaware of this possible challenge to his work, and at the opening of Book II in Mysterium Fidei he addresses the modern challenges to the historicity of Christ’s supper and the dominical command to repeat the ritual sacrifice. De la Taille acknowledges that German theologians such as Adolf Jülicher (1892), J. Hoffmann (1903) and Spitta (1893) argue, largely from the fact that Jesus was fully human and could not have had any clear foreknowledge of his death and resurrection, that the supper accounts are not meant to be interpreted as instituting the eucharistic sacrifice. (Cf. de la Taille’s discussion of the alternative views of these thinkers in MF II, 5-13). De la Taille also presents the widely varying proposals (popular in the 1890’s-1915) that the supper derives from pagan myths, or totemistic rites (ibid., 14-16). But de la Taille contends that the liberal Protestants, modern rationalists, or critics of the mythic school, fall prey to ‘lapses’ of logic and of the laws of criticism—‘demonstrating a constant predilection for subjective invention against objective testimony’ (16, cf. also n. 2). Returning to the central question—‘Did [Christ] or did he not command the supper to be renewed in the Church’—de la Taille focuses his case for an affirmative answer on 1Cor. 11.23, where Paul testifies that he is handing on a received teaching about the supper. De la Taille surmises that this teaching was not Paul’s invention—for how could such a transformation occur in a mere twenty years after Christ’s death: that the supper would evolve ‘from a primitive nothingness to into a true action concerning the body slain for us and the blood of the new testament’, and that Christians would believe that Christ himself ‘celebrated the supper in this ritual fashion’ (MF II, 17)? Paul, who was not at the supper, could not have the force of such authority unless it rested upon the Lord’s own command (18). De la Taille further suggests that the ‘uniformity’ of rite and belief in the New Testament period can be attributed only to Christ’s own authority—for such a ‘uniform and concordant’ development would otherwise have to be counted one of the more ‘stupendous miracles of the scriptures’ (ibid.). Finally, de la Taille finds in the synoptics accounts of the last supper as a new pasch the ‘implicit inculcation of the command to repeat’: like the old pasch which was a ritual ‘fixed’ by law, so too the new pasch was to be part of the new convenant law (MFII, 21). John’s Gospel is not an exception to acknowledging the historical institution of the eucharistic sacrifice, for all through the sixth chapter, Christ insists that no one will obtain life ‘without eating the body and drinking the blood’—a possibility which he intended to be available for all, throughout the ages (21-22).

To be sure, the debate about the historicity of the supper and the institution of the eucharist continues in the twenty-first century. What in the last supper accounts is historically accurate and what is literary or cultic fabrication? The bulk of today’s ‘New Questers’ for the historical Jesus, led by John Dominic Crossan (The Historical Jesus, San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), would deny the historicity of the last supper—even though the sources for it are early and multiple. A persuasive and sympathetic account of the likely historicity of the last supper can be found in John Meier’s ‘The Eucharist at the Last Supper: Did it Happen?’ (Theology Digest 42 (1995): 335-351), who insists that the onus of proof is upon the those who deny that the supper occurred. More, de la Taille would no doubt applaud the following conclusion of Meier:

...[T]he prophetic words and actions of Jesus over the bread and wine were not simply
Aligning the three gospel accounts of the last supper, along with 1 Cor. 11, de la Taille argues that the texts put before us a bloody death—both in words (the separate mentioning of the body ‘as given’, and blood ‘as shed’) and in the things themselves, which designate the body and blood (MF I, 51). The propitiatory intent in these narratives is not to be discounted: ‘shed for many unto the remission of sins’ (Matt 26.28); ‘which shall be shed for you’ (Mark 14.24): ‘which shall be delivered for you’ (1 Cor. 11.24). De la Taille thus concludes that something sacrificial is being accomplished in the supper: the passion is ‘put before us (in medio est)’, ‘implied in the bloodless rite, with some kind of propitiatory benefit’ (MF I, 51; 35, 1921).

To be sure, one can admit that these scriptural words indicate a propitiatory intent without seeing that something sacrificial is thereby done—but that would be to overlook the dynamic of sacrifice which we have explored above. Given that sacrifice belongs to predictions with stage props. The words and actions...set in motion and revealed the deepest meaning of what was about to take place, while at the same time they already communicated something of the saving reality to those who shared the bread and one cup of Jesus (350; italics mine).

However, the work of a scholar like Bruce Chilton (A Feast of Meanings, New York: E.J. Brill, 1994) would take to task de la Taille’s simplistic vision of the uniformity of the rite and interpretation of the last supper among the New Testament Christian communities. Chilton argues for six different ‘types’ of eucharist ritual and understanding in the New Testament. For a helpful assessment of current literature and trends, see Robert Daly’s ‘Eucharistic Origins’ TS 66 (2005): 3-22. In the end, Daly wonders if we need to worry excessively about tracing ‘eucharistic praxis back to the historical Jesus or even to the New Testament in order to legitimate it’ (17). Perhaps not, but de la Taille’s theory of eucharistic sacrifice does indeed depend upon the historical truth of certain actions and words of Jesus at that supper before his death on the cross. For another fascinating study of the supper as a sacrifice, see Mary Douglas’s essay, ‘The Eucharist: Its Continuity with the Bread Sacrifice of Leviticus’, in which she suggests that Jesus was aware of the Levitical tradition of bread sacrifice for sin offerings, and that he and the disciples would have been clear about the associations for the word ‘body’: temple, tabernacle and God’s creation. (Catholicism and Catholicity: Eucharistic Communities in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives, ed. Sarah Beckwith, Oxford: Blackwell Publications, 1999, 97-112.

In sum, I would argue that de la Taille not only responded adequately to his contemporaries on this question, but that today’s scholarly challenges are also far from decisive.
the category of sign and gift, the supper reveals Christ offering himself as victim, through the sign and image of that immolation to occur on the cross. In this representation of that 'future mactation' there is a 'real and present' oblation of Christ, an offering achieved through the symbolic power of Christ's dicta, declaring the bread to be his body handed over, and the wine, his blood flowing from that body (MF I, 52). What is offered 'apparently' is the bread and the wine; what Christ indicated was actually there, is offered in truth. In short, the words of Christ are effective of the presence of that offered-up body on the cross, if not of the achieved mactation.¹²

De la Taille denies that this liturgical offering is merely a sign of some more secret giving ('donationis secretioris'), as if the offering simply 'foretold' of a 'real' oblation to happen at later point. On the contrary, at the supper Christ actually delivers himself into the hands and possession of God. In the representative, symbolic, sacramental, mystical (de la Taille accepts the rough equivalency of all these adjectives) immolation of the supper, Christ is 'dedicated to the passion' and the oblation of the victim is 'actually made (perficitur)' (MF I, 56; 39, 1921). More, the different verb tenses of the Greek (present: didomenon) and the Vulgate (future tense: 'shall be shed') present a felicitous discrepancy according to de la Taille. Indeed, the discrepancy is theologically complementary: the present tense indicates the 'present representative immolation', through which is made the oblation of an immolation that will occur later, as 'denoted by the future tense' (MF I, 56, n. 9).

¹² 'Repraesentatur igitur mactatio Christi, sed non fit' (MF, 36, 1921).
If we grant that the victim is handed over to God at the supper through a sacramental immolation, we yet may query whether the interior devotion and will, directive of the gift to God, is adequately expressed by Christ’s words and actions at the supper. De la Taille gives three reasons for affirming this to be the case. First, Christ’s free will is indicated by his renewal of the covenant/testament (‘this is the blood of the new testament’ Mark 14. 24), an act that must always be freely engaged. Needless to say, standing with the testimony of the ‘ancient teaching’, de la Taille affirms that the new testament was indeed ‘founded (conditor)’ at the supper and celebrated by Christ the priest, even as Moses sprinkled blood on the people saying ‘This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you’ (Exodus 24. 8; MF I, 75-78). Christ, giving clear and external evidence of his will, makes the new covenant, which is later ‘sealed’ with his death on the cross.13 Secondly, in the previous giving of thanks and blessing over the bread and wine, Christ exhibits the directionality of the gift—returned and surrendered to God (‘munera Dei Deo reddenda’). Both his words of thanks and his gestures would be revelatory of his intention to offer his life, in the gifts of the bread and wine.14 Thirdly, the intent of Christ is sensibly revealed in the body and blood given not so much to the disciples, but for them—and for the many, unto the remission of sins and reconciliation with God (MF I, 51-53).

---

13 In demonstrating that Christ’s words and actions indicate the establishment of a new testament, de la Taille unapologetically looks to a history-of-religions tradition. He cites Wellhausen and Smend for evidence of the ancient custom of ‘ratifying’ a contract/compact with blood (MF I, 75, n.3).
14 De la Taille here cites Moses Bar Kepha’s Explanatio mysteriorum oblationis, a passage which discerns Christ’s will in the offering of thanks at the supper: “By that phrase he gave thanks, [Christ] declared to us...that he assents to the will of the Father—for thanksgiving is assent—as though he said: I assent to thy will, O Father, that I receive suffering and death for the human race” (MF I, 52, n.2). Though de la Taille does not develop this further, the suggestion that the very giving of thanks and praise over the bread and wine already engages the determination of the will, is worth greater liturgical reflection.
Based on the New Testament narratives (and his definition of sacrifice), de la Taille sees the supper placing before us a gritty reality. We are not looking at a last supper easily sentimentalised as a poignant farewell meal between Jesus and his friends, a meal that would be a kind of ‘monument’ to his memory. In the offering of his body and blood, Christ is *deputing* himself to his passion and death: here is the sign of Christ’s interior devotion, here is the oblation of himself as victim for the remission of sins.

Yet, as we turn to the powerfully-invoked witness of the Fathers and liturgies, we must first address the underlying assumption of Christ as *liturgus*, i.e., Christ acting as *priest* in the offering of his death to the Father. Incorporating the Epistle to the Hebrews 5-7, de la Taille insists the sacrifice offered by Christ be understood in Melchisedechian terms, which, he argues, requires a *unity* between the cross and the supper. How so? First, de la Taille proposes—with a consensus of exegesis on his side (‘all exegetes’ he rather too boldly says)—that Hebrews quite plainly declares Christ to be a priest ‘according to the order of Melchisedech in respect of the sacrifice of his passion and death, whereby as the eternal Redeemer he opened the way to heaven for us (per respectum ad sacrificium suae passiosis *ac mortis, quo aperuit nobis viam coeli redemptor aeternus*)’ (*MF* I, 94; 67, 1921). So we say that it is in respect to the cross that Christ carries out this priesthood; and we say that the *pre-eminent resemblance* between Christ and Melchisedech lies in the ritual form and mode of offering the sacrifice, namely

---

15 De la Taille rejects decidedly the suggestion of Christ’s ‘dual’ sacrifice—Melchisedechian at the supper, and Aaronic on the cross. This question of Christ fulfilling an Aaronic priesthood on the cross, was raised at the Council of Trent—even included in the first draft of the decree, but firmly ‘corrected’ and excised from the final draft. Cf. de la Taille’s discussion of this theological ‘correction’ in *MF* I, 155-157.
the material of bread and wine. How do these two affirmations square? For de la Taille, the coupling of these two assertions leads inevitably to the inference ‘that Christ offered the sacrifice of his passion in the consecration of the bread and wine’ (*MF I*, 95).

Indeed, unless we admit the oneness of the supper and cross, the Epistle’s relentless association of Christ’s Melchisedechian priesthood to the sacrifice of redemption presents an ‘insoluble exegetic difficulty’. Thus, both on the basis of the gospels and the Epistle to the Hebrews, de la Taille secures his claim that the offering of the passion at the supper is real, *pragmatic* sacrifice.

A short sampling of the literature called forth to confirm his thesis on the unicity of the supper and cross is worthwhile, if only to render a sense of the theological fruit and the surprising implications of this doctrine. As mentioned earlier, the Eastern Fathers seem most apt articulators of de la Taille’s eucharistic theology. We shall hear from two Syrians, Ephraem and Aphraates, and the Cappadocian Gregory of Nyssa, who all lend a vibrant tenor to the unicity of supper and cross. Ephraem, in his second ‘Hymn of Unleavened Bread’, realistically overlays the sacrifice of the supper and that of the cross:

‘*He broke the bread* in his hands for the sacrifice of his body; *he filled the chalice* in the sacrament of the offering of his blood. Priest of our propitiation *he offered the sacrifice for himself*.‘

Ephraem evocatively depicts Christ as priest of his own sacrifice, offering and effecting the immolation in the dedication and ritual gestures with the bread and wine. Aphraates,

---

16 De la Taille admits that Hebrews points to other similarities between Christ and Melchisedech (e.g., Heb. 7. 1-3), but he thinks that these are merely ‘superficial’ likenesses (*MF I*, 94).

in a passage reckoning the counting of ‘the three days’, similarly understands the
sacrifice as beginning, and radically so, at the supper:

‘He who took his own body in food, and his own blood in drink, is reputed with the dead. Before he was crucified, the Lord with his own hands gave his own body to be eaten and his own blood to be drunk...From the time when he gave his body in food and his blood in drink, three days and three nights elapse’.

The suggestion that the supper oblation casts Jesus as among the dead potently coincides with de la Taille’s view that the offering of his body and blood at the supper is indeed real and obligating. Gregory of Nyssa gives an even more startling interpretation in his Oratio I in resurrectionem, establishing that Christ commenced and disposed everything in relation to the great sacrifice of redemption. Not waiting for betrayal and arrest, Christ “‘opens the way by a sacrifice ineffable and invisible to men’”:

‘...and he offered himself for us an oblation and a victim, priest and at the same time that lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world. When did he do this? At the very moment when he openly showed that his own body was to be received as food, because the sacrifice of the lamb was now perfected’.

According to Nyssa then, the supper is the ‘ineffable’ oblation and the ‘invisible’ immolation of sacrifice. In a word, after the oblation of his body and blood at the supper, Christ is, so speak, a ‘dead man walking’.

---

18 Demonstratio XII, De Paschate, n. 6 and 7, P.S., part. 1, t. 1 col. 517, 520. MF I, 62.
19 Cf. also MF I, 123-124. The absolute underscoring of the freedom of Christ in offering his death at the supper inevitably includes—given the pactum of sacrifice—an obligation to actually give the gift offered. In other words, after the ritual offering, Christ is not ‘free’ to withhold the gift.
20 P.G. 46, 612. Cited by de la Taille on pp. 62-63 (MF I). De la Taille also provides at length what he calls ‘direct’ evidence from Hesychius of Jerusalem, whom he deems to have written more on the explanation of the supper than the ‘other Fathers’ (cf. MF I, 67-69).
If the Fathers provide de la Taille with significant testimony for the unicity of the supper and cross, evidence from the Church’s *lex orandi* is similarly suggestive. The anaphora of the Liturgy of St. James, for example, underscores the willing salvific action of Christ at the supper with these words: “...on the night in which he was given up,’ nay on the night on which *he gave himself up for the life and salvation of the world*, taking bread into his holy and immaculate hands, etc.” (*MF I*, 70). The ancient Egyptian liturgy of St. Mark proclaims the same: ‘Jesus Christ *on the night which he gave himself over* for our sins, *and submitted to death for all*, reclining in the flesh with his holy disciples and apostles, taking bread, etc’ (*MF I*, 70-71). If these liturgical examples exhibit the will and action of Christ in offering himself to the passion, de la Taille also provides a Holy Thursday proper from the early western Ambrosian rite that indicates the sacramental immolation at the supper:

> Can we despair of thy mercy, we who have been considered worthy to receive the high office of offering this great victim to thee, that is the body and blood of our Lord Jesus, *who for the salvation of the world gave himself to that holy and venerable passion? Who instituting the form of the sacrament of salvation, first offered himself as victim*...²¹

These early texts from the Church at prayer (a brief sampling of those gathered by de la Taille) convey an understanding of the passion as beginning, and actually *offered* by Christ, at the last supper.

More radically, de la Taille also approaches the union of the supper and cross by showing that the Fathers not only speak of the fruits of redemption *beginning* at the supper, but that they conceive as well that the new covenant is both ‘announced’ and

'entered into' at the supper *(MF, I, 60 and 82ff.)*. He is quick to add, however, that this teaching is not put forward with any intimation of a dismissal of the cross. Gregory of Nazianzen, for example, preaches that the remission of sins is accomplished at the evening sacrifice of the supper.\footnote{Oration 45 in sanctum Pascha, n.16, *P.G.* 36, 644.} Sharper examples of this doctrine are collected from medieval theologians, who contest that the old law, which does not take away sin, came to an end at the supper, when Christ inaugurated the new order and ‘took away sin’. John of Rouen puts the matter strongly in describing the work of the supper:

‘He decreed that a mystery be celebrated wherein the wounded by sin, and the weakened in virtue, would be restored to eternal salvation, and the darkness of sin dispelled, those having true peace in their hearts would be illuminated with the light of faith. For on that day he brought the old law, which punished sin, to an end, and instituted the first sacrifice of his body and blood, whereby sins are taken away’ *(De officiis ecclesiasticis, P.L. 147, 49)* *(MF I, 60, n. 12).*

For de la Taille, the implication of such writing leaves little room for doubt: the sacrifice of the cross is ‘already being enacted’ in the supper (‘Sacrificium igitur crucis in coena jam agitur’) *(MF I, 60, n.12; 41, n. 1, 1921).*

The patristic teaching that the ancient pasch is fulfilled *both* by the supper and the passion provides further proof for this sacrificial unity. On this note, Ephraem is again quoted at length, this time from his second and third *Sermo in hebdomadam sanctam*. Here de la Taille underscores that Ephraem links the old pasch to the new in terms of what is being fulfilled at the supper and on the cross. At the supper, the disciples were “‘witnesses’” of the new pasch—“‘they gazed in wonder at the sacrifice; for they had
never partaken of the like". The pasch of Egypt, offered so that "the first-born might not be slain", was brought to a close: "This [new] pasch was offered because of the slaying of the first-born". De la Taille corroborates Ephraem's poetic theology with another liturgical witness, here drawing from a Chaldean eucharistic prayer:

`...for when the time arrived when he was to suffer and come to his death...having in obedience to the law of Moses made the pasch with his disciples, he then in place of this pasch introduced his own pasch before his death, the memorial of which we now make, as he gave us to do, until his return from heaven: for our pasch is Christ who was immolated for us. After he had supped therefore in the legal pasch of Moses he took bread, etc.'

The meaning is plain. The new pasch begins in the supper and carries forward to the cross: 'that is, the sacrifice of the one Lamb, commenced in the supper, is completed on the cross—as he hastens on from the offering to the immolation' (MF I, 92-93).

Through a condensed presentation of de la Taille's scriptural and patristic evidence, I have thus far attempted to indicate that this teaching about the supper-cross sacrifice posits no 'new theory' in theological tradition, as some of his adversaries accused. To be sure, de la Taille himself admits that it is a doctrine 'not well known in the schools today' (though he does point to recent ecclesial preaching where it may be found), but current obscurity does not denote innovation. Even so, the heated question

23 Sermo 2, n. 6-10, ed. Lamy, t. 1, 380-390; MF I, 82-83. Tertullian and Paschasius Radbertus are also cited as conclusive examples of the teaching that the pasch of the Lord is fulfilled indivisibly in the supper-cross (MF I, 84-6; 90-1.)
24 Max Saxonia Missa Chaldaica, pp. 32-33; cited by de la Taille on p. 92 (MF I).
25 Most notably in Henry Edward Cardinal Manning's The Glories of the Sacred Heart (London, 1877), a passage quoted by de la Taille in MF I, 93. De la Taille must have appreciated the irony of finding the words of contemporary preaching to be 'ahead' of the theological textbooks.
for his contemporaries was whether or not this unicity of the supper and cross was coincident with Tridentine teaching, and to this topic we now turn.

Council of Trent: one sacrifice or two?

Shortly after the publication of *Mysterium Fidei*, Dominicans Vincent McNabb and Alfred Swaby acerbically argued against understanding the supper and cross as a single sacrifice: de la Taille’s unicist theory was declared to be fundamentally ‘irreconcilable’ with the declaration of the Council, a ‘denial of the mind of the Church’.

26 McNabb will add to the theological stakes by insisting that de la Taille’s theory is ‘nothing short of an *evacuatio crucis*’. How de la Taille responds to the latter charge we shall note shortly. However, critique came from within de la Taille’s own religious order as well—and from his esteemed colleague at the Gregorianum, Cardinal L. Billot.

In 1929, a Spanish Jesuit by the name of M. Alonso, wanting to reiterate a defense of Billot and the doctrine of Trent issued a trenchant attack against de la Taille’s theory in *El sacrificio eucaristico de la Ultima Cena del Señor según el Concilio Tridentino*. In

---


27 McNabb, op. cit., 1095.


29 Scholarly assessment of Alonso’s work is not laudatory; he frequently and egregiously misinterprets de la Taille, accusing him variously of denying the doctrine of real presence, and of taking his teaching from such thinkers as Renz and Weiland (whom de la Taille soundly critiques in *Mysterium Fidei*), and of encouraging the faithful to ‘forget the letter’ of the Church’s teaching on sacrifice. Cf. Jimenez, ‘En el Cincuentario del *Mysterium Fidei*’, op. cit., pp.258-9, 273 n. 182; idem, ‘A proposito de la controversia’, op. cit., 220 n.3; Emile Jamoulle, ‘l’unité sacrificielle de la cène, la croix et l’autel au Concile de Trente’,
nuce, the heart of the disagreement revolves upon the question of the numerical
distinction between the sacrifice of the supper and the cross, and then the consequent
configuring of the relationship between the mass and the sacrifice of the cross. De la
Taille’s critics hold to a dual understanding of the sacrificial offering in the supper and
Christ’s death on the cross. De la Taille finds this ‘dualist’ position highly problematic
and a ‘mainly post-medieval’ assumption. The Fathers and the liturgies say nothing of a
‘dual sacrificial action’ between the supper and the cross. He suggests, moreover, that
this duality is a false inference ‘based on the numerical distinction, which on the
admission of all must exist between the sacrificial activities repeated by the Church and
the sacrificial action whereby Christ redeemed the world’ (MF I, 106). The crux of the
difference between de la Taille and his adversaries may be captured in this question:
where does one place numerical distinctness? Are there three sacrifices (supper, cross,
and mass—each with oblation and immolation), or are there but two (supper-cross and
the mass)? De la Taille argues for the latter, and we will now investigate how he
constructs a case that the oneness of the supper and the cross is at least implied in the
official text of Session 22—and even quite explicitly discerned in the well-documented
controversies among the bishops and theologians gathered for the Council (collected in
Acta genuina Concilii Tridentini).
Simply put, the Council does not *explicitly* declare a sacrificial unity between the supper and the cross; in fact, it is difficult to fault an interpretation that reads the sticky ‘although….nevertheless’ wording in Chapter One (Session 22) as suggesting two distinct sacrifices. Here is the key phrase upon which the debate centers:

‘Although (*etsi*) [Christ] by his death was to offer himself to God and the Father on the altar of the cross, in order to redeem us there… Nevertheless (*tamen*) in the last supper…declaring that he was a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech, he offered his body and blood to God the Father under the appearance of bread and wine’ (*Council of Trent*, Session 22, c. I)(MF I, 159, n. 12).

Does the language of the Council thus envision two ‘true, proper, and complete sacrifices’ (as McNabb defends)? The *Acta* reveals that there was a large contingent at the Council who viewed the supper as a sacrifice ‘before’ that of the cross, most of whom thereby believed it better in responding to the Reformers *not* to declare anything specific about the sacrifice of the supper. De la Taille’s tactic in dealing with the Tridentine declaration is two-fold: first, he shows that the teaching of the *oneness* of the sacrifice of Christ proves more crucial in the final shaping and framing of the Decree—even if it does not appear openly; and secondly, he argues inversely from what *is* expressly said about the mass (Chapter 2, Session 22) to what *must* logically be concluded about the supper.

De la Taille grants a ‘common’ dualist supposition among the Tridentine Fathers, especially early in their debates; even so, he counters that given this context, it became the task of those who held to the *oneness* of the sacrifice to more fervently defend it (and so the documentation which de la Taille presents convincingly attests) (cf. MF I, 155-56).

---

31 A most impressively thorough treatment of the Council debates on this question can be read in E. Jamoulle’s ‘L’Unité sacrificielle de la cène, la croix et l’autel au Concile de Trente’, op. cit., pp. 50-61.
He proposes that those who opposed the general (dualist) notion ultimately had the greater hand in the final wording of the decree, and that their thought is more 'akin' to that final definition (MF I, 155). This is not indubitable logic, i.e., the suggestion that a minority opinion, which effects change to an original draft, has the ultimate hermeneutical clout. However, neither is such a dynamic improbable.

The question remains whether or not de la Taille is justified in arguing that the tenor of the 'although...nevertheless' phrase need not be read as setting up numerical opposition between the supper and the cross. De la Taille contends that the sentence could be read in the following way: 'although' Christ could have 'enacted the sacrifice of the cross' without the supper—perhaps by some other rite—he 'nevertheless' desired that through the supper the cross 'should be Melchisedechian' (MF I, 159-160, n. 12). To further shore up this possible interpretation, de la Taille recalls the 'scope' of the Council: it was not an attempt at constructive theology but fundamentally a response to Protestant 'error'. The passage in question can thus be interpreted quite likely as saying that 'although the cross is a most true sacrifice (this we all believe), nevertheless we must believe that Christ, as priest according to the order of Melchisedech, willed that the supper should be also a sacrifice' (ibid.). If the final text of Session 22 does not openly declare the unicity of the supper-cross sacrifice, neither does it require a two-sacrifice understanding.

32 Perhaps the most fiery—and indeed ad hominem—critique of de la Taille's reading of Trent can be found in The Clean Oblation. M.D. Forrest essentially argues that de la Taille's sees 'unicism' in the Council fathers where, in fact, a dualist position is being declared (pp. 74-103). De la Taille, he insists, slants the evidence in his favor. On the other hand, Jamouille's careful study, op. cit., demonstrates that the majority of Council Fathers were actually inclined to de la Taille's unacist position, even though the language employed is not identical (cf. pp. 49ff).
Secondly, de la Taille argues that the Council undoubtedly asserted a unity—even a sameness—between the mass and the cross (‘for the Victim is one and the same, the same now offering by the ministry of the priests, who once offered himself in the cross, the manner of offering alone being different’). To be in accord with the Council on this teaching about the mass is to admit that Christ offered himself as victim—to be immolated—at the supper. The difference between the mass and the cross, given that the Victim is identical, is linked only to the modality of offering. Thus, ‘arguing from the mass back to the supper’, we can conclude that if in the mass the faithful ‘offer the death as having happened, [Christ] must have offered his death as impending’ at the supper: we ‘cannot teach the one in the mass without concluding to the other in the supper’ (MF I, 158).

Does de la Taille ‘have’ his opponents here? Even though McNabb and Sweeney assert that the mass and the cross are ‘substantially’ the same sacrifice, they are not thereby granting the kind of numerical oneness between the mass and the cross that de la Taille thinks to obtain between the supper and the cross. Is de la Taille’s unicast view or that of his adversaries more logically convincing in forging a concept of the connection between the mass and the cross? That is a matter to which we will return in the next chapter. In sum, given the just the Council declaration itself, it seems that de la Taille

---

33 ‘Una enim eademque est hostia, idem nunc offerens sacerdotum ministerio, qui se ipsum tunc cruce obtulit, sola offerendi ratione diversa’ (Session 22, c. 2).
34 De la Taille would have us recall that the Council wished not only to refute Luther’s conclusion that the mass is not sacrifice, but also to disengage the premises of that conclusion, namely that Christ did not offer a sacrifice in the supper. For, if we understand the Protestant argument in terms of a syllogism, it would proceed in the following way: ‘In the mass we do what Christ did at the supper; Christ did not sacrifice at the supper, therefore neither do we offer sacrifice in the mass.’ De la Taille, ‘Coena et passio in theologia apologetica contra pseudo-reformatores’, Gregorianum IX (1928), 180.
cannot fully persuade about the sacrificial unicity of the supper-cross. But in fact, de la Taille does not seek definitive support—only a possible line for his own interpretation. If the language of Chapter One of Session 22 does not confirm the unicity of the supper and the cross, based on the history of the Council—the strongly decisive minority voices, and based on the doctrinal connections affirmed about the mass at Trent, de la Taille can none the less find 'probable' support for his central thesis in the Council’s work—which is all that he ever claims.

We can close this section by analysing more precisely the nature of the unity—via sacrifice—between the supper and cross, and the consequences of that conjoining, viz., the peculiar ‘sacramental realism’ to which the doctrine gives rise. The nature of the union between the supper and the cross is carefully spelled out. De la Taille insists that the supper not be construed as a 'petite' or preliminary or subordinate sacrifice to the bloody sacrifice on the cross; rather, the supper is 'coordinated and co-numerated' with the cross. As we noted in Chapter 1, when discussing the relationship between oblation and immolation in sacrifice, the connection is as integral as form to species, or, in other words, the union is one of constitutive parts. Now it is exactly this notion and analogy of unity which Vincent. McNabb, O.P., vehemently opposed, declaring de la Taille’s thought to be emptying the cross of meaning. McNabb protests that, if the last supper is the formal element of the sacrifice, and passion and death is considered the ‘material element’ of the sacrifice, then one cannot say that they are the same sacrifice—anymore than one could say that ‘the soul is the body’, or that ‘the body is the soul’, or that ‘the body is the man’, or that ‘the soul is the man’. With this parsing, McNabb thereby
accuses de la Taille of casting the cross as a mere ‘part’ of the sacrifice of redemption, which, he concludes, directly opposes the Church’s belief on ‘the redemptive sacrifice of Calvary’.³⁵

De la Taille’s thought on the supper-cross unity is indeed a good deal subtler than McNabb portrays. We can make three clarifying points. First, de la Taille specifies that this unity between the eucharistic oblation and the bloody immolation need not—and indeed is not—a unity in genere rei. However, it is unity ‘in genere signi—for it is oneness as sacrifice; and sacrifice as such, is a sign, an actually existing sign of invisible and internal dedication’ (MF I, 137; italics mine).³⁶ Against the dualist position, de la Taille brings forward an argument from the nature of the being of a sacrament or a sign. Because unity is derived from being, the unity of a sacrament belongs to its signifying components. In the case of sacrifice, belonging by definition to the category of signs, every sacrifice seeks its unity in the reciprocal and composite signifying elements. From these premises, we can conclude the following:

If the supper and the cross intrinsically and indissolubly concur in signifying the donation of Jesus as Victim to the Father for the salvation of the world, then the supper and the cross are a single sacrifice—even though sacrifice is found in the supper—thanks to the signifying influx from the cross, and sacrifice is found in the Cross, thanks to the signification already established in the supper.³⁷

To better explicate what is intended by this in genere signi, de la Taille suggests an analogy to the unity between the form of the consecration and the eucharistic species:

³⁵ McNabb, op.cit, (1094-1095)
³⁶ ‘Unitas illa ex oblatione eucharistis et immolatione cruenta, non est, neque oportet ut sit unitas in genere rei; sed profecto est unitas in genere signi; siquidem est unitas in genere sacrificii, et sacrificium, ut tale, inter signi recensetur: signum existens invisibilis internaeque dedicationis’ (MF,102,1921).
they are not one *in genere rei*, but they are indivisible *in genere sacramenti* or *signi*. In the sacrament of the eucharist, the form is 'identical with the matter, and surely one sacrament with it'. De la Taille distinguishes that the unity of form and matter cannot be transferred so absolutely from physical things/substances (e.g., soul and body) to that of sacraments and sacrifices. Secondly, and this also crucial to getting at the heart of de la Taille's concept of the sacrificial unity, he limits the analogy in a further way: for the unity of the sacrifice is 'multo strictior' than that of the eucharistic sacrament. In the sacrament, the words of consecration, which determine the bread and wine as significative of the presence of Christ, are transient. By contrast, in the Christ's sacrifice the supper oblation not only determines the passion to be *sacrificial*, but as an oblation begun in the rite it *continues* throughout the passion, up until the death of the Lord (*MF* I,138):

...sic in sacrificio Christi passio tota, ad mortem usque, determinatur *ad esse sacrificiale* per oblationem eucharisticam Christi, unde, accepta ratione formalis, habet ut sit et dicatur sacrificium ipsum redemptionis, in quodam continuo fieri decurrens, usquedam, intercedente morte, consistat in *facte esse* (*MF*, 102, 1921).

This statement about the *continuity* of the supper oblation is crucial; if not taken seriously, de la Taille is vulnerable to the accusation that he denies any sense of offering upon the 'altar of the cross' (which would, as he himself admits, be contrary to the mind of Trent). Put most sharply, the formal and determining element of oblation, while *clearly evident* in the ritual action of Christ at the supper, does not *cease* with the end of

---

eucharistic meal. On the contrary, the offering of the gift, the pledge of the victim, is ‘kept up’ by a perseverance of the will of Christ, ‘revealed in so many acts and words’ until his death on the cross (MF I, 138-9).

Thirdly, de la Taille invokes philosophical and scholastic reasoning to demonstrate that his position does not demean the cross. In order to show that the ‘material element’ of the sacrifice, the cross, gives the sacrifice its ‘absolute substantial reality’, he appeals to a philosophy of actual existing material things, which tends to more ‘justly’ and ‘properly’ attribute ‘actual substance’ to the material element—‘assuming that it is endowed with form’ (MF I, 141-2). Two other examples, one concerned with Thomistic ‘rational psychology’ and the other with moral order, work to obviate the *evacuatio crucis* assessment of his theory. According to Thomas, choice is ‘formally’ in the reason, but materially and substantially in the will. Presupposing the will being directed by reason, we do not hesitate to say that choice is located where it is ‘materially’. Analogously, de la Taille suggests that we may say of the sacrifice of Christ that is substantially where it is materially, namely on the cross (MF I, 142), notwithstanding the determining aspect of the supper. So, too, in the moral order: the work of the sacrifice will appear to be more ‘luminous’ and ‘heroic’ on the cross, than in the offering ‘under a symbol’. The ‘moral value’ of the ritual oblation at the supper is secured, as it were, by the suffering on the cross.40 If somewhat strained, these examples do allay any suspicion that de la Taille’s theory detracts from the sacrifice of the cross. Still, we should

---

40 Yet, even while admitting this point, de la Taille again stresses that the supper is of great moral significance: for it is there that the obligation to hand himself over to God for the salvation of all was *willingly assumed* (MF I, 143, n. 14).
underscore that de la Taille intends the supper-cross sacrifice to be fully conceived as a union; the juxtaposition and moral weighing of one action against the other is, ipso facto, artificial and beside the point.

To summarise what we have thus far argued in this chapter, for de la Taille the very nature of sacrifice exposes and demands the strict unity of supper and cross. This unity is not only suggested in scripture and the tradition, but it is also (at least) permitted in the Tridentine teaching about sacrifice. In fact, we have seen that de la Taille finds ample support for his position among the Council Fathers—even if the final wording of Session 22 remains ambiguous. I want to elaborate now upon two ‘neat’ consequences that obtain in de la Taille’s theory of the unicity between supper and cross. First, because of the sacrificial dynamic of gift-offering seen in the supper-cross sacrifice a robust sacramental realism and doctrine of real presence surfaces in his eucharistic theology (though recall that de la Taille is not concerned to prove real presence). Secondly, we also discover in his theory a concomitant and remarkable vision of the supper-oblation as inclusive of the entire Trinity.

Sacramental realism and oblation in the eternal Spirit

If in the supper Christ’s death is truly offered in sacrifice, the presence of his body and blood must be postulated—that is to say, the ritual offering of Christ at the supper cannot be merely a kind of ‘prophetic adumbration’ of an offering yet to be made, a ‘parable’ of the approaching death, or a figural ‘anticipation’ of messianic joy (MF I,
For sacrifice, recall, includes both sign and reality. As sign it indicates interior consecration, but it likewise must include the actual handing-over of a gift to God. If one were to suggest that Christ held only bread and wine in his hands, there would have been 'no sacrifice of his death, the flesh and blood of the victim to be immolated would not have been offered' — or at most, it would have been 'offered in figure' (MF I, 150).

Accordingly, there would be no 'sacramental immolation' at the supper and no victim offered unless the 'symbol or sacrament contains the true body and blood' (MF I, 151).

Similarly, no new covenant is made in the cenacle unless the chalice is the cup of blood. In a word, de la Taille's argument for the sacrificial reality of the supper necessarily includes the teaching of real presence; Christ's dicta must be efficacious in reference to the bread and wine.

Does it not follow from this that the disciples would have received the flesh of the victim yet to be immolated in blood? How is this to be conceived? De la Taille underscores that the modus oblationis is the crucial theological principal operative here:

...the Lord could have given himself in the banquet previous to the immolation in blood for this reason: that the victim once constituted under the symbols of immolation, not only was destined for immolation, but was then made apt to be received as food and drink. The very nature of the offering, therefore, made possible for the banquet to anticipate the immolation' (Hoc est, quia fuit modus oblationis, ut hostia, sub symbolis immolationis semel constituta, non solum in immolationen destinaretur, sed jam aptatur ad comestionem et potionem. Ex genere igitur oblationis factum est ut convivium posset anticipare immolationem) (MF I, 81; 57, 1921; italics mine).

---

41 De la Taille 'takes on' and refutes these propositions (attributed to Adolph Jülicher and Spitta) more fully in Book II of Mysterium Fidei, pp. 6-7.

42 De la Taille admits that this would be a figural sacrifice of the 'ancient' sort: bread and wine 'sacrificed' as a type to the cross. But Christ's sacrifice, fulfilling every sacrifice, could only be an offering of himself as res.
Hence, the reality of the act of oblation, absolutely central to de la Taille's concept of sacrifice, concludes to the disciples having partaken of the victim of the sacrificial banquet—even prior to Christ's death on the cross. As we shall see vividly when examining de la Taille's concept of the ecclesial sacrifice, much depends on this *modus oblationis*. It is the bearer of sacramental reality; it is the act which unites events of different temporalities.

But to this phenomenology of oblation we must also add the gift-dynamic of sacrifice, specifically as it would apply to Christ's offering at the supper—both as man and God. First, whilst divine acceptance of the victim was not made *manifest* until the resurrection, de la Taille argues that the Father's acceptance was, in some sense, assured at the supper—'invisibly indeed but nevertheless infallibly' (*MF I*, 201). This 'secured' acceptance derives from the fact that Christ, 'being God', offered himself through the Spirit (by that same power that the Church would later invoke in her own eucharistic oblation): 'The blood of Christ, who by the eternal Spirit offered himself unspotted to God, shall cleanse etc.' (*Hebrews* 9. 14). God was 'of obligation', in the 'bond of moral union' implicated by sacrifice, to take up into glory the flesh offered by the Son in the eternal Spirit (*MF II*, 181). In short, the sacrifice of the supper was already ratified by divine acceptance, so that, even if the flesh of Christ was not yet glorified by the resurrection, it was nevertheless that accepted and ratified victim which was 'returned' in the banquet, i.e., which he and his disciples ate and drank.\(^{43}\) De la Taille perceives God's

---

\(^{43}\) De la Taille rather persuasively demonstrates, largely from the 'perfection of sacrifice' and from tradition, that Christ partook of the banquet with the disciples (cf. *MF I*, 165-180). We will address this further in Chapter Five.
pledge of this ‘return-gift’ in so far as ‘the transubstantiation was accomplished through divine power’. Put somewhat differently, in Jesus’s oblation both as human being and God, all three mysteries converged: supper, death and resurrection.\(^4\) In virtue of the obligating dynamic established in sacrifice and engaged in by the divine persons, de la Taille can theologically assert that ‘even at the supper, the eucharist could signify the fruit of the death and resurrection and hence cause it’ (\(MF II, 182; \text{italics mine}\)).\(^5\)

The sacramental realism which de la Taille here expounds unquestionably emerges from his notion of sacrifice. If his understanding of the reality of sacrificial oblation at the supper has been labeled ‘confused’—a confusion of the sacramental and the real/natural, as Vonier, and others repeating Vonier, would have it—\(^6\) that ‘confusion’ may be said to appear only (and especially) if the dynamic of oblation-immolation and the concomitant unicity of the supper-cross sacrifice has been denied \(a\ pri\)ori. Quite apart from emphasizing the will and desire of Christ operative in sacrifice—which, as we shall show later, configures our own participation in that sacrifice—this insistence upon the oblation of the passion at the supper and the truth of that gift there offered, proves instrumental to making theological sense of the ecclesial eucharist as ‘sacrifice’. But

\(^4\) In Benedict XVI’s Apostolic Exhortation \textit{Sacramentum caritatis}, we hear something surprisingly similar: ‘In instituting the sacrament of the Eucharist, Jesus anticipates and makes present the sacrifice of the Cross and the victory of the resurrection’ (§10).

\(^5\) ‘Et vi illius vincula moralis, poterat jam eucharistia in coena significare fructus mortis et resurrectionis, proindeque et causare’ (\(MF, 291, 192\)).

\(^6\) This designation of de la Taille’s position as ‘confused’ actually comes from Michael McGuckian, S.J. (\textit{The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: A Search for an Acceptable Notion of Sacrifice}. Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2005, p. 100), although the tenor of Vonier’s writing is strikingly similar. Vonier’s complaint is that in dealing with the supper or the mass, one cannot invoke anything suggestive of a natural or real sacrifice, for the mass and supper are both thoroughly sacramental—belonging to ‘another order’ entirely. Anscar Vonier, O.S.B. \textit{A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist} (Westminster: Newman Press, 1956), pp. 87-91, \textit{passim}. Cf. Raymond Moloney, S.J. \textit{The Eucharist}. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 208-209.
before turning to that topic we need to delineate de la Taille’s notion of the *sacrificium coeleste*, a corroborating thesis of oblation and acceptance, and perhaps the second most controversial (and frequently misconstrued) aspect of de la Taille’s eucharistic theology. A correct interpretation of de la Taille’s notion of Christ as eternal and celestial victim is particularly significant to his understanding of the sacrificial nature of the mass (as soon will become evident).

The eternal and celestial sacrifice: *‘Hostia illa perpetua est’* (4 Sent. 12, in lit.)

*He is still our priest,*  
*our advocate who always pleads our cause.*  
*Christ is the victim who dies no more,*  
*the Lamb, once slain, who lives forever.*  

Eucharistic Preface 24

The notion of an eternal sacrifice and victim is the second pillar to de la Taille’s theory of eucharistic sacrifice, and one about which theological debate circled. Again, only by a disciplined attention to the defining elements of sacrifice does the proper understanding of de la Taille’s ‘eternal sacrifice’ emerge. The central question can be posed thusly: with death on the cross, does the sacrifice of Christ thereby reach an end? De la Taille answers that, indeed, in terms of oblation and immolation, nothing more could be added—no further act on the part of priest or victim is needed. However, recall that sacrifice, by definition, is *perfected* by its acceptance. De la Taille, along with the early Fathers of the Church, envisions a kind of *poësis* in sacrifice. God’s acceptance of the gift of Christ, exhibited in the resurrection and ascension, *consummates* the offering and immolation of the victim with a glory that endures eternally. God, as it were,
'crowns' the 'work of man' by this perfecting acceptance (MF I, 183). To demonstrate that Christ remains eternal victim and sacrifice, de la Taille carefully navigates through scriptural and patristic sources, exposing that this teaching is embedded in the notions of Christ as 'eternal victim', 'eternal altar' and 'eternal intercessor'. Equally important, de la Taille stipulates how this 'celestial sacrifice' must be conceived in order to avoid suggestion of a new and different sacrifice, other than the one made 'once for all' at the supper-cross (de la Taille will remain loyal to the inspiration of his theology—the Letter to the Hebrews). Here he is particularly at pains to distinguish his own position from that of German and French School oblationists. Let us first go right to the heart of the matter and spell out what precisely our author means by the 'eternity of the sacrifice'.

De la Taille is quick to offer two clarifying principles about his doctrine of an eternal, celestial sacrifice: the 'sacrifice' cannot be considered in an active sense; nor, on the other hand, is the 'celestial sacrifice and victim' simply metaphor or sign. Substantiating both assertions again demands fore-fronting the genus of sacrifice. If oblation and immolation (when it occurs) constitute the two external acts of sacrificing, then once these acts are accomplished, the sacrifice may be said to be at an end. Yet, considering the question from the aspect of the victim and its acceptance can expand that closure. True enough, when the acts of oblation and immolation are completed, the 'victimal condition' perdures only as long as the victim remains incorrupt. With the resurrection and ascension of Christ, however, the flesh of victim has become 'inviolate' and utterly sanctified, living eternally in glory. 'Must we then say that there is no sacrifice in heaven?', de la Taille asks (MFHO, 70). To be sure, there is no sacrifice of
the risen Christ in an active sense—nothing repeated nor in a state of coming to completion (in fieri). Instead, the sacrifice ‘continues (perseverat)’ as the ‘passive sacrifice’, i.e., in that state ‘of which it has been the purpose of the sacred rite to bring the victim’: the victim ‘durat’ in the state of being (esse) as ‘accepted victim’ (MF I, 202; 143, 1921). De la Taille’s ‘passive sacrifice’ reiterates that sacrifice is *donum*:

Christ is in heaven, in the quality of gift, offered once, accepted and kept by God for ever. This is what is meant by designating Christ as eternal victim, or celestial sacrifice (MFHO, 70-1).

When de la Taille speaks in terms of ‘celestial sacrifice’ and ‘eternal victim’, he indicates that the victim offered at the supper and immolated on the cross remains as gift in the Father’s presence, eternally exhibiting himself in his humanity that suffered for the sins of the world.

However, de la Taille likewise curbs any temptation to ‘rank’ the ‘celestial sacrifice’ as mere metaphor or sign—and here again we have a glimpse of de la Taille’s constant and careful negotiation between the external and internal dimension of sacrifice. The passive sacrifice in heaven, he argues, is not to be understood as some continuing internal devotion of Christ (*affectum Christi internum duntaxat*). Rather, the celestial sacrifice, *is* sacrifice ‘in a strict sense (*proprium sacrificium*)’, ‘denominating’ some external condition (*proprietatem externam*) in the humanity of Christ, specifically, the glory obtained in the sacrifice that was eternally ratified by God (MF I, 202; 143, 1921). If not metaphor, neither is the celestial sacrifice a *sign*—a clarification that might seem odd given de la Taille’s frequent reminder that sacrifice belongs to the nature of a sign. That the celestial sacrifice is no longer a sign derives both from the fact that in Christ’s
sacrifice there is a closure between sign and signified—"in quo signum aequaret rem"; and also from the belief that in heaven, all is 'resplendent truth' (there is no longer need for figure or veil) (MF, 143). Can one say that the celestial sacrifice signifies the devotio of the sacrificer? Yes, but in a way that collapses the distinction between sign and signified. In Christ's sacrifice, the offerer and the gift have become the same: the Priest offers himself as victim.\(^{47}\) If Christ is the 'sacrament' of himself in the earthly sacrifice, in the celestial sacrifice there is pure transparency. For de la Taille, this 'closure' between sign and signified is far from trivial, for from it 'flows the efficacy of that sacrifice to sanctify us' through the Church's sacraments. The ecclesial signs are not 'vain' or 'empty', only because they signify that full sacrifice which remains eternally held as gift, and thereby eternally sanctifying of those now participating in it (MF I, 203).

But how does de la Taille claim support for his thesis from scripture and tradition? His approach is to argue that what is taught in 'sacred writings' about Christ as eternal victim, eternal altar, and eternal priest, indirectly lends credence to the notion of a celestial sacrifice. Again, from a wealth of material I will select a few central witnesses to his theory, those that seem more precisely to reveal his theological and spiritual position.

De la Taille calls attention first and foremost to the rich patristic vision of Christ's resurrection and ascension as constituting the eternal ratification of his sacrifice. The sacrificial dynamic of offering/immolation/acceptance is vividly preached among the Fathers, most pronounced in their penchant for seeing the resurrection and ascension as

\(^{47}\) 'Hence his was a full (plenum) sacrifice in which the sign was equated with the thing signified (in quo signum aequaret rem)' (MF I, 202; 143, 1921).
the integral third element, or fulfillment, of the paschal sacrifice. Citing a number of patristic and medieval witnesses, resurrection and ascension is portrayed variously as a ‘perfection of immolational dignity’; as the consummate sanctification of the victim; as the final purification of the gift; as the divinisation of the human condition of the victim, transferred into the hands of God; as the gift transformed and ‘beautified by the light of eternal glory’; and as the ratification of the efficacy of Christ’s priesthood (cf. _MF I_, 185-196). Perhaps Augustine can be allowed to speak for the Fathers de la Taille cites, in a phrase that captures _in nuce_ the sacrificial completion in the resurrection: ‘This then is the evening sacrifice, the passion of the Lord, the cross of the Lord, the offering of the saving victim, the holocaust accepted by God. _In the resurrection, he made this evening sacrifice a morning gift_’ (_In Psalm_ 140. 5; _MF I_, 191). It is a gift, we might add, of that eschatological morning that has no end.

De la Taille likewise rehearses how the Fathers would interweave images from Hebrew sacrifices to indicate the perfection of Christ’s sacrifice in the resurrection and ascension. The resurrection was frequently portrayed as the descent of God upon the victim, a holocaust fire signifying God’s communion _ad sacrificium Christi_. On the other hand, the ascension was seen the raising up of the victim to God—or the sweet odour of the holocaust smoke taking flight for heaven (_MF I_, 194-200). Divine acceptance is found in either case. For de la Taille, the point to be underscored is that in the tradition of patristic thought, resurrection and ascension confer on the sacrifice an ‘excellence’ beyond other sacrifices, and an excellence which perdures as the victim lives eternally in the presence of God.
Concomitant to this understanding of eternal divine acceptance, and flowing quite naturally from it, both Scripture and the Fathers give expression to doctrines of Christ as eternal victim, altar and intercessor. Not surprisingly, de la Taille interprets Hebrews 9. 1-24, which marks Christ’s entrance into the ‘inner sanctuary’, as the sanctification of his flesh ‘by celestial glory’. In other words, Hebrews presents us with Christ who, having made his sacrifice once only ‘at the end of ages’, none the less remains an ‘eternal gift’, an oblation always coram Deo. De la Taille will insist repeatedly that the gift offered by Christ in sacrifice is never retracted; nor is acceptance by God limited or conditional (cf. 

_MF I_, 209). The ‘liturgical’ passages sprinkled throughout the Book of Revelation (cf. 5. 2, 6, 12; 8. 3-5; 9. 13, 15), also suggest to de la Taille some kind of heavenly, continuing worship. Still, he stipulates that this worship consists of Christ’s ‘presentation’ of himself to the Father as one ‘once slain’ but abiding forever ‘unto the praise of God and the glory of the saints’ (_MF I_, 185). This question of the nature of Christ’s heavenly ‘liturgy’, and the cleverly negotiated distinction between ‘presentation (_exhibatio_)’ and ‘oblation’, will be taken up again at the close of this chapter.

In addressing Christ as eternal altar (‘We have an altar whereof they have no power to eat who serve the tabernacle’, Heb. 13. 10), de la Taille exposes the traditional notion of Christ being the altar of his own sacrifice. Specifically, Christ’s body, sacramentally ‘splashed with blood’ in the chalice of the supper and then really so upon the cross, _is_ the altar. Hesychius, in his commentaries on Leviticus, details this teaching in a striking way:

---

48 Cf. the interesting note (n. 1) on 184, in which de la Taille advocates and elaborates upon C.H. Huyghe’s commentary on Hebrews 8. 5.
'He shed his intelligible blood...on the altar, that is to say, on his own body....For Christ himself, by the sprinkling of his own blood offered his passion for us unto our salvation....For Christ was made the whole of his sacrifice—priest, sacrifice, and altar. He is himself the man made ready (Lev. 16. 21), made ready for the passion for us.'

Recalling that the altar in ancient sacrifices represented the place of divine dwelling and the locus of sanctification for the gift, de la Taille also argues that the altar and victim must therefore be the same in Christ's sacrifice: only Christ himself could sanctify himself, for only in the body of Christ did God dwell in an 'absolutely physical and substantial way' (MF I, 220).

Yet, these suggestions that Christ was the altar of his sacrifice do not necessarily compute to an eternal, celestial altar. De la Taille moves forward in his argument to present a substantial sampling of commentaries upon the eternal 'golden altar' of Revelation 6. 9, commentaries which interpret the symbol as referring to the celestial victim, and in particular, to the humanity of Christ. Moreover, he brings forth from tradition that liturgical perception of the Church's liturgy as directed to, even celebrated upon, a celestial altar. If, in ancient sacrifices, a gift needed to be offered through an altar, Christ approached God through himself and now remains as the altar through which the faithful offer sacrifice. Irenaeus's well-known passage from Adversus haereses expresses pointedly this liturgical and Christological teaching: ‘The Word of God

---

49 In Levit. 1, 2 and 5, P.G. 93, cc. 883, 885, 1001 (MF I, 219).
50 De la Taille draws upon the following Aristotelean principle: 'what produces any perfection in another, has more perfection in itself than that which it produces on the other' (MF I, 215). Cf. also Matthew 23. 19: ‘...Ye blind, for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?’
51 Perhaps the most interesting of these examples, from the Glossia Ordinaria in Apoc. 6. 9, 8. 3, claims that Christ, according to his humanity, is both his own 'golden alter', and the 'altar of trinity' (MF I, 221, n.12).
desires that we too should offer a gift at the altar frequently and without intermission. *The altar therefore is in heaven for thither our prayers and offerings are directed*” (MF I, 222). Interestingly, the Fathers whom de la Taille cites emphasize that this heavenly altar is the *humanity* of Christ, an emphasis I would argue that stresses the image of Christ as victim, whose humanity is present eternally (in passive propitiation) before the Father. As we shall see, this accent upon the humanity of Christ is likewise central in de la Taille’s theology of grace.

Patristic and mediaeval thought on the perpetual intercession and mediation of Christ corroborates what de la Taille wants to say about the celestial sacrifice. That the heavenly Christ offers prayers and supplications and petitions before the Father is a teaching intimately related to his condition as eternal victim. That is, the rôle of Christ as our advocate indicates his eternal presence ‘ante conspectum Dei, in carne quam ex nobis assumptam obtulit pro nobis’ (MF, 167, 1921). According to de la Taille, Gregory Nazianzen is the ‘great champion’ of this interpretation: in Christ’s heavenly intercession and advocacy for us, there is no sense of ‘humiliation’, no prostration at the Father’s feet. Rather, “‘as Word and counsellor of the Father, [Christ] persuades him to bear with me, because of all that as man he suffered. This, I think, is what advocacy means here’” (Or. 30 n. 14; *MF* I, 236). Gregory the Great puts this even more pointedly, articulating that the prayer of Christ before the Father is his assumed human nature—an intercession less by word than by mercy.

---

52 Cf. a passage from Gregory the Great in which he envisions Christ as unceasingly presenting ‘incarnation’ to the Father. De la Taille draws attention as well as to some mediaeval witnesses in St. Bruno of Segni and Gerhoh of Reichersberg (*MF* I, 206, 226).
'In this way he speaks to the Father for us, that he presents himself to the Father in our likeness. His words, his petition consists precisely in this: he presents himself to the Father as man for mankind. Because interceding for sinners, he presents himself as the just man who merits indulgence for others' (Moral., l. 22, 17, n.43; MF I, 237).

It seems important for de la Taille that the celestial intercession be seen in terms of Christ’s eternal victimhood, for it is through that condition that the Son continues to make his latreutic and propitiatory will known.53

However, Christ does this not as ‘a suppliant’, but as the Son, ‘using the power of God as his own power’.54 With Hebrews 5. 6-10 in mind, de la Taille frames this from another angle: whilst in the flesh, Christ offered prayers and supplications, now, in lieu of ‘prayer’, there is the blessing of ‘the pontiff’: namely, the eternal Sacrifice sends the Holy Spirit (MF I, 241).55 More impressive still, and a view congruent with de la Taille’s thought on grace (to be explored in Chapter Four), Nicholas Cabasilas’s construes Christ’s continuing mediation in terms of an act of union:

‘For having once been our mediator...he did not withdraw, rather he is ever interceding, not by some form of words and prayers, as ambassadors do, but by an act. What is this act? He unites himself to us, and through himself imparts to us his own graces’ (Liturgiae expositio, c. 45; MF I, 236).

I have been intent here to expose the precise nature of de la Taille’s thought on the ‘passive’ heavenly sacrifice of Christ, largely because this notion is, I think, at the root of

53 De la Taille draws upon two sermons of Thomas (In Hebr., 7, lect. 4; and In Rom. 8 lect. 7), in which Thomas acknowledges that the heavenly Christ intercedes as victim by continuing to make manifest ‘the desire of his most holy soul for our salvation’ (MF I, 238-39).

54 MF I, 240. De la Taille notes that this is the ‘principal distinction’ between the intercession of Mary and Christ: Christ intercedes as one of the Godhead; Mary is rightly called ‘omnipotens supplex’ (cf. n. 5, 240).

55 ‘Clamor scilicet nostrae hostiae exauditus est a Deo, penetrans coelos, ubi consummatus Christus non incumbit reconciliationi quasi adipiscendae, sed inventam nobis impertit, factus obtemperantibus sibi causa salutis aeternae. Pro precibus enim quas litans olim noster sacerdos obtulit Deo, superest jam pontificis benedictio, missio scilicet Spiritus Sancti (Hebr., 5.6-10)’ (MF, 170-171).
controversy about the nature of Christ's activity in the earthly, ecclesial sacrifice. In other words, what one determines about the *sacrificium coeleste* inevitably bears upon ecclesial sacrifice—a wager which we will substantiate shortly.

It remains for us here to see how de la Taille distinguishes his own view from the popular German and French School teachings on Christ's continued sacrifice in heaven, and to examine his nuanced suggestion concerning the distinction between 'oblation' and 'presentation'. For de la Taille, there are two ways to 'err' in considering the teaching of the 'eternal sacrifice': 1) the error by *defect*, which 'overlooks' or denies the celestial sacrifice; or 2) the error by *excess*, which considers the heavenly sacrifice in an *active* manner—and here de la Taille identifies 'two schools' of Catholic theologians—German and French. De la Taille attends in detail to this second 'error', clarifying his own position in contradistinction to these 'oblationist' thinkers.

In brief, the German school of thought conceives of the celestial sacrifice in heaven as an 'internal' act of obedience on the part of Christ, repeatedly renewed in heaven—until, that is, the day of judgment. De la Taille finds this theology problematic

---

56 In an illuminating passage, de la Taille himself entertains and then rejects the suggestion that the phrase 'celestial sacrifice' is so misleading theologically that it ought to be 'withdrawn'. He offers four reasons why it ought to be retained in theological discourse. 1) There are a number of traditional phrases in the Church, e.g., 'participation in the sacrifice', and 'consummation of the sacrifice' which would have no meaning without the concept of a 'passive' sacrifice. 2) Eliminating the phrase would be 'deviating' from the Fathers who rather frequently referred to Christ as still being a sacrifice, quite apart and independent of the ecclesial sacrifice. 3) It would depart from the mediaeval practice of referring to eucharistic reservation with the word *sacrificium*—which can only be understood in the passive sense. 4) To withdraw the phrase would also encourage a 'forgetfulness' about where all prayers and sacrifices have their end, namely, in the temple or house of God, wherein all gifts of God's faithful are received (*MFHO*, 74).

57 De la Taille claims that Cardinal Lugo (*De Mysterio incarnationis*, dip. 28, n. 35) is a prime example of this 'error by defect' (*MF I*, 247).

58 The primary German theologians considered by de la Taille are: Albert Stoeckel; J.T Franz; Pell; Thalhofer and Max T. Hompel. Among the French school, de la Taille identifies, Père de Condren; Dom Olier; M. Lepin.
in a two-fold way. First, and obviously, it perceives the sacrifice of redemption as ongoing, as if the once for all sacrifice of Christ were insufficient. (This critique applies to the French School as well—and all theological proposals of an active sacrifice in heaven.) Secondly, construing the sacrifice as ‘internal’ sacrifice ignores that sacrificial action is properly signifying, i.e., there is no sign unless the sacrifice has an external esse (‘Perit autem signum, nisi habeat esse externum’). 59

The French School, on the other hand, has a comparatively more robust external sacrifice occurring in heaven. De la Taille cites passages from the leading French oblationists P. de Condren and Dom Olier. This school of thought purports that Christ’s sacrifice began here on earth only “in order to be continued in heaven, where we find the perfection of sacrifice” (MF I, 249). How is this celestial sacrifice envisioned by these French thinkers? As de la Taille interprets the French School, 60 there is, beyond the presentation of the Christ’s humanity before the Father, some active oblation of his body (accompanied by sacerdotal prayer), and, even more surprising, a kind of self-immolation or ‘annihilation’ that occurs in the very process of glorification: the divine consuming fire annihilating all that is mortal in the humanity of Christ (MF I, 250). De la Taille strongly objects to the proposal that there be anything of immolation or destruction in the divine glorification. The glorifying of Christ is the Father’s act of acceptance; it is pure consummation (MF I, 251). Needless to say, he notes that such entangled theological

59 MF I, 248, 252-3; 176, 1921). Some of these German theologians suggest this internal sacrifice ‘happens’ to be ‘outwardly manifest’ in the wounds of Christ’s glorified body. De la Taille finds this too weak of a connection between the internal and external element of oblate sacrifice (MF I, 248, n. 6).
60 Cf. also the work of M. Lepin, L’idée du sacrifice dans la religion chrétienne (Paris, 1897), pp. 187 passim.
positions as ‘immolation or destruction by Christ’s own glory’ are given scope only because some ‘new’ immolation is seen as necessary to maintaining a concept of celestial sacrifice (MF I, 250). Rejecting the teaching of these two schools, de la Taille opts for what he calls a ‘middle course’. There is no ‘formal continuation or renewal’ of active offering in the celestial sacrifice, he writes, but there is a ‘virtual duration’ of that one active oblation in the perpetual victim, which remains eternally sacred to God. Though offered once in time, the gift is eternal, for Christ gives ‘irrevocably’ and God accepts eternally.61 In short, the celestial sacrifice perdures on the basis of the eternal and formal state of Christ as victim once offered, immolated, and forever accepted. De la Taille states this truth even more elegantly in a Letter responding to missionary priest confused about the manner of Christ’s offering and intervention in heaven. The celestial sacrifice of Christ, he writes,

is intercession which is no longer in the process of going on (fieri); it is mediation whose function no longer is to draw opposites closer together, but to keep them welded into unity. One only activity remains to Christ, and it is to cause life to circulate from the divine summits to the lower regions of our fallen humanity, from the Father to all his children.62

But de la Taille is prescient enough to acknowledge that the language of the Fathers and the liturgies is at times ambiguous, open to the interpretation that Christ

---

61 ‘Quare medii inter duos scopulos incendentes, nullam formalem oblationis activae continuationem aut instaurationem fingimus, virtualem autem oblationis duratione, profitemur, in hoc consistentem, quod ex oblatione sua temporali una, valida in aeternum (cum ex parte donantis irrevocabiliter, tum ex parte acceptantis aeternaliter) manet Christus Deo in perpetuum sacer, seu theothytus’ (MF, I, 254; 179, 1921). De la Taille persuasively cites M.J. Scheben as giving the ‘best’ account of this teaching in his Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik (vol. 3, 1882, n. 1496, p. 445); cf. MF I, 254, n. 15.

62 MFHO, 54.
He asserts that his notion of ‘passive sacrifice’ adequately covers these difficult passages from the Fathers. Yet, de la Taille desires to underscore that the heavenly sacrifice is best understood as more cognate to presentation than oblation (though he notes that the two are ‘closely akin’). There is a difference, he argues, between Christ’s eternal manifestation of himself to God—in an abiding presence to the one who received him—and an actual handing-over of a gift in sacrificial oblation. This seems to me a terribly important allowance in de la Taille’s eucharistic theology, one which significantly discourages any suggestion of active sacrifice on the part of the glorified Christ. Those who objected most vehemently to de la Taille’s subtle notion of the ‘passive’ celestial sacrifice, were loathe to accept any concept intimating that Christ was not involved in the mass-sacrifice by a new and personal act of oblation. We are now prepared to see how this ‘passive’ yet eternal sacrifice significantly structures de la Taille’s theology of the ecclesial mass-sacrifice, lending it a coherence rarely found in the thought of his detractors.

---

63 Gregory the Great will further complicate the issue by using immolation and oblation interchangeably when speaking of the heavenly sacrifice (MF I, 253, n.13).
64 Cf. M.D. Forrest in The Clean Oration, op. cit., esp. 137-140. Vonier seems entirely to miss the point about a passive celestial sacrifice (Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist, op. cit, 262-268).
Chapter Three: the ecclesial sacrifice

We have thus far seen how de la Taille’s theory of sacrifice shapes his doctrine about the unicity of the supper-cross sacrifice, and how it founds the concept of a celestial victim—eternally accepted and sanctified and held by God. In forging a response to the ever-contentious question of how the mass is ‘a true and proper sacrifice’, de la Taille unfolds the logic already advanced in these two principles. This chapter on the Church’s sacrifice divides in a three-fold way. First, we shall explicate de la Taille’s theology of ecclesial sacrifice, showing how it undercuts false assumptions about the mass-sacrifice (which were largely post-Tridentine ‘inventions’ — and still held dear by some of his early twentieth-century contemporaries) and how it ‘resolves’ many of the difficulties posed by teaching of Trent. Secondly, the question of who offers the mass-sacrifice and how that offering is enacted will need to be treated in some detail. A discussion of immolatio symbolica and of the nature of the consecratory prayer are essential to apprehending de la Taille’s unique sense of the ritual mode of oblation. Thirdly, and most significantly in terms of this study, we will look at de la Taille’s rather striking approach to the question of the efficacy and fruits of the mass-sacrifice, a largely over-looked aspect of de la Taille’s eucharistic theology but one critical to his integration of sacrifice, grace, and prayer. He relentlessly construes the fruits of the eucharistic sacrifice in terms of the internal devotion of those who offer: sacrifice is much less an
abstract theory than a real act and practice. At the end of this chapter, we thereby begin to sketch the important link between sacrifice and devotio, a subject that will be taken up fully in a later chapter.

The mass as a sacrifice: unitas ex parte rei oblatae

Recall that de la Taille’s strongest critics were those who argued (and ostensibly on the basis of Session 22 of Trent) that the supper and the cross are each, as it were, true and ‘complete’ sacrifices: the supper being a ‘sacramental sacrifice’, a sacrifice in specie aliena; the cross being a ‘physical’ sacrifice, or a sacrifice in specie propria. But how is the mass-sacrifice, which the Catechism of Trent identifies as ‘one and the same sacrifice as that of the cross’, to be theologically construed? Precisely this is the difficulty for theologians who maintain the supposedly Tridentine ‘dualist’ position about the supper and cross, a difficulty ‘resolved’ by some in stressing a ‘real immolation’ in the mass; or, by others, in proposing that communion is in fact constitutive of the ecclesial sacrifice. De la Taille, not surprisingly, rejects both proposals—‘errors’ attributed to the absence of any profound sense of the nature of sacrifice.

His own approach to the mass-sacrifice emerges lucidly when both the strict unity of supper-cross sacrifice and the reality of a ‘passive’ heavenly sacrifice are admitted (cf.

---

1 In this ‘subjective’ emphasis to ecclesial sacrifice, de la Taille can be seen as a precursor to later twentieth-century theologians like Schillebeeckx and Rahner, who, though very differently, would give attention to the subjective side of the church’s sacraments. In fact, as David Burrell, suggests (‘Many Masses and One Sacrifice’, Yearbook of Liturgical Studies, 1964), Rahner is somewhat in debt to de la Taille for his own approach to the question of the value of one and many masses.  

2 Cf., e.g., McNabb, op. cit., 1093, 1096, 1099; and M.D. Forrest, op. cit., pp. 160ff. Cf. also Eugène Masure’s treatment of Billot, who upheld that the mass and the cross were not the same sacrifice—either in number or in species—‘non idem numero neque specie’ (The Sacrifice of the Mystical Body, London: Burns & Oates, 1954), pp. 17-19 (main text and notes).
In nuce, the mass gains ‘entrance’, as it were, to the supper-cross sacrifice primarily by way of what is offered: namely, the same victim offered to be immolated at the supper, is now offered as immolated and glorified in the ecclesial sacrifice of the mass. Obviously, this unitas ex parte rei oblatae is made possible by a theology of an eternal victim, and, perhaps less obviously, by a concept of a subordinate and derivative oblation, a concept which permits the Church to participate in the offering of Christ at the supper—and in such a way that the action is truly, formally, the Church’s (a point we will address shortly). If in the mass a ‘new’ victim were offered, the mass would be an additional sacrifice to that of the cross—which is precisely what the Reformers feared to be the case in the Catholic denomination of the mass as sacrifice.

On the same note, any suggestion that Christ intervenes by way of a new, personal sacrificial action in the ecclesial sacrifice indicates that a supplemental act on Christ’s part is needed in the redemption of humanity. In order to better illuminate de la Taille’s own position, it is helpful to examine how he responds to theories inimical to his own.

Perhaps the easiest of the sacrificial theories for de la Taille to dismiss is the one that locates, for a variety of reasons, the constitutive element of sacrifice in communion. Renz, for example, argues that the mass is not formally an offering of the body and blood of Christ, but rather the ‘preparation’ and ‘setting forth’ of a banquet. Such a thesis, de la Taille argues, clearly runs counter to Trent’s affirmation about the oblation of the mass (MF II, 199). A more complex theory, advanced by theologians such as Soto, Cano, and

---

3 Pope John Paul II, in his 2003 Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesia de eucharistia*, seems to be rejecting this same theological position in his following statement: ‘By virtue of its close relationship to the sacrifice of Golgotha, the Eucharist is a sacrifice in the strict sense, and not only in a general way, as if it were simply a matter of Christ’s offering himself to the faithful as their spiritual food’ (§13).
Robert Bellarmine, does not deny that the mass is offering of the body and blood of Christ, yet it does locate the necessary component of sacrificial immolation in communion—i.e., the consumption of the species causes either a symbolic (Cano, Soto) or real destruction of the victim (Bellarmine). Predictably, de la Taille’s initial response to such theories is a sharp reminder about the dynamic of sacrifice. Communion is neither the oblation nor the immolation: it is rather the reception of the gift, sanctified and returned by God as food. He also appeals to the tradition that places the offering of the sacrificial gift on a separate axis from that of receiving the sacrificial food. For instance, my offering and prayer might ‘save’ you, but my eating cannot. The reason for this is ‘plain (in promptu)’: through offering and prayer something may be impetrated for another, but the reception of the divine gift is neither prayer nor oblation (MF II, 200; 305, 1921). De la Taille likewise forthrightly denies the sort of ‘realistic’ immolation/destruction that Bellarmine is seeking in the mass-sacrifice. In short, we can capture de la Taille’s position with this succinct and felicitous phrase: if one looks for the crucifixion or immolation—instead of looking for the crucified—in order to make the mass a ‘real sacrifice’, then one is seeking in vain.

Another set of proposals about the ecclesial sacrifice focuses on the status of the victim. Is a new ‘state’ of victimhood induced by the mass? Or, on the contrary is Christ no longer victim at all? De la Taille categorises as an ‘error by excess’ those theories which see the consecration of the mass as victimizing Christ anew, specifically, placing

---

4 Thomas, in fact, confirms that the sacrifice is indeed complete before communion (ST 3, 83. 4) (MF II, 200).
Christ in statu decliviari (Cardinal de Lugo; Cardinal Franzelin; Raynaud). Though not a ‘bloody immolation’, this induced state of victimhood is a kind of ‘death’ in which Christ is deprived of his connatural life (MF II, 202-3).\(^6\) Whilst de la Taille admits that such a teaching of Christ ‘suffering’ anew in the mass may be found ‘scattered’ in books and sermons (predominantly from the ‘modern period’), he none the less soundly rejects as ‘ignoble’ and ‘inconsistent with Christian piety’ any suggestion that a new state of victimhood is produced in the mass.

By contrast, he argues that the tradition, and most evidently the teaching of the scholastic Fathers, speaks relentlessly of immolation in sacrament. Language that refers to Christ’s immolation in the mass must be understood as indicating only this immolation in signo—just as Augustine suggests that we call something according to what it is an image of, or what it resembles, without thereby speaking falsely (Ep. 98, n. 9; MF II, 211-12). De la Taille appeals directly to Thomas (ST III, 83, 1) for the classic expression of how to conceive of the mass as an immolation: “‘But the celebration of this sacrament is an image representative of the passion of Christ, which is true immolation. And for this reason (ideo) the celebration of this sacrament is called the immolation of Christ’” (MF II, 212). To de la Taille’s mind, the tradition solidly refuses to entertain in the mass ‘any real blood-shedding in Christ, …any detrition (detritio) or lessening (diminutio) or lowering (extenuatio) of any kind, or change (immutatio) whatever, even bloodless’ (MF II, 212; 312, 1921, italics mine). Not only does such a rejection safeguard the doctrine of

---

\(^6\) Cardinal de Lugo is here cited as an example of this school of thought: ‘Although the body of Christ is not substantially destroyed in the act of consecration, still it is destroyed in a human manner, in as much as it is given a lower status, and as such it is rendered useless for the human services of the human body’ (De venerabili eucharistiae sacramento, disp. 19, sect. 5, n. 67-68) (MF II, 202-203).
Christ’s incorruptibility as resurrected and glorified victim, but it also underscores that the mass cannot stand apart from the cross: the mass is sacrifice *relative* to that of the cross (*MF II*, 213). We will return to this question of sacramental immolation when we explicate the ecclesial oblation—upon which oblation rests the truth of the representative *immolatio*.

Yet, de la Taille’s most interesting and challenging interlocutor is his former mentor and contemporary colleague at the Gregorian University, Cardinal L. Billot. I address at some length their disagreement, as it demonstrates the distinctiveness of de la Taille’s thought and provides critical insight into the question of the internal ‘immolation’ of the offerers. Billot (along with Vasquez) dismisses the necessity of any thesis about an eternal, celestial victim; instead, he focuses the sacrificial explanation of the mass on the eucharistic species themselves. Above and beyond the commemorative character of the eucharistic species, Billot maintains that they sacramentally constitute a true sacrifice because they ‘fittingly represent the internal and invisible’ *devoitio* of those ‘offering themselves’ in worship of God.7 For Billot then, the mass is a sacrifice *sub species aliena*; it is neither numerically same as the sacrifice of the cross, nor is it the same as that of the supper.8

If de la Taille appreciates the subtlety of Billot’s position—and we should note that Billot’s theory is also a fresh break from immolationist theories—he challenges its insufficient account of sacrifice. Sacrifice, de la Taille reiterates, must include both *res et signum* and *res tantum*. The ‘reality and sign’ is the giving over to God of a victim

---

7 Billot, *De Ecclesiae sacramentis*, 4, t. 1, 611, 616; 568-572; *MF II*, 216.
8 Cf reference to Masure in note 2, supra.
(immolated, to be immolated, or now being immolated), and by an action apparent the senses. The ‘reality only’ is internal immolation of the one offering. If the oblation is to be a sign of internal devotio, then it must be the case that the gift being handed over bears the reality or condition of immolation. Such immolational reality, de la Taille argues, is found in the Church’s offering of the flesh and blood of Christ—a victim already immolated to God and ratified. The upshot of de la Taille’s response to Billot might be put in this way: it is not any external signification of the worshipper’s desire to be immolated to God that suffices for proper sacrifice, but only that res et signum which links internal devotio to that of a true victim. In other words, a thing is not sacrificed merely on the basis that a sign ‘professedly sacrificial is employed in connection with it’; rather, the ‘latreutic signification’ of sacrifice both ‘arises from and has its foundation’ in the oblation of an external thing truly immolated (MF II, 218-219, italics mine). Billot, it seems, has gotten the sacrificial signification backwards.

The immolative reality, therefore, is not to be proved by the sign, but, on the contrary, the sign is to be regarded as dependent on the immolative reality, as presupposed and underlying that sign (MF II, 219).

Two important concepts can be gleaned from de la Taille’s rejoinder to Cardinal Billot. First, immolation or the immolative reality of the victim stands ontologically prior to the ecclesial sacrifice—and that reality is intimately related to the Church’s action. Secondly, and correlativey, the sacrificial signification and real giving of our internal immolation to God depends upon the victim, Christ, even as a kind of mediating reality. In de la Taille’s theological framework, the believer’s internal devotio does not ‘take flight’ for heaven, as it were, without the offering of a true victim. The devotion of the
offering Church is participative in the victim’s, so that the Christian might be offered to God and henceforth live ‘not after the desire of men, but according to the will of God’ (1 Pet. 4. 1). As we noted earlier, de la Taille walks neither as an extrinsicist nor as one emphasizing only the internal reality of sacrifice. He prudently straddles the fence, insisting upon a theory of sacrifice and sacrament which honors and indeed demands truth both of the exterior sign and of the interior reality.

If, according to de la Taille, Billot’s theory misperceives the signifying dynamic of sacrifice, Billot’s theology is also problematic in refusing any concept of the sacrificium coeleste. Without a celestial victim, the intrinsic oneness of the mass and the supper-cross sacrifice is imperiled. More, the absence of an eternal victim creates significant difficulties in explaining the propitiatory value of the mass, upon which Trent adamantly insists. Having attended to some rival theories about the mass-sacrifice, we are in a better position to appreciate de la Taille’s central thesis, namely, that the unity of the ecclesial sacrifice with the supper-cross sacrifice stands upon the identity of the victim offered. Now let us turn to the second critical feature of de la Taille’s theory of the mass—the subordinate and derivative nature of the sacrificial oblation at mass.

The ecclesial oblation: subordinatio ex parte oblationis activae

We have examined how de la Taille answers the question of what is offered at the sacrifice of the mass, and how that what—the eternal victim immolated and ratified—grants sacrificial status to the mass. Next we need to examine how he construes the contentious issue of who offers the ecclesial sacrifice and how that offering is
accomplished in the Church’s ritual action. The ‘who offers?’ question opens onto the
debate of whether each mass includes a personal and formal act of offering on the part of
Christ, or, as de la Taille will maintain, only a ‘virtual’ act of offering by Christ. At the
core of de la Taille’s position is a careful delineation of the Church’s subordinate, yet
participative, power in the offering of sacrifice. Our explication of how the ecclesial
ritual accomplishes that sacrificial oblation attends to de la Taille’s curious, but not
unpersuasive, position on the consecration as oblation, as well as his logical (if
infelicitous) conclusion about the rôle of the epiclesis in eucharistic sacrifice.

Christ’s offering at the ecclesial sacrifice. The same critics who descried de la
Taille’s unicist perception of the supper and cross as contrary to Trent, also take issue
with his proposal that Christ does not formally offer at each ecclesial sacrifice.9

However, de la Taille’s understanding of Christ’s activity at the ecclesial sacrifice is
utterly consistent with his theology of eucharistic sacrifice, as we have delineated it thus
far. Is Christ the offerer and priest of the Church’s sacrifices? ‘Yes’, if one understands
that Christ, the high priest, offers now through the oblation of his mystical body, the

---

9 Forrest, for example, suggests that de la Taille’s position is indubitably counter to the Tridentine
declaration (‘For the victim is one and the same, and the same person (idem) now offers by the ministry of
his priests who then offered himself on the cross, only the manner of offering being different’ c. 2, Session

This question of Christ’s rôle in the offering of each sacrifice did not simply ‘go away’ in the
decades following the publication of Mysterium Fidei. For example, we can note in addresses given by
Pius XII in the mid-1950’s an attempt to respond to the new ‘personal sacramentals’ being introduced by
theologians like Karl Rahner, who, I contend, was clearly influenced by de la Taille. (Cf., for example, the
numerous footnotes to Maurice de la Taille in his The Celebration of the Eucharist. New York: Herder and
Herder, 1968, original in German, 1949). Pius XII, wanting to uphold an objective sense to the mass-
sacrifice, announces that Christ is intimately, and ‘separately’ active in each offering of the mass: “With
regard to the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice, the actions of Christ, the High Priest, are as many as are
the priests celebrating”’ (Cf. David Burrell, ‘Many Masses and One Sacrifice’. Yearbook of Liturgical
Studies,1964, 113. It may be argued, in fact, that the question has not been definitively settled in this new
century.
Church—whose sacrifice he has made his own. As was clear in the concept of Christ’s continued sacrifice and intercession in heaven, there is no new, active rôle of Christ as *liturgus*. Instead, Christ gives to the offering Church ‘the power of presenting’ his body and blood to God *as its own victim* (*MF II*, 187). All that is ‘new’, then, derives from the particular activity of the Church, even though all the power comes from Christ who communicates his sacerdotal power to the Church: ‘Novitas tota est ex parte ecclesiae, quanquam virtus totu est ex parte Christi’ (*MF*, 296, 192).  

De la Taille couches this crucial principle in terms both of causality and of virtual and formal offering. Christ, in effect, is the principal and universal cause of the Church’s sacrificial oblation; the ecclesia is the particular or subordinate cause under the priesthood of Christ—*-sub sacerdote Christi*. The ecclesial priesthood is derivative of Christ’s—*-sicut ex fonte rivulus et a sole radius*’ (*MF*, 195, 192). The Church now sacrifices only ‘by virtue of that one sacrificial act carried out long ago by Christ’. The principal power and act of sacrificing passes (*transit*) from the head to the body, thereby allowing the Church to make its own the one offering of Christ at the supper and on the cross. In fact, de la Taille argues that unless the current offering is conceived as subordinate and participatory of the Lord’s, then the oneness of the two sacrifices would ‘fall to the ground’ (*MF II*, 192). If Trent does indicate that Christ offers anew in his own

---

10 The Church’s offering proceeds *virtually*, ‘in quantum oblatio ejus, firma in saecula, supereminet nostris, *quas incorporat sibi*, influens in eas vim exhibendi Dei corpus et sanguinem Christi *tanquam hostiam nostram*’ (*MF*, 295, 1921; italics mine).

11 In the strictest manner of speaking, the ecclesial sacrifice is not sacrifice *in se*, but sacrifice *per participationem* (*MF*, 195, 1921).

12 Even should one argue that the consecration implies some new causative power on the part of Christ, de la Taille shows that this causality does not require that Christ be formal offerer as well: the efficient cause and the offerer are related in distinct ways to the sacrifice (*MF II*, 194, esp. n. 1).
person (à la McNabb, Sweeny, Forrest, Vonier) through the ministry of the priesthood, then a *multiplicity* of redeeming sacrifices must obtain. For Christ, who is ‘not subordinate to himself’, could not offer again without offering something ‘perfectly equal’ to the first sacrifice (*MF II*, 191-93).

De la Taille presents an alternative vision, explicating that Christ offers *virtually* at the mass, rather than *formally*, which is to say that the power—*virtus*—of the Church’s offering is Christ’s, but that the concrete, specific action is properly the Church’s. Allowing his definition of sacrifice to seal the question, de la Taille concludes that ‘he alone formally offers sacrifice who offers visibly’ (*MF II*, 196). Christ remains a priest forever offering through the ecclesia: his one oblation at the supper-cross ‘incorporates’ the Church’s derivative and sensible oblation, which oblation renews the sacrifice.

**The mode of oblation.** Granted that the Church is the formal offerer of the sacrifice—though this offering is participatory in Christ’s past and only priestly oblation—still we might press de la Taille to say more about the relationship between this oblation of the once-immolated and eternally-accepted victim and the *immolatio symbolica* i.e., the representation of the passion. How are (real) oblation and immolation *in sacramento* related? And does the fact that the Church immolates in symbol *only* thereby detract from mass being a true sacrifice (the nagging fear of many post-Tridentine theologians)? This latter concern is not difficult to answer, for such diminishment to the sacrificial reality of the mass would be the case only if immolation were the ‘same thing’ as sacrifice (*MF II*, 211-212). But we know that, according to de la
Taille’s theory, sacrifice is essentially the oblation of a victim (immolated or to be immolated). So, how does one correlate the oblation and immolation of the ecclesial sacrifice?

De la Taille hangs much on St. Peter Canisius’s definition of the mass (in fact, it is the epitaph to Mysterium Fidei): ‘The sacrifice of the mass, carefully considered in all its bearings, is the holy and living representation, and at the same time the bloodless and effective offering of the passion of our Lord, and of the bloody sacrifice which was offered for us on the cross’ (Opus catechisticum, De sacramentis, q. 7; MF II, 94). Canisius leads the way through this question by both distinguishing and linking the representation and the oblation: the mass-sacrifice is a representation of the bloody death on the cross; the oblation is the offering of that passion and death. More explicitly put: ‘the representative rite is oblative of, or such that it offers, the reality represented by it’ (MF II, 94). Whether or not de la Taille has accurately captured the sense of Canisius’s definition, and there were challenges to his reading (e.g., Forrest, 57), I would contend that he has expressed well what he wants to say of the oblation and immolation of the ecclesial sacrifice. Not surprisingly, our attention is drawn relentlessly back to the supper: at the supper, Christ offered his passion and death in symbolic immolation; we do the same at the mass. The offering in the mass, as in the supper, is realis et praesens—unlike the immolation, ‘represented as past or future’ (MF II, 23-24). De la Taille goes on to make a most striking claim about the genus of oblation, a claim that in sacrificial oblation distinctions of time and signification collapse:

For it is one and the same thing to offer the body of Christ as having suffered and died in the passion, as to offer the passion and death of
the body; it is the same to offer the blood as shed, as to offer its
shedding; the same to offer Christ as victim of a past immolation,
as to offer that immolation itself. (Idem est enim offere corpus Christi
inquantum passi et mortui, ac offere ejus mortem et passionem; idem,
offere sanguinem prout effusum, ac offere ejus effusionem; idem,
offere Chrsitum ut hostiam ex praemissa immolatione existentem,
ac offerre ipsam immolationem) (MF II, 24; 195; 1921).

These words announce a distinctive feature of de la Taille eucharistic theology: the mass
is a sacrifice because, sub actu oblationis, it is the same to offer a thing as a past
occurrence as to offer the thing itself. One could, no doubt, question this transgression
of the historical-temporal and of the normal perception and phenomenology of gift-
giving. But it is crucial to acknowledge that, for de la Taille, the identity of the mass and
the sacrifice of Christ is realised through the modus oblationis.\(^\text{13}\)

Consecration and petition

When de la Taille considers what is required on the part of the Church to
accomplish the sacrifice, oblation and immolation coalesce even more securely and the
external/internal tension of sacrifice again comes to the fore. In explicating the sacrificial
actions of the Church, de la Taille makes two rather arresting claims: 1) the consecration
accomplishes the sacrifice—but Christ’s dicta alone do not suffice, and 2) though a
petition for transubstantiation (in the ‘epiclesis’ or Supplices te) is eminently
convenienter to the eucharistic sacrifice, such a petition is not a necessary condition or

\(^{13}\) Moloney (Eucharist, op. cit., 209) misrepresents de la Taille, suggesting that he locates the unity of the
eucharist and the cross only in the victim. To the contrary, de la Taille proposes that the mass and the
supper-cross are united also under the ritual action of oblation.
cause of the consecration. In each of these arguments, the definitional components of sacrifice are evidently operative, as is a certain attentiveness to the last supper.\(^{14}\)

Consecration and sacrificial oblation. De la Taille holds the theological position that the consecration effects the sacrifice. This is so not only because of the efficacy of Christ’s words, repeated by the officiating priest in persona Christi, but also because of the fact that the consecration and the oblation are simultaneous. By insisting that the consecration accomplishes the sacrifice, de la Taille is first of all reacting to two other extant teachings about the sacrifice of the Church, which respectively claim that the sacrifice is *perficitur* either in the communion or in the breaking of the bread.\(^{15}\) More interestingly, however, he is intent also to make sense of what the early Fathers meant by indicating that the sacrifice is accomplished *per precem*. Combing through early sources (here particularly Justin, Ignatius, Tertullian, and Clement of Rome), de la Taille surmises that the word ‘sacrifice’ most frequently refers to the *sacrificial action*, i.e., to the prayers of thanksgiving over the bread and wine (prayers which include the consecratory words of Christ). Even so, he argues that it does not follow that the eucharistic prayer is thereby the *reality offered* (instead of that which terminates the


\(^{15}\) De la Taille clearly rejects the suggestion that the banquet is the sacrifice proper, a question already treated in Chapter One. As for the teaching that the breaking of the bread is central to the sacrifice—as the perfect symbol (‘*absolutum exemplar*’) of Christ’s death—de la Taille traces its emergence in the early mediaeval Church and cites Cano as a proponent of the view. However, he denies that this teaching has foundation in Scripture or in the Fathers (cf. *MF* II, 403-406). If, hypothetically, there were no fraction of the bread, the sacrifice would yet be complete.
sacrificial action—the body and blood of Christ) (*MF* II, 60ff, 73-75).  

In fact, the contrary is suggested:

> For if the giving of thanks is here to offer sacrifice, evidently that over which thanks is given is offered in sacrifice. Hence we conclude, naturally, that what is consecrated by the thanksgiving is offered in sacrifice (Nam si to εὐχαριστεῖν est sacrificare, videtur sacrificari id ipsum quod dicitur εὐχαριστεῖσθαι proindeque satis naturaliter existinabitur in sacrificium offerri res per gratiarum actionem consecrata’) (*MF* II, 73; 225, 1921).

De la Taille thus maintains that *what* is accomplished through the prayer of consecration—an oral action enunciating and pragmatically effecting the presence of the body and blood of Christ—is the reality offered.

Holding to what ‘all admit’—that the words of Christ (‘This is my body, This is the chalice of my blood’) are the essential form of the consecration, de la Taille yet wants to ask if anything else is necessary for the efficacy of this form. On the basis of the nature of sacrifice, he concludes that *verba formalis* require two contextualizing additions: 1) some words that indicate a clear sacrificial intention, and 2) some words that provide the sacramental form with a power both *recitative* and *significative*. In

---

16 De la Taille is here responding directly to the work of Franz Wieland (*Mensa und Confessio*, 1906; and *Der vorirentische Opferbegriff* 1912) who ostensibly argued that in the early Church (at least before Irenaeus, and in some cases after Irenaeus) there existed no perception of an offering of the body and blood of Christ (cf. *MF* II, 42ff; 60ff). De la Taille’s reading of the sources here is impressive in scope and detail. Throughout the footnotes of this Elucidation XVIII (‘The Fathers of the first two centuries knew that we offer to God in our celebration of the eucharist the body and blood of Christ’), de la Taille presents to his defence, or respectfully challenges, the translations and interpretations of such contemporary figures as Renz, Battifol, Harnack, Edmund Bishop, and Dom Leclercq. In other words, though de la Taille’s own interpretations may be questioned—and perhaps there may never be a definitive interpretation on the early Fathers on this question of eucharistic sacrifice—he demonstrates an astute engagement with the historical texts and with contemporary scholarship upon those texts.

17 A contemporary challenge to de la Taille might be made in terms of arguing that there are early examples of eucharistic prayers that (apparently) lack the institution narrative (e.g., The Liturgy of Addai and Mari). Cf. for example Robert Taft, ‘Mass Without a Consecration’, *Worship* 77(2003): 482-509.
addressing both of these points, he underscores that the full dynamic of sacrifice cannot be foreshortened in theological reflection on the ritual action of the mass.

Against those who deny that the consecratory words need any further determination, de la Taille argues that Christ’s sacrificial intention cannot be sufficiently indicated simply by the verbal formula. As at the supper, the ecclesial sacrifice must plainly express both Christ’s desire to offer a sacrifice of propitiation and the directionality of the gift offered to God. Looking to the testimony of ancient liturgies, as well as to what Christ in fact plainly willed at the supper (namely, to offer sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins), he insists upon the necessity of words which determine that what is done in symbol is done pro nobis: in remissionem peccatorum (words most appropriately found in reference to the chalice) (MF II 440-44). As de la Taille clarifies, what is at stake here is not the issue of real presence, which Christ might have effected without sacrifice, without the oblation of a victim to God. Rather, it is a question of the ecclesial eucharistic form fully signifying what Christ willed to accomplish: ‘by transubstantiation he willed to offer sacrifice, he willed to offer the transubstantiation sacrificially’ (MF II, 442, 446). Hence, because the sacramental form effects what it signifies,\(^\text{18}\) it must express all that it is meant to express and accomplish—the sacrificial intent of Christ to offer a victim pleasing to God for sinners. The sign character of sacrifice, demands that inner intention be signified by an external, ‘visible word’. Sharply put, had Christ’s intention remained ‘secret’ or hidden at the supper, there would be no eucharistic sacrifice. The ecclesiastical sacrifice must signify as Christ did.

\(^{18}\) ‘[E]st enim indivisibilis in re effectus ille et significatum’ (MF, 456. 1921). In other words, in sacramental action, one cannot divide what the formula signifies from what is achieved in reality.
On the same note, de la Taille adds a more controversial thesis: necessary also to the signifying efficacy of the consecratory formula is a narrative preamble ‘putting’ these words ‘on the lips of Christ’. Thomas does not require any such introduction to Christ’s dicta (cf. ST III, 78, a. 1, ad 4). I suspect that the ‘controversy’ stirred over de la Taille’s proposal (on this ‘still freely discussed’ question, he qualifies), derives largely from his assertion that Scotus’s opinion here is not only ‘solidly’ more probable than Thomas’s, but more harmonious with Thomas’s own thought on sacrifice and the sacraments. But de la Taille cannot follow Thomas obsequiously here, for the signifying exigencies of sacrifice and sacrament demand that the words be uttered in such away that they ‘ritually signify their effect’. Unless it is clear that the words ‘This is my body’ refer to Christ’s body (and not the priest’s), then they lack their properly signifying sense (MF II, 455). In other words, if the narrative preamble identifying the words as spoken by Christ is not part of the consecratory form itself, still it is a condition for that form—as it is prayed in the eucharistic sacrifice—to be efficacious. Scotus lucidly puts it this way:

‘The sacramental words must signify by virtue of the words (ex vi verborum) that which is effected by virtue of the sacrament. But by virtue of this consecration the effect is that the true body of Christ is there; therefore the words, sufficient by their own proper virtue, must signify that the true body of Christ is contained there’.

---

19 Forrest, for example, takes great umbrage at de la Taille’s audacity: ‘It is rather amusing, after deserting the opinion of St. Thomas in this matter....and adopting that of Scotus, to tell the Angelic Doctor that his own principles are better served by the opinion of Scotus. St. Thomas should be the best judge of what “satisfies his own principles”’ (The Clean Oblation, op. cit., 247).
20 MF II, 449. ‘Verba formae non producent suum effectum, nisi ita prolate, ut suum effectum rite significant’ (MF, 459, 1921).
21 In a footnote (p. 450, n. 1) de la Taille also offers the ‘neat’ suggestion that the narrative introduction is rather like a ‘disposition’ to the truth of the form.
22 4. D. 8, 2, n.4; cited in MF II, 457.
Those who follow Thomas on this question argue that the priest’s intention to utter the words as belonging to Christ suffices. De la Taille reminds us however that in the dynamic of sacrifice, and so too in the Church’s sacramental sacrifice, private intention alone has no signifying power. An intention not evident to the senses can never supply what is lacking to the form, any more that a hidden desire to give a gift to God is accomplished without the actual (ritual) handing-over of the gift. Perhaps we could say, then, that in the realm of sacrifice, which is in genere signi, external manifestation is intimately tied to efficacy.

Epiclesis and sacrifice. If de la Taille does not hesitate to insist upon the necessity of sacrificial intention and a narrative preamble (the Qui pridie), it may be surprising to learn that he denies such necessity to the epiclesis (and not because he simply lacks a sufficiently developed pneumatology). The epiclesis, he argues, though having an apt place (locum aptum) in the eucharistic sacrifice, is neither causally nor conditionally essential to the consecratory form, which would be complete and efficacious without it. It is worthwhile attending to reasons he articulates for the appropriateness of the epiclesis, for they tell us something critical about eucharistic oblation and the externalisation of desire. In the end, we may justifiably ask whether or not de la Taille’s position on the epiclesis finally squares with his own theory of sacrificial action.

De la Taille casts the epiclesis (and the Supplices te rogamus) as a petition for transubstantiation— which in turn, he specifies, is likewise a prayer for divine acceptance. Without rehearsing de la Taille’s demonstration that in the Supplices te we have a Roman
epiclesis, I simply underscore his interpretation of this petition. In the Supplices te, the Church invokes divine assistance for the transferal of the gifts on the ecclesial altar to the celestial altar, an invocation equivalent to asking that they ‘be changed into the heavenly victim of the body and blood of Christ’ (MF II, 154). In so far as such a transformation of the bread and wine into the celestial victim is effected by the transubstantiation, de la Taille goes on to argue that the transubstantiation is the acceptance by God of our ecclesial offering. A prayer for acceptance is interchangeable with a prayer for transubstantiation; in effect, they are the same (cf., MF II, 154, 422 passim). If the epiclesis is so construed (as a prayer for transubstantiation and/or acceptance), is it not both redundant and ‘useless’, given that the consecration has been accomplished in the words of institution?

De la Taille’s argument, in a Appendix to Elucidation XXI (‘The mass in relation to the heavenly sacrifice’), proceeds impressively by way of comparing the Supplices te to Eastern epicleses in a variety of early liturgies, analyzing place and meaning of the prayers (MF II, 154ff). He provides good reason for thinking that the formula can be traced back to ‘sub-apostolic’ times, when the faithful would find little strange in this prayer, so imbued were they with Ignatius’s Epistles, the Letter to the Hebrews and St John’s Apocalypse. Moreover, while he prefers to think of the angel as Christ (which is questionable, cf. J. Jungmann, The Mass of the Roman Rite, V. II, 234), he is correct in pointing out that, if this is an epiclesis calling upon the Divine Word (not the Spirit) to descend, then such an invocation is indeed quite early (MF II, 167-169; 426 ff.). He likewise cites at length two mediaeval thinkers, Paschasiaus from the West and Nicolas Cabasilas from the East, who both interpret this part of the Canon as an epiclesis (ibid., pp. 158-161). Interestingly, de la Taille suggests that an ascensional epiclesis—a prayer that the gift be taken to the heavenly altar, is essentially equivalent to a descensional epiclesis, in which the petition invokes the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the offering that it may be transubstantiated (ibid., 161, n.1). For, the bearing of the gifts from the earthly altar to the heavenly ‘means the same thing as their sanctification or consecration because the sacrifice derives its sanctity from the altar’ (159). Indeed, de la Taille draws upon a wealth of sources to demonstrate that this celestial altar is the body of Christ. Because the altar on high is Christ, what is on that sublime altar and what is received from that altar can only be the glorified body of Christ (154). In fact, the ex hac altaris of the Supplices te is understood to be the celestial, not the earthly altar. As Jungmann would later expound, there is in the Supplices only one altar, not two: ‘. . .it must be said that in the metaphorical language of our prayer the earthly altar wholly disappears from view and is absorbed, so to say, in the heavenly one which alone has validity’ (The Mass of the Roman Rite, op. cit., 236).

De la Taille points to the Quam oblationem (which has ‘crept into a place before the consecration’ in the Roman canon) as an example of the conflation of a prayer for acceptance and transubstantiation: ‘we beg that our offering be ratified and accepted by the fact of its passing into, becoming the body and blood of Christ’ (MF II, 422, n. 1).
Apart from acknowledging that the epiclesis has been 'solemnised' and 'sanctioned' by centuries of use on the Church, de la Taille locates the *congruitas* of the epiclesis under the liturgical principle of 'distension', by which he means that what is solemnised in one indivisible moment in the liturgy, needs to be 'distributed', 'diffused and expanded' over a series of words and ritual actions. The *ratio* of this 'distension' is to engage the faith and affections of the worshippers in a salutary way (*MF II*, 419). The epiclesis constitutes such ritual expansion: it distends and opens up the essential action of consecration, achieved in the *dicta* of Christ. In other words, the epiclesis (or the *Supplices*) has a declarative and elucidating function in regard to the oblation and consecration, while also giving expression to the desire of those offering that the transubstantiation/acceptance indeed occur. Given this principle of ceremonial expansion (*principio caerimoniarae expansionis*), as well as the understanding that acceptance comprises the *finis* of sacrifice, de la Taille voices approbation for the post-consecratory position of the epiclesis.

However, I want to ask if de la Taille's diminishment of the *epiclesis* (that is, as having a ceremonial but not necessary function) best serves his own argument about the dynamic of sacramental sacrifice. We can acknowledge that the consecration in effect accomplishes the sacrifice, for there one finds immolation in symbol, oblation, the presence of a victim, and divine acceptance. Still, if propitiatory intent and a narrative preamble are essential for the sacrificially signifying power of the consecration, would it

---

25 The sacerdotal prayer of Jesus in John's Gospel (c. 17) is provided as an example of this ritual elucidation and extension of time. De la Taille also sees in this Johannine passage (esp. 17.19) a 'model' for the structure of the Church's epicletic prayer (*MF II*, 425).
not be consistent to insist as well upon an oral expression of ecclesial desire—since de la Taille has argued that the Church formally offers the sacrifice?

It is helpful here to invoke a passage which I think illuminates de la Taille’s ambiguity and ambivalence. He favorably cites, but ultimately steps away from, the position of Dom Toutée, who holds that two things are necessary in the eucharistic sacrifice: 1) the recitation of the words of Christ, which effects the conversion of the bread and wine; and 2) the expression of the Church’s desire that Christ, according to his promise, not be wanting in the sacrament (the epiclesis). These two elements are one action—though separated in ritual time. Toutée suggests that it does not matter which comes first—the consecration or the epiclesis—though he finds it more apt (and I agree) that the desire (‘impetratory cause’) be expressed before the recitation of Christ’s words (‘efficient cause’). (De doctrina Cyrili, dissert. 3, c. 12, n. 97. P.G. 33, 283; MF II, 416-17). While de la Taille seems to find Toutée’s thought appealing, he none the less fears that it makes of the epiclesis a condition of the consecration—a possibility that, unlike the narrative component of the consecration, de la Taille rejects. Dom Toutée’s thought, I argue, is significantly more attuned to de la Taille’s own emphasis upon the external manifestation of internal devotio in sacrificial action. If, beyond the simple verbal formula, some words are needed to indicate Christ’s intent to make of himself a victim, it would follow that the desire of the Church to make that victim her own would also require signifying clarity (supplied by the petition/epiclesis).

But de la Taille is rather puzzlingly adverse to this possibility. Instead he prefers to rest with the (weak) reply that our petition for transubstantiation is ‘implicitly
contained' in the words of consecration. How so? De la Taille’s answer is evidently circular: The petition for transubstantiation is in the words of consecration because they themselves are an oblative action, which oblation *pragmatically* seeks acceptance (the end of all sacrificial offering); and, acceptance consists in the transubstantiation itself (*MF II*, 437). Even if de la Taille’s logic seems difficult to gainsay, it is worth questioning whether or not the Church’s desire is adequately manifest in the oral action of the consecration. In the ecclesial sacrifice, the epicletic prayer appears to manifest most plainly the desire of the *formal* offerer of the sacrifice. The discussion which now follows on the relationship between the *devotio* of the offerers and the fruits of the sacrifice, would seem only to strengthen our suggestion that de la Taille misfires on the question of the necessity of the epiclesis.

‘*de fructi sacrificii et de devotione*’

Curiously, de la Taille’s teaching on the relationship between sacrifice and the *devotio* of the offerer did not attract much attention at the time of the book’s publication; nor, save the striking exception of Karl Rahner, did it find a hearing among later

26 'Postulatio enim transsubstantiationis implicite continentur in nostro sermone consecratorio, etiam nulla postulatione enuntiata. Continetur scilicet in nostro sermone: quatenus is rationem habet actionis oblativae, oblativa autem actio est ex sese quaedam pragmatica petio acceptationis, acceptatio autem nostri sacrificii in transsubstantiatione sita est' (*MF*, 453, 1921).

27 Cf. Rahner (*The Celebration of the Eucharist*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1968) was keen to answer the question about mass-frequency and the value of many masses over a single mass. Building upon de la Taille’s work, he establishes the following principle: ‘...mass must be celebrated as often as its repetition increases the *fides* and *devotio* of those taking part’ (92; cf. 91-106). Would de la Taille have agreed with Rahner’s thesis? Not without considerable qualification, I am inclined to think. De la Taille would encourage Rahner not to forget the central *directionality* of sacrificial action—something given to God; and, whilst de la Taille underscores the principal of the *offering Church* (*totius Ecclesiae*), Rahner, for his part, finds such a notion unsatisfying—philosophically and theologically. (Cf. D. Burrell, ‘Many Masses
twentieth-century theologians. Because de la Taille underscores the intentionality of the worshipping community, a principle loudly promoted in much post-Vatican II liturgical theology, it is odd that this feature of de la Taille’s erudite work continues to be ignored. Apart from the possibility that de la Taille’s book is widely-known only through the reading of Volume I, I also suspect his teaching on devotio is unattractive precisely for the reason that it is too tied-up with his theory of sacrifice. De la Taille’s proposal about devotio is not a novum; it is at least as old as Thomas (cf. ST 3, 79, 5, c): the fruit of the sacrifice is proportioned to the intensity of the devotion of the one offering. More comprehensively, though the mass-sacrifice is of infinite value, though the fruits of the sacrifice are without limit, those fruits are ‘restricted’ by the affectus of the Church offering in common, and by the devotion of individuals (in an accumulative way). We shall now delineate further these two elements to de la Taille’s thesis, namely, the nature of the sacrificial fruits and the rôle of devotio within the offerers.

In pursuing his question about the fruits of the sacrifice, de la Taille defines precisely what is meant by these fruits, from whence these fruits derive, and how they are distinct from the fruits of the ‘sacrament’. These distinctions, typically ignored in contemporary eucharistic theology, are not, I submit, without value. Given what we have seen about the nature of sacrifice, de la Taille’s assertion on the difference between the fruits of ‘the sacrifice’ and that of ‘the sacrament’ might be expected. For the sacrifice of the mass does not consist in receiving some good from God, ‘sed in offrendi’; the sacrament pertains not to offering but to receiving something from God (the returned-gift

and One Sacrifice’, op. cit., 107-108, 116.)
of the sacrifice). Activity and passivity (perhaps too rigidly) enter into de la Taille's
distinctions: 'Passivi sumus respectu sacramenti, activi respectu sacrificii. Agit circa nos
Deus in sacramento; agimus nos erga Deum in sacrificio' *(MF II, 226; 320-1, 1921). In
considering the fruits of the sacrifice, clearly the *directionality* of the gift is again
important. If the fruits of the sacrament are best spoken of in terms of our *sanctification*
by God, the fruits of the sacrifice are, properly speaking, best understood in terms of
*propitiation*, i.e., reconciliation and atonement. Yet, wanting to hold to an 'organic
notion' of the sacrificial fruits, de la Taille also recalls for us that every sacrifice is, by
definition, *pragmatic impetration* (and this by way of *latria* and *eucharistia*). Thus, by
saying that it 'suffices' to place the fruits of the sacrifice in the propitiatory effect, de la
Taille is casting the net more widely than appears at first glance. To clarify, the fruits of
the sacrifice primarily reconcile humans to God, but it is the same love of 'the priest'
from which flows 'relief from every possible need' *(MF II, 225, n.1). The whence of this
fruit derives from the 'thanksgiving and adoration which Christ exhibits towards God'—a
worship that the believer makes her own in the mass oblation, and which 'opens' (in
God's generosity) the fount of all benefits.

We can make two assertions based on de la Taille's concept of the fruits of the
sacrifice, both of them linked to the dynamic of sacrifice and the nature of the gift offered
at the mass ('ratione rei oblatae'). First, because God has accepted eternally Christ's
impetration, an acceptance made known in the resurrection, that effective impetration is

---

28 Suarez, apparently, denied impetratory fruit to the sacrificial action of the ecclesial sacrifice *(MF II, 227).
29 Cf. *supra*, Chapter One.
'infallibly' won when the Church offers to God Christ's victim. De la Taille does not attribute this infallibility to a kind of efficient causality, but rather to a 'moral cause' implied by the sacrifice itself. In other words, the fruit of the sacrifice ex opere operato does not indicate the 'immediate infusion' or production in the offerer of grace or some other specific divine gift.

[S]ed intercedit sacrificium per modum causae mere moralis, dum, pia laude Deo reddita, vel justa compensatione exhibita, misericordiae divinae recluditur aditus ad nos, sive justificandos, sive custodiendos in bono atque in melius promovendos (MF, 321, 1921).30

By way of the dynamic of sacrifice, God is hence 'prepared (paratus)' and 'bound (obligatus)' to respond and bestow his mercy—in a 'way suitable to our own individual state and condition' (ibid.).

Again we hear the possibly dissonant suggestion of sacrifice placing God under some obligation. But de la Taille encourages us to view this not in a mechanical way, but as a pactum between a giver manifesting her devotio and a receiver who, if he accepts the gift, is in a morally obliging position to bestow a return-gift. If, however, God has eternally accepted the gift once offered by Christ, ostensibly this places the offering Church, does it not, in the position of being assured of the fruits of the mass-sacrifice? After all, the sacrifice is a 'done deal'. Or is it? Indeed the efficacy of the sacrifice ex opere operato is assured; however, it is precisely at this point that de la Taille raises the question of the relationship between devotio and the fruit of the mass.

30 '...the sacrifice intervenes merely as a moral cause, in so far that, when by way of sacrifice we give praise to God, or offer...just compensation, the way is opened for the mercy of God towards us, either to justify us or to keep us good and make us better' (MF II, 226).
Secondly, on the basis of what is offered, we affirm that the gift itself is infinitely pleasing to God, and thereby ought to make the mass-sacrifice abundantly and infinitely fruitful. The victim of the passion has ‘infinite propitiatory power’. Even so, de la Taille argues that the fruits of ecclesial sacrifice are limited or restricted by the offerers themselves, in particular, by the measure of their affect in offering the gift (MF II, 228ff.). Favorably citing both Bellarmine (De missa, 1, 2, c.4) and Scotus (Quodlibeta, n. 20), he takes seriously the fact that sacrifice is an action—not an object. If Christ’s sacrifice is an accomplished act, we might say that the sacrifice of the offerers is in fieri. In the following passage, Scotus makes the point neatly in pointing out the difference between the offering of the eucharist and the eucharist reserved in the pyx:

‘[The fruit] does not correspond precisely to the good contained in the eucharist, for that good is exactly the same when the eucharist is reserved in the pyx, and nevertheless, it is not of the same efficacy for the Church as when it is offered in the mass….Clearly then, just as the eucharist is not fully acceptable precisely by reason of what is contained therein, but it must be offered, so, too, the offering is not fully acceptable, except by reason of the good will of some offerer (MF II, 231).

To reiterate, the oblatio of sacrifice is an action inseparable from the internal affect of the one offering.

If the will of the offerer is crucial in ‘measuring’ the fruit of the mass-sacrifice, can it ever be the case that an utter lack of devotion—in the offering priest, the assistants, and the attending faithful—would entirely curtail the efficacy of the sacrifice? Even should such an extreme case obtain, de la Taille answers negatively: the Church as a whole is always the principal offerer and ‘wins without fail’ acceptance for the oblation of the Christ-victim (MF II, 233). Invoking an Augustinian teaching, de la Taille
confirms that the intervention of entire Church is congruent with the sacrifice-sacrament. For, just as the body of the Church is the res tantum of the eucharistic sacrament, so the oblation of this whole body is competently and sincerely offered only by the ‘whole Church (totius Ecclesiae)’ (MF II, 237; 330, 1921). To be sure, the devotio of the Church is not a constant reality: it is subject to both increase and diminishment. However, though it may be greater at one time than another, the sanctity granted it by the presence of Holy Spirit never perishes altogether (MF II, 239). Even though my intention and devotio ‘counts’ in the offering of the sacrifice of the mass, that offering is not exclusively mine, but the common victim of the entire Church.

Is this devotio on the part of the members of the Church offering sacrifice thought to be a mere interna oblatio? Obviously not, for this would not be sacrifice at all. De la Taille proposes that the desire and votum of the faithful is ‘external’ or outward in a two-fold way. First, and principally, it is externalized in the public initiation of baptism, whereby every Christian is ordained (ordinatur) to offer the sacrifice of the Church (by the ministry of priests), and in the rite of ordination, in which a baptised Christian is ‘publicly deputed’ to present the sacrifice on behalf of the Church (MF II, 237). We shall look with much greater depth in Chapter 8 at the question of baptism and pragmatic, immolational participation in the ecclesial sacrifice. Let it suffice here to acknowledge that de la Taille highlights the sacerdotal character of baptism. He emphasizes that baptism is a sharing in the priestly power of Christ, whereby Christ dedicated himself to

---

31 This concept of the ‘offering Church’, thought not new with de la Taille, has not been unanimously upheld. Rahner, for example, in the interest of ‘a more personal sacramentalism’, denied that the concept had validity. Cf. David Burrell, op. cit., 116.
God. Furthermore, he argues that this baptismal character means, at the very least, that every baptised Christian has the ‘habitual desire of being conformed to Christ in offering to God the unique victim of our salvation’ (*MF II*, 236). The priest, on the other hand, is ritually deputed to *give expression* to the desire and intention of the faithful. As the Syrian Narsai seems to have coined, the priest is the ‘tongue of Church’ (*MF II*, 237, n.2). Secondly, the liturgical formulae give ‘open expression’ to the desire of the offering community. De la Taille suggests, for instance, that the dialogue, the *Amen*, and the kiss of peace are all manifestations of the offerers’s *votum* in the mass-sacrifice (*MF II*, 260-66).

To sum up, from the perspective of the gift offered in the ecclesial sacrifice, the fruit of the sacrifice *ex opere operato* is of infinite value. However, the Church’s actual oblation at a particular eucharistic liturgy does determine ‘accidentally’ the fruit of that sacrifice, according to fervour of the offerers themselves. The limitation of the fruit is thus by way of potentiality and capacity. An analogy to sacramental disposition helps here. Just as sacraments sanctify *ex opere operato*—‘by the virtue of the sacrament itself’—this sanctification is effected in ‘proportion’ to one’s disposition to *receive* that grace. So, too, the sacrifice: though an ‘inexhaustible fount of benefit’, its fruits are proportioned to the devotion of the offerers (*MF II*, 232). Put somewhat differently, and with an emphasis upon participation in Christ’s oblation, each offerer, according to his

---

capacity ('suo captu') or desire, can exhibit to God as his own that gift of infinite proportion (MF II, 230; 323, 1921).

Conclusion

This chapter and the previous have displayed how de la Taille’s eucharistic theology is shaped by a theory of sacrifice that both distinguishes and unites the acts of oblation and immolation, setting the former in a new and essential light. The supper and cross are thereby seen as a single unified sacrifice; the mass becomes a commemoratio and repraesentatio not simply of the bloody cross (immolation, strictly speaking), but of the supper-cross sacrifice. The external intention or will of Christ in the offering of himself as victim to the Father takes a central place, devotio being underscored as crucial also to the ecclesial sacrifice. We likewise explored how the eternity of the accepted victim marks de la Taille’s understanding of how the mass and the supper-cross sacrifice are the ‘same’. The victim offered is the same, and Christ, who offered once, now offers virtually through the Church; he permits the ecclesial oblation to participate in his own.

We have seen that the modus oblationis mystically closes the ‘gap’ between Christ’s sacrifice and that of the Church, making of both a ‘true and proper’ sacrifice. Moreover, we have noted that the nature of sacrifice as sign and gift shapes and elucidates de la Taille’s theology of the eucharistic prayer. For de la Taille, the external/internal tension endemic to sacrifice demands that the words of consecration be fully signifying—of Christ’s intention at the supper, and of the Church’s intention at the mass. I argued, further, that de la Taille’s own theory would be better served by granting
a fuller scope and rôle to the epiclesis. Finally, we began to demonstrate how the affect of the offerer centrally measures the fruits of the sacrifice offered.

We can now turn to de la Taille’s theology of grace, which, I maintain, resonates profoundly with his theology of eucharistic sacrifice. De la Taille’s understanding of sanctifying grace, the reality of deifying union with God, does not stand apart from the oblatio and devotio of the worshipper. In other words, we shall see that sacrifice rightly precedes and is correlative to the sanctifying grace of eucharistic union.
PART II:

*de gratia*
Chapter Four: eucharistic union and divinisation

In the last three chapters on eucharistic sacrifice, I have explicated de la Taille’s theory of eucharistic sacrifice, elucidating his nuanced use of the dynamic aspects of gift: oblation and devotio. In the process, I have intended to diffuse a crude reading of de la Taille and have underscored that his theology of sacrifice is solidly rooted in the patristic literature of the East and West. The second part of this study aims at retrieving a further aspect of de la Taille’s eucharistic theology, an aspect which, I argue, is integral to his thought on sacrifice, namely, the reality of sanctifying grace. This should not surprise. If we recall that in the Church’s oblation of the acceptable victim (immolated now in mysterio), God accepts the offerers as his table guests in a divinising banquet, a theology of grace is anticipated—even patent here. It is the burden of these three chapters not only to explicate de la Taille’s mind on grace, but to suggest also that, without contesting a Thomistic understanding of sanctifying grace, he is none the less inclined to the Greek patristic point of departure, which underscores uncreated—rather than created grace. That is to say, de la Taille is more interested in exploring divine indwelling, more interested in beginning with the intimate presence and initiative of the holy Trinity uniting itself to the human soul, than with a focus upon habitual grace and the created gifts. I shall nuance this thesis as we proceed. For now, I simply note that this shift in
approach, if not in doctrine, commands attention in our effort to give a genuine interpretation of de la Taille's theology of eucharistic sacrifice.

In the yet untranslated Liber III ('De sacramento') of Mysterium Fidei, de la Taille takes up the theological questions surrounding the eucharist as sacrament (as opposed to, but surely not unrelated to, the eucharist as sacrifice). Elucidations XXXVI – L treat such topics as the nature of the eucharist as a sacrament, the relationship of the various parts of the sacrament (sacramentum tantum, res et sacramentum, res tantum), the question of concomitance, the mystery of incorporation to Christ, desire in baptism and in the eucharist, the necessity of the eucharist and its position vis-à-vis the other sacraments, and the question of transubstantiation. It is in this third part of his work that a theology of grace explicitly surfaces. In fact, in a series of Appendices attached to his treatment of the res tantum of the eucharist (i.e., a participation in the grace of Christ and in the mystical union of Christ's body, the Church), de la Taille writes a veritable mini-treatise de gratia. Given that his projected treatise on this topic will likely remain

1 P. Edgar Hocedez, in Volume III (1878-1903) of his Histoire de la Théologie au XIXe Siècle, provides an interesting account of the 19th century theological 'problème' concerning sanctifying grace and the question of filial adoption (pp. 254 – 259). Hocedez details the of importance of Scheeben's work (Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik, 1882), which insists upon a close reading of the Greek Fathers on the question of the consortium divinae naturae. Whilst Scheeben was attacked for suggesting that participation in the divine nature (and filial adoption) was, above all, an effect of the substantial presence of the Holy Spirit in the soul (instead of an special supernatural assimilation of the soul by created grace), his retrieval of the Greek Fathers opened up new possibilities for considering the relationship between created and uncreated grace. De la Taille favorably cites the work of Scheeben Handbuch in Book I of Mysterium Fidei, particularly when considering questions of the celestial sacrifice and teachings on Christ as altar and priest (cf. MF, 156, 179, 265; 1921). Although he does not refer specifically to Scheeben in his writing on grace, I would suggest that de la Taille is clearly familiar with Scheeben's thought and in sympathy with Scheeben's retrieval of Eastern patristic thought.

2 Recall, as we recognized at the beginning of this study, that de la Taille has departed from the typical theological pedagogy of scholastic and post-Tridentine theology, opting to present the eucharist as sacrifice before considering the eucharist as sacrament.
undiscovered, our exposition of de la Taille’s theory of grace depends preponderantly upon *Liber III* of *Mysterium Fidei*.

Fortunately, however, de la Taille would return to the topic of grace in another forum: two journal articles written in the 1920’s. In 1928 (seven years after the first edition of *Mysterium Fidei*), de la Taille published an article on grace in the journal *Récherches de sciences religieuse*, an article entitled ‘*Actuation créée par acte incréé*’. This essay was followed in 1929 by a second, clarifying essay written after the fashion of a Platonic dialogue, ‘*Entretien amical d’Eudoxe et de Palamède sur la grâce d’union*’, which appeared in *Revue apologétique*. These two essays provide a crucial and more explicitly metaphysical articulation of de la Taille’s theology of grace, which will be taken up in Chapter Six. If the eucharistic scope of *Mysterium Fidei* reflects on divine indwelling primarily in terms scripture, tradition, and sacramental signification, the point of departure in these later writings is, decidedly, a Thomistic metaphysics of act and potency. Still, within these two different articulations, the common denominator is a keenness for the uncreated Gift of divine union to the soul.

Whether or not his metaphysical formulation in these later writings constitutes a shift in de la Taille’s central insights about grace will be a question addressed in due

---

3 De la Taille himself distinctly mentions the purported manuscript *De gratia* four times in Book III of *Mysterium Fidei* (491; 522, n.2; 575, n.1; 600, n. 1), making a total of six references throughout the whole of *Mysterium Fidei*. The appendices in Book III prove quite valuable—not only for supplying us with de la Taille’s thought on grace in relationship to the eucharist, but for giving a good indication of how de la Taille’s thought on grace was taking shape systematically before 1920.

4 These two essays, ‘Created Actuation by Uncreated Act’ and ‘Dialogue on the Grace of Union’, along with a third entitled ‘The Schoolmen’ (which was originally a conference paper given at the University of Cambridge in 1925), were translated and published in a book form: *The Hypostatic Union and Created Actuation by Uncreated Act* (West Baden College, 1952). I will be using this English translation, except where de la Taille’s native French proves illuminating.
course. Let two observations suffice for now. First, the two different articulations pose no contradiction; in fact, 'created actuation by uncreated Act' is a theory de la Taille applies to sanctifying grace (as well as to the beatific vision and the incarnation). As I will suggest, the journal essays reveal a certain genetic dependence upon de la Taille's understanding of grace in the eucharistic context. Secondly, without question it is the metaphysical articulation of the later journal articles that accounts for de la Taille's enduring theological contribution. A set of essays in the 1940's and 1950's (primarily in the journal *Theological Studies*) gives ample witness to the generativity of the concept of 'created actuation'. It not only spawned a renewed interest in considering the metaphysics of the hypostatic union, but also percolated new questions about the Trinitarian structure of grace in the souls of the just. To be sure, the 'after life' of de la Taille's seminal concept of 'creative actuation' in the mid-20th-century risorgamento of Catholic thought on grace is a story of theology worth tracing. However, my focus in

---

this chapter will perforce be selective. I want to draw attention to what the expositors of de la Taille's metaphysical articulation of grace have failed, oddly enough, to note: the connection between his published articles on grace, and his eucharistic reflection on grace in *Mysterium Fidei.*

Consequently, this chapter will first—and at greater length—explicate the contours of de la Taille's theology of grace as gleaned from Liber III of *Mysterium Fidei*, that is, from his treatment of the eucharist as *sacrament*. For the most part, I will follow de la Taille's own order and emphasis, which clearly indicates that a theology of grace properly begins with the grace of Christ, for all grace is a *participation* in Christ's grace, a participation granted through the flesh of the God-Man. Eucharistic union with Christ frames the *topos* of grace in *Mysterium Fidei*. We will begin then with de la Taille's scriptural and patristic reflection on union with Christ and the Church—the proper effect of the sacrament of the eucharist. Subsequently, in Chapter Five, we will present de la Taille's detailed discourse on a) the grace of Christ; b) sanctifying grace, with an accompanying reflection on sin; and c) sacramental grace and the dynamic of desire within the economy of the Church.

Again, this presentation will be alert to the interaction of de la Taille's thought on grace with that of eucharistic sacrifice—a relationship difficult to overlook in a close

---

similar and complementary, Matthew Lamb ('An Analogy for Divine Self-Gift', op. cit.), takes a much less irenic approach, underlining the significant difference between de la Taille and Lonergan, and elevating Lonergan's construal of grace as the more adequate—philosophically and theologically.

7 In fact, I imagine that de la Taille's treatise *De gratia* would have been a synthetically-written account of grace, one that pointedly *integrated* the various questions falling under the genus of grace (e.g., sin, hypostatic union, sanctifying grace and sacramental grace, eucharistic union with Christ, divinisation, the necessity of the eucharist, divine indwelling, contemplative union). Such an integrated approach does not seem to have been the model for treatments on grace among the generation of theologians that followed de la Taille.
reading of Book III. Indeed, as we learn from an unpublished letter, de la Taille owns that his treatment of the eucharist in Book III focuses less upon the sacrament’s ‘rapports’ with the incarnation, and more upon its ‘rapports’ with ‘le sacrifice de la redéption’. Why? De la Taille does not take the latter approach simply because it is conveniens, neatly congruent with the notion of sacrifice that shapes the whole of his work. More significantly, he focuses on the fundamental link between redemption and the eucharist because both incorporation to Christ and the Church’s prolongation of the incarnation in the sacraments depend upon a participation in the sacrificial victim. After all, de la Taille writes, the grace and glory into which we are led by the eucharist is, ‘in the present economy’, ‘the crowning of the sacrifice (le couronnement du sacrifice)’. The point may seem overly obvious. However, de la Taille is here stepping off the theological track which prevailed in his era. True enough, Thomas, in the Tertia Pars of Summa, treats the sacraments as (instrumental) extensions of the incarnation; yet he likewise delineates that the entire sacramental life of the Church flows from the side of Christ upon the Cross (cf., for example, ST III, 61, 1, ad 3; 64, 5, c). De la Taille finds the second, sacrificial and concorporative perspective most ‘urgent’, noting that the incarnation-sacramental view can be found in ‘other places (ailleurs)’—indeed, ‘everywhere (partout)’. Whereas, the sacrificial angle is infrequently accented, even

---

8 I am quoting here from a letter dated '29 août 1921. Villa du Sacré-Coeur', which is collected at the Jesuit Archives in Vanves, outside of Paris. I am grateful to Père Robert Bonfils, S.J. for granting me permission to look through the letters of Maurice de la Taille. (The addressee is uncertain, but the letter leaves clues that its recipient might have been the writer of a review of Mysterium Fidei published in the journal Etudes.): ‘Pour ce qui est du troisième livre, sur le Sacrement, il est parfaitement vrai que j’ai eu pour objet l’étude de sacrement dans les rapports avec le sacrifice de la rédemption... Il importe donc de bien montrer que le prolongement de l’incarnation dans l’Eglise doit se concevoir en dependence de la participation de l’Eglise à l’hostie du sacrifice. C’est ce que j’ai eu l’intention de montrer un peu partout dans le 3e livre.’
though it ‘sustains’ the theological approach to the sacraments which departs from the incarnation.

To anticipate somewhat, two underlying idées give shape to de la Taille’s treatment of grace and the sacraments in Book III of Mysterium Fidei. First, Christ is the Head and source of the grace of redemption as the victim of the sacrificial banquet, thereby making our participation in that saving grace dependent upon the eucharist. There is no other access to the redeeming grace of Christ apart from his eucharistic flesh. Secondly, I hope to demonstrate that a salient theology of intentio undergirds his discussion of the sacrament of the eucharist—as it did his theory of sacrifice. In effect, desire for the eucharist is grace itself, and thereby effective of that intimate union to Christ the victim.

Our third chapter on grace will then specifically address de la Taille’s theory of ‘Created Actuation by Uncreated Act’, with its illuminating analogy between sanctifying grace, lumen gloriae, and hypostatic union (the ‘grace of union’). ‘Created actuation’, I argue, is an insight shaped by his eucharistic theology, as well as by a Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge, act and potency. I hope to add to the supportive twentieth-century expositions of de la Taille’s essays on grace, what generally has been overlooked, namely, that de la Taille’s thought on grace emerges from a context of eucharistic sacrifice. The question of divine indwelling cannot be fully conceived apart from the recognition of eucharistic grace and union, which is bestowed in partaking of the flesh and blood of Christ.

---

9 Ibid.
Historical context: the controversy concerning nature and the supernatural

However, before proceeding with an explication of Book II, we pause to make some historically-situating observations about de la Taille’s work on grace. One says nothing new in remarking that the first half of the twentieth-century witnesses to a theological flowering—though a thorny one, to be sure—of interest on the question of grace, more precisely, on the correct interpretation of Thomas on the relationship between nature and grace. This controversy among interpreters of Thomas reached an apex with the publication of Henri De Lubac’s *Surnaturel* in 1946, and, in 1950, occasioned the responsive encyclical of Pius XII, *Humani Generis*. At the core of the grace-controversy lies this question: Is it indeed the case that a human (and humans in community), can, in and through the power and goodness of natural capacities, arrive at happiness or completion, thereby construing grace and supernatural existence as something *extrinsic* to—added to—the nature and destiny of man? Or, rather, are human beings so created with a defining supernatural destiny (*visio Dei*) that grace is *intrinsic*—and indeed necessary—for all human flourishing and perfection? The former possibility,¹⁰ often affixed with the name ‘pure nature’ theology, allows for a natural human end that can be achieved through capacities natural to rational beings (surely a just *Aristotelian* reading of Thomas)—even if that end is finally imperfect (theologically

---

¹⁰ This reading is frequently attributed *initially* to Cajetan, the influential 16th-century interpreter of Thomas. But it had equally strong proponents among Suarez and the Carmelites of Salamanca, who understood Thomas’s ‘*desiderium naturale*’ as a vague, if innate ‘velleity’, and then in Bellarmine, who crystallised the notion of a two tiers: natural and the supernatural. Cf. Fergus Kerr’s discussion of the grace ‘quarrels’ in *After Aquinas* (Blackwell, 2002), 134-138.
speaking). Such a perspective (apparently, at least) secures the utter gratuity of grace, a gratuity that Pius XII sought to safeguard in *Humani Generis*. The second position, advocated by *nouvelle théologie* and articulated authoritatively by de Lubac, dismantles any sharp divorce between the natural and the supernatural in rational creatures; it embraces the Thomistic paradox that humans have been created with a *genuinely* ‘natural desire’ for the vision of God, a vision which none the less cannot be attained without the supernatural elevation of the human (through grace) to a participation in the divine. Put differently, God intends this end of divine union for all, he instills the desire for this end as part of the ‘make-up’ of every human creature, and, he grants that end only by raising human nature through his own divine assistance.

De Lubac’s argument generated a good deal of theological anxiety.\(^{11}\) Does it not collapse the proper distinction between the natural and the supernatural? Does it not somehow ‘bind’ God to fulfilling the natural propensity of the human soul? Does not grace thereby become something pedantic—unsurprising and a ‘right’ for all rational creatures? And, does this not vitiate a genuine realm of human autonomy, an autonomy that Thomas advocates in his ethical and socio-political reflections? As later twentieth-century theology reveals (especially the work of Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan)\(^{12}\),

\(^{11}\) And a good deal of personal offence, as Fergus Kerr notes in *After Aquinas* (*op. cit.*, 136-7). De Lubac audaciously attacked almost every revered interpreter of Thomas, including his magisterial contemporaries: Garrigou-Lagrange, George Tyrell, and A.-D. Sertillanges.

de Lubac and nouvelle théologie did not adequately answer these difficulties—if indeed such a paradox is ultimately ‘answerable’. Even so, I think Fergus Kerr neatly summarizes the enduring influence of de Lubac’s critique of natura pura with the following words: ‘Few now doubt that when Thomas taught that human beings have a natural desire for the vision of God he meant what he said.’

Granted, I have over-simplified a very complex debate of the 1940’s and 1950’s. However, my intent in setting up clearly-defined boundaries in this controversy is to imagine where de la Taille might have declared his own mind, had he lived a decade longer and entered the debate in a direct way. Earlier, in the ‘Introduction’, I labeled de la Taille a forerunner of the nouvelle théologie movement, yet also pointed out that he repeatedly shows his independence as a thinker and interpreter of Thomas. Do we indeed have any solid evidence that he would have aligned himself with de Lubac in this

---

with a recent issue of Nova et Vetera (English Ed., Vol. 5.1, 2007) devoted to the topic, all exemplify the contemporary attention these questions still command.

13 F. Kerr, op. cit., 137. We must note, however, that Feingold’s The Natural Desire to See God (op. cit.) and Reinhard Hütter’s essay ‘Desiderium Naturale Visionis Dei—Est autem duplex hominis beatitudo sive felicitas: Some Observations about Lawrence Feingold’s and John Milbanks’s Recent Interventions in the Debate over the Natural Desire to See God’ (Nova et Vetera 5.1 [2007]: 81-131) are yet intent to nuance this question of a ‘natural desire’ in the creature to see God. What Feingold and Hütter want to emphasize is that Thomas allows, hypothetically at least, for a notion of pure nature—that is, a notion that the human being, given its constitution as a spiritual being, does enjoy natural desires (naturalia desideria—desires given by the creator of human nature) for earthly orconnatural happiness, including, for example, the natural desire for the body and soul to be always united, as well as the natural capacities to achieve that happiness. All creatures naturally desire their cause, the source of all created perfections. However, the desire to see God face-to-face, the desire for a union to God that is also a participation in the divine nature is not innate and so surpasses the nature of the rational creature that it must be given by God. Specifically, the human is moved to this supernatural end by the Holy Spirit. To summarise, both natural and supernatural desires are God-given, and the latter builds upon the former, as it were. However, considering the de facto reality of sin, the natural desires of the human being—any more than the supernatural desires—cannot be achieved without divine assistance, without the superadded gifts of grace. The notion of ‘pure nature’ allows us to distinguish between the human condition as created, and human nature sub conditione peccati. Cf. Hütter’s illuminating discussion, pp. 98-118.
'quarrel' over grace? Can anything definitively be said *sans* his manuscript *De gratia*, *sans* his own careful analysis of key texts from the Thomas corpus?

Perhaps a telling clue to de la Taille's sympathies appears in de Lubac's own *Mémoires*. In a set of dairy notes, recorded to assist his recollection of the unfolding events of 1946-1947 (when his *Surnaturel* was under close scrutiny and his teaching career in jeopardy), de Lubac mentions a meeting with Père de Boynes, a congenial if theologically conservative Vicar General at Rome. The '26 September 1946' entry reveals this significant reference to de la Taille:

'A visit to Père de Boynes. I know that he had distrusted me for a long time. Very kind,—though it was he who directed the interview. He amicably signaled to me that Père Maurice de la Taille, in his projected work on grace, had sent walking the idea of "pure nature".'

If we accept the suspicious de Boynes's statement as accurate, de la Taille's reading of Thomas on grace and the natural desire for union with God might well have resonated with de Lubac's.

Yet, quite apart from this diary entry, de la Taille's extant writings do leave strong intimations of his leanings on the nature/grace question. In the course of this chapter, it will become evident, first, that de la Taille's eucharistically-rooted theory of grace denies a strictly two-tiered understanding of nature and grace. His emphasis upon the movement of the will in eucharistic oblation points to the reality that grace and sanctification is not a *creatio de novo* in human nature: the worshipper brings something of her own (desires

---


15 This Roman reference to de la Taille's 'lost' treatise, aligning it with de Lubac's condemned book, could perhaps speak volumes as to why this treatise in-the-making seems to have disappeared without a trace.
natural and supernatural) to the altar, even if the intention of the heart to offer is itself elicited by God. Secondly, the desire for union with the divine is certainly cast as dependent upon the ‘prior’ gift of grace won, possessed, and dispensed through the sacrificial victim. That eucharistic grace is not an extrinsic gift to human beings, but is the very source of the desire for transformative union with God, is also suggested by de la Taille’s theology of seeing the desire for eucharist present (and indeed efficacious) in worshipping communities antecedent to the Christian sacrifice. What is more, we shall see that his theory of ‘created actuation by uncreated Act’, with its assertion of divine self-donation to the creature as foundational to the union of sanctifying grace, also sheds light upon de la Taille’s concept of supernatural elevation.

**Grace in *Mysterium Fidei***

De la Taille’s treatment of grace in *Mysterium Fidei* begins, properly speaking, in Book III (Elucidations XXXVI - L), when he moves from the sacrifice of the eucharist to considering the eucharist ‘insofar as it is a sacrament’. The Book is divided into four chapters, the first of which takes up the basic question of whether the eucharist is a sacrament, and if so, what kind of sacrament (Elucidations XXXVI – XXXVIII). The second, and for our purposes most substantial chapter, addresses the three different parts of the sacrament (*sacramentum tantum, res et sacramentum, res tantum*), the relationship between these elements and their causal power, and how the eucharist compares with the other six sacraments (Elucidations XXXIX – XLVIII). As I mentioned above, a
discussion of the res tantum of the eucharist provides the springboard for de la Taille’s ‘treatise’ on grace. Chapter Three (Elucidation XLIX) follows with an examination of the question of the necessity of the eucharist (is it an absolute necessity or a necessity of means?), exploring the critical rôle of desire in the eucharist and the distinction between spiritual and corporeal eating. This Elucidation, particularly rich in scriptural and patristic reflection upon the dynamic of desire in both baptism and the eucharist, will figure prominently in the last chapter of this study, when baptism and sacrifice are compared and correlated. In the final and lengthy Elucidation L, de la Taille addresses issues concerning ‘the conditions of eucharistic presence’—e.g., various theories of eucharistic conversion, the duration of eucharistic presence, the relationship between the accidents of the species, and the substantial reality of Christ’s presence. Except perhaps tangentially, I shall not incorporate de la Taille’s extensive philosophical arguments against ‘erroneous’ conversion theories (e.g., theories of adduction and reproduction). We need only note here that de la Taille’s defence of transubstantiation—by his own admission—is driven by a concern to ‘protect’ the unity between the historical and eucharistic body, so that body received in the eucharist be the same body offered to God for our salvation, the same body which is the fountain of grace.

For the most part, our discussion of de la Taille’s thought on grace will follow the outline suggested by his own structured exposition in Book III of Mysterium Fidei. After looking first at de la Taille’s telling slant on how the eucharist is sacrament, I shall attend to de la Taille ‘demonstration’ of the believer’s union to Christ in the sacrament of the eucharist—a demonstration largely ex scriptura et traditione. His choice of scriptural
images and patristic discourse manifests the centrality of union and the gift of uncreated Grace. We shall then turn in Chapter Five to his more systematic treatment of the topic of grace, focusing upon grace in general and upon the grace of Christ. Here de la Taille reflects at length upon the relationship in Christ between the grace of union and habitual grace, providing unmistakable intimations of his later writing on ‘created actuation’. Chapter Five concludes with some brief remarks about the relationship between the eucharist and the other sacraments—more precisely, the relationship between sanctifying grace and sacramental grace, the significance of the movement of desire in the sacraments, and the necessity of the eucharist.

Of what is the eucharist a sacrament?

De la Taille begins with a traditional reminder, taken from Thomas (ST III, 60, 2 and 3) who himself looks to Augustine, that a sacrament is ‘generally understood’ to be ‘the sign of a sacred thing that sanctifies man’ (MF, 475). Given this definition, de la Taille proceeds to inquire about the cause and end of our sanctification. That which ultimately sanctifies, he asserts, is the passion of Christ; and this sanctification occurs through the ‘form’ of sanctifying grace and for the purpose of heavenly glory. This indicates that the eucharist properly can be called a sacrament if it indeed signifies these three things: passion, grace, glory. Because he has dealt earlier in the work with the sacrificial signification of the eucharist, de la Taille moves quickly to the central subject

16 For de la Taille, the separate species of bread and wine, along with the signifying words indicating body blood, bear forth the image of Christ’s immolation in the passion. Thus the consecrated bread and cup is the sign of the Lord’s passion (cf. Elucidations XVII, XX, XXII).
of Book III, namely, how the eucharist is a sacrament of grace and glory. Distinctly, sacramental signification of grace and glory becomes a question of ‘partaking in the sacrifice itself of our salvation through the eucharist’ (MF, 475).

De la Taille specifies that this partaking in the sacrificial banquet of eucharist has a double aspect: a distinction between sign and signified leads his reflection here. What is the sign of partaking in this redeeming sacrificial feast? Simply enough, it is the eating of the victim in the eucharist. But of more interest to de la Taille is the question of what is signified by the believer’s partaking of the sacrificial banquet. The answer is more complex: first, that which is signified pertains to ‘future life, namely sharing in the divine goods of heaven’ (glory); the second signification (grace), however, refers to the present time and is again two-fold. Partaking of the eucharist signifies 1) a spiritual union with God, or ‘a sanctification of those eating, who are led, as it were, into divine holiness through the victim who himself possesses divine sanctity’; and 2) a spiritual union between those who have eaten, as they become ‘sharers (consortes) in the one divine food’ — or in other and rather more startling words, those who have partaken become ‘one in substance’, consubstantiales, in and through their eating of the divine victim (MF, 475). In the first signified union, a communion with God, partaking of the eucharistic body and blood indicates a share in the holiness and gifts achieved in the acceptance of the victim. There is, so to speak, a contagion of divinity spreading from the victim that effects union with God. Ecclesial union, one the other hand, is signified both in the commensalsality of the eucharistic sacrifice, and more importantly de la Taille suggests, by partaking of the one divine food, which transforms those partaking into a
single substance or body. Hence de la Taille argues that the eucharist is a three-fold sacrament of union in which incorporation to Christ is perfected: partaking of the eucharist signifies union to Christ—and thereby to the Father, and it signifies union to one another, and it signifies union to ‘the glorious resurrection’ (MF, 475).

Even more, because the eucharist is a particular kind of sign, a practical sign, it causes these three effects by signifying them. In regard to the present effect—union with Christ and with the ecclesial body—the sacrament of the eucharist clearly indicates and thereby causes this union by indicating it (‘demonstrando inferens’); in promising the future effect of resurrection, that resurrection is procured in the promising. That the effects of grace and glory are caused by the efficacy of the eucharistic food—and not, for example by the affect of the one receiving, is a truth that de la Taille easily supports from scripture and the early teaching of the Church. In fact, he finds it ‘more surprising’ that the causal power of the eucharist could be denied upon the basis of scripture. In a section of several columns, he proceeds to unfold the mind of Paul, the Gospel of John and the thought of the early Fathers on the question of sacramental causality and eucharistic incorporation. Much more than establishing ‘proof’ that the eucharist effects such incorporation, we discern here de la Taille’s robust predilection for discoursing on the eucharist as the sacramentum communionis ad Christum, and for identifying the

---


18 De la Taille acknowledges this 16th century-inaugurated debate over the causality of the eucharist. His tone is one that suggests the ex opere operato debate is put to rest by scripture and tradition (MF, 476). But lest the reader jump to the erroneous conclusion that de la Taille has a strictly mechanical view of the sacraments, recall the distinction—and tight connection—that de la Taille holds concerning the active offering of the sacrifice and the passive reception of the eucharistic fruits of grace (cf. MF, 616-617, and supra, Chapter 3).
intimacy of that union in terms of a sanctifying participation (grace) in the divine—through the flesh of Christ. So that the framework for his systematic presentation on grace will be clear, it is crucial to attend to the theological texts and images that de la Taille employs for eucharistic union. Predictably, given his principal lens of sacrifice, the key scriptural and patristic passages brought forward speak to the importance of the altar, the divinising effect of eating the victim’s flesh, the intimacy of the communion achieved in the eucharist, and the beginning of resurrected life in our union with Christ. Once again, we note that a preference for the Eastern Fathers surfaces and shapes his discussion of these topics.

Deifying union (grace), ecclesial union, resurrecting union. De la Taille’s teaching about eucharistic union ad Christum is fundamentally rooted in two New Testament passages: 1 Cor. 10.16-21, in which a sacrificial perspective regarding participation in the altar emerges, and John 6.56-57, in which de la Taille considers the indwelling promised by Christ in eucharist. His profound exposition of these passages manifests the divinising intimacy of eucharistic union. De la Taille gathers patristic as well as medieval sources to further underline that this union is achieved only through the flesh of the assumed humanity.

‘The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. Look at Israel according to the flesh; are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? So what am I saying? That meat sacrificed to idols is anything? Or that an idol is anything? No, I mean that what they sacrifice, [they sacrifice] to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to become participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and
also the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons. I Cor. 10. 16-21

I quote this Corinthian passage in full because de la Taille’s distinctive reflection relies heavily upon Paul’s manner of linking of sacrifice and altar with the concept of κοινωνία (‘participation’). At this point in his exposition, de la Taille is not primarily interested in the suggested ecclesial bond between members of the body, a bond effected by the partaking of the one cup and loaf. Instead, he urges that the word κοινωνία points to something more profound yet, namely, that in those eating there is a ‘sharing (consortium)’ in ‘the sanctity inhering in Christ as victim’ (MF, 476). De la Taille demonstrates this by recalling for us the ‘anatomy’ of sacrifice. In every sacrifice, the gift (hostiam) is made holy through the altar of the divine, the altar which stands as the ‘vicarious seat’ of God, the holy ‘fountain’ of sanctity. Therefore, as the victim is ‘sanctified and sanctifying’ through the altar, so those who partake of the victim ‘acquire some share of the sanctification from God’, derived through the victim, by way of the altar.

But the sanctity of the victim is not separate from the sanctity of the altar, which is not separate from the holiness of God. In fact, the one who is sharer of the first [the holiness of the victim], also is partaker of the second [the altar] and of the third [God]. More, unless there is an altar—sanctified and sanctifying, no victim is desired; neither is the altar looked for except on account of the holiness of God. Just so, one does not come into the holiness of God unless made to pass through the altar, to which the way is opened through the victim (MF, 476).

19 It should be noted that de la Taille is citing, both here and with his exposition of John 6, the Greek New Testament texts, which no doubt makes a difference to how he imagines union and participation.
20 Attamen voce κοινωνία aliquid plus enunciatur quam ipsa demum manducatio corporis ac sanguinis Christi; sed assertu inesse manducantibus quodam consortium sanctitatis inhaerentis Christo ut hostiae.'
De la Taille’s point in connecting God’s holiness to the sanctity of the altar and victim is this: Paul’s κοινωνία refers to a participation in divine sanctity that is the worshipper’s by partaking of the victim, the worshipper’s through the altar upon which the victim is sacrificed, and the worshipper’s from the divine to whom the victim is sacrificed. Such is Paul’s objective, de la Taille argues, in likening Christian communion in the body and blood of Christ to Jewish communion with the altars of sacrifice, and to Gentile communion with the demons to whom they sacrifice (MF, 476). But this analogy requires two stipulations. The idol worship of the pagans ‘acquires and transfers’ only ‘execration and pollution’, for that is the nature of the demons. The Jewish tradition offered sacrifices to the God, but since the victims were ‘figural’, so too the sanctity transferred through the flesh of the victims was but ‘figural’, or a ‘shadowy’ sanctity. Whereas, in Christ’s offering of himself as a victim to be immolated, which gift was received into glory by God, he truly obtains divine sanctity and bestows it upon those who partake of his flesh and blood (MF, 476-7).

De la Taille underscores that, for Paul, κοινωνία is a true, not figural, union with the divine; it is an ontological and not merely physically sharing in the victim. Why else, would Paul conclude, ‘You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and the table of demons’? To be sure, if κοινωνία is taken only as ‘physical eating or sharing’, one could partake of disparate altars. But if this partaking and union is understood ‘rightly’, as producing in itself a communion or ‘consortium’ of divine sanctity, then obviously no worshipper could participate in both cups and tables, ‘because in fact divine sanctity cannot be experienced along with
demonic pollution' \textit{(MF, 477)}. Paul, he summarises, could not have ‘more vividly preached the reality of the sanctity in us granted through the eucharistic banquet’ (ibid). The transference of sanctity to us from God through the sacrificed victim and altar: what can strike the mind as more realistic? What more profound \textit{communion} can be imagined than this participation in the very holiness of God through Christ—altar and victim?

‘\textit{Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.}’ \textit{John 6.56-57} supplies de la Taille with his second ‘demonstration’ or reflection upon the union to Christ effected by eucharistic eating. His exposition here takes us into the heart of divine indwelling. Interpreting the words of Christ in verse 56, de la Taille describes our eucharistic union with Christ as a kind of ‘mutual penetration of two things and in a single mingling (\textit{duorum penetratio mutua atque in unum commixtio})’. More importantly, this mingling is not of two corporeal things, but rather is proposed to us as a union in the divine life of Christ, a union that is a participation in that common divine life flowing within the Trinity.

For de la Taille, the mutual abiding promised by Christ in the eucharist is best perceived in light of Christ’s own ‘guiding example’, namely, of the ‘community of life flourishing between himself and the Father’ \textit{(MF, 477)}. The life that the Father communicates to the Son is the life that Christ communicates to those who receive the eucharist; it is a vitality that conjoins at the deepest level of existence. Yet, de la Taille offers this theological qualification: the divine life from the Father is consubstantial in the Son, whereas in us it is possessed by a participation that cannot achieve a ‘perfect
similitude' or 'equality' to that divine life shared between Father and Son. Even so, de la Taille confirms that the 'by no means obscurely proclaimed effect of the eucharistic food is the life of Christ, which is divine, enlivening us' (MF, 478).

This Johannine mutual presence and sharing in the divine life leads de la Taille to clarify some aspects concerning our consortium in divine sanctity and dominical life. For example: is this effect of the eucharist union a permanent one? Is it a union with Christ according to his divine nature only, or also according his human nature? In this section, we have not only de la Taille's first definition of sanctifying grace, but also his first depiction of what he calls 'the order of deifying life', an order which begins with the flesh of Christ. Liturgical texts as well as theological discourses from the tradition amplify what he intends to convey about eucharistic consortium with Christ.

De la Taille argues that this sharing in the sanctity and life of the divine is a permanent and dynamic union, flowing both from Christ's divine and human nature, though principally through the Lord's flesh. He again reminds us of how Paul conceives this spiritual consortium with Christ: first, this eucharistic union is with the 'flesh of the immolated Christ' (in partaking of the eucharist); then, the union is also with Christ 'as altar, according to his human nature'; and then lastly, with Christ 'as he is (in) himself, according to the divine nature, to which sacrifice is offered' (MF, 478). This three-fold Pauline vision of eucharistic union does not, however, suggest three kinds of communion with Christ. Even if the believer's participation can be considered under these three aspects, the reality is 'one and indivisible'. But de la Taille's central agenda

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{21}}\] Perhaps one should write 'Paul', as I suspect that de la Taille is also thinking here of The Epistle to the Hebrews.
here is to establish a truth proclaimed in John’s gospel: divinisation commences in a
eucharistic union to the flesh of Christ, ‘[a]nd therefore, so long as we remain conjoined
spiritually with the human nature of Christ, with the flesh of Christ, so long do we also
remain united with the divinity of Christ’ (ibid.).

We thus arrive at de la Taille’s first identification of ‘sanctifying grace’: it is
something (aliquid) that ‘really inheres’ in the Christian, that remains, in and through
consortium in Christ. Yet, de la Taille is quick to clarify how this sanctifying grace is
ordered to the two natures of Christ and how the quality of its permanence is properly
understood. Whilst it is the case that sanctifying grace is related both to the divine and
human natures of Christ, the relation is not an equal, but an ordinate one: ‘for, not unless
life is flowing into us continually from the Lord’s flesh, are we conjoined to the divinity;
so too, our flesh is vivified only through the flow of the divine life’ (MF, 479). In other
words, sanctifying grace, a share in divinising life, is bestowed through a union with the
flesh of Christ in the sacrificial banquet.

Concerning this order of divinising life, de la Taille adds a further theological
note, a point asserted by ‘several Doctors’ of the Church, and distinctly by Thomas.
True enough, the human body shares in divine life through the humanity of Christ; yet,
the union between the Lord’s flesh and and the believer’s is ‘accomplished mediantly by
the soul, which is vivified constantly by the flesh of Christ, the proximate source of life
(principium vitale) in the order of deifying life (vitae deiformis)’. We cannot imagine, he
writes, ‘some immediate sanctification of our flesh’—one that is ‘permanent and
inhering’—apart from the mediation of the soul. Sketched out, then, the ‘order’ of deifying life would appear this way:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Christ’s divine life shared with the Father and Spirit} & \\
\downarrow & \\
\text{Christ’s flesh} & \\
\downarrow & \\
\text{divine life flows into the soul} & \\
\downarrow & \\
\text{vivification of our flesh}
\end{align*}
\]

Depicted with equal care is the nature of this ‘permanent’ union of sanctifying grace. De la Taille’s understanding of the abiding presence of Christ through eucharist union is far from instrumental and static:

For, in so far as we participate in the holiness of Christ, under so great a stream which pours into us from Christ, that far can we and ought we also aptly to say that Christ is, according to his humanity, spiritually conjoined to us, and even intimately united to us through an enduring touch (contactum) of power. De la Taille’s comment is a remarkable one. He specifies that Christ’s permanent presence is not a ‘substantial’ one, but is none the less one that is ‘continually infused’ according to ‘his spiritual efficacy’, and one that not only causes grace but sustains that grace in being: ‘For the Lord’s flesh is not the cause in fieri only of our grace, but also the cause in esse; that is, as long as he is causing grace, that long is the reality of grace present’ (MF, 479, n.1). In other words,

---

\(^{22}\) De la Taille refers the reader to ST III, 8, 2: ‘The whole humanity of Christ, which is to say the body and the soul, flows into humans, as much into the soul as into the body, but principally it flows into our soul, and secondarily into the body’ (MF, 479 n.2).

\(^{23}\) ‘Quatenus autem sub tali influxu Christi participamus Christi sanctitatem, eatenus etiam apte dici potest et debet Christus nobis secundum humanitatem suam spiritualiter conjunctus atque unitus intime per permanentem contactum virtutis’ (MF, 479).
sanctifying grace is Christ’s abiding and life-giving power within the believer, an intimate and dynamic union that is forged in the reception of his eucharistic flesh and blood. As a potent liturgical articulation of this eucharistic reality, de la Taille brings forward a post-communion prayer *super populum* from the liturgy of Bishop Serapion:

‘O God of Truth, Lover of Humanity, may the communion of your body and blood (*κοινωνία τοῦ σῶματός καὶ τοῦ σῶματος*) remain (*συνπαραμεινάω*) with this people. May their bodies be living bodies [which is to say enlivened spiritually through the source of deiform life taken up within them], and may their souls be cleansed souls. Grant that this blessing, effected by the union of the eucharist, be enduring (*τήρησιν*) and unharmed (*ἀσφάλειαν*)’.  

Likewise, de la Taille turns to Canon 13 of St Ephraem’s *Necrosima*, in which the Syriac Father describes eucharistic union as a ‘co-mingling’ of the Lord’s body with that of the believer, to the end that his body abides in the believer’s as its source of life: ‘... *Your body, the source of our life, remains in us. In us, O Lord, your body is the greater part*’.  

For de la Taille, the union *ad Christum* which derives from the eucharistic flesh of the Lord is one in which the divinising life of grace resides and *presides* in the life of the Christian—soul and body.

Still, de la Taille leans most heavily upon two sources from tradition that speak ever more sharply about the nature of our intimate, life-giving union to Christ in the eucharist: Hilary of Poitiers’s *De Trinitate*, and, Cyril of Alexandria’s *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. He brings forth these texts from the storeroom of tradition largely, I suspect, because they emphasize that the entrée into divine life is realized through a

---


sharing in Christ’s human nature, a participation attained through his eucharistic flesh and blood.

De la Taille quotes, very nearly *in toto*, four chapters from Book VIII of Hilary’s *De Trinitate*, chapters in which Hilary refutes the erroneous suggestion that Christ was united to the Father only according to a union of wills, rather than of natures. His arguments draw extensively upon the eucharist and John’s gospel. Clearly, de la Taille is considerably attracted to Hilary’s lengthy analogy between the ‘natural’ union of the Father of the Son and the human’s ‘natural’ union to Christ in the eucharist. Most particularly, he highlights the ‘*commercium carnis*’ in Hilary’s depiction of eucharistic union.

Hilary’s argument and analogy from ‘the sacrament of perfect union (*perfectae sacramentum unitatis*)’ can be summarized in this way. The Word has truly become flesh, and Christians receive this flesh as food; this union between Christ and the believer in the eucharist is a *natural* one—i.e., a union according to human nature (and not according to any mere conjoining of wills). Now, Christ has announced that those who eat his flesh enjoy not only the kind of union which he has with the Father, but also enjoy that very Life which is the union. Therefore: a) the union Christ has with the Father is a ‘natural’ one, according to the divine nature of the Father, from whom he receives life in the Spirit; and b) the believer is joined to Christ and the life of the entire Godhead in the ‘perfect union’ of the sacrament (*MF, 479-80*). Hilary brings his reflection to a close with these words: “We are to proclaim the mystery of the true and natural unity since both through the glory of the Son granted to us and through the Son’s abiding presence in
us carnally [understand: according to the exchange of flesh \textit{(commercium carnis)}], we are united to him corporeally and inseparably’’\textit{(De Trinitate, VIII, 17; MF, 480}).

De la Taille underscores Hilary’s view that the divinising union is a consequence of a ‘commerce’ of flesh that occurs in the eucharist, without which the human does not know divine life, which is to say, does not live the supernatural life of grace:

Hilary assigns a double \textit{commercium carnis} between us and Christ. First, the Word remains in us carnally because of his flesh; and second, we remain in the incarnate Word according to that dominical taking up of our flesh. In both cases (doubtless with the incarnation presupposed), the effect is placed in the sacrament—ordinately however, even as from the first the second proceeds: ‘For no one shall be in Christ, unless he himself were dwelling in that one; for the only flesh he has taken to himself is the flesh of those which have taken his flesh.’ This is considered a mutual immanence because we live through Christ: ‘In the manner that he lives through the Father, in the same way we live through his flesh’. We exist in him ‘inseparably united’, and he himself is in us ‘dwelling naturally and enduringly’.

In other words, in considering the reality of our ‘mutual dwelling’ with Christ—and thus with the entire Trinity, de la Taille emphasizes divine prerogative and the gift of the flesh of Christ in the eucharist. In the reception of his eucharistic flesh and blood, Christ takes-up the believer’s flesh to himself (an intimate union of like and like) and fills it with his own divine life. Such is the \textit{commercium carnis} that Hilary seems to envision in eucharistic union.

Cyril’s Commentary on John 15, a passage treating the image of adherence between vine and branches, provides de la Taille with another instance of the traditional teaching about a eucharistic union of natures and the permanence of that union. Cyril

\textsuperscript{26} MF, 480. De la Taille is pulling together lines from Book VIII of Hilary’s \textit{De Trinitate}, which he has already quoted in context.
does not doubt that the discourse in John 15 identifies Christians as participants in Christ’s human nature; nor does he equivocate upon the reality that the believer draws from Christ the life which vivifies her own flesh. Here is a short segment of the much longer passage cited in Mysterium Fidei:

‘In what way may it be thought ambiguous, or who of sound mind would doubt it, that when we refer to the image of the branches, we understand Christ to be the vine according to the flesh, whilst we, being branches draw upon his very life from the vine itself? As Paul says: For we are all one body in Christ, seeing that we who are many are one bread, for we all partake of the one bread. Let anyone speak who can account for this, who can provide a reason other than the power of the mystical eulogia. Why do we receive it within us? Is it not that it may make Christ to dwell in us corporeally through a participation and communion of his sanctifies flesh? ...

...And the Savior himself says: He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him. By which words we should especially observe that Christ did not only say that he would be in us according to a certain relation only, as it is thought by some to be through a disposition in the soul, but also by a natural participation (κατά μέθεξιν φυσικήν). For just as if one were to melt wax with wax entwining them by the fire, which makes two things one, so through the reception of the body and of precious blood of Christ we are conjoined—he in us and we again in him. ....For if we do not eat of his flesh, nor drink of his blood, we shall not possess eternal life within us, that is, in our own flesh. For eternal life is rightly judged to derive from the flesh of Life, that is, the flesh of the only-begotten’ (P.G. 74, col 341-344; MF,481).

De la Taille draws a number of theological conclusions from Cyril’s words about a participation of natures between the vine (Christ) and the branches (those initiated into Christ)—as the image suggests. More, this union is a permanent one through the eucharist, so long as the believer clings to the Life of the vine, received through Christ’s flesh. In fact, de la Taille argues that Cyril links this image of participation in immortal
life to eucharistic communion ‘as effect to cause’. Concomitantly, the vine-branches image demonstrates that Christians depend for their existence, formally speaking, upon union to Christ (MF, 481). In sum, intimate and enduring union to Christ through the eucharistic flesh and blood, which bestows grace and divine life, is achieved ‘through [Christ] because of his assumed nature, to which we are conjoined’ (ibid.).

De la Taille brings to a close his theological reflection on eucharistic union ad Christum with words that underscore Christ’s humanity and the necessity of the believer’s desire for his flesh. In the eucharist, he writes, the Christian is made to participate in the holiness of God and is made capable of divine life ‘not only in Christ as he is God, but also as he is human’—a humanity that is ‘immediate and very near’ (MF, 482). The life of the divine nature is extended to the believer through Christ’s assumed flesh:

To this life we adhere; to him we cling; to this life we remain connected, and in an unbroken union, not only held by the soul, but also by the body… Thus it is that we would be nothing in the order of grace without some addition of the Lord’s humanity; for the Lord, through the exchange of one life, assumes to his very self those who receive that divinising life into themselves with a full and avid heart’ (MF, 482; italics mine).

Such is the transformative commercium of the eucharist. Christ ‘takes up’ into his own flesh those who, desiring a share in his own divine life, ‘take up’ the eucharistic flesh of...
his human nature—the altar through which one participates in the life of the Godhead. This permanent union of branches and vine, through which a single divine life flows is, for de la Taille, the reality of divine indwelling and sanctifying grace.

De la Taille’s discussion of ecclesial union through the eucharist follows readily from the preceding treatment of union to Christ. I focus on two salient features of his presentation: first, the union between Christ and the Church and between Christians, as formed at the altar in the reception of the Lord’s body; and second, the reality of fraternal charity flowing within and from the body. De la Taille’s scriptural point of departure here is I Cor. 10.17, where he interprets Paul in a straightforward manner. Which is to say, Paul claims that ecclesial unity is caused by the eating of the eucharistic bread, for in that bread Christians are all concorporate in the one living body of Christ: ‘For if we all are incorporated in to the one Christ, we are also made one body (concorporamur). If we all participate (communicamus) in Christ, we also participate in one another (ad invicem)’ (MF, 485). De la Taille heralds John Chrysostom’s preaching on Paul for the pointed assertion that in sharing the one bread, all live by the same divine life communicated through the one sacrificed body of Christ.

‘What is the union which Paul mentions? That we are the body itself. For what is the bread? The body of Christ. And what are they receiving? The body of Christ; and not many bodies, but one body... For you do not live by a different body, nor are you nourished by a different body, but all exist by the same very body of Christ’.29

De la Taille underscores that the reception of the one eucharistic bread inseparably determines union to Christ and with the body of the Church. There is no union to Christ,

29 P.G. 61, 200; MF, 485.
he argues, without union to all who have partaken from the altar. The head does not exist apart from the body any more than the members exist distinct from the head and from one another: ‘One is the incorporation to Christ head of the ecclesiastical body, just as there is one sacrament of that incorporation’ (MF, 485). De la Taille cites the now famous passage from Augustine’s Commentary on the Gospel of St John, in which Augustine meditates on the mystery of unity through the creative divine life flowing from the eucharist:

‘O sacrament of piety! O sign of unity! O bond of charity! He who wishes to live has where he may live, has from whence he may live. Let him approach; let him believe; let him be incorporated that he may be given life. Let him not recoil from the joining the limbs... Let him cling to the body, let him live unto God from God (Deo de Deo).’

In speaking of this shared divine life and the exchange of flesh in eucharist, de la Taille does not hesitate to speak of the union between the Church and Christ in terms of Genesis 1 and the union proclaimed between male and female. In fact, de la Taille seems to favor this marital image (also Pauline) as aptly expressive of the intimacy and permanence of eucharistic unity to Christ. In partaking of Christ’s flesh, the Church becomes that body of Christ, just as it written, ‘Let the two become as one flesh’.

If the unity and love between the Christ and the Church is thought of in terms of the sexual union between bride and bridegroom, the caritas of the members united by the divine life of the body is equally intimate and powerful. De la Taille first articulates that the ecclesial bond forged in the eucharist must not be thought a communion only with those in the Church militant, but all those who are in Christ.

30 In Joan. 26.13, ibid.
31 Cf. two telling citations from the tradition in MF, pp. 486, 495.
The power to be joined most intimately to the Blessed Virgin or to one of the saints: this belongs to the eucharist. And behold, these who are clinging together, this tight bond is neither so ideal or fictitious, but a real and vital spiritual bond of mutual immanence in Christ. The power to restore the original and indispensable relationship with your deceased loved ones: this belongs to the eucharist. And whether they are in heaven or in purgatory, behold they are so close to you, and so truly spiritually one with you, just as you yourself are spiritually one with Christ, in whom they dwell. Therefore who partakes of the eucharist, participates in the universal Church of Christ—those of the Church militant, the Church being perfected, and the Church in triumph (MF, 487; italics mine).

With these pastorally eloquent words, de la Taille affirms the power of the eucharistic to unite all those alive to God through the flesh which incorporates and gives life. Yet, another characteristic of this fraternal union pertains to the intimacy of the charity shared among the living members of the body, a charity of which Christ is the arché. De la Taille acknowledges that a certain distinction obtains between love of God and love of neighbour in the pilgrimage of salvation—even if, ideally, they are united in the ‘economy of grace’. He suggests that the Church is provided hope and strength for the realisation of this unity of love in the eucharist. For the love of God and neighbour is ‘more fully ours in as much as there exists the one body of Christ and of the faithful.’ ‘Whether we are loving Christ or our brothers, what we love is one indivisible thing, which is the fullness (πλήρωμα) of Christ (Eph. 1.23).’ We belong, through a single incorporation, to both. With a single love does the believer love head and members.32

32 The converse side of this is articulated by Augustine, who questions how, in sinning against a brother, one can claim guiltlessness before Christ: ‘No one is innocent when he sins against his brothers. For it was said by the Apostle “If however sinning against your brothers, wounding their conscience, you sin against Christ” (1 Cor. 8.12), and this because we are made members of Christ. In what way do you not sin against Christ when you sin against his members?’ (Sermo, 82, c.3. n.4), MF, 488.
Even so, de la Taille sees this caritas of the body extending beyond those who directly partake of Christ’s flesh. Is eucharistic love, engendered by union to the body, the same as a love attentive to all human beings? De la Taille argues that eucharistic love regards all people, even those outside of the Church, on the ut sint principle—that is, on the principle that that they might become members of the one body of Christ. Quoting from Augustine’s Commentary on the Epistle of John, de la Taille is eager to suggest that eucharistic love is universal and directed to, as well as flowing from, the body of Christ:

‘May you always be enflamed with brotherly love, whether towards those who are your brothers already, or towards your enemies, so that they may be made a brother by your loving. Wherever you love a [Christian] brother, you love a friend, who is with you already, who is even already conjoined to you in catholic unity...But you love the other who does not yet believe in Christ....but you therefore love that he might be a brother. Thus all our fraternal love is towards Christians, directed towards all of Christ’s members’ (In Epist. Johan. tract, 10.7; MF, 488).

In other words, de la Taille rejects the suggestion that eucharistic charity is exclusive. Christ’s sacrificial love extends to all who might—by the desire of God—become members of his body.

Significantly, the reason a believer’s love is as it is—thoroughly rooted in the eucharistic body—rests on the fact of Christ’s mandatum. After instituting the supper, Christ takes to himself and makes new the commandment of fraternal love. Why? Because he who is love ‘is himself in the eucharist’, ‘both as the generative new principle of fraternal charity (as building up all into the unity of his body) and as the new obligating reason (inasmuch by incorporation he demands a single love for himself and for his members) (John 13.34-35; 15.12; 17.21-23)’ (MF, 488). The one divine life,
through which the eucharistic body exists, commands the fraternal love newly envisioned by Christ on the eve of his sacrifice. De la Taille sums up the matter nicely:

If you strike against charity, you offend the eucharist; if you seek charity, you discover it in the eucharist. Look upon the law of the New Testament, built upon the blood of the New Covenant, and upon the body of the victim made sacred to God in the last supper, and imparted to the disciples!’ (ibid.).

By partaking of Christ’s body and blood believers become one life and one concorporeal sacrifice of love. Indeed, de la Taille insists that the eucharist is the very fountain of Christian love to the other.33

We have thus far seen how de la Taille explicates the intimacy and vitality of eucharistic union to Christ and to all the member of his body in the Church. However, that singleness of life, that divinizing grace of union, is also the promise and reality of resurrection. As the great sacrament of incorporation, the eucharist is the best ‘spiritual proof’ of bodily resurrection. We can capture the kernel of de la Taille’s thought in this way: if one is incorporated through the eucharist into Christ’s heavenly and glorified flesh, that one likewise shares corporeally in immortality. In order to hear the tenor of de la Taille’s argument, and particularly to note the rôle of sanctifying grace in the resurrection of the body, we shall attend to a few key moments in his scriptural and patristic exposition of this eucharistic truth. The question again hinges upon the reality of

---

33 In partaking of the eucharistic food, every possibility of love is strengthened. De la Taille insists that this sacrament is the ‘fountain of ascetical theology’—just as he insisted earlier that this was true of sacrifice. ‘Every virtue whatsoever’, he writes, depends upon union with God, and the one who frequents the eucharist with genuine devotion will be a testament to the growth of the spiritual life and the strengthening of caritas. ‘For when the virtues are exercised, the work and reality (opus et res) of the eucharist is actualised and eucharistic life is passed on’. Such is the gift of God, who not only desires that the Christian may understand and preach the virtuous life of charity, ‘but also that we may be filled with the strength to live such a life’ (MF, 488).
the exchange of flesh in the eucharist. In a word, the sacrificial food of Christ's now divinized body is the 'yeast' of resurrection within the believer's own corporeality.

John 6.54 and 58-63 stand as the key loci for establishing the causal, resurrecting power of the eucharist. According to de la Taille, Christ is doing three things in this passage: 1) declaring that those who eat and drink of the sacrament will enjoy eternal life and be raised up by him ('Who eats my flesh and drinks my blood will has life eternal, and I will resurrect him on the last day'); 2) drawing attention to the godly providence of the bread and to his own heavenly origin ('This is the bread which has descended from heaven'); and 3) 'most especially' pointing to his 'glorious ascension' ('This scandalizes you? What if you were to see the Son of man ascending to where he was before?') (MF, 491). Christ's line of argument was intended both to meet the likely scandal caused by his words and to elicit faith in his disciples. In light of these verses in John 6, can anyone think it 'incredible that, when [Christ's] flesh is translated into the divine condition of God, that he would pass on to his friends (consortes) his divine life—both incorruptible and glorified?' (ibid.). Surely, de la Taille asserts, it is fully in accord with nature and reason to judge in this way: because the Christian is made one with Christ in the eucharist, he or she shall also 'be united to him in the resurrection of the body'.

On the basis of Christ's post-supper words in the synoptic gospels (Matthew 26.20, Mark 14.25, and Luke 22.29-30), de la Taille also argues that Christ connects eucharistic eating and drinking to the promise of a future spiritual banquet in heaven.

---

34 MF, 491, and n.1.
These passages may be understood in a two-fold way: 1) that Christ sees the ritual supper as a sort of *figure* of one to be celebrated in the kingdom; or, 2) that he connects the meal now being instituted with the heavenly banquet as 'an incomplete thing to its fulfillment', rather like a seedling to its mature growth. But this second possibility comes with a relentless condition, namely, that the fruit of vine now being drunk is *one and the same* that will be later enjoyed (Matthew 26.20)—if in a new way (*MF*, 495). Drawing upon a number of patristic and medieval sources, de la Taille provides cumulative evidence of the doctrine that 'we eat the same bread that we shall eat', and that 'the Lord promised the same thing that he in fact gave' (*MF*, 496). The future banquet refers not only to Christ’s resurrection, but also to the bodily resurrection of believers—as associated to his, in part by a future shared condition (‘*I will bestow it upon you, just as the Father bestows it to me*.’) (*MF*, 496). Thus the supper was instituted ‘as symbol and cause’ of future resurrection to an eternal life of glory, a life in which the pascha would be fulfilled (ibid.). But such language as 'seed' and 'cause' evidently implies that this bodily immortality has *already begun* in eucharistic union to Christ.

How can we fathom that resurrection is 'thus pledged, and thus acquired and procured through the eucharist'? (*MF*, 491). De la Taille first focuses attention upon the power of sanctifying grace. Whilst he refers the reader to his treatise *de Gratia* for a fuller treatment of this question, de la Taille here gives, *in nuce*, a valuable description of how sanctifying grace 'modifies' both soul and body. In doing so, he appears to be much more explicit than his 'master', Thomas, about the effect of *gratia sanctificans* upon the

---

35 E.g., Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 5. 36. 3); Athanasius (*Epist. Heortast.* 7, 8); Gregory of Nazianzus (*Or. 45 in Pasch*, c. 23); Nicolas Cabasilas (*Liturgiae Expositio*, 45).
body. Secondly, de la Taille relies upon a number of demonstrative images from the Fathers to secure this efficacious theological connection between the eucharist and resurrection.

As the first and proper effect of eucharistic union, sanctifying grace ‘modifies’ not only the powers of the soul (where the virtues reside), but also ‘the substantial esse itself’ of the soul, by which the body is informed. For de la Taille, this means that ‘our bodies are already now temples of the Holy Spirit, sanctified, as it were, by being brought into consortium with the sanctity of the Lord’s body’ (MF, 491-2). Through the soul’s intimate contact with the flesh of Christ, the body likewise, by its most ‘intrinsic element’, is now ‘anointed with divine grace’ (MF, 492). The esse of the soul is affected; the Spirit dwells in the soul and body, anointing it. We will return to a fuller description of these realities in Chapter Six. For now, we point to de la Taille’s citation of Romans 8.10-14—Paul’s assertion about the indwelling of the Spirit in our mortal bodies, which bestows upon us a share in the resurrection of Christ. These verses are not forthrightly eucharistic, but de la Taille suggests that we read them so: for it is through the eucharistic flesh that the Spirit comes to dwell in the soul and in the body (ibid.).

De la Taille takes a further step in considering the power of sanctifying grace in the soul and in the body. He urges the reader to think in terms of the interconnected perfection of the soul in this life and in the next. While existing on earth, conjoined to the body, the soul’s informative esse is perfected through grace; in heaven, this power is perfected through glory. De la Taille concludes that the soul’s informative esse, as perfected entirely in glory, ‘demands’—‘desires with its entire being’—union to the
glorified body. Denys the Pseudo-Areopagite’s *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* proclaims this shared destiny of perfection between the soul and body. Here de la Taille refers to a passage (c. 7.1-2) in which Denys is discussing the rites of the dead. In these lines, Denys asserts the unified perfection of body and soul in the life of grace and glory:

> These pure bodies, conjoined and persevering with the holy souls, since they are yoke-fellows and conjoined combatants *in their divine labors*, they also shall receive their due resurrection in the steadfast strength of the soul’s divine life [grace]. For being made *copulata* with the holy souls to which they were conjoined in this life, they will receive both deiform and incorruptible immortality, and also a blessed repose, since they were made members of Christ.... Now some among the profane think that this body, linked to its proper soul, is severed perpetually, as much as it is little fitting for these bodies to be constituted in a life of deiformity and blessed rest. They are by no means understanding (not yet sufficiently learned in divine knowledge) *that life most deiform in Christ has already begun for us*.

Since the body and soul ‘sweated’ (as one translator puts it) together in this earthly life of spiritual growth in divine likeness, and since the body along with the soul becomes a member of Christ in the eucharist, the body will fittingly share in the life of glory of the soul. De la Taille is clear that this seed of resurrection begins now in the sanctifying grace that is the prime effect of eucharistic union to Christ.

Turning to a number of Fathers—again with a preference to those from the East, de la Taille supports his theological claim that sanctifying grace, this *energia radicale* and seminal cause of the resurrection, is attributed to the eucharist. We will hear briefly

---

36 *Sed et anima separata, ut per gratiam in terris, sic in coelis per gloriam perfectionem, quoad esse informativum; et pro tanto se tota postulat unionem ad corpus gloria perundendum* (MF, 492).
37 *MF*, 492, n.1; *De Eccles. Hier.* 7.1-2, *P.G.* 3, 553 (italics are de la Taille’s). De la Taille is here quoting from the Latin, as opposed to the Greek. My translation is based upon his Latin citation.
38 This list of the sources cited by de la Taille indicates this preference: Ignatius (*Ad Eph.* 20.2); Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.*, 4, 15.5); Clement of Alexandria (*Pedag.* 2.2); Athanasius (*Ep. 4 ad Serap.*, n.19); Gregory of Nyssa (*Orat. Catech.* c.37); John Chrysostom (*In I Cor.*, hom. 24); Cyril of Alexandria (*In Ioannem* 6.55); Dionysius Bar Salibi (*Commentarii in Evangelica*, Introduction, c. 28).
from two passages brought forward by de la Taille, the first from Gregory of Nyssa, the second from Cyril of Alexandria—both of which underscore that the eucharistic flesh of Christ works the immortality of our own bodies. In Gregory’s *Catechetical Oration*, the chapter devoted to the eucharist communicates above all that the eucharist is the great antidote to the mortality of human poisoned flesh, poisoned as it is. If the soul, remaining united to Christ through faith, has the possibility of salvation, the body comes to participate in the life of the Savior “by another mode”. The body is made capable of immortality only in the eucharist, that is, through a union to the flesh of Christ, the “medicine of healing”:

‘For just as if you would mix something deadly with something healthy, what is combined is rendered harmless, so also Christ’s immortal body, when it is within him who eats, it changes the whole mortal body into its own nature.... Now, since only that body which is taken up into God can receive this grace, it is clear that otherwise it is impossible that our body be immortal, unless it is made to participate in incorruption through a communion with what is immortal’ (Orat. Catech. 37; MF, 492-3).

The ‘mixing’ of Christ’s immortal flesh with ours in the eucharist dispenses grace, the divinising power to incorruption within our bodies.

‘In preference to others’, de la Taille again cites Cyril (*In Joannem*. 6.55), who similarly reflects upon the causal connection between our partaking of Christ’s flesh and the reversal of our corporeal death sentence. Because the Word was united to his flesh in such a way that he imparted to it the “whole of divinity”, he thus banished death from our nature:

‘Now death, which through the lie invaded us, may subject the body to corruption; however, because Christ is in us through his very flesh, we shall be altogether resurrected. For it is incredible, indeed truly impossible, that he should not give eternal life to those in whom he dwells. For consider
how it is that we put many husks in the fire in order to maintain the spark of the flame; so also our Lord Jesus Christ through his flesh puts life within us, or, as it were, plants the spark of immortality, which spark abolishes every corruption that is within us' (MF, 493).

Without question, for Cyril and for de la Taille the eucharist initiates—sparks—bodily resurrection: a seminal power or grace is released within us by the presence of Christ’s life giving flesh. The Syrian Fathers, however, supply de la Taille with perhaps his favorite image in regard to the promise of resurrection in the eucharist: Christ’s flesh within us works as a kind of yeast, fermenting the whole mass of dough, drawing it up to himself. Through the sacred mystery of the eucharist, we are ‘fermented’ into resurrection, our bodies elevated by the life-giving yeast of Christ’s immortal flesh.

To summarise, we have seen in this section how, through scripture and tradition, de la Taille gives an account of eucharistic union and of the divinising grace that flows from this union. His (Cyrillian) emphasis is upon the flesh of Christ, which constitutes

---

39 Cf. de la Taille’s citation of Dionysius Bar Salibi (Commentarii. in Evangelica, Introduction, c. 28), 494.

40 I have been suggesting that the thought of Cyril of Alexandria seems to be a significant influence upon de la Taille’s understanding of the life-giving grace that comes to us through partaking in the eucharist. Whilst Cyril does not employ the theological language of sanctifying grace in his treatment of the incarnation and eucharist, his perception of the tight unity between the Logos and the flesh of Christ is a unity that both endures in the eucharist, and is the reason for its life-giving, divinising power. The scope of this study does not permit me 1) to look in greater detail at the various debates over Cyril’s Christology and its connection to his eucharistic theology, and 2) to then access where de la Taille’s own reading of Cyril might stand. For instance, one contested question is whether, for Cyril, Christ’s presence in the eucharist is somatic, pneumatic, or emphatically both (a question which is extended to ‘Is divine indwelling through the Holy Spirit or through Christ’s flesh in the eucharist?). I think the evidence supports those scholars who argue the third position—emphatically both—and I suspect that de la Taille also supports such an approach. Some good sources to consult on this topic (as well for a general understanding of Cyril’s eucharistic theology) are Lawrence J. Welch, Christology and Eucharist in the Early Thought of Cyril of Alexandria (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1994); Ezra Gebremedhin, Life-Giving Blessing: An Inquiry into the Eucharistic Doctrine of Cyril of Alexandria (Uppsala, 1977), cf. esp., pp. 77-85; and Daniel A. Keating, The Appropriation of Divine Life in Cyril of Alexandria (Oxford, 2004), pp. 64-104.

Still, we can assert at the very least the following points about Cyril’s influence upon de la Taille’s thought. First, with this Eastern patriarch, though certainly in different terms, de la Taille’s notion of the incarnation maintains a powerful sense of the Word’s—and indeed of the whole Trinity’s—actuation of the very esse of the human nature and body of Christ, so that the human nature lives by the divine nature (cf.
the key to understanding the intimacy of this union, the dynamism and permanency of the grace imparted by this union, and the caritas demanded by our incorporation. We noted as well that this love is enflamed, strengthened, and (potentially) universally disseminated by partaking in Christ’s flesh and blood. Incorporation, de la Taille also argued, is ‘ordered’ to resurrection, for it is ‘impossible’ that the intimacy of eucharistic union with Christ—with Life and Grace itself—should not acquire a participation in his divine glorification. We are now in a position to consider de la Taille’s more ‘scholastic’ treatment of sanctifying grace, a treatment that gives extensive and principal attention to the grace of Christ. This topic is not incidental: we have seen that a share in grace through eucharistic union ad Christum flows directly from the flesh that the Word assumed in the incarnation.

discussion of this below). Secondly, de la Taille robustly affirms that we must eat the flesh of Christ in order to have divine life within us; the Logos-sarx (to borrow Cyril’s language) vivifies. Thirdly, divine indwelling is a matter of our being spiritually ‘taken up’ into the divine body of Christ. This occurs most ostensibly in our participation in the Lord’s sacrificial banquet, after which we bear a ‘natural’ relationship to Christ—as branches on a single vine, and become united with Christ to the Father, in the Spirit. Consonant then with Cyril, de la Taille underscores both pneumatic and somatic aspects of our appropriation of divine life in the eucharist. Finally, we can suggest that de la Taille’s Christology and eucharistic theology places a greater emphasis upon the redeeming oblation of Christ, the sacrificial victim.
Chapter Five: the grace of the Redeemer

How does the preceding discussion of the grace of union to Christ in the eucharist fit into a broader theory of grace? How does de la Taille understand sin and the power of grace to save? We turn in this chapter to a more technical discussion of grace, sin, and soteriology, a discussion which leads to de la Taille’s careful analysis of the grace in Christ. For it is Christ’s grace that allows us to speak and conceive of the power and effect of grace in the life of Christians—including that grace of union which flows from the eucharist.

**Grace in general.** Following an explication of the sacramentum tantum and the res et sacramentum of the eucharist, de la Taille defines the res tantum as that invisible reality into which the eucharist leads the believer, namely, into a participation in the grace of Christ: ‘The grace that we derive from the eucharist, incorporated to Christ, is from authority a participation in the Lord’s own grace, imparted to us through the living power of the Lord’s flesh’ (MF, 513). At this point in Mysterium Fidei, de la Taille discourses specifically on the nature of grace, seeking not only a general definition of grace and a more particular delimitation of eucharistic grace, but also focusing extensively upon the grace of the Redeemer—for he aims to show that all grace flows ‘mediantly’ from Christ’s humanity. Whilst this mediant cause of grace is evident from his previous discussion of eucharistic union, here de la Taille provides a more classically, i.e., scholastically structured presentation, one that anticipates the style and content of his later journal articles. To reiterate, however, I contend that the context of eucharistic
union must not to be forgotten—either here, as de la Taille proceeds with his mini-
treatise de gratia, or in the interpretation of his subsequent essays on grace.

All grace, de la Taille begins, can be understood by its single purpose (ratio),
which is the ordering of all rational creatures to seeing God sicut est.¹ Since the divine
intellect is the end of every spiritual creature, grace is of one species and genus (‘though
it transcends every species and genus, so that it may reach as to a deiform order’) in every
rational creature (MF, 513). Put differently, grace has the same form in all those being
drawn to God: it prepares (coaptat) the created intellect for the beatific vision (MF, 513).
In a rather theologically-packed statement, de la Taille writes that grace ‘resides’ in the
souls of the just human ‘by nature (per modum naturae)’, building upon and radically
transforming that nature—‘directly affecting of itself not the operation or faculty, but the
substance of nature’(ibid.). We can note two interesting elements in this general
description of grace in creatures, both of which yield intimations of de la Taille’s position
on the question of the supernatural that would come to the fore in the decade after his
death. First, if grace elevates and adapts the intellect for seeing God fully, it does not do
so by an extrinsic mode or alien imposition, but, as it were, from within nature, and by
transforming that nature. Secondly, this ‘species’ of grace is more than a polishing-up of
a capacity to see God; it does not ‘speed-up’ a process that would have met perfection
without grace. Rather, this grace influences the very essence of human nature. De la
Taille sounds this note of intrinsicism more unmistakably in his discussion of the

¹ De la Taille acknowledges that all creatures—and not just rational creatures—have a ‘species’ of grace
proportioned according to their nature, by which they tend toward their end, an end which is itself
‘specified’ by the ordering mind of God (MF, 513).
sanctifying grace of the eucharist, which we address shortly. But for the moment, de la Taille identifies the single ratio of grace in order to explore the relationship between the grace of the just—whether of angels or humans—and the grace of Christ.

The grace of Christ

If the ‘species’ of grace is the same in Christ and in other rational creatures, de la Taille purposes to demonstrate the perfection and causal power of Christ’s grace. In short, he argues that in the order of grace Christ’s grace is highest absolutely (and not just relatively), and, consequently, that all other grace is a participated grace in that of Christ’s. The proposal that Christ’s grace is summa leads to a detailed analysis of created grace in Christ, grace that is highest on account of the hypostatic union. We shall follow the central points of de la Taille’s explication here on the relationship between the grace of union (the hypostatic union) and habitual (sanctifying) grace in Christ, both to discern the contours of his thinking on these questions at the publication of Mysterium Fidei, and to inquire how his construal may be informed by the eucharistic context of this work.

Christ’s grace is highest absolutely, that is to say, not simply greater than all others, but greater in so far as there cannot be a higher grace. This unsurpassable magnitude results naturally (‘naturaliter’) from the hypostatic union, as some ‘perfect disposition’ to that union—but consequent and not antecedent to it (MF, 513). The unpacking of this dense statement takes us into de la Taille’s first three appendices in Book III: Appendix E, which investigates how sanctifying grace is connatural to the
hypostatic union; Appendix F, which explicates the problem of 'perfect disposition' in regard to sanctifying grace in Christ; and Appendix G, which enumerates the ways that Christ's grace is highest and explicates the consequences of this truth within the order of grace. If, as de la Taille proposes, the grace of Christ is the prime analogum for the whole genus of created grace, and if Christ is indeed the fountain of grace, his discourse on grace in the Redeemer ought to prove foundational.

Sanctifying grace as connatural to the assumed humanity of Christ. De la Taille forestalls misunderstanding by immediately underscoring that sanctifying grace is not connatural to Christ's humanity when considered in and of itself; but only insofar as that nature is assumed in the incarnation (MF, 514). From the standpoint of the incarnation, however, one can say that sanctifying grace is in fact owed (is a debitum)—morally and physically—to the human nature of Christ; moreover, he argues, created grace 'naturally' accompanies the uncreated grace of the incarnation. In de la Taille's demonstration of the connaturality of grace in Christ, statements about the intimacy of the divine-human union and about the agency of the Trinity and divine indwelling prove revealing about his larger theological vision of grace.

De la Taille spells out the 'moral debt' of grace to Christ in the following way. The 'natural' Son of God, having assumed human nature and existing as a human being, none the less clings to the glory of the Father. That paternal glory is thus owed to the human nature in which the Son now exists. In other words, the possession of divine glory

---

2 If grace is only debitum to the human nature because of the incarnation, because the Word joins himself to that nature, we can be sure that de la Taille would reject the suggestion that grace is in any way 'owed' to humanity. Grace remains grace—gratuitous—to human nature.
‘rightfully belongs to Christ in his human nature’ (MF, 514). However, because human nature can possess divine glory only ‘by means of participation (secundum participationem)’, which is to say through the grace that ‘fits’ the natural capacity of the soul for such glory, we can thereby assert that habitual grace was necessarily owed to Christ’s human nature. Still, any suggestion about a moral necessity presupposes the grace of union, for which, de la Taille urges, there could be no preceding merit or disposition.

With much greater detail, and with a depth of reflection and articulation that looks forward to his later work on grace, de la Taille treats the ‘physical’ necessity of grace in Christ as consequent to the created grace of union. Three important assertions surface in this focused question upon the grace of union and its relationship to habitual grace in Christ: 1] the grace of union is a personal actuation of the human nature by the Esse of the Word; 2] operation follows being, and therefore habitual grace was necessary to Christ’s agency; and 3] the intimacy of this union was such that Christ lived through the divine life. Each of these assertions lends a further ‘thickness of description’ to de la Taille’s understanding of sanctifying grace in Christ.

I find it helpful to locate de la Taille’s discourse on the grace of union squarely in Thomas’s own exploration in Question 2 of the Tertia Pars of the Summa. These

---

3 De la Taille’s Latin composition is clever here, playing upon haerere/haereditas: ‘Debitum quidem morale: nam Filius Dei naturalis in humana natura, est Dei in humana natura naturalis haeres. Haeredi autem paternae gloriae debetur gloria paterna in ea natura, in qua est haeres. Debetur igitur Christo in humana natura haereditas gloriae divinae’ (514).

4 His point on this moral debitum concludes with a citation from Thomas (3 D., q.1, a.1, 5m): ‘From this itself, that he was God, glory was due to him; still it is right that something be formally perfecting the soul itself to the act of glory. And this was grace’ (MF, 514, my translation).
preliminary remarks clarify what our author assumes of his reader. In Article 10, Thomas asks whether or not the incarnation, the union of the two natures in Christ, ‘took place by grace’. For Thomas, the answer must be yes, since human nature cannot be united, ‘lifted up to God,’ without grace. Yet Thomas distinguishes between two notions of grace, and between two ways of being lifted up to a participation in the divine life. Grace, he reminds us can mean *either* the ‘will of God freely granting something’—and certainly the incarnation can be among the many things said to occur by God’s good will, *or*, grace can mean the ‘gratuitous gift itself of God’, by which the union of the human nature to the divine is also said to be a grace, as it occurred without any preceding merit (*ST* 3, 2, 10, c). However, Thomas prefers to identify the ‘grace of union’ in stricter manner, which demands a further distinction between two ways that humans are granted a share (by the gracious will of God) in what lies beyond their natural capabilities. The first way is *by operation*, in which habitual grace adapts the soul ‘to know and love God,’ and this, in fact, is how the saints are united to God. The second way is *by personal being*, and this way belongs exclusively to Christ, whose human nature is taken up into ‘the Person of the Son of God’ by this *grace of union* (*ibid.*).

De la Taille, I would submit, carries forward the Thomistic nomination of ‘grace of union’. He underscores that in this created grace of union the Word ‘immediately touches’ the very substance of the assumed humanity, *actuating* the human nature through ‘its obediential potency’ and according to the personal *Esse* of the Word, which is pure act of being (*MF*, 514). Whilst de la Taille does not here write the precise phrase he would become known for—‘created actuation by uncreated Act’—clearly the seeds of
his later thought have begun to sprout. De la Taille clarifies that this grace of union does not indicate that the human nature thereby exists as uncreated, but rather, remaining created ‘it none the less exists, not as we do, by a natural mode, but in a divine mode, and supernaturally’ (MF, 514). The actuation of the hypostatic union is ‘created’ and ‘supernatural’: it is ‘the communication of the divine Esse to the human nature, or conversely, the union of the human nature to the Esse of the Word’ (MF, 515).

But de la Taille’s intention in this work is not to give a fully-delineated account of the hypostatic union, but rather to demonstrate that sanctifying grace in Christ is indeed both connatural and a physical necessity because of the grace of union. To this end, he introduces a metaphysical principle regarding the proportional relationship between being and operation. He asserts that the actuation of being in regard to esse ‘connaturally determines the actuation of an agent in regard to operation (operari)’. If the human nature of Christ has been personally actuated by the divine Esse of the Son, then concomitantly the intellective operation of the assumed soul—though, again, remaining created—would be ‘acted through the pure act of intelligibility (per actum purum intelligibilitatis)’, i.e., by the divine essence itself (MF, 515). The ‘middle term’, so to speak, of de la Taille’s argument is that such intellective activity transcends the natural capacity of the human mind, thereby leading to the conclusion that habitual grace must elevate Christ’s mental agency to operate in proportion to its existence by divine Esse.

5 Interestingly enough, in considering the mystery of this supernatural actuation, de la Taille’s mind turns analogically to the eucharistic accidents. He proposes that he knows of only two occurrences in which something becomes divine, existing supernaturally, i.e., according to an esse not commensurate to its nature, but superior to it: the first, as we have seen, is the incarnation, in which the human nature exists according to the uncreated Esse of the Word; and the second is the accidents of the converted eucharistic species, which exist not so much through the esse of another subject, but possess esse as if they were a substance (MF, 515, n.1).
In other words, the grace of union ‘connaturally carries with it’ habitual grace; the hypostatic union ‘physically’ calls for sanctifying grace.

De la Taille makes a final and far from insignificant observation about the *debitum* of habitual grace from the incarnation. The origin of this created grace is, ‘like the cause of the (hypostatic) union’, the ‘work of the entire Trinity, and also both are rightly attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit’ (*MF*, 515). De la Taille will later qualify that the hypostatic union, though caused by the Trinity, is a *relation* to the Word alone (a distinction Thomas makes in *ST III*, 2, 7, c); but presently his point is to signify the intimacy of the divine-human union and to signal the agency of the entire Godhead and divine indwelling.

The grace of union and sanctifying grace insist that Christ lived a human and natural life, but that he lived it through the divinity, and consequently ‘supernaturally and divinely’ (*MF*, 515-6). For the grace of union does not suggest a ‘remote’ divinity, affixed in some way to the humanity so that the divine lives through another, and specifically through a ‘created esse.’ Rather, the divinity ‘was and is so intimate to the humanity’ that ‘the man lives by that divinity, just as he exists through the divine esse’ (*MF*, 516). Does this not sound familiar? The echoes here of his earlier excursus on the intimacy and efficacy of eucharistic union are surely intentional. De la Taille caps his point about the grace of union by rehearsing the words of 16th-century Jesuit Francesco Toletus:

---

6 In contrast to his later essays, de la Taille here makes this point about divine indwelling and the natural/supernatural life of Christ with significant accent and elegance. I suggest that this is the case because of the eucharistic context. After all, he has just finished discoursing upon the eucharistic passages in John 6, particularly those referring to the Father’s intimate indwelling in Christ.
‘Christ was God and man: insofar as he was God, he lived because of the Father, since he had with him essence and life from the Father. So also as man, he lived because of the Father, because he received life as a man. For since that man was God and the Son of God, he lived a natural life of grace and glory because of the union to the divinity. For this divinity communicated all things to the humanity’ (In Johan. 6.57).

The italics in this quote belong to de la Taille; he is clearly keen to show Christ’s possession both of created grace and of divine glory—gifts which Christ now imparts to those who partake of his flesh. The divine-human intimacy in the grace of union is the analogue to the intimacy of eucharistic union ad Christum, the singular cause in believers of sanctifying grace.

Apart from the moral and physical exigency of sanctifying grace in Christ, de la Taille desires to show that uncreated Grace naturally draws along (trahit) created grace. Here we see a glimpse of de la Taille’s theological interest to bring divine indwelling to the forefront of his discourse on grace, i.e., his inclination to begin with the reality of divine indwelling, with the gift of God himself—rather than with the created gifts. It is true, de la Taille writes, that the Holy Spirit cannot dwell within us ‘without created grace arising in us’, just as a ‘participation in brightness derives from the presence of the sun.’ Therefore, this is true to an even greater extent when the uncreated Gift is not just accidently, but substantially united to human nature: created grace ‘will radiate from the uncreated brilliance of the sun’ (MF, 516). De la Taille draws upon Thomas not simply

---

7 P. de Letter has suggested that, even before Rahner, de la Taille had introduced a shift within the theological approach to grace: a shift away from the Thomistic and scholastic approach which began with the created graces and moved to reflection upon God’s self-gift, to a theology beginning from the divine indwelling and then looking at created grace. (Cf. De Letter, ‘Created Actuation by Uncreated Act: Difficulties and Answers’, op. cit., pp. 61 and 84). I would add the following two observations. First, it is very likely that de la Taille’s keen inclinations toward divine indwelling derive from his reading of Scheeben and the Eastern Fathers. Secondly, and perhaps unexpectedly, the Thomistic passages here employed by de la Taille hardly suggest that Thomas considered the created gifts before divine indwelling!
for the image, but as a support for understanding habitual grace as an ‘effect of the incarnation’:

‘For grace is caused in man by the presence of the divinity, just as light in the air is caused by the presence of the sun. However, the presence of God in Christ is understood according to the union of the human nature to the divine person. Wherefore the habitual grace of Christ is seen as a consequence of that union, as splendor accompanies the sun’ (ST III, 7, 13, c).\(^8\)

That habitual grace so accompanied the hypostatic union was not an undisputed theological question.\(^9\) In fact, de la Taille introduces and responds to a possible objection in positing this created grace in Christ. The objection proposes that the grace of union takes the place and rôle of sanctifying grace in Christ, since the grace of union is itself ‘ordered to the beatific vision (visionem intuitivam)’ (MF, 516). In other words, if habitual grace—as distinct from the virtues—‘perfects’ the ‘substance itself’ of the soul, bestowing upon it a habitual being (and not just a power) that is supernatural, then such a grace is unnecessary when one concedes that the grace of union ‘abundantly perfects’ the substantial esse of the soul, now actuated by the personal Esse of the Word. Habitual grace in Christ thereby appears superfluous.

De la Taille’s response is informative, again underscoring a Trinitarian agency and the end of habitual grace. He begins by identifying two aspects in every created substance: ‘a passive potency in regard to existence’ and a ‘radically active principle in regard to operation’. The grace of union actuates the soul of Christ in relation to its

\(^8\) MF, 516. De la Taille likewise argues that the Fathers give an account of sanctifying grace as flowing from the incarnation; he refers the reader to Petavius’s work, De Incarnatione Verbi (l. 11, c.7. n. 5-7), for the patristic witness.

\(^9\) De la Taille mentions that Suarez and the 17th-century French theologian Louis Thomassin had argued to the contrary (MF, 516).
passive potency (obediential potency) towards existence, and in fact perfects that passive potency—for nothing can more completely put that soul formally into existence (MF, 516). De la Taille again specifies that the entire Trinity causes this grace of union, even though the union terminates in a relation to the Word alone. On the other hand, the perfection of the radically active principle of the soul is ‘not only caused by the whole Trinity, but it looks to and is joined to the enjoyment and knowledge of the whole Trinity’ (MF, 516). The root principle of the soul’s operation is destined, de la Taille suggests, for union to and enjoyment of the Trinity. He thus concludes that it is ‘fitting’ for that operating principle of the soul to be perfected by, divinised by, another grace, namely habitual grace—‘a grace attributed to the whole Trinity and specifically to the indwelling of the Spirit’ (ibid.). Put otherwise, the grace of union terminates in a personal relation of the Word to the soul’s very potential for existence, whereas sanctifying grace in Christ is necessary to elevate and fit the soul for beatific vision and union with the entire Trinity.

Having demonstrated that habitual grace is connatural to the grace of union, both morally and physically necessary in Christ and an apt theological consequence of the incarnation (and of Trinitarian causality), de la Taille takes up the thorny theological question of disposition and grace. Again, brief attention to this next Appendix will be salutary in understanding his later articulation on ‘created actuation’.

**Sanctifying grace as perfect, consequent disposition to the hypostatic union.**

This Appendix (F) probes more deeply into the question of the relationship between the grace of union and sanctifying grace in Christ. De la Taille appears to be exploring, in
terms of grace and the human soul, that paradoxical Thomistic position of mutual priority and causality, eager to exclude any temptation to think of sanctifying grace in Christ as an antecedent disposition to the hypostatic union. One can pose the question in this way: what comes first, a disposition to the reception of grace, or grace itself? As Thomas suggests in his ‘Treatise on Grace’ in the Prima Secundae, we may indeed speak of a disposition in the soul towards grace, but that disposition itself is the effect of grace (cf. ST IaIIae, 112, a. 2, c and ad 1; 113, a.7).

De la Taille delineates this position in terms of a distinction between disposition considered actively and passively. Active disposition is that which prepares the material for the reception of the form—in which view the disposition is understood as praevia, that is, as coming before the form. Moreover, this active, prevenient disposition can be either necessary, or congruent—the first of which is ruled out in regard to the incarnation, while the second (congruent disposition) may be allowed in a limited sense. For instance, human nature that possessed grace would indeed be fitting to the incarnation ("as beauty is a kind of disposition to marriage"). Nevertheless, as there is no existence of Christ’s human nature apart from, or prior to the incarnation, this actively-construed, congruent disposition is likewise eliminated.

Disposition taken in a passive sense implies a much different relation to the form: it does not ‘previously adapt the material to the form’, but, once the form is presupposed

---

10 Recall what was said above (p. 170), and what de la Taille seems to presume as true from Thomas’s ‘Treatise on Grace’ in ST IaIIae, 109-114, namely, that there is no merit before grace. The disposition to grace is itself grace.
11 De la Taille is here following Thomas’s De Veritatis, 29, 2. Only when something is perfected gradually can any place be given to antecedent disposition—whether necessary or congruent (MF, 517).
and the matter is in relation to it, this consequent disposition adapts the material more fully to the form. However, de la Taille qualifies that this ‘perfective’ disposition has itself already been perfected by the form. Thomas supplies the example (ST IaIIae, 113, 8; Veri. 28, 8, c. and ad 5): love and contrition are perfective dispositions to grace, but they can only flow if ‘first infused by habitual grace’ (MF, 517). More, in the order of nature, what is thought to be perfected by the form, i.e., ‘perfected to the form (ad formam)’, must follow that form:

Consequently, neither is it necessary to attract the form or to prepare to be congruent with its arrival. Rather, the disposition is itself fashioned, originated, and necessitated through the form (MF, 517).

De la Taille is re-stating here what amounts in Thomas to a kind of mutual priority and causality. In terms of the incarnation then, sanctifying grace in Christ is considered passive, consequent and perfective disposition. Put conclusively and suggestively, in this case disposition is grace. Not only does disposition naturally follow the perfection of the grace of union, but consequently, ‘it cannot exist without existing in due proportion to the union itself’—so that, we might say, disposition is the adaptation by grace (MF, 517).12

Again borrowing an image from Thomas, de la Taille suggests that we think of the relationship between sanctifying grace and the grace of union as that of heat to fire; if heat is a disposition to fire, it none the less is an effect of the form of the fire (ST III, 7, 13, ad 2).

De la Taille acknowledges the different articulations of this relationship in theologians like Cajetan and de Lugo, who both suggest that habitual grace in Christ is

12 ‘Hujsmodi autem dispositio est gratia: nam et consequitur, ut dictum est, ad gratiam unionis connaturaliter; nec proinde potest quin existat in debita proportione ad ipsam’.
not a disposition, but rather a ‘natural property’ related to the personal union as to an end. For, sanctifying grace “emanates” from the grace of union, and is thus ordered to that union as to an end, just as creatures made by God are ordered to that end because God exists and made them (MF, 518). Whilst de la Taille has no particular quarrel with this approach to habitual grace in Christ, he prefers to call this ordination and relationship to an end ‘after the style of St Thomas’, namely, as ‘consequent and perfect disposition’. This stylistic ‘preference’, if you will, is not without consequence.

Recall that de la Taille is here building a case for understanding grace in Christ as the source and prime analogum for grace tout court; his predilection exalts ‘perfective disposition’ as a more salutary category for considering the question of nature and grace than that of a ‘natural property’ ordained to a finis. To this reader, and in view of de la Taille’s preceding discussion of eucharistic union, ‘perfective disposition’ opens two heuristic facets about sanctifying grace in the eucharist. First, consequent and perfective disposition rightly implies that reception of the eucharist depends not upon a preparatory grace, but upon Christ taking up the believer’s flesh to himself when the eucharist is received (as the Fathers cited earlier attest). For in fact the eucharist forms and perfects participation in the grace of Christ. Second, the dynamic of eucharistic desire, to be shortly discussed in full, seems better served by this articulation of ‘grace as congruent disposition’. The ardor, the heat of love and desire for the eucharist is certainly disposition to the eucharist itself, and de la Taille insists upon this devotio in the offering of sacrifice.\textsuperscript{13} However, as the heat-fire metaphor signifies, this disposition of desire is

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. Chapters 2 and 3 of this study.
also, and perhaps primarily, a consequence of the eucharistic union. Union to the body of Christ generatively fashions and perfects this love.

**Grace in Christ is the highest absolutely.** Having demonstrated that habitual grace in Christ is both *debitum* and connatural from the incarnation, and having shown that it can be only consequent and duly proportionate to the grace of union, de la Taille lastly considers the ways in which Christ's grace is thought to be highest absolutely. There is no controversy about this point: de la Taille asserts that the Fathers, Thomas, and 'even' Scotus and his followers all agree upon this theological teaching (*MF*, 518). Nor, apart from clarifying the 'apparent' contradiction of Christ's grace being both finite and highest, does de la Taille seem engaged in the instruction of any complex metaphysical concepts. Instead, I suspect the significance of this Appendix (G) lies in the opportunity it provides de la Taille to further meditate upon the height, depth and breadth of grace in Christ. We cannot fail to note here the *pleasure*—if one is allowed to say so—that de la Taille takes in theologically expounding the immensity of grace in Christ. I will mention only those elements not raised in the preceding appendices, and then underscore his illuminating treatment of the 'contradiction' in denoting Christ's grace as highest absolutely.

De la Taille begins with a citation from Petavius's *De incarnatione Verbi* (l. 11, c. 6, n. 6; c. 12, n. 6-7), an attractive passage set forth as representative of the Fathers and scholastics:

>'Since it is said by the ancient Fathers that Christ not only received grace and sanctity as a gratuitous gift, but that he also bestowed it upon himself, grace was to him the same as nature, established in being by him—not communicated extrinsically, but according to being (*οἰκοθέν*), and present...
and flowing into himself from himself. This reality shows the immensity
of the grace, circumscribed by no end or terminus'.

Such is de la Taille’s opening reflection on the absolute quality of Christ’s grace: he who
is alpha and omega receives and confers grace upon himself, and does so in accord with
the eternal and infinite Esse of the Word. Sanctifying grace in Christ is by no means
extrinsic. De la Taille proceeds to probe the truth of this paradoxical teaching in five
ways—the first three of which are obvious from the preceding discussion, namely, 1]
whatever is held ‘naturally’ is held in the highest possible way’ (habitual grace naturally
follows from the personal union); 2] a cause measures its effect (the grace of union is the
highest possible union for a creature, thus its effect, habitual grace, will be the highest)
and 3] perfect disposition is ‘fitted’ to the resident form or end, which, being the Esse of
God himself is thus summa. But new and significant in this section is de la Taille’s
reflection on divine filiation and the beatific vision, to which we now turn.

A proof of the unsurpassibility of Christ’s grace is gleaned from considering the
question of filial adoption. Giving a traditional Western position, de la Taille denotes
that for creatures being drawn to God, grace is purposed for divine adoption. Because of
the hypostatic union, however, the soul of Christ enjoys a ‘permanent union (unio
schetica)’ to the Holy Spirit and the entire Trinity, thereby making grace a ‘proper
consequence and gift’ of Christ’s ‘natural Filiation’ (MF, 519).15 Clearly, this grace of

14 ‘Quoniam Christus non solum gratiam et sanctitatem tanquam donum gratuitatem accepisse, sed etiam sibi
ipse contulisse ab antiquis Patribus dicitur: eo fit ut naturalis eadem, illi esse statuat, nec extrinsecus
communicata, sed o˙ko˙t, et de suo sibi praesens et affluens. Quae res immensam et nullo fine ac termino
circumscriptam eam esse demonstrat (MF, 518).’
15 ‘In anima autem Christi, ubi ex unione hypostatica ad Verbum resultat unio schetica ad Spiritum
Sanctum et totam Trinitatem, gratia est sequela et dos proprdie Filiationis naturalis’.
Christ’s natural and substantial Filiation cannot be surpassed; in fact, the gifts which accompany the Christian’s adoptive filiation—a sharing in grace and divine glory—only ‘deficiently imitate’ that which is proper to natural Filiation.

De la Taille refers here to his Greek Father of choice, to Cyril of Alexandria’s *Commentary on The Gospel of John* (11, c.12). Commenting upon verse 22 from chapter 17, ‘And the glory which you gave to me I have given to them, so that they may be one as we are one’, Cyril teaches the following: in the incarnation, the natural, Unbegotten Son of the Father becomes man, and in this taking on of human flesh by the Word, Christ is the true and natural *Filius*. Christ receives and is the glory of the Son, a glory and sonship in which the baptised share through his own self-Gift. Specifically, Cyril writes, the only way to our adoption and union with the Father is through Christ: ‘For the Son is in us, corporally as man, commixed and united with us in the mystical *eulogia*; he is in us spiritually as God, by the power (ʾēvēργēία) and grace of his Spirit, the spirit which in us begins a newness of life, and makes us to be sharers in the divine nature’ (*P.G.*, 74, 563-4). Note again that de la Taille is thinking in a eucharistic context, as he builds a case for the immensity of grace on Christ. In short, the union of the assumed humanity of Christ with the entire Trinity results in a grace of Filiation that cannot but be highest, a grace and union in which adoptive filiation *participates*.

In a similar way, de la Taille demonstrates the *summa* of Christ’s grace through a consideration of the *visio Dei*. Grace, he begins, is ‘proportioned to vision’. Since Christ’s soul was conjoined to the *Esse* of the Word of God, and since there is no ‘greater conjunction of the intelligible to the one thinking’ than what is ‘seen’ according to *esse*, 
there can be no greater vision than that which Christ enjoyed. The conclusion is obvious: grace proportioned to the highest vision will be highest grace. De la Taille expands this rather simple ‘proof’ with a passage from the 16th-century Dominican Melchior Cano, a text that again directs us to the sub-discourse in these appendices, namely, the exploration of union to Christ through the eucharist, in which there obtains a participation in the One who is Grace himself. Cano focuses on the relationship between the grace of union and the light of glory through which the blessed see God:

‘The union of the soul of Christ with the Word is greater than the union of blessed with Word. In fact, from this union of Christ’s soul with the Word exists the light (claritas) in the mind of the blessed, the light which allows them to see God. Hence much greater is that union by which such light arises’ (De locis theologicis, 12, c.13, fol. 440).16

Through Cano’s words, de la Taille reiterates the central principle in these appendices: it is from the hypostatic union that Christ’s grace is highest, and it is from that fullness that believer’s may participate in the divine light and life.

Having presented ‘five ways’ that show Christ’s grace to be highest, de la Taille introduces and responds to the following objection. The concept of absolute highest grace suggests a contradiction: For first, if God’s nature, life, beatitude, and proper operation are infinite, a sharing in that divine nature by grace ought to be open to infinite growth and increase for any created nature. Therefore, one can always conceive of a greater grace, in the same way that ‘any creature can be created by God to be a better creature’.17 More, is it not a contradiction to think of Christ’s grace as finite and yet absolutely highest? De la Taille’s extensive response to this ‘contrived’ objection

16 MF, 519-520.
17 cf. ST I, 25, 6, c.
gives occasion to highlight some of the important aspects of his theology of grace, namely: the supernatural; ‘mixed’ and ‘pure’ perfection; and, union and divinisation as the end, the terminus of grace. I suggest that the following discussion yields the clearest perspective of de la Taille’s thought on the debate that emerged over the supernatural in the 1940’s, and which still attracts attention today.

To begin, de la Taille reinforces that the consortium of the divine nature is ‘intrinsically supernatural’ to every created (and creatable) nature. As such, it is not owed to creatures, and is formally closed to the ‘freedom or observation’ of the subject. De la Taille names this grace a ‘mixed’ perfection, the kind of perfection that has its ‘summum’ in God (‘infra Deum’) (MF, 520). By contrast, a pure perfection (like the perfection of being, or the perfection of the intellect) is not closed by definition to the notion of a natural potential for something higher, nor to the noting of an obediential potency in the subject. Every creature can be made better by God, and every natural intellect may be improved (ibid.). Succinctly, de la Taille aligns grace, and the union with divinity that it grants, with the supernatural. He denies that it is subject to ‘natural’ and observable laws of growth and increase. Likewise, he establishes that pure perfections, like the human intellect, may progress endlessly.

This distinction in place, de la Taille argues that no one ‘should fret’ that the created intellect may grow infinitely, whilst grace—including the grace of Christ—cannot do so. Nor is there any ‘scandal’ in acknowledging that ‘among perfect things, grace is counted mixed’, even though it is discerned among many things ‘naturally pure’ (ibid.).
De la Taille averts the ‘scandal’ by depicting both perfections as dependent upon the supernatural:

Now [the pure natural perfection] is so from the nobility of grace, by which such goodness is brought in, so that every natural perfection whatsoever is always supernatural and gratuitous, marking therefore the unworthiness of the subject (MF, 520).

Are these words a robust statement against the notion of ‘pure nature’? Apparently, de la Taille allows for a notion of natura pura in outlining the difference between pure and mixed perfections. Still, even these pure perfections depend upon grace—and here I suspect he means grace in Thomas’s first sense: ‘the will of God freely granting something’.

De la Taille confirms this direction of thought by stating that the perfection of anything pertains finally to grace, although the ‘imperfection’ of every thing is attributed to nature, for nature can always be transcended by grace (MF, 520). In simpler terms, he concludes thusly: ‘In the end, the smallest grace of beatific vision carries with it an infinitely greater light of intelligibility than the keenness of natural intelligence in any degree’ (ibid.). If the created intellect (pure perfection) possesses an infinite capacity by the grace or will of the creator, when the divine unites itself to this intellect in the beatific vision, that light and union surpasses every ‘natural’ potential of the mind.

Furthermore, de la Taille also meets the false implication that divine impotency must be responsible for the fact that habitual grace in Christ cannot be made better. He shows to the contrary that this ‘limitation’ in Christ’s created grace is a consequence of the ‘intrinsic end’ of the form itself—‘which cannot become superior to itself’ (MF, 520).

For the end of grace is union with God, and the greatest possible union with God for a

---

18 Cf. discussion supra, pp. 170-171.
created nature is the hypostatic union. Therefore the grace of Christ reached the highest measure possible for grace. Though finite in the order of being, Christ’s grace is infinite considered in terms of the *ratio* or form of grace (*MF*, 521; cf. *ST* III, 7, 11). Put otherwise, Christ’s grace is in fact the *plentitude* of grace, and as such cannot be made greater—even as God’s power is not to be faulted ‘because the number four cannot be made greater than it is’ (cf. *ST* I, 25, 6, c.).

Having responded adequately to the question of Christ’s grace as created, incapable of increase, and yet *highest*, de la Taille summarises his metaphysical analysis about this grace in the following way. Unlike human beings, Christ can be said ‘to possess’ grace connaturally, but also ‘to be the subject’ of that connatural grace: ‘...[T]he plentitude of that grace is both the proper corollary of the hypostatic union, and, apart from the hypostatic union cannot exist’ (*MF*, 521). More, because God makes a gift of himself in the Son’s assuming of human nature (the grace of union), the grace of Christ is the ‘chief *analogum*’ in the whole order of grace. Indeed, every grace in ‘any created person will be born to look to the grace of Christ, as a deficient participation in perfect plentitude’ (ibid). There is no grace, *simpliciter*, which is not referred to the divine person, ‘whether as his own natural property’ or as a participation in what is his.

Conceiving Christ’s grace as prime *analogum* allows de la Taille to hold two neat theological positions. On the one hand, even though grace, ‘by the pleasure of God’, may be increased always in creatures, still that grace, ‘however intense’, remains ‘incomparably inferior’ to Christ’s. Here again, a Thomistic image proves salutary: as fire is to the sun, so is the grace of any creature to the grace of Christ (cf. *ST* III, 7,11, ad
3). Our grace participates in, but none the less never attains to, the plentitude that is the very source of grace. On the other hand, and somewhat paradoxically, de la Taille denies that Christ’s grace is thereby a \textit{limit} to our grace. For although our grace has its beginning and end under God, and is also ‘permitted some sort of endless progress under him’, Christ’s grace would be limit or boundary \textit{only} if it were commensurate to our grace and ‘greatest’ in a relative, not absolute, way (\textit{MF}, 521). Retrieving the words of Fulgentius, de la Taille concludes that the greatness of Christ’s grace, a consequence of the hypostatic union, is best conceived as ‘“the plenitude of perfection and the perfection of plenitude”’.\textsuperscript{19}

To sum up the theological work done in these appendices on Christ’s grace, we note in the first place that the hypostatic union is \textit{the} determinative theological factor in considering created grace in Christ. The intimate union of the human flesh and the Word, the personal actuation of the very \textit{esse} of Christ by the \textit{Esse} of the Word, ‘demands’ a concomitant divine presence and assistance in the soul of Christ: thus a habitual sanctifying grace caused by the entire Trinity—if also rightly attributed to the indwelling of the Spirit. The very intimacy of the union, which determines that Christ lives a divine life, likewise necessitates that this grace be the highest. As \textit{summmum}, Christ’s grace inevitably stands as principal \textit{analogum} and source of all created grace—grace that participates in his fullness. We likewise recognised de la Taille’s preference to denominate habitual grace as ‘perfect, consequent disposition’, a preference which, I suggested, adds clarity to his thought on habitual grace in humans, i.e., (eucharistic) grace

\textsuperscript{19} Fulgentius, \textit{Ep.} 14, n. 28 (\textit{MF}, 521-522).
as a consequent disposition to the gift of divine indwelling. To this point, we have confirmed that eucharistic communion with Christ amounts to a sharing in his divine life and the to a participation in the fullness of his grace. In the final section of this chapter, we have yet to analyze the nature and effect of the divinising grace in the eucharist, while at the same time observing de la Taille’s thought on sin and soteriology.

The sanctifying grace of the eucharist: sin and redemption

Three interrelated topics structure this section: 1] de la Taille’s thought on the nature of sanctifying grace in the eucharist, which is the grace of the Redeemer; 2] the nature of the sin from which we are redeemed in the eucharist; and 3] the dynamic of desire in receiving from the font of grace. For the most part, de la Taille leans upon Thomas for his understanding of sanctifying grace as elevating and healing (elevans et sanans); however, it is likewise clear that he extends the thought of his ‘master’ by accenting various aspects of the scholastic presentation. For instance, de la Taille heavily stresses that this grace comes to us not only through the incarnation and the cross, but particularly through union to the flesh of Christ, the victim offered and returned to us by God for salvation. More, he gives fuller treatment to Thomas’s suggestion about the fundamental dynamic of desire and intentio in the flow of grace from the eucharist.

Sanctifying grace—the elevating and healing grace of the Redeemer. A comparison between the grace bestowed upon believers in the eucharist and the grace offered to the innocent Adam and to the angels commences de la Taille’s explication. As we discovered earlier, the very ratio of grace, its raison d’être, is to raise creatures to
union (*consortium*) with the divine. This grace, available (and necessary) to the unfallen Adam and to the angels, is the same grace granted in the eucharist, but with a ‘more particularised’ power, *specialior* because directed to a nature weakened through sin. De la Taille is keen to state that this sanctifying grace is not ‘of another species’, but rather is grace in an ‘allotropic’ state, discharging *two gifts*—one elevating and one healing. The ‘special’ difference of this grace can be enumerated in a three-fold way. The difference principally derives from the ‘diverse condition of the subject’—the integral human being (or angel) and humanity wounded by sin.\(^{20}\) Secondly, the difference may be noted both in terms of power and in terms benefits: ‘Not only did a more powerful grace arrive in the grace of the Redeemer, but also a grace with greater benefits, insofar as these are conferred to us not simply unmerited but while we are sinners’.\(^{21}\)

Thirdly, this ‘difference’ of eucharistic grace is considered from the perspective of the *end* of sanctifying grace. And it is here that de la Taille places the accent. Even though all grace is directed to uniting creatures to God, a different kind or *quality of desire* can mark the rational creature’s movement toward this end. For the unfallen Adam and for angels, the end of union with the divine is looked to ‘only as desirable’—simply, as it were, and without agony. However, for post-lapsarian man, that end of union is desired, surely, but also is perceived as fraught with difficulty (*arduus*). In the post-modern milieu, this desire for divine union would likely be termed not just arduous,

\(^{20}\) *MF*, 522; cf. also n. 1 on the same page.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., n. 2. In this note, de la Taille again points us to a more extensive treatment of the elevating and healing powers in his *De gratia*. 
but ‘impossible’. Thus, whilst de la Taille attends to eucharistic grace as elevating and healing, he focuses even more directly on its power to ‘operate’ upon the desire of the wounded human will. The eucharist ‘brings in a by far more powerful grace, advancing man beyond every level of human strength and constancy, to fix the desire of his love in God’ (MF, 522, italics mine).  

This suggestion about the virtue of sanctifying grace to ‘fix’ human desire aptly segues into a topic not addressed in se, but one which can be instructively gleaned from de la Taille’s remarks throughout Mysterium Fidei: namely, the concept of sin which colours his entire theology of eucharistic sacrifice. Without question, de la Taille conceives sin as residing in the fragmented will, as a weakness within the intentio that impedes a pure desire for God. Recall that in our first chapter on sacrifice, we noted that sacrifice is offered not to the omnipotence of God, by which he creates and holds all things in existence, but rather it is offered to God’s goodness and lovableness, through which he calls all creatures to a share in his own divine life. Sin, and its consequences, is marked by the incapacity to direct desire, seated in the will, towards that offer of union with God. Desire is distracted, misdirected by the concupiscence of both the flesh and the spirit. In such a state, reparation for sin—even venial sin—cannot be given to God apart from the grace of Christ, apart from his own offer of perfect love on the cross. Why is this so? De la Taille explains that our sin, our failure in love, is an eternal debt in the

---

22 Cf. for example the Catherine Pickstock’s After Writing: The Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).
23 ‘...quod longe potentior importatur gratia, et caritatis in Deum defixae intentio, ultra omnem humanae firmitatis atque constantiae gradum, pro vecta’.
24 Cf. supra, p. 38.
sense that a simple and eternal God cannot be ‘partly loved’ or ‘partly rejected’. What was necessary for the redemption of humankind was the complete love and perfectly ordered desire manifest in the eternal sacrifice of Christ.\(^{25}\) Participation in the oblation of Christ’s sacrifice, by way of which one likewise participates in the sanctifying grace of Christ, re-forms and purifies an imperfect and fragmented desire of God.

De la Taille invokes principles of Thomistic Christology in describing both how Christ’s grace and *caritas* effect redemption, and how Christ is most properly considered ‘Head’ of humanity. Grace clearly plays a central rôle in de la Taille’s soteriology. To be sure, it is true that the Son assumes human nature in order to heal it, and that the end of the incarnation is this healing. However, de la Taille follows Thomas in construing this healing as the effect of Christ’s habitual grace, which, as we have argued above, is consequent to the grace of union. He thereby defends Thomas’s configuration of the ‘curing’ of human nature: ‘the human nature of Christ is the cure through Christ’s habitual grace’ (*MF*, 522).

Now for Thomas and for de la Taille, in order for the sacrifice of Christ to be truly redeeming—‘adequate for the compensation of sin’—it had to manifest the greatest sorrow that could be ‘endured through grace’ and *caritas* (*ST* III, 46, 6; ad 3, ad 6). This greatest love and grace are important features to de la Taille’s understanding of sacrifice and the redemption of human desire. His selection of the following passage from Cano evidences this, for Cano’s language points to the seat of desire in the will as the place of greatest suffering in Christ:

\(^{25}\) See footnotes 41 and 42 in *MF* I, p. 209. Here de la Taille is arguing for the necessity of Christ’s *eternal*, celestial sacrifice.
‘Truly it is probable that, in the intellectual will of Christ, which is his own will, that the degree of sadness was not only highest but also greatest. For it is desirable in the victim for sin that there be a contrition of heart and a sorrow of the will (the sacrifice wanted by God is a contrite spirit, etc.); also this spiritual sorrow is a contrary medicine for sin, because its seat is chiefly in the will....Augustine, moreover, asserts that Christ took up those defects of our nature, which in the perfection of grace were not repugnant at all, but which emerge from a love of good things and from holy charity’ (De locis theologicis, 12, c.13; MF, 523, italics mine).

We underscore here both the reality that Christ’s greatest suffering occurs in the will, in the seat of love and intentio, and the importance of the operation of grace in the act of redemption. Such a supreme sorrow, de la Taille argues, is necessarily accompanied by a grace powerful enough to heal and strengthen every infirmity of the human condition (MF, 523). And it is this grace which Christ merited in his sacrifice, a grace offered to all sinners—‘however fallen, however overthrown, however broken’ (MF, 524). Citing Hebrews, the Epistle so seminal to his thought, de la Taille emphasizes that there is no limit to the healing and assistance coming forth from the ‘throne of grace’, from the high Priest who sympathises with our every weakness. Moreover, because this grace was won in a particular way through Christ’s sacrifice, the dispensing of this grace is tied to the victim of the sacrifice and our participation in that sacrifice:

For what he procured through the oblation of sacrifice is obtained through a participation in sacrifice, the fruit of the oblation coming back from God through the most acceptable victim. Thus the grace of our reparation is present to us by participating in the body and blood of Christ, which is the eucharist (MF, 524).

---

26 Interestingly, if oddly, de la Taille suggests that the presence of the comforting angel in Luke’s gospel provides an outward sign of this inner, assisting grace in Christ (MF, 522).

27 ‘Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help’. Hebrews 4.14-16.
Christ’s supreme love and sorrow, as well as the plenitude of grace attending the oblation of his sacrifice, thereby clarifies how eucharistic grace is proclaimed as the cure for the feeble and misdirected desire of the fallen human will. As we have come to expect, de la Taille provides a wealth of ‘testimony’ from early and medieval Fathers, as well as a sampling of liturgical prayer to corroborate this teaching about eucharistic grace. I cite here but one example of this tradition, one that seems to reflect best de la Taille’s mindset, and one that again comes from Cyril of Alexandria. De la Taille draws upon this text from Cyril’s Commentary on John, which, he reminds us, is read during the octave of Corpus Christi:

‘You partake of the eucharist (eulogiae), believing it capable of vanquishing not death alone but also of removing our every vice. For Christ calms in us, the fallen, the savage law of the flesh in our members. He stirs up our love of God, he mortifies the agitated motion of the soul, not imputing sin to us, though we stand in it, but rather curing us as those that are sick. He binds up what is fractured, he lifts up the fallen, just like a good shepherd, and one who would lay down his life for the sheep’.28

Eucharistic grace, a sanctifying grace that flows from participation in Christ’s perfect and redeeming love, is seen by de la Taille to work upon the fragmentation of the will: it ‘calms’ agitation in the soul and ascetically shuffles desire; it enfames love and encourages virtue; it cleanses by an “all-powerful aspersion”; and, it strengthens resistance to temptation, to the distraction of desire for God.29

**Headship of Christ.** In an ‘Epilogue’ to his Elucidation on sanctifying grace (the *res tantum* of the eucharist), de la Taille is intent to discourse more fully upon the

---

28 *In Joan. 4, c.2; MF, 524-25, n.2.
29 Cf. de la Taille’s presentation of sources on this question of the effect of grace upon the will, *MF, 524-525.*
headship of Christ—a theme which also emerged in Book I of Mysterium Fidei. It is a discourse that underlines a) the centrality of Christ’s body, to which we are ‘added’ in the eucharist; and b) the reality, intimated above by the patristic sources cited, that Christ first ‘takes up’ into his own divine life the flesh of those who desire to receive his body in the eucharist. De la Taille establishes that the theological title of Christ as ‘Head’ is understood ‘chiefly’ in terms of ‘the flow of grace’, or in terms of that activity and power of infusing grace. 30 Further, he specifies that this activity properly begins only after Christ’s sacrifice, as it is also only consequent to the sacrifice that humans may become Christ’s members—‘knit’ to his body, as it were, through partaking of the eucharist and thereby sharers in his sanctifying grace.

This understanding of Christ’s headship indicates that Christ is head differently over the angels and over humanity. For the angels do not receive grace through a sacramental participation in the eucharist, through which flesh and blood Christ merited grace for humans. De la Taille reflects upon the significance of this headship with these words:

[Christ] gives grace to us through his body, of such a kind that is itself needed in the body, and that through his body it was merited for us—to which end he assumed a body. Whence we cling to Christ’s body much differently than the angels: it is through grace by which we are truly made concorporate to him, not only according to a communion of [human] nature but also to the consortium of one spiritual sanctified body. For our participation in the Lord’s sacrifice introduces this union to the divine body. Now the angels are neither sacramentally nor spiritually capable of such a communion—although Christ, through his sacrifice, merited for himself the state of glory in which he would illumine the angels. On this

30 Cf. both MF I, 39 and Liber III, 525. De la Taille naturally acknowledges that Christ is also considered ‘Head’ as ‘ruler’ over all creation. However, he is interested here in a eucharistic context of head, body and grace., 176-180.
account the angels praise him more abundantly, because they are now associated and joined together spiritually to the Son of God in their intellectually subsisting created nature. Whence they are both more closely kindred and more truly to be called ‘sons of God’ (MF, 525-26).

Unlike the angels then, humans desire the eucharistic body because of the life and grace which flow from it, and because of a longing for consortium with Christ. By this meditation upon Christ as ‘Head’ among angels and humans, de la Taille seeks to further unfold the mystery of access to union and grace through the eucharistic body of Christ. Humans cling to the body of the glorified victim for and in grace.

The theological significance of Christ’s headship is further confirmed in an earlier (Book I) exploration of Christ’s own partaking of the eucharist at the last supper.31 Whilst de la Taille is there most interested in looking at Christ’s partaking from the aspect of sacrifice, he also argues that the headship of Christ makes it ‘intrinsically fitting’ that he should partake before his disciples at the supper. The crux of the question, a question that might sound curious to our ear, is the significative value of Christ’s partaking, which accentuates the following: as ‘head of the human race’, Christ ‘opens the way’ to the kingdom and to the gifts of God (‘bona Dei’). We can summarise de la Taille’s lengthy and rich discussion upon the partaking of Christ by focusing on the two pivotal features of his reflection: a) Christ’s partaking perfectly signifies that influx of grace from head to body; and b) his feasting signifies causally the sanctification of his followers.

31 De la Taille argues that Christ did indeed eat and drink of the eucharist at the supper, a position he holds with Thomas (4D. 11, 3, 1, ad 3), with an extensive host of patristic and medieval witnesses, and in congruence with a number of early liturgies—Coptic, Syrian, and Armenian. (Cf. MF I, 165-174.)
De la Taille calls to mind testimony of Fathers and Doctors of the Church\textsuperscript{32} whose thought affirms that ‘we are unable to eat of the bread and drink of the chalice alone’, but rather that we only partake ‘under Christ and in Christ and with Christ (\textit{sub Christo et cum Christo et in Christo})’ (\textit{MF} I, 177; \textit{MF}, 127). Hence it is fitting that he who now ‘sups with us and through us in the Church’—both as \textit{banquet (convivium)} and as fellow-guest (\textit{conviva})—should himself not only provide the food ‘by which we should be vivified’ but also first partake of it himself. Christians cannot eat the ‘bread of the children of God’ unless he, as head, \textit{initiates} us into the feast of his Father (ibid.). Thus by his own eating and drinking, Christ ‘initiated us to the eucharistic table’, granting us ‘admittance throughout the ages to be his table guests’, making us ‘with himself one household of God, one family, one stock’, and to securing for us a share of all the goods of his Father’s banquet (\textit{MF} I, 177). Granted, Christ himself receives nothing in his partaking, but as head of the body he ‘pours forth’ ‘both the privilege and the fruit of eating’ (\textit{MF}, 127). For de la Taille then, Christ’s eating signifies that his partaking in grace and sanctification opens the way for the sanctification for his followers. The believer is not incorporated to Christ unless Christ is first, i.e., unless the believer is received, gathered, and drawn by the flesh of Christ.\textsuperscript{33}

It is hardly surprising to find de la Taille taking this signifying power of Christ’s eating a step further, asserting that what is signified by Christ’s action is in fact \textit{caused} in those who also eat. Two points, integrally related, seem to emerge about the causality of

\textsuperscript{32} He particularly has in mind passages from Cyprian, Jerome, Ambrose, Honorius and Augustine—which he has cited in the preceding pages. Cf. ibid.

\textsuperscript{33} ‘Non incorporamur quidem Christo nisi percepta alqualiter carne Christi (ut infra, in libro tertio, constabit): sed nec percipimus carnem Christi vitaliter nisi Christo incorporati’ (\textit{MF}, 127).
Christ’s eating and drinking at the supper. First, when de la Taille articulates that Christ’s eating signifies banquet-fellowship with him in his Father’s household, he intends that this symbolic action causes the effect of that ‘family relationship (cognitionis)’ (MF I, 177). Secondly, we need to acknowledge that Christ’s partaking of the victim does not indicate any growth in sanctity in him, for he was already replete with sanctifying grace—as we have argued above. However, his partaking shows forth that he is in fact the sanctified one, he himself feasting upon the victim offered to God, and the victim made sacred in its approach to God. The very unity of identity in this signification—for in Christ (the partaker) there is the very sanctity of the victim, the victim who in fact possesses the sanctity of God—is efficacious in those who eat, participating in the truth of that signification as Christ’s members.

Therefore, from the perfect truth of signification [in Christ’s partaking] flows the efficacy of the sacrament among us. And thusly, according to the gospel promise, do grace and truth descend from the only-begotten to brethren, from the head to the members. Christ intended all this in his one prayer: For them do I sanctify myself, so that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. Or, ‘I scarcely acquire the sanctity of the sacrifice for myself than I distribute it to the very ones who partake with me of my supper’ (MF, 128).

De la Taille’s reflection on Christ’s headship in partaking at the last supper is clearly intended to reinforce the central thesis of his theology on the res tantum of the eucharist: partaking of the eucharist is sign (and cause) of union ad Christum, a union which grants a sharing in the divine life and in the sanctifying grace of the eternal victim and sacrifice. Christ is ‘head’ and ‘font’ of the grace that raises and heals fallen nature. Christ’s own partaking of the eucharist is demonstrative: it reveals his desire to take to himself those for whom he offers his life, and, it shows his followers where this grace can be found.
Even more, it signifies the believer’s access to, or initiation into the divine sanctification which leads into the very heart of Trinitarian life.

**Eucharistic and sacramental grace: desire and the necessity of the eucharist**

We have seen that the eucharist effects intimate union to Christ, and that in that union one receives, or better, participates in Christ’s elevating and healing grace—grace superlatively belonging to him on account of the hypostatic union, and grace ‘won’ for all in the greatest love and sorrow of his sacrifice. Two essential questions remain in our analysis of de la Taille’s theology of grace. The first inquires into the relationship between eucharistic grace and the grace of the other sacraments—which de la Taille distinguishes as ‘sacramental grace’. We shall briefly indicate how this sacramental grace borrows from or depends upon the eucharist. Secondly, de la Taille raises the question of the necessity of the eucharist for salvation. His handling of this topic fascinates, for it brings fully to the surface a theology of desire that, I maintain, is a critical but overlooked facet of his theory of eucharistic sacrifice. In a rather nuanced way, but one consonant with Thomas and a broad spectrum for voices from both the East and West, he argues that the eucharist is indeed necessary for salvation—but that this is a necessity of means, not of law. Moreover, it is a necessity that can be met through a sincere desire for the sacrament of union ad Christum.

De la Taille’s treatment of the relationship between eucharistic grace and the grace of the other sacraments confirms a central principal of Book III, namely, that all grace is a participation in the grace of the Redeemer. Specifically, all grace flows from
the eucharistic body of Christ—the victim offered, accepted by God, and returned as sanctifying food. Citing from the *Catechismus Romanus*, de la Taille assumes the burden of ‘proving’ the comparison found therein, which posits the eucharist as “‘the fountain of all graces’” from which the other sacraments flow as rivulets. According to the 16th-century catechism, the eucharist is such a fountain because “‘in a marvelous way’” it contains Christ the Lord, who is the “‘fountain itself of every heavenly gift and grace’”.34 De la Taille pursues this metaphor by establishing the difference between *sacramental* and *sanctifying* grace, and by showing that all the sacraments do in fact draw upon the fountain of the eucharist by desire.

De la Taille partially unpacks this teaching about the nature of eucharistic grace by considering the question of sacramental causality. He posits that the *res et sacramentum* is the mediating cause of the *res tantum* (cf. *MF*, 581). As we have seen, the *res et sacramentum* of the eucharist is the body and blood of Christ, which, he argues, alone signifies and causes grace by itself (*ex seipso*), imparting a ‘participation in divine sanctity and life’.35 If the eucharist alone causes sanctifying grace, i.e., the grace of the Redeemer himself which at once elevates and heals, the *res et sacramentum* of other sacraments signify—by themselves (*ex sese*)—only ‘something towards grace, considered in such a way as disposing or ordered to grace (*aliquid ad gratiam, ita*

---


35 De la Taille is here drawing upon Thomas, *ST* III, 79, 1, ad 1 and 2. It is worth quoting de la Taille’s own confirmation of this point, which he articulates in the language of sacrifice: ‘For, as we have said frequently, the sharing (*consortium*) of divine life and holiness is not obtained other than from a partaking of the living and vivifying victim—sacrilified and sanctifying. Now to give and indicate this sharing in his life and sanctity is truly an act of the victim himself, even as it is placed before us for the partaking’ (*MF*, 583, n. 3).
consideratam, quasi disponens vel ordinatum)' (MF, 573, 583). De la Taille identifies this ‘dispositive’ grace as ‘sacramental grace’, even as he is quick to add that it must be understood, ‘materially speaking’, to be the same as grace, but a grace ultimately imparted only by the flow of grace from the eucharist—‘placed on top (superimpendente)’ of the other sacraments, as it were.

In short, the other sacraments are thought to cause grace imperfectly, for example by the removing or forestalling of obstacles to sanctifying grace. They thus participate in an incomplete way in the power of the eucharist. On the other hand, the eucharist is said to ‘causally complete’ the other sacraments. One could justly ask if the other sacraments truly contribute something ‘beyond’ sanctifying grace, or if the eucharist needs the other sacraments. De la Taille attends to both of these queries. He offers two possibilities for understanding the causal relationship between the eucharist and the other sacraments. First, the eucharist can be seen as universal cause, whilst the others are particular causes; or, second, the eucharist can be viewed as ‘the maker’, and the other sacraments as ‘tools of the craft’. Most immediately obvious from these comparisons is that the other sacraments cannot operate without the principal cause—namely, without the eucharist.

However, de la Taille also wants to argue that the eucharist requires the collaboration of the other sacraments, not in terms of ‘receiving power from them’, but in terms of requiring particular dispositions in the subject. The eucharist ‘employs’ the other sacraments, insofar as the res et sacramentum of each sacrament, bestowed at a particular moment in time, ‘modifies a passive potency in the subject with respect to the

36 'For all the sacraments through sanctification prepare one either for receiving or consecrating the eucharist' (ST III, 73, 3; cf. also 65, 3)
grace of the eucharist’ *(MF, 577-578).* This modifying of an obediential potency is no mean work of grace—as we discovered in our discussion of grace above. If the eucharist is deifying union with Christ and therefore with Father, it is not surprising that it requires the preparatory effects of the other sacraments. In a manner of speaking, the other sacraments open a new passage for the power of the eucharistic meal, a power from which these sacraments ‘borrow’ for their own efficacy.\(^37\)

De la Taille supplies corroborating passages from the tradition. We will look only at a single passage from Denys’s *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (c. 3.1). In the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, Denys gives to the eucharist the proper name of ‘communion or synaxis’, and then adds that it is ‘the sacraments of sacraments (*τελετῶν τελετήν*)’—because without the eucharist the other sacraments are not only *incomplete*, but without power to gather one fully into union with God: “‘Now if therefore each of the hierarchical sacraments [apart from the eucharist] remains incomplete (*τέλη*), our communion and gathering to the One is not perfectly accomplished, and thus our full perfection is denied because the sacrament alone is inef ficacious’” *(MF, 575).* In other words, it is only from the perfective grace of union to God, accomplished in the eucharist, that the other sacraments derive their grace.\(^38\) Summarising this teaching, de la Taille adds his own poetic image to

\(^{37}\) De la Taille does not hesitate to acknowledge here the application of the reciprocal logical order of priority and posteriority. *MF*, 584, n.1.

\(^{38}\) The preaching of St Vincent Ferrer speaks to this same doctrine with a charming image of the planetary system:

‘Now among the them all, the sacrament of the eucharist is principal...because this great sacrament gives power to the others. This is demonstrated in the heavens, in which there are seven planets: first the moon, second Mercury, third Venus, fourth the sun, fifth Mars, sixth Jupiter, and seventh Saturn. And just as the sun stands in the middle, as in the fourth place, and gives power and light to the other planets, so the sacrament of the eucharist is reckoned as
the Fathers and Doctors he has summoned for witness. He writes that just as all churches are built to face the East, so all the sacraments ('as well as the whole Christian liturgy and ecclesial discipline') look to the rising sun of the eucharist, in which 'our Sun visited from high to illumine those who live in darkness and the shadow of death' (MF, 575).

The eucharist, as it were, is the energia and light of the whole sacramental system.

The sacraments therefore have the power to induce their proper effects through the outpouring of sanctifying grace from the eucharist. Thinking congruently with Thomas (cf. ST III, 62, 2; 4 D. 1.1.4. 5; Veri, 27, 5, ad12, fi.), de la Taille maintains four (only apparently contradictory) assertions about the relationship between sacramental and sanctifying grace: 1) sacramental grace 'adds' something beyond our sanctifying grace; 2) sacramental grace is, however, not actually distinct from sanctifying grace—except according to purpose (ratio); 3) sanctifying grace can exist without sacramental grace; and 4) when sacramental grace is present, it exists always in relation to and from sanctifying grace (the grace of the eucharist) (MF, 583). Paradoxically then, we can say that sacramental grace is antecedent (dispositive) to sanctifying grace, that it is consequent to the grace of the eucharist, and that it is gathered within (intra) eucharistic grace.

But apart from sacramental causality, which clearly indicates the necessity of the eucharist for the redeeming grace of the Christ, de la Taille discusses the relationship between the eucharist and the other sacraments in terms of desire. We have established

---

in the fourth place (!), from which the other sacraments receive power and light—and it receives nothing itself from the others' (Sermones de tempore. In octava corporis Christi, sermon unicus. Ed. 1497. Codicis 00 fol. III a., p. 245). MF, 576.
that union _ad Christum_ and a participation in the grace of the Redeemer is necessary for salvation; and we have seen that this _consortium_ derives from eating of the eucharistic flesh of the Gift offered, Christ. De la Taille now argues, in line with traditional teaching, that this eucharistic grace and union can be received by desire (_ex voto_). I postpone until Chapter Eight an exposition of the dynamic of desire operative between the primary sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, a dynamic which, I contend, stands at the heart of de la Taille’s theory on sacrifice. In the meantime, however, we need only underscore how de la Taille regards each of the sacraments as ‘charged’ with desire for the uniting and healing grace that flows from the eucharist. A fervent orientation of the will toward the eucharist, if authentic (by which we mean a desire to receive it _in re_), is itself efficacious of this grace.

Why is this the case? Why does a sincere _devotio_ and attraction to the grace of the eucharist itself apprehend this grace? From the sacrament of the eucharist, understood as the ‘union of love in Christ to God’, streams the grace which ‘meets’ and creates and enflames the devotion of the subject disposed towards it. All sacramental grace, indeed salvation itself, ‘hangs (pendeat)’ upon this desire for the eucharist (_MF_, 605). De la Taille cites with high approbation the ‘illustrious’ Toletus, a 16th-century Spanish Jesuit:

_Hence it is that, not in baptism alone, but also in the other sacraments, the desire for the eucharist is included. Indeed, within the desire of each of these sacraments is the eucharistic desire. For the one who possesses the desire for baptism, at once has the desire for the eucharist; similarly with the one who holds confirmation, penance and the other sacraments in desire. Thus, even though the eucharist is necessary for salvation, the sinner may be justified through contrition with the desire of confession, as the Council of Trent held in Session VI. For within confession itself is the desire for the_
the very grace of eucharist—for the end of every sacrament is the eucharist itself (In Joan. 6.54, Colon Agrip. 1589, col. 605; MF, 577).

Concluding from Toletus’s reflection, de la Taille writes that every sacrament of the new law can give the “‘grace of union’”, because they all ‘touch’ upon this grace through the ardent longing for the eucharist. In short, the eucharist is received in the other sacraments by way of desire (MF, 577).

De la Taille also draws upon the authority of Thomas, attending especially to Question 80, article 11 of the Tertia Pars. Here Thomas provides an ‘eloquent’ summary of his teaching about the centrality of the eucharist and the necessity of spiritual eating—eating ex voto—for salvation. De la Taille understands Thomas to be asserting these four points in q. 80: 1) incorporation to Christ is necessary for human salvation; 2) for that reason, the spiritual eating of the eucharist is necessary; 3) consequently, one must say that a desire for receiving the eucharist actually (in re) is necessary; and 4) therefore, if it is in one’s power, the sacramental reception of the eucharist is necessary for salvation of every man’ (MF, 605). In a word, spiritual eating—the desire to receive the eucharist—is, at the very least, essential for salvation. De la Taille clarifies, along with Thomas, that this desire is merely ‘empty’, thereby inefficacious, if it remains unsatisfied when the opportunity to receive sacramentally arises. In our final chapter, we shall explore why de

39 In more detail, de la Taille brings together three separate statements from the Tertia Pars: a) “‘Before the reception of this sacrament [the eucharist, in re], a man can possess salvation through the desire of receiving this sacrament, just as before baptism, one can receive salvation by the desire for the sacrament of baptism’”; b) “‘So that one may possess life simpliciter it suffices to have [the eucharist] by desire’”; and c) “‘[Infants] desire the eucharist by the intention of the Church, and consequently, they receive the reality of the sacrament itself’” (MF, 605). Desire clearly plays the critical rôle not only in attaining the benefits of the eucharist, but also for enjoying the grace of any of the sacraments.
la Taille also argues for a frequency of communing in re. For now, let it suffice to say that the very desire to receive needs to be flamed by the grace of the eucharistic banquet.

This teaching permits de la Taille to defend the idea that the ancients, before the advent of Christ and his sacrificial oblation, were also saved 'through faith and a desire for the eucharist'. De la Taille admits that this doctrine can appear 'odd' and 'even absurd' (MF, 599), though amply supported by Fathers in the East and West. Still, it is not excessively strange considered within this sacramental theology of desire, and in view of eucharist as the sacrificial meal of the cross, by which all 'are made to participate in that one sacrifice' of redemption:

For just as it was necessary that a man should live toward God in (implicit) hope of the true victim to come, so also now the (implicit) desire of receiving the true victim is deemed necessary. Thus the fruit of the sacrifice, which is received from the victim of the sacrifice, is properly gathered by that desire—as was said a multitude of times (MF, 599-600).

However, de la Taille does acknowledge a difference between the spiritual eating of the ancients and the spiritual eating of believers after the institution of the eucharist. In the latter, we can say that the salvation and eucharistic nourishment ex voto is by efficient causality, for after the sacrifice of Christ, the grace of the eucharist does indeed work upon the human soul and its desires in a way that indicates something newly-created, a change accomplished by God efficienter. For those who lived before the institution of

---

40 For example by Augustine (In Joan., tr. 26, c. 6, n.12); by Ephraem, rather boldly in Hymni Azymorum 17, 5 (Ed. Lamy, vol. I, 618); by Hugh of St. Victor (Quaestionum et Decisionum in Epistolas Pauli, 80, P.L. 175, 529); by Chrysostom (In 1 Cor., h. 1, P.G. 61, 191); by Ambrose (De mysteriis, c. 9, n. 58), et als. Cf. MF, 597-599.

41 Cf. discussion below in Chapter Six. What de la Taille seems to be saying here in terms of efficient causality is that the sanctifying grace of the eucharist, received either in voto or in re by those existing after
the eucharistic sacrifice, that causality can only be described as final or intentional. In other words, if the eucharist does not yet exist, it cannot save through a mode of efficient causality, but it can operate in a mode of final causality, whereby 'it already summons the desire, and also will inform that desire, and consequently make it worthy of the end' (MF, 600, italics mine). Such is the power of the eucharist grace to attract those who lived in faith and expectation before Christ's sacrifice; and so great is its saving influence that, those who desired it, in fact received it in voto.42

De la Taille follows Thomas, as well as a number of Patristic voices, in robustly interpreting Paul when, in 1 Cor. 10.3-4, he writes about Moses and the Hebrews that 'all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink, for all drank from the same rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ'. The manna is understood to be 'a sign of eucharistic desire', and therefore one can say, as does Thomas, that the ancients ate and drank 'spiritually' of the eucharist: "All ate the same spiritual food, that is the body of Christ—understood spiritually by way of a sign....And all drank the same drink, which is to say the blood of Christ, also spiritually by way of a sign (in signo). ...Because the desire for the food and drink is sufficient, he [Paul] says All ate; and because that desire is unfailing [indeficiens], he says that they ate the same’’ (In I Cor.; MF, 600).

To sum up, de la Taille’s theology of grace and the sacraments manifests the necessity of the eucharist for salvation. The sacraments depend for their own causal power upon the eucharist, from which their 'dispositive' grace flows, and, each of the

---

42 Cf. de la Taille’s clarifying remarks in MF, 600, n. 2.
sacraments is ordered, according to *intentio* and *desiderium*, to the sanctifying grace of the eucharist, to union with Christ. We have been prepared for such theological assertions by de la Taille’s emphasis upon the grace of Christ and his insistence that the source of all grace and divine life is the body of the sacrificial victim. ‘Just as in every sacrifice’, de la Taille writes, ‘so too in the Lord’s sacrifice, every fruit is expected to come from the victim, in which manner that fruit can be communicated to us’ (*MF*, 577). Similarly, no secondary principle of grace can ‘stand’ unless subordinate to the ‘source of sources (*principiorum principio*)’ and unless connected to the ‘perfection of perfections’ (ibid.). In the end, our every desire for grace is always towards the eucharist, always directed towards union with Christ. Whilst the sacraments do indeed dispose us in grace to the eucharist, it is the desire for the eucharist itself that perfects these dispositions of grace (*MF*, 611). We can close this chapter with a statement that again reveals the principle of reciprocal priority and causality which marks de la Taille’s theology of grace: ‘For the eucharist itself begets both the desire, which disposes one toward grace, and the grace from which desire proceeds’ (*MF*, 612). The eucharist is essential for the life of desire, for life *ad gratiam*. 
Chapter Six: 'Created Actuation by Uncreated Act'

The previous two chapters have focused on de la Taille’s theology of grace as it was articulated in *Mysterium Fidei*, particularly in Book III—‘De sacramento’. We attended to the essential features of this presentation: 1] the three-fold signification of the eucharist, which alerted us to de la Taille’s propensity to think of grace in terms of deifying union to Christ and participation in his body the Church, and in terms of the fulfillment of that grace in resurrected glory; 2] the careful delineation of grace in Christ, in order to perceive how he is the ‘fountain’ and ‘head’ of the sanctifying grace which elevates and heals us; and 3] the necessity of the eucharist (the grace of the Redeemer) for every grace that flows through the sacramental economy of the Church—a necessity neatly entangled with desire for the flesh and life of Christ. I have underscored in the exposition above that grace is bestowed by partaking in the sacrificial victim, a partaking that effects union with Christ, and through Christ to the entire Trinity. Likewise, I have pointed to the reality that this sharing in divine life depends on the willingness of Christ to take-up the believer into his own flesh and divine life. This willingness he demonstrated in offering himself as sacrificial to gift to God, and in dispersing himself as the sanctified victim, spreading his grace through bread/flesh and wine/blood.

In this chapter, I shall focus on de la Taille’s later writing on grace, in which he introduced a central insight summed up in the phrase ‘created actuation’. As noted earlier,¹ the two journal essays he dedicated to this topic generated a wealth of response,

¹ Cf. note 5 in Chapter Four.
attracting the attention of theologians intrigued by questions of grace in relationship to the hypostatic union and divine indwelling. The burden of this chapter is less to defend de la Taille’s theory than to explore his proposal about created actuation in light of *Mysterium Fidei* and his theological project therein. Secondly, we can be attuned to ascertain further his peculiar mindset on the question of nature and grace—and to assess his contribution to the topic.

As intimated earlier, apart from a level of technical diction, I see little substantial difference between what he develops about grace in *Liber III* and in these later journal articles. In *Mysterium Fidei*, de la Taille was eager to demonstrate that sanctifying grace belonged most properly and in the highest to Christ, as connatural to the grace of union. In these later essays, he is more intent to prove that the hypostatic union results in a real change or modification, ‘a *passive* actuation’, in the human nature. What appears to be at stake in this is an analogy *tout court* for divine indwelling (whether we are speaking of the hypostatic union, the beatific vision, or sanctifying grace). The analogy distinctly excludes any extrinsicist reading, for the actuation described by de la Taille is 1] an actuation of a potentiality in the subject which really inheres (is something ‘created’) and 2] which unites that subject to the Act, without affecting that Act. In a word, what obtains in this created communication is a *union*, and a union which neatly concurs with de la Taille’s explication of the sanctifying grace communicated in eucharistic participation. I am suggesting that de la Taille’s ‘created actuation’ formula was incubating as he prepared and wrote his major work on the eucharist, a work intently interested in that grace consequent to partaking of the sacrificial victim.
Both Prudence de Letter, and Malachai Donnelly, the key expositors and supporters of de la Taille's essays on grace, fail to acknowledge that de la Taille’s thought on grace is embedded in a context of eucharistic sacrifice and union. The connection between the two articulations is a seminal one. How can we explain, in theological and metaphysical terms, the kind of *circumincession* between Christ and his members, an effect of the eucharist given potent expression by traditional voices like Cyril of Alexandria? Does eucharistic union give rise to 'created actuation', or more accurately, is sanctifying grace a kind of created actuation effected by the transcendent Act? More, does de la Taille’s later, metaphysical construal of hypostatic union bear the marks of an incarnation considered in the context of eucharistic sacrifice, that is, as an event oriented to dispersal of the grace belonging to Christ? I think so.

*In nuce*, the two realities promoted by the theory of 'created actuation by uncreated Act' resonate with what we already know about sanctifying grace: first, that habitual grace is the self-donation of God (in the eucharist) to spiritual creatures, and second, that such grace is a consequence of God’s desire to unite with creatures, actuating a capacity — *which is itself the union*—for deifying friendship with the Godhead. Clearly, de la Taille’s theory of 'created actuation' goes beyond the (natural) relationship of efficient causality, by which every creature is oriented to God as Creator (as final end), and indicates a (supernatural) immediate union of divine actuating presence in the human soul. I suspect that behind de la Taille’s analogy from potency and act lies the image of

---

2 De la Taille applauds Pierre Pourrat (*La spiritualité chrétienne*, Paris: V.Lecoffre, 1918, p. 18) for employing this term, used of the union of the Trinity, to describe the nature of the unity between Christ and the believer in the eucharist (*MF*, 511, n. 2).
that intimate and vivifying union of incorporation into the body of Christ. Let us explore this thesis in the course of unpacking and analyzing de la Taille’s theory of ‘created actuation’.

‘Created Actuation by Uncreated Act’

It is incumbent that we begin with a rather careful explication of what de la Taille means by ‘created actuation’, before attending to how he applies it analogically to the beatific vision (lumen gloriae), sanctifying grace, and the hypostatic union. I will rely predominantly upon the article of that title (‘Actuation créé par acte incréé’, 1928), drawing upon his second, dialogue piece (‘Entretien amical d’Euxode et de Palamède sur la grâce d’union’, 1929) only to clarify questions raised about the application of his theory to the grace of union. An initial note is worthwhile: de la Taille bristled at the accusation that this theory posed something ‘new’, i.e., something specifically incompatible with Thomistic principles. In fact, at the end of his ‘Dialogue’, he (as Palamedes) confesses that he is likely a mere ‘plagiarist’ to express that in grace we are ‘actuated in a created fashion by the Uncreated’. As with his allegedly ‘new’ theory of eucharistic sacrifice, de la Taille must again labor to shake-off the unwanted title of ‘theological innovator’.

---

3 ‘Dialogue on the Grace of Union,’ op cit., 76. In a similar self-deferential way, de la Taille earlier claims in this same essay that the phrase ‘created actuation by uncreated Act’ may be a ‘new’ one, but that he lacks the ‘erudition’ to substantiate such a possibility (66). At this point in the essay, de la Taille is addressing those who challenge his reading of Thomas; but it would also be true that he would object to any suggestion that puts his theory of the supernatural at odds with a patristic teaching of divine indwelling.
To properly explicate 'created actuation by uncreated Act', we will take each part of the formula separately, beginning with the concept of actuation. An actuation is a 'communication' by an act to a receptive 'potency', a communication that bestows a perfection upon that which is imperfect. On the side of the subjective potency then, actuation involves a 'change' and 'amelioration'. De la Taille chooses his words with extreme care as he describes the relation which obtains in actuation: what the act communicates is itself, thereby initiating a union between the subjective potency and the act. Actuation is 'a union, a self-donation (un don de soi)' (CA, 29). What de la Taille wants to stress is that actuation is not principally in the order of efficient causality, which is to say, that it has little do with 'generation' or 'production'. Rather, relation and union are the key terms in actuation. It might be salutary at this point to recall that when God operates by efficient causality, certainly there is a real relation of dependence in the creature, but there is not necessarily divine self-gift. In the order of grace, however, divine causality 'builds upon' created nature to the end of union. Divine indwelling does indeed mean self-donation of the triune God; it intends union.

But, if efficient causality is ruled-out as the proper mode for considering actuation, de la Taille does not want to eliminate all causality, for indeed the act causes a modification in the potency. Hence, he inclines towards the category of formal causality, but not without several careful distinctions. Actuation, he insists, is not necessarily 'information'—though it certainly can be and, in the natural order, is so. When actuation is information, the act is in some way dependent on the potency for its own perfection,

---

4 'Created Actuation by uncreated Act', op. cit., 29. From this point on, I will refer to this essay as CA, followed by the page number.
i.e., there is a reciprocity of sorts, ‘an exchange of resources’, even though they be hardly equal (CA, 29). The readily apparent example of this information-actuation is the human soul. The soul actuates the corporeal matter of the body, informing it, yet also needing it for the ‘integration’ of its powers. The potency, in this case, complements the soul’s own perfection.

Still, though formal causality holds true of actuation in the natural order, it cannot be applied strictly to actuation by the uncreated Act of being. And this restriction is for an obvious reason: ‘The uncreated Act cannot be dependent on a creature in any way whatever. It will give itself and receive nothing’ (CA, 30). Thus the dynamic of actuation must be qualified when we focus upon the last part of de la Taille’s phrase, ‘by uncreated Act’. Act, de la Taille maintains, does indeed communicate itself, but there is no formal causality—‘properly so called’, and thereby no ‘formal effect’ in the subjective potency (ibid.). Enmeshed in these Aristotelian and scholastic categories, can one say anything more precisely about this actuation? De la Taille’s strong advocate, Prudence de Letter, argues that de la Taille has in mind a ‘quasi-information’ by uncreated Act, or, ‘quasi-formal causality’, a concept which Rahner, apparently independent of de la Taille, employed in his early work (1939) on uncreated Grace. De Letter grants that he has not found this phrase in de la Taille’s work; nor have I, and I would be somewhat more

---

5 De la Taille was taken to task by Thomas Mullaney, O.P., precisely for blurring the ‘distinction’ between the supernatural and natural orders, cf. ‘The Incarnation: De la Taille vs. the Thomistic Tradition’ op. cit., p. 2 and passim. I think it will be clear that de la Taille amply protects himself from such an accusation.

hesitant to apply this Rahnerian concept to de la Taille’s vision. Thomas Mullaney, O.P., and, much later, Matthew Lamb, have faulted de la Taille for misunderstanding or misappropriating the categories of act and potency.⁷

Without attempting to refute either critic—de la Taille’s ‘Dialogue’ amply justifies his Thomistic use of act and potency, it may be said that de la Taille is ‘stretching’ these categories, without transgressing them however. In fact, de la Taille does employ the term ‘quasi-formal effect’ as he is discussing John of St. Thomas’s understanding of the incarnation and of the anointing of Christ’s soul by the ‘uncreated Sanctity’. The passage suggests de la Taille’s approval of John’s phrase, for it indicates that there was, in the human nature of Christ, an intrinsic change and effect in the grace of union (‘Dialogue’, 69). What is clear is this: de la Taille affirms that the uncreated Act effects, in its actuation, a modification in the subjective potency, and that this change in the potency is real (and permanent). More, it is ‘an adaptation of the potency to the Act’ (CA, 30), which adaptation signifies union. De la Taille casts no objection to thinking of this as a ‘quasi-formal effect’ in the subject. But he prefers to eschew language of cause and effect in order not to divert attention away from the result of this actuation, which, considered either from the side of the Act or of the receptive potency, is a relation of union.

Before turning to the three-fold analogical application of ‘created actuation by uncreated Act’, we give heed, finally, to the first part of the phrase. What does de la Taille wish to underline by calling this actuation something ‘created’? I want to suggest

---

that ‘created’ adds four aspects to the reality of actuation—some of them obvious and already intimated above. First, a created actuation has a beginning: there was a time when the eternal Logos was not united to human nature, and there is a moment when the believer has yet to be sanctified by Trinitarian grace. Secondly, something created suggests a new reality: what previously existed only in potency has received a perfection of being. We can suggest, thirdly, and concomitantly, that this new reality is gratuitous and accidental to the potency. This new relation of union might not have existed; this actuation by the Uncreated includes an act of volition on the part of the Act. Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, in calling this actuation in the subject something ‘created’, de la Taille insists, I believe, that this actuation (which we shall soon name sanctifying grace) is intrinsical to the creature, which is to say, the actuation by uncreated Act (God’s self-gift) ‘intrinsically affects’ the believer. Put otherwise, the term ‘created actuation’ militates against any sense that God’s grace, God’s actuation of a created potency to union with him, is something ‘alien’—an extrinsic adaptation or a mediate reality—rather than immediate union and reality. Whether or not one can claim with certainty that this inclination away from an extrinsicist approach to grace stems fundamentally from his work on the eucharist, it is none the less quite impossible to imagine de la Taille’s depiction of eucharistic intimacy, along with his saturation in the Eastern Fathers, as providing for any other theory of grace than the kind he articulates here.

De la Taille both tests and unpacks his ‘hypothesis’ of ‘created actuation’ in looking analogously at the 1) the light of glory, 2) sanctifying grace, and 3) the hypostatic

---

9 Cf. de Letter’s ‘Created Actuation by Uncreated Act’, op. cit., p. 64.
union—three instances of God’s self-donation to humans, or in his words, three examples ‘où Dieu se fait l’Acte d’une puissance créée’. Prudence de Letter suggests that this order of explication, beginning with the *lumen gloriae* and ending with the grace of union, is simply pedagogical, going from what is simplest to understand to that which is most difficult. This may be the case, even though the hypostatic union, as we discussed above, is *the* analogum and the fount of all created grace. However, de la Taille also intimates in both of his articles that his insight into created actuation comes most directly from Thomas’s discussion of the light of glory in *Contra Gentiles* III, 53 (CA, 30-31; ‘Dialogue.’, 48-49). In other words, de la Taille understands his insight as a coherent and faithful reading of Thomas’s heuristic portrayal of the *lumen gloriae*. We shall thus begin where de la Taille does, with an exposition of his interpretation on the light of glory.

**Lumen gloriae.** In *Contra Gentiles* III, 53, quoted at length in de la Taille’s first essay, Thomas details what is necessary for the possibility of beatific vision: the divine essence, by way of its own intelligible, uncreated species, must be immediately joined to the created intellect, enabling it to see what otherwise is beyond its capacity, namely the divine substance. Now, for the divine to be united in this way to the creature requires a change in the created intellect, a change that Thomas understands as the “acquisition of a new disposition” (CA, 31). De la Taille seizes upon precisely these two details—union and disposition—from Thomas’s account of the light of glory, arguing that the disposition is both the ‘only new reality’ to formally obtain from this actuation ‘by the

---
uncreated species’, and also, it is what ‘constitutes’ the reality of the union ‘in all its newness’ (ibid.). To clarify, this disposition does not precede the actuation of the intelligence by the divine species. Rather, the union of the divine to the created intellect is the immediate disposition, the radical adaptation of the soul to the Uncreated. We could say then—and each would be true—that the lumen gloriae is the created actuation; it is the immediate disposition for union; it is the communication of the Act to the potency—and its reception; and, it is the perfection of the receptive potency to seeing the divine substance (CA, 30-32). De la Taille is confident that Thomas’s position on the light of glory ‘confirms’ the general theory of ‘actuation of a created potency by an uncreated Act’.

In keeping with the concerns of his own theory, de la Taille highlights that the light of glory is not an information by God, as if the beatific vision is a joint operation by the Act and the created intelligence. No, this created gift of union determines that the operation be ‘exclusively’ of the ‘potency joined to the actuation’ (CA, 32). The lumen gloriae is pure gift, pure grace, and intimate union to the divine; however, it is not purely uncreated Act. It is a created actuation that depends upon the potency of the subjective intellect ‘as on its material cause’, for the actuation creates a proportion between the potency and what is ‘all-divine’, the Act (CA, 32). Hence it is not difficult to understand why the created actuation can be called a ‘habitual power’ of the subject, a ‘dispositio imperfecti ad perfectum’.

The grace of union. As I want to discuss sanctifying grace in the third position, we will consider next how ‘created actuation’ applies to the hypostatic union, the
application most controversial—as his second article (‘Dialogue’) testifies. Whilst there is no significant shift in de la Taille’s thought on the ‘metaphysics’ of the incarnation from what he outlined in *Mysterium Fidei*, we are offered a much richer depiction of the grace of union. De la Taille is less keen in this later writing to confirm the question of Christ’s possession of habitual grace—a question relegated to a page or so at the end of his ‘Dialogue’, where he rather amusingly quotes himself from *Mysterium Fidei*.\(^\text{11}\) Instead, de la Taille is here eager to demonstrate that his theory of grace as created actuation holds true for the grace of union as well.

As de la Taille’s exposition of the union of the Word to human nature as an instance of created actuation is appealingly straightforward in his initial essay, I will rely predominantly on this first articulation. We have established that the actuation of the intellect for the beatific vision is a habitual actuation or disposition, an ‘accidental’ quality adapting that soul to the vision of God as he is. The essential difference in applying created actuation to the incarnation lies in the contrast between an *accidental* and a *substantial* actuation. For de la Taille, this substantial actuation is uniquely the grace of union, whereby the uncreated Act, the Word, uniting itself to the human nature, actuates the very potency to existence of the human soul. That human potency to existence is thereby substantially united to the *esse* of the Act: it exists by the *Esse* of the Word (CA, 35-37). Again, and even here in this case of the hypostatic union, de la Taille

\(^\text{11}\) From the lips of Palamedes (de la Taille in this dialogue), we have these words: ‘Dear friend, I told you I was keeping that [habitual grace in Christ] for the last. I shall not say much about it, for I can rest content with quoting what I have found on the subject in an author whom I shall refrain from recommending, as he is a contemporary. But on this point at any rate, he seems to echo the ancients, and that is why I take the liberty of making my own what he writes on page 516 of a work devoted rather to the mystery of the altars than to the economy of the incarnation’ (‘Dialogue’, 75-76).
qualifies that this actuation by the Word ‘does not inform,’ but rather *perfects*, absolutely, the obediential potency of the human nature.\(^\text{12}\) Is this then an immediate communication of the Word to the human nature? Indeed: in the grace of union, the created actuation is a substantial adaptation (in the order of being) of the nature to the divine *esse*. And is this adaptation an instance of efficient causality? Yes, but not of efficiency alone. As we saw in *Mysterium Fidei*, de la Taille also repeats here that in terms of efficient causality, the entire Trinity causes the union, whereas the Word alone is the *term* of the union.

Perhaps this is the apt juncture to underscore the critical feature of de la Taille’s theory of created actuation. He seems to be attempting to find a way of speaking of God’s self-donation to something created in manner that is not *only* of the order of efficiency—though de la Taille knows and insists that the very foundation of the transcendence ‘proper to the supernatural depends upon efficient causality’ (CA, 36).

Even so, the causal ‘mechanics’ of created grace appear to interest de la Taille less than the relationship of union brought into existence by uncreated Act giving itself to created being.

Undoubtedly every created gift is an effect produced by God: the hypostatic union as well as the light of glory or sanctifying grace. But what makes a thing supernatural is not, in the last analysis, a causal relationship but is, either proximately or remotely, a *relationship of union* between a created passive potency, whether nature or faculty, and an uncreated Act (CA, 35-36; italics mine).

\(^{12}\) Unlike the actuation which occurs in the beatific vision, there is no material causality on the part of the human nature (CA, 35).
It is, therefore, the reality of relation and union that proves fundamental to the theory of created actuation, a union brought into being by the self-gift of the Divine.¹³ Again, I want to suggest that this honing in upon relation and union is not accidental, but rather a consequence of de la Taille’s earlier research and writing on the sacrifice and sacrament of the eucharist.

Not surprisingly, it is the question of relation that demanded significant clarification in his second article on the hypostatic union. However, we make a final point from ‘Created Actuation’ before turning to de la Taille’s more extensive remarks on actuation in the incarnation. When God makes himself the act of a created potency, this supernatural event and union requires a ‘divinely infused adaptation or disposition’ (be it substantial or habitual) in what is created. This ‘ultimate disposition for the Act’, which is itself introduced by that Act, is ‘found to be indissolubly joined to the Act within the potency which it actuates’ (CA, 37; italics mine). I underline this point because it alerts us, once again, to the fact that de la Taille firmly aligns disposition (or grace) with the reality of union.

In ‘Dialogue on the Grace of Union’, de la Taille defends his theory of created actuation in its application to the hypostatic union, and particularly in reference to questions about relation and union. I will focus briefly on these two points of contention, for I submit that they prove revealing about sanctifying grace as well. De la Taille argues with his interlocutor in this essay about the created grace of union between the human

¹³ I gather that this emphasis is what P. de Letter intends when he notes de la Taille’s ‘inversion’ of perspective on grace: namely, that the whole question of created grace is seen from the ‘angle’ (the activity and initiative) of uncreated Grace. De Letter, ‘Created Actuation’, op. cit., p. 61 and 84.
nature and the Word. Drawing upon Thomas and two Thomists of the 'first rank'—Cajetan and Billuart—de la Taille counters his opponent's objection that the grace of union adds something 'mediate' between the conjoining of the Word and the human flesh. De la Taille asserts, with Thomas, that this grace of union is not a 'medium', anymore than the light of glory is medium between the intellect and the uncreated ('Dialogue', 48-49; cf. Contra Gentiles III, c. 53 and In III Sent. d. 2, q. 2, a, 2, questiunc. 3). Rather, this grace is taken to be the union itself. There is no prior modification of one of the two extremes before the union, no in-between state, as it were, that readies the human nature for union with the divine. The created grace of union is the modification: it is the union.

De la Taille approaches this from a second perspective, addressing the question of relation. His interlocutor proposes that Thomas allows for something created in the hypostatic union, but that this something is only a relation, a relation which is, of course, real only from the side of the humanity, and founded upon the 'two natures as united'. In other words, the interlocutor finds that Thomas allows only for a created relation, a relation which is not a constitutive element of the union, but subsequent to that union ('Dialogue', 49-50, 54-55). But de la Taille responds that Thomas's true teaching on relation is otherwise. The relation of the incarnation demands a foundation—and one that is not eternal, as the Word existed eternally without this relation, but rather temporal, one that is 'distinct from the humanity', but which can 'sustain the relation' ('Dialogue', 50). It is here that the appeal of 'created actuation' emerges. De la Taille shows that the
divine unifying action, 'formally immanent' but 'virtually transitive', requires a foundation in time. This foundation is the 'passive' receptivity of the subject, 'corresponding to the unifying action of the agent' ('Dialogue', 51):

This passion, correlative to the unifying action of the Trinity, is the passive union: exactly what I myself say is the foundation of the relation (ibid.)

Later in the article, directly appealing to Thomas and Billuart, de la Taille delineates that the foundation of the relation is a mutatio and a tractio. His argument proceeds in this (Thomistic) manner. Every union implies a relation, and every relation that has a beginning in time is the consequence of some change. Change involves both action and passion. In the incarnation, the action—the assumption of the human nature—belongs to the Word; the passion, or change, belongs entirely to the human nature and is the foundation for the relation. More, Thomas also calls this passion, or change, a tractio—a 'drawing' of the human nature into the divine nature and being of the Word. This passive traction is the unifying action of the Godhead, it is the created grace of union, and it is the foundation for the new, supernatural relation between the created and Uncreated. Thus we have a created actuation by uncreated Act.

We can summarise de la Taille's exposition on the grace of union as created actuation by underscoring three realities. First, the unifying actuation of the Divine produces a created change, an actuation that modifies—or better—perfects that to which it unites itself. The grace of union is thus last disposition to union with the Word, as well

---

14 What de la Taille is suggesting by these phrases might be put this way: the transcendent and uncreated Act will not overtake and usurp the proper esse and activity of the created soul. Its actuating power will be transitive, in the sense that it will produce a divinising change in the created, receptive potency.

15 Cf. 'Dialogue', 59-60.
as the foundation and gift of that union. Secondly, the hypostatic union teaches us that actuation by uncreated Act pulls or draws the potency into the life of the divine, and that this traction occurs in the union itself. Thirdly, in the incarnation there is an absolutely perfecting change, a complete traction of the potency in the human nature, such that we recognize this actuation as a substantial union to the divine. Indeed, de la Taille has put a good deal of ‘flesh’ upon his intimations about actuation in Liber III. The question of relation and union has been thoroughly propounded.

Sanctifying grace. We now turn to de la Taille’s application of created actuation to sanctifying grace. Based on the analogy to the grace of union and the lumen gloriae, similar features ought to emerge in de la Taille’s treatment of habitual grace. Is sanctifying grace a created actuation co-terminous with the union and with the real relation (on the part of the potency), arising from the self-donation of the uncreated Act? Is this grace a change and ‘traction’ of the human soul? More, if in the hypostatic union the created esse is united immediately and substantially to the eternal Esse of the Word, and, if in the light of glory, the created intellective faculty is united immediately (though accidentally) to subsistent Truth, how does de la Taille cast the union of sanctifying grace through this lens of created actuation? In this section we shall also address how de la Taille’s theory of grace corresponds with deiformity. Can created actuation account for divinisation—an issue central to sanctifying grace in Mysterium Fidei? As we address these questions, I invite the reader to keep in mind the previous discussion of eucharistic grace in Liber III. For de la Taille here adds ‘in another key’, as it were, to his basic intuitions about sanctifying grace garnered from his reflection on eucharistic union with
Christ. We hear a similar emphasis upon participation in the one divine and divinising life; we are reminded again about eucharistic union and the significance of desire and the will.

De la Taille’s depiction of sanctifying grace as a created actuation provides a fresh perspective on the (seemingly) static scholastic notion of habitual grace as a ‘quality’ in the soul.¹⁶ Without departing from the Thomistic suggestion that grace is ‘something’ in the soul, created actuation invigorates that concept with a radical dynamism. First, de la Taille explains sanctifying grace as actuation of the soul by the very life of the divine. This soul, moreover, already exists in potency towards union with that divine life:

There occurs in the just, even during their present life, an actuation of their souls, as substances which at first exist and live by virtue of their rational life, but which are in potency to an accession (surcroît) of divine life through an uncreated Vital Principle (un Principe Vital incrété). In communicating itself to them (but without informing them), this Vital Principle equips them radically for the functions of their new life, of which the beatific vision is the full flowering (CA, 32; ‘Actuation Créée’, 257-58).

This Vital Principle, which recalls the eucharistic Life flowing between Head and members, between the vine and the branches, actuates the very essence of the soul by its presence. Still, that actuation is by way of a created gift, which constitutes the union of the divine essence with the essence of the human soul. A union of ‘essence with essence’? Indeed, this is what de la Taille insists upon; this, in fact, is how he interprets

---

¹⁶ I say ‘seemingly’ as I think we in the West too quickly judge scholastic notions ‘static’, especially in comparison to the more dynamically-conceived theological concepts that emerge from the Eastern tradition. I have attempted in this thesis, following de la Taille’s lead, to challenge this perceived theological bifurcation. If de la Taille avoids the language of ‘quality’ both in reference to the light of glory and to sanctifying grace, he none the less does use it at one point in his presentation, as if to allay any fear that ‘quality’ is inherently opposed to created actuation. Cf. ‘Created Actuation’, 34.
the much contested\(^{17}\) New Testament verse from Second Peter, 1.4, with its suggestion of
deified creaturehood: the soul is a 'recipient of the divine of nature (*divinae consortes*
[kovwovn] *naturae*'). In the essence of the soul, 'underneath the faculties, intellect and
will', the uncreated Act of divine life comes 'to actuate the receptive capacity of the soul,
in order that the corresponding actuation may arise' therein (CA, 33). This
'corresponding actuation' is sanctifying grace. Henceforth the soul is 'wedded to the
divine essence and associated with the divine life' (ibid.).

De la Taille does not leave us with the impression that once this 'marriage' is
effected sanctifying grace is on its own, so to speak. For again, stress is placed upon the
union, and upon a vital participation in the divine life. The actuation that constitutes this
grace, and the grace itself, depends upon the indwelling of the uncreated Gift. Without
that presence, habitual grace 'would lapse into nothingness (*elle s'évanouit*)' (CA, 33;
'Actuation créée', 259).

De la Taille approaches this truth from another angle when he addresses the life-
long journey of the graced soul towards the beatific vision, a journey that is undertaken in
love and desire, and a journey which is possible *only* through an already-existing union
with God. In other words, de la Taille articulates the theological point (which we often
associate with Denys\(^{18}\)) that our desire for God is measured by God's own desire for his
creatures. Charity, de la Taille writes, alone holds 'the office of seeking and causing us
to seek God' as he is in himself, of desiring him 'above all things' (CA, 33). This love
can so desire God that one's happiness is situated 'in the happiness of the Creator', *just

as God himself first of all (tout le premier) freely offers his changeless beatitude to beatify his loved ones’ (ibid.; italics mine). Such a relationship obtains only between friends, and friendship requires a community of life—for how can another’s happiness be mine without this deep sharing of life? De la Taille clarifies that God does not depend upon this fundamental union for the bestowal of his beatitude upon others: God’s love suffices to share his divine life with a creature. However, on the part of the creature, friendship with the Divine requires—‘as a preliminary condition’—a ‘radical union between the soul and God’ (ibid.). Such is the union of sanctifying grace, effected by actuation of the Act. ‘Underlying (sous-jacente)’ our the believer’s love for God, this union enflames desire for the Divine; it thereby moves the will to ‘reach with an ardor that takes its measure from [God]’ (ibid.; italics mine).

This ‘measure’, we should underscore, is not external to the human soul, nor is it a matter of divine initiative alone. Rather, it is consequence of the possession of the Act. De la Taille proposes that, even ‘while being an actuation of the potency by the Act’, the soul ‘possesses’ God in sanctifying grace—just as the intellect possesses God in the light of glory (CA, 34). Concomitant then to the created actuation which is sanctifying grace,

---

19 De la Taille here adds a note quoting Thomas in I Sent., d. 14, q. 2., a. 2 ad 2: “‘In the [temporal] procession of the Holy Spirit [to creatures]...regarded as containing the donation of the Holy Spirit, a new relation of the creature to God, of whatever nature it may be, is not enough; the creature must be referred to God as that which is possessed’” (CA, 34). If we look to his second essay, ‘Dialogue on the Grace of Union’, de la Taille seems to go beyond this saying: even as an actuation, it is a possession: or, because it is an actuation it is a possession of the Act. I quote the passage in full, as I think it illuminates well de la Taille’s thinking: ‘An efficient cause produces; an act gives itself, communicates itself to a potency which receives the act and thereupon finds itself united to the act. Accordingly, the actuation of the potency by the act is related to the act, not as to an efficient cause, but as to the term of a union: of a union that enriches, ennobles, perfects, but has nothing in common with an autonomous or intermediary form, a “mode of union”. For it is nothing else than the possession of the Act by the potency and, in the case before us [hypostatic union], the substantial anointing of the humanity by the Chrism of the divinity’. Op. cit., 65.
the desire of God becomes an internal rule, as it were, of the creature’s desire and caritas. Possessing God in sanctifying grace, the soul (its life, will and intellect) is likewise possessed by God. The exchange which de la Taille addressed in speaking of eucharistic union, is here an exchange of love understood in terms of the union between act and potency.

We can understand more sharply how this is the case by analyzing de la Taille’s proposal about deiformity and the supernatural. Led again by Thomas, de la Taille asserts that ‘nothing more resembles the uncreated Act than its created communication’ (CA, 40; italics mine). Naturally, this resemblance is supreme and most sublime in the created grace of union, where there is a ‘true and substantial communication of natural sonship’; Christ is Son ‘by nothing else than the eternal generation that is accomplished in the bosom of the Godhead’ (CA, 41). But de la Taille assigns a divinising transformation to sanctifying grace as well. The souls of the just are even now deiform ‘owing’ to the created actuation by which God communicates and unites himself to the soul.

Grace is the seed of God (semence de Dieu) in our souls, so closely bound up with the light of eternal life that by itself it excludes all darkness of sin (I John 3.9). It is light, though dim as yet, because it is the illumination of the essence of our souls by God all holy, who is uncreated Light, lumen vitae (John 8.12). (CA, 40; ‘Actuation créée’, 267)

The seed of God, which can only resemble God, actuates the soul of a redeemed creature, making her like to God. Interestingly, the image for likeness which de la Taille engages

20 De la Taille references Contra Gentiles III, c. 53 and the Summa Theologiae I, q. 12, a. 5 and ad 3. Both passages suggest that the lumen gloriae makes the creature deiform, that through this created communication, the intellect has some share in the divine likeness.

21 Traces of de la Taille’s attraction to Cyril of Alexandria are evident in this later writing as well.
here is that of light—a prevalent and significant metaphor in the tradition of contemplation and mystical union, which we will explore in the next chapter. More, we shall have ample opportunity to explore how this light of the all-Holy proves painfully purgative in contemplative prayer and baptismal oblation. For now, we merely remark that this deifying actuation of grace, which unites us to the Act, involves both a change and traction within the soul, as well as an assimilation to the divine Act. Earlier, in the eucharistic context of *Mysterium Fidei*, the central image of divinisation was that of a participation in the eternal life of God, a conforming to the love and will of Christ: this is a change wrought by sharing in the feast of the Divine Gift.

Whether sanctifying grace be thought of in terms of divinising life or light, de la Taille focuses on the actuation that, though created, is the result of God’s self-donation. This self-donation and union, along with the traction, change, and movement of the soul in sanctifying grace is, without question, a supernatural event. If God wills to become the act of a receptive, created potency, this can only be ‘an occurrence surpassing all connaturalit[y]’ (CA, 37). Therefore, as we noted above in discussing the hypostatic union, the potency will be obediential (not natural) in reference to the Act, and some ‘divinely infused’ adaptation or disposition will be necessary for the union. Created actuation, sanctifying grace, ‘ultimate disposition’ for the Act: these are all but synonymous for de la Taille, and, most significantly, they all ‘transcend the whole order

---

22 Prudence de Letter pointedly dismisses any surprise concerning this transformation into divine likeness: ‘It [the created communication of grace] is a supernatural likeness to God; it assimilates the creature to God and makes it deiform. This is not surprising, since the created actuation, of its essence, is nothing else than the last disposition or adaptation to the uncreated Act—or, seen in another perspective, it is His effect that of necessity bears a similarity with Him’ (‘Created Actuation’, op. cit., 66).
of connaturaliy' (ibid.). De la Taille instructs that sanctifying grace (as much as the light of glory) be thought of as supernatural, not because it is caused by God, but because it is the foundation of a real union with the Act.

As intimated above, sanctifying grace is the 'substratum' of the creature’s love and desire for God, and as such makes the will’s movement toward the divine Act also supernatural (CA, 37). Since the principle of sanctifying grace is ‘God essentially possessed within the very heart of our essence’, every ‘disposition’ toward this grace and possession—‘whether proximate or remote, whether habitual or actual’—will also belong to the order of the supernatural, and will also be an assimilation to, or imitation of God’s caritas. This is hardly a negligible assertion. De la Taille is saying something utterly consonant with what he argues about the dependence of the other sacraments on the eucharist in Mysterium Fidei, but also something more direct and inclusive. What invests the other sacraments (and de la Taille here leads us to assume that he would include prayer and other spiritual disciplines as well) with virtus, with the transformative power of eucharistic grace, is the ‘relationship of union’ tied up with sanctifying grace. De la Taille argued that the other sacraments ‘borrow’ power from union to Christ, the reconciling Victim of the eucharist. Here he proposes something similar: any movement toward the Act that is undergirded by sanctifying grace—the substratum of divine-like charity in the soul—will also be supernatural (ibid.). For every such movement of desire must be ‘on the same plane as its term’, and, as de la Taille has established, the term of created actuation is the very life of the Trinity. More boldly, within the grace of the eucharist, every movement or disposition in love toward God is supernatural (though
building upon a potency), because in each of these there is an ‘implied’ relationship of union to the Godhead.23

To conclude this exposition of de la Taille’s ‘created actuation by uncreated Act’, I want to underline the aspects of his treatment of grace which seem to rise in an organic way from his earlier mini-treatise *de gratia* in *Mysterium Fidei*. First of all, we have shown that ‘created actuation by uncreated Act’ provides a manner of understanding the self-donation of God without erasing the distinction between Creator and creature, and critically, without allowing any possibility of conceiving this Gift as extrinsic to the creature. By necessity, actuation touches and perfects the potency and can only result in the potency’s union to the act. Clearly, de la Taille is attracted to the relation and intimate union that created actuation implies, an attraction, I suggest, that emerges from his work on eucharistic union. Actuation is principally concerned with the kind of deifying union initiated by divine indwelling. De la Taille has argued that the created actuation, the grace, would dissolve without that union and presence.

Secondly, we acknowledged de la Taille’s clever analogical application of his theory to the light of glory, sanctifying grace, and the grace of union. His application demonstrates that the actuation in each of these instances is created—but none the less *supernatural*, and thereby dependent upon the ‘ultimate’ adaptation and deifying assimilation effected by the presence of the Act. In regard to sanctifying grace, we have underscored that this created actuation is a union of the soul’s essence to the divine essence, a union that can only obtain through a substantial transformation in the soul’s

---

23 De la Taille specifies that this relationship is *implied*—‘either formally or at least by way of reduction’ (CA, 57).
capacity for God—just as de la Taille described of sanctifying grace in his eucharistic treatise. More, we have seen here how the union of sanctifying grace becomes the substratum for every movement of desire in the just towards God, a desire measured, as it were, by the presence and possession of God in the very heart of the soul. De la Taille’s thought here dovetails neatly with his theology of Christ’s redeeming grace in the eucharist.

De la Taille’s contribution to 20th-century Catholic thought on grace and divine indwelling stands on its own—as the number of journal responses to it amply shows. What I have hoped to bring to the fore in this presentation are some of the resonating links between the features of ‘created actuation’—relation, union, and divinisation—and de la Taille’s earlier articulation of sanctifying grace in terms of eucharistic union. We might ask, justly, why de la Taille did not ‘complete’ his picture of grace in these later articles with some explicit discussion of eucharistic union. It is hardly a response to say that he was writing ad the expectations of those who would be reading these journal articles. As I pointed out earlier, none of the respondents to de la Taille’s theory either engaged his earlier work, or made their own connections to the indwelling promised by eucharistic grace. Still, I would submit that, were de la Taille’s purported work de Gratia to be found—even in an outline form—we would no doubt see the more synthetic propensity of his thought.

Finally, in spite of Lonerganeans like Matthew Lamb who fault de la Taille for choosing the ‘wrong’ analogical image, i.e., for beginning with act and potency
('composite being') instead of with what the human intellect can know of God, it seems to be the case that de la Taille's selection of an analogy is spot-on, at least if we consider the context of his eucharistic theology. For created actuation harmonises well with de la Taille's delineation of sanctifying grace and the grace of union in Mysterium Fidei. More, his Eastern-theological predilection demands an analogy that is principally dynamic, an analogy that places indwelling first, and an analogy 'comfortable', so to speak, with deification and the paradox of mutual priority and causality. 'Created actuation by uncreated Act' meets all of these demands. Lastly, what cannot be overlooked, it seems to me, is de la Taille's unique and heuristic place in the development of thought on the supernatural in the first half of the 20th-century. Using both the Thomistic tradition at hand—but distancing himself from the two-tiered nature/grace thought of Suarez, and the context of eucharistic grace, de la Taille articulated an appealing, intrinsicist approach to the supernatural—one with which De Lubac could sympathize, and one which likely provided momentum to Rahner's work on grace.\(^5\)

**Conclusion**

The threads of these three chapters (Part II) on grace are many. Let me gather them by reminding the reader of the loadstone to which they all return: the grace of the

\(^{24}\) The reader may judge for herself whether or not Matthew Lamb is successful in proving the superiority of the latter analogy. Cf. M Lamb, 'An Analogy for the Divine Self-Gift', *op. cit.*

\(^{25}\) Whilst it is clear that de Lubac was familiar with Mysterium Fidei, I have found no evidence that he engaged de la Taille's later and more technical journal articles on the topic of created actuation. For a reference to Rahner's recognition of de la Taille's thought on grace, cf. note 5 *supra.*
Redeemer, a grace found in partaking of the sacrificial banquet. In focusing on the eucharist as sacrament, *Liber III* has given us a further perspective on de la Taille’s theory of eucharistic sacrifice detailed in the three opening chapters of this study. The *res tantum* of the sacrament, sanctifying grace—healing, elevating, strengthening, enfuming and fixing desire—is the gift won by the victim who offered himself in sacrifice at the supper and shed his blood on the cross. The fruits of the sacrifice are all from and through the victim, most especially the fruit of union with the divine life in the eucharistic banquet.

De la Taille has emphasized that partaking of the eucharist—efficacious only for those who willingly *offer* sacrifice, is a *commercium carnis* with the sanctified Christ. In the eucharist, Christ takes to himself the wounded flesh and desire of believers, he disseminates his holiness and pours out divine grace—a grace superlatively his, as de la Taille has demonstrated at length. Christ is the ‘head’ and fountain of grace; through the eucharist he initiates the believer not only into union with himself—a sharing both of his human and divine nature (by participation), but also into union with the whole Trinity. De la Taille’s theory of created actuation eloquently displays that the Act unites itself to the human being, adapting the essence of the soul for union with the divine. We have seen as well, especially in the patristic sources of the East, that de la Taille envisions the relation of sanctifying grace as a dynamic one, with the life flowing from the body of Christ becoming a necessity to the existence of the Christian.

De la Taille has insisted that the union *ad Christum* and *ad invicem*, which is a consequence of eucharistic grace, creates a new substratum of love and desire that
becomes the measure and the *energia* for every act of virtue, every ascetic practice. In addition, we have witnessed in this discourse on sanctifying grace the emergence of a more replete theology of desire: the eucharist is essential to the very life of desire and crucial to the formation of a single-hearted *caritas*. In the following chapters on contemplation, ‘mystical’ theology, and baptismal transformation, several of these threads will again be picked up—particularly those of divine indwelling, union, and desire. We will begin to explicate a two-fold, salient convergence in de la Taille’s eucharistic theology: the intersection of sacrifice with the life of prayer, and a merging of the grace which pours forth from the eucharist with the gifts that accompany the practice of contemplation.
PART III:

*de contemplatione et de baptismo*
Chapter Seven: Contemplative Prayer

I have intended the previous three chapters on grace to act as a kind of yeast upon the detailed exposition of sacrifice that occupied the beginning of this study, showing forth how the dynamic of sacrifice is subsumed in the life of grace. De la Taille’s theory of grace animates his notion of sacrifice-as-gift, demonstrating why oblation and the movement of desire are central to the offering of sacrifice. Our chapters on grace have argued that all grace flows from the flesh of the incarnate Son, an immolated flesh that now vivifies; that God’s self-gift to the soul—which is a real union—constitutes de la Taille’s first principle of supernatural life; and, that *deifying union* is the grace of sacramental reception of the eucharist. This grace and life, poured out by Christ upon the one who eats and drinks of his flesh and blood, is received according to the measure of obative desire. We have thus seen that sacrifice necessarily engages the will and that eucharistic grace not only aligns with the recipient’s desire but ‘raises’ it—enflames it further, orienting and strengthening it through union to Christ and his ecclesial body. The present chapter will frame this interlacing of sacrifice and grace in terms of a broader picture of the spiritual life, and particularly, in the perspective of contemplative prayer. In short, I shall argue that the context of contemplative prayer is fundamental to de la Taille’s theory of eucharistic sacrifice, not simply adding a another layer to the mix, but rather providing, as it were, a *sub specie aeternitatis* view of the theology of sacrifice and grace/union with which we have been engaged.
Admittedly, de la Taille’s three-volume *Mysterium Fidei* does not supply a distinct Elucidation on the topic of contemplation and its relationship to eucharistic sacrifice. However, it is evident—and not just in his prefatory remarks¹—that the spiritual life motivates his extended reflection on the eucharist. In the course of this chapter I will draw attention to some of the key passages in *Mysterium Fidei* that directly address prayer, but we shall be concerned primarily with two short works of de la Taille devoted to contemplation. The first is a densely compact essay written for *Récherches de science religieuse* in 1919, entitled, simply, ‘L’oraison contemplative’. In his own words, de la Taille desires in this article to ‘indicate briefly’ how ‘traditional theology’ speaks to ‘certain questions touching passive contemplation’. He is intent to avoid, in this rendering of contemplative experience and theological principles, ‘awakening’ the ‘echoes’ of controversy about this topic, heated controversies spanning some ‘three centuries’. With very few footnotes, and a paucity of direct references to theological texts² or specific mystical accounts, de la Taille provides a calm and lucid description of contemplation (its method, its trials, its place in the spiritual life, the rôle of a director), from a theological perspective. The value of this piece was recognized quickly: in 1921, it was published in booklet form in France, and then, in 1926, it was translated into

¹ De la Taille defines that theology ought to be engaged with those matters of most significance to ‘our spiritual progress’, and should be a ‘science’ of revealed truth aimed at ‘fostering piety’ (Preface, viii-ix)

² In the course of his essay, de la Taille points briefly to four Thomistic texts. The only other theological figure mentioned is Catherine of Genoa: in a footnote, de la Taille suggests that readers consult her *Dialogues* for an example of God’s purgative action upon the soul in contemplation. We shall return to this predilection for Catherine’s works later in the chapter.
English and published as *Contemplative Prayer*. We should not fail to note the early date of this journal essay. Contrary to one of his biographers, de la Taille’s interest in prayer was not simply a topic for the ‘last years of his life’. Rather, his theological interest in contemplation was coincident with *Mysterium Fidei*, and ‘L’oraison contemplative’ was his first post-bellum writing. I wonder, in fact, if this essay was not a tribute to his former teacher, René de Maumigny, S.J., who died in 1918. A well-respected spiritual master, Maumigny, directed de la Taille’s tertianship year at Mold, in 1904, and had a shaping and lasting influence upon the young Jesuit. Maumigny’s much reprinted two-volume treatise on prayer, *La pratique de l’oraison mentale* (1905) was often brought into conversation with Poulain’s widely-read *The Graces of Interior Prayer*. For our purposes here, it will profit us to note that in this comparison to Poulain, Maumigny’s thought on prayer is characterized as practically and ascetically oriented, and marked by a striking emphasis upon the rôle of love in contemplation.

---

3 ‘L’oraison contemplative’, *Récéherches de science religieuse* X: 273-292 (1919); *L’oraison contemplative* (Paris: Beauchesne,1921); and *Contemplative Prayer*, transl. by a Carmelite Tertiary (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1929). Hereafter I refer to this work as CP, and will use the English translation, except where otherwise noted.


5 J. Lebreton, ‘In Memoriam’, *Récéherches de science religieuse* XXIV (1934), 7. According to Lebreton, the influence of Maumigny’s spiritual teaching was not only incredibly ‘dear’ to de la Taille, but also particularly ‘fecund’.

6 Bainvel, in his ‘Introduction’ to the tenth edition of Poulain’s *Graces of Interior Prayer* (English ed. by Herder Books, 1950), draws an extensive comparison between these two great ‘masters’ of the spiritual life (cf. pages lxiii-lxvi). Significantly, he details both that Maumigny’s work was originally elicited as a response to Poulain’s first edition of *Des Graces* in 1901, and that Maumigny amended and expanded the later editions of his work as he continued to learn from and respond to Poulain (lxvi). (Apparently, the two never met.)

Whilst de la Taille’s style and thought is distinctive, it is none the less easy to see traces of Maumigny’s thought upon his pupil. We shall have occasion later in the chapter to note a specific dependence, which de la Taille himself acknowledges, on the question of an intermediate state between common prayer and passive prayer.
The second, and more substantial source of de la Taille’s theory of contemplation and mystical theology appears in a 1928 lengthy review (again for *Récherches de science religieuse*) of Dom Cuthbert Butler’s *Western Mysticism*. In the Second Edition (1927) of this spiritual classic, Butler appends some seventy-five pages of ‘Afterthoughts’—an addition which de la Taille describes as a ‘critical study’ of the contemporary literature on mysticism. De la Taille’s ‘review’ is, for the most part, an extensive ‘gloss’ upon the central issues raised by Butler’s added reflections. The essay thus proves an invaluable resource for assessing how de la Taille negotiates some of the more difficult and controversial questions facing theologians interested in prayer and mystical experience. Unlike his earlier piece on contemplation, this essay is well-documented with footnotes that reveal a depth of familiarity with contemporary figures (e.g., Garrigou-Lagrange, Gardiel, Poulain and M. Saudreau). More importantly, de la Taille consistently supports his own positions with those he considered authorities on the spiritual life: Thomas and John of the Cross. Beyond revealing the shaping sources of his own theology, de la Taille gives us a sharp taste of his distinctive interpretive stance on controversial theological issues raised by the work of these thinkers. As I hope to demonstrate, these two essays on contemplation together provide a vital (and overlooked) component to de la Taille’s theological vision of eucharistic sacrifice and grace.

---

7 ‘Théories mystiques: A propos d’un livre récent’, *Récherches de science religieuse* XVIII (1928): 297-325. Hereafter, I refer to this essay as Tm. We should also note a third and rather surprising little piece which de la Taille wrote on the English mystic Teresa Helen Higginson (1844-1905) [‘Une mystique anglaise d’aujourd’hui: Thérèse Hélène Higginson’ *Etudes* 193 (1927): 474-479.] The essay seems to be prompted by a Cecil Kerr biography on Higginson published in 1927,
In the first part of this chapter, I shall attend to the salient aspects of de la Taille’s thought on contemplation and the life of prayer, outlining the general features of his thought on prayer and the spiritual life, features which clearly resonate with the material we have exposed in preceding chapters. A second section will then address the more controversial and (perhaps) more telling aspects of de la Taille’s mind on passive prayer, including questions of a ‘transitory state’ between meditative prayer and passive prayer, questions about the nature of mystical union and John of the Cross’s bold language of the ‘substantial touch’ of contemplation, and, lastly, epistemological questions raised in regard to passive prayer. His treatment of these topics, which seem perennial in academic discourse about contemplation, reveals the centrality of contemplation to his theology of the eucharist and suggests his concern for legitimizing contemplation as integral to theology tout court. I conclude this chapter by accenting how de la Taille leads us, again by a focus on Christ and sacrifice, to an integrated vision of the eucharist, grace, and passive prayer. It is arguably the case that the connection between contemplation and the eucharist is more often taken for granted than descriptively pushed. De la Taille provides us with a way to think more explicitly about, and to articulate, this elusive relationship.

Section One: The contemplative journey—faith, love, purgation

J. V. Bainvel, S.J., both an admirer and critic of de la Taille’s *Contemplative Prayer*, has called the work a ‘theologico-mystical’ treatise, and indeed the terse essay focuses the reality of passive prayer with sharp theological observations. In fact, Bainvel
has questioned whether de la Taille’s treatment is a bit too neat and tidy, set forth as truth without substantiating argument.\(^8\) We shall have occasion in this section to ‘hear’ how de la Taille defends himself (since Bainvel graciously published de la Taille’s letters of response\(^9\)), but let us first elucidate that specifically ‘theological’ discussion of contemplation. For instance, how does de la Taille define the ‘object’ and ‘medium’ of contemplation, and how does he construe the rôle of love and faith in such prayer? That de la Taille sees his thought on contemplation in the trajectory of Thomas and John of the Cross will surface in a clear way here. Then, we shall turn to de la Taille’s vision of contemplation in the whole economy of the spiritual life, engaging questions about the limits of human virtue, about grace and the supernatural, and about the purgative, sacrificial aspects of passive prayer. All too briefly, I indicate how de la Taille’s thought on the work of purgative love in contemplation echoes the writings of both Catherine of Genoa and John of the Cross. *Contemplative Prayer* and the redressing letters to Bainvel are the key sources in this part of the chapter; however, I shall also draw upon ‘Théories mystique’ to amplify the positions articulated in this earlier work.

**Contemplation and faith**

At his most precise, de la Taille defines contemplation as ‘a loving fixing of the gaze on the Sovereign Good in the medium at once luminous and dark of faith’ (*CP*,


\(^9\) Ibid., xciii-civ.
10) We shall investigate, in the first place, that last phrase concerning the ‘luminous and dark’ medium of contemplation, which I suggest, bears the influence of John of the Cross. In what sounds like a characteristically scholastic discussion, de la Taille begins his theological discourse on contemplation by asking about its object and its medium—to the end of disclosing the central theological category for contemplation, namely, faith. De la Taille aims to establish how contemplation is different from ordinary, abstractive intellectual activity and from angelic knowledge of God, and, distinct also from the lumen gloriae—from the beatific vision when there will be no intermediary between the mind and God. If angelic knowledge of God occurs without abstraction, without deduction or inference, but rather in a single intellectual act, de la Taille reminds us that it nevertheless occurs through an ‘image or resemblance’—not as a kind of middle term, but rather as the ‘luminous medium’ or a ‘refracting prism’ (CP, 2). Similarly, he argues, contemplation in the human soul is not a kind of abstractive knowing, or a knowledge that supplies the contemplative with ‘distinct pieces’ of information or representations of supernatural objects. On the other hand, de la Taille also discounts the possibility that contemplation involves a new species ‘placed in the spirit miraculously by God’ (CP, 2).

---

10 Or, la contemplation, nous l’avons vu, n’est pas autre chose qu’un arrêt amoureux du regard sur le Souverain Bien dans le milieu lumineux et ténébreux de la foi’. (‘L’oraison contemplative’, op. cit., 280).

11 The ‘light of glory’ raises the power of the human intellect that it might see God ‘face to face’. In this graced light, God is known not by a mental species ‘borrowed’ as it were from the senses; rather the divine essence of God itself becomes the intelligible form of the human intellect by which God is seen as he is. The lumen gloriae disposes the created soul for this supernatural vision and is the light by which the divine essence is seen (cf ST I, 12, aa. 5-6).

12 De la Taille does admit that a saint may, on rare occasions, receive some ‘particular’ piece of supernatural knowledge—outside of the deposit of faith (e.g., knowledge of the state of a soul after death), but such ‘intellectual vision is not essential to contemplation’ (CP, 3). I suspect that de la Taille has in mind John of the Cross’s careful division of the kind of intellectual thoughts that the soul can apprehend in c. x of Ascent II. When John is parsing spiritual (as opposed to ‘corporeal’) supernatural knowledge, he
He reminds us that the object of contemplation is the Supreme Good, the infinite Love of future life, which reveals itself 'splendidly' as 'transcendent darkness'—a kind of luminous darkness which increases the higher and purer is the contemplation: 'This is the contemplative way of knowing the Divine Goodness in all its excess' (CP, 3-4). But if this divine revealing does not depend on intellectual abstraction or representation, and if it is not an immediate communication, as it will be in the beatific vision, what is the medium of contemplation? The medium of this divine revelation is the light of faith—but faith which 'emerges and disengages' itself from a rational knowledge grounded in the senses, faith, that is, which enlightens the soul as an 'obscure ray of the eternal brightness'—which is its origin. In other words, faith is here understood as that divine light—at once luminous and dark, in which the contemplative can 'see' God ('in lumine tuo videbimus lumen') (CP, 4). We can thus identify three features of de la Taille's predilection for defining contemplation in terms of faith: 1) in contemplation, God is revealing himself in and through the light of faith, a light which has its source in the divine light; 2) this medium is not an abstractive knowing, but rather more analogous to angelic knowing, in which the intellect becomes a kind of mirror or refracting prism of God's own light (CP, 2); yet, 3) because the human intellect is less pure than the angelic,

argues that one finds here both 'distinct and particular' and 'dark and general' knowledge. Without the assistance of the bodily senses, 'particular' knowledge can be communicated to the soul in 'visions, revelations, locutions and spiritual feelings'. This seems to be the 'particular' knowledge which de la Taille allows a peripheral place in contemplation. And again, if we give John of the Cross's definition of 'dark and general knowledge', we can note that de la Taille is closely following John here: 'The dark and general knowledge (contemplation, which is imparted in faith) is of one kind only. We have to lead the soul to this contemplation by guiding it through all these other apprehensions, and, beginning with the first, divesting it of them' (Ascent II, X.4).
the medium of faith is obscure, a *fides qua* by which the soul clings—‘unknowing’—to God, a faith which, in fact, is God’s infused gift.

That contemplation is situated under theological category of faith is, of course, well-noted in the work of John of the Cross (cf., for example, *Ascent II*, c. i; c. vi; c. ix).

In fact, that de la Taille depends on John’s notion of the darkness of faith as a medium of contemplation can be vividly ‘heard’ in the following passage from John’s *Ascent of Mount Carmel*:

> For the likeness between faith and God is so close that no other difference exists than that between believing in God and seeing Him. Just as God is infinite, faith proposes Him to us as infinite... and as God is darkness to our intellect, so does faith dazzle and blind us. Only by means of faith, in divine light exceeding all understanding, does God manifest Himself to the soul (*Ascent II*. ix. 1).

However, as if perhaps anticipating protest to his sanjuanist view of the medium of faith, de la Taille provides a rare footnote in his *Contemplative Prayer*, outlining five reasons why contemplation aligns, *conveniens*, with the theological virtue of faith. The first reason accentuates that contemplation is not direct, intuitive vision of God as he is.

Appealing to scripture, de la Taille dismisses the possibility that contemplation entails some intermediate state between faith and the beatific vision: faith will pass away and there will the intuitive vision of God (e.g., 2 Cor. Xiii. 8-13; 1 John ii. 37). Secondly, we know that the just live ‘on God by faith’, and it is by contemplation that the worshipper ‘feeds upon’ divine food. We will return to this eucharistic image for contemplation at the close of this chapter; let it suffice for the present to note that, as in sacramental eating, so in contemplative eating: faith is essential. De la Taille’s third reason for linking
contemplation and faith leans upon the witness of mystics themselves, who use the ‘very expressive’ phrase ‘naked faith’ when describing contemplative light. Fourthly, de la Taille draws upon Thomas and the relationship between the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the theological virtues (cf. ST Ia IIae, 68, a. 4, ad 1, and a. 8, c). The gifts flow from the theological virtues and are both regulated by and in service to the theological virtues. De la Taille spells out this relationship more fully in the main text, when he describes that faith in the just soul is ‘furnished’ with an octave of seven notes/gifts, susceptible in contemplation to the pressure of the Spirit, the digitus of God. God reveals himself in an infinite number of ways, playing upon these notes made vulnerable and receptive in faith (CP 5-7).13

For de la Taille, the fifth and theologically ‘decisive’ reason for situating contemplation in faith is that the (Thomistic) definition of faith applies to contemplation. Faith is a ‘kind of religious knowledge’ defined by its relation to the divine—an adherence to the First Truth, which is believed, believed upon its own testimony, and believed in light of the content which accompanies it (qua creditur, cui creditur, in quam creditur).14 Because this ‘triple relationship’ is found in contemplation, de la Taille argues, contemplation justly belongs to the order of faith (ibid., 5). However, as we have noted above, contemplative faith does appear to be different than non-contemplative faith, for contemplative faith does not ‘borrow’ its ‘materials’ from the ‘abstractive

---

13 Cf. Ascent II. xxix. 6, for a passage in which John of the Cross speaks of the Holy Spirit communicating to the intellect in the light of faith. Perhaps this is an apt place to acknowledge that de la Taille’s work on contemplation does not detail, as did John, a three-fold purification of intellect, memory and will. As we shall see, de la Taille certainly articulates a purgation of the will; but he does not appear to have developed a theory on the transformation of the memory in contemplation.

14 Cf. ST IaIIae, 2, 2.
reasoning’. Are we, therefore, actually speaking of an altogether different kind of faith? De la Taille insists that only a philosopher, ‘who considers psychological facts from the point of view of their relation to consciousness’ would announce a difference in kind between contemplative and non-contemplative faith. Instead, de la Taille encourages us to consider a scientific analogy: this ‘difference’ is better understood, he suggests, in terms of an ‘allotropic’ state of ‘the same chemical body’ (CP 5-6). This is a neat escape, if you will. For the chemical analogy is telling when we consider that transformation (without destruction) is substantially the aim of sacrifice, grace, and contemplation. In this case, we are speaking of a purification of faith (not a radical change to its nature), a faith loosened from its normal state of dependence upon the senses, becoming the medium by which God communicates his very self to the soul. (We shall return in Section II of this chapter to a lengthier discussion about the ‘knowledge’ of contemplation. De la Taille, some eight years later after his first publication on contemplation, would refine — without dramatically shifting — his position on the nature of contemplative faith and knowledge in his essay, ‘Théories mystiques’.)

Still, the Jesuit theologian J. Bainvel critiques de la Taille precisely upon his theologicalategorizing of passive prayer. Does de la Taille too facilely ‘reduce’ contemplation to an act of the theological virtue of faith? To answer this question is to segue into our next topic: the rôle of love in contemplation. In a letter of reply to Bainvel, de la Taille defends his understanding of contemplation as an exercise of faith in a two-fold manner, both of which underscore the element of desire for the divine object of faith. First, de la Taille again underscores how contemplation ‘matches’ the definition
of faith, adding here a element of love: contemplation is ‘an adhesion to the last end, on the testimony the last end gives to itself, and by love for the last end’. However, he also distinguishes what is commonly considered an ‘act of faith’, namely that it is an act accompanied by discursive thought and dependent upon ‘historical motives’ of credibility, from what he intends by the act of faith, or instinctus fidei, which is conditioned only ‘by the presence of faith’. Put differently, contemplation can ‘do without’ the circumstances of common faith because in it the divine object ‘becomes present...in that divinely rooted love in which it reveals itself’. We can better understand de la Taille’s mindset about the dynamic of faith, love, and passive prayer if we look both at his portrayal of the ‘door of entry to contemplation’, and his distinctive interpretation of Thomas on the question of whether contemplation is essentially an intellective or volitional act.

**Contemplation and love**

Calling forth the witness of Thomas, de la Taille argues convincingly that contemplation is not only ‘born under the empire of love’, a love marked by the charity of friendship (CP, 10), but that, in fact, love ‘presides’ over contemplation (Tm, 302). Contemplation does not find entrance into the soul either by a specific intellectual effort at sublime thought, or by the negative effort to eliminate thought and shut down the

---

15 Ibid, civ. Interestingly, de la Taille here recalls John of the Cross’s ‘certainty’ upon founding contemplation in faith, and how John exalts this contemplation over such gifts (‘gratis datae’) as visions and revelations, which are ‘exterior to faith’. 
mind. Rather, its mode of entry is of 'the affective order, per viam voluntatis'.\(^\text{16}\) In his commentary on Butler's *Western Mysticism*, de la Taille addresses this question at length, for he is unhappy with Butler's sharp division between those who follow Bonaventure, underscoring the will and the primacy of love in engendering contemplation, and the Thomists, who exalt the rôle of the intellect and argue that contemplation engenders love.\(^\text{17}\) To the contrary, de la Taille contends that Thomas is quite close to Bonaventure on the question of contemplation and love, only Thomas brings 'his particular gifts of precision and analysis' to the topic (Tm, 302-3). Is de la Taille slanting the evidence here, giving volition a leading rôle in contemplation—as he does in his theory of grace and of eucharistic sacrifice? Or rather, is he providing a legitimately nuanced interpretation of Thomas's thought on the relationship between the will and the intellect in contemplation? Let us review with some care the key passages which de la Taille calls forth from the Thomist corpus.

Without question, Thomas defines contemplation as an essentially intellectual act: 'Contemplation pertains to the simple intuition itself of truth' (*ST* IIaIIae, 180, 3, ad 1); and, as an act, it terminates in love (ibid., ad 3). This definition granted, de la Taille asserts that Thomas does not thereby preclude love as *preceding*, as well as following, contemplation. Indeed, is it not the case for Thomas that love both 'triggers' and 'carries' the contemplative gaze (Tm, 301)? From the same question of the *Summa*, de la Taille cites art. 7 (ad 1) at length:


\(^{17}\) Tm, 301. Butler places John of the Cross in the camp of Bonaventure, whilst Dominicans of every stripe, and even the Benedictine Mgr. Hedley, are situated in the Thomist camp.
'Although contemplative life does consist essentially in the intellect, it nevertheless has its beginning in love; for it is charity which prompts one to contemplation of God. And it is precisely because the beginning must correspond to the end that the final term of contemplative life is found in love, under the form of the joy that one takes in seeing what one loves'.

With Thomas, de la Taille underlines that love of God enflames the intellect with the desire to see God. Thomas distinguishes that the will acts upon the intellect in two ways: through exciting a love of the object, or, by exciting a love of knowing itself. Yet in contemplation, the love which moves the intellect is decidedly not 'a love of knowledge alone', but rather 'the love of the object in view', namely, God. Consider a mother who looks with joy at her child—not with an aesthetic interest in his features, but because she loves him: 'Elle le dévore; et voilà ce qui s'appelle aimer parce qu'on aime, et pas pour une autre raison. ...St Thomas est avec la mère' (Tm, 302-3). For de la Taille, none of this imperils Thomas's foundational statement that the contemplative life, 'in so far as its essential action, belongs to the intellect'. Assuredly, the contemplative gaze is essentially a knowing (connaissance)—but it is a loving intellection.

De la Taille presses his interpretation of Thomas further. That love 'presides' in contemplation ought not to surprise if one recalls that faith itself, though substantially in the intellect, is there none the less as a product of love (CP, 9; Tm, 303). Faith owes its beginning to a 'pressure' upon the will, to an attraction for the goodness that 'promises itself in eternal life' (cf. De Verit., q. 14, a. 2 ad. 10). Thus actuated by this desire (appetitus), the intelligence attaches itself to 'the Supreme Good by a voluntary and

---

18 The italics are de la Taille's. Curiously, de la Taille does not complete the sentence from the Summa, which finishes: 'and that very joy (delectatio) in seeing the beloved excites an even greater love'.
19 Tm, 302, n. 6. De la Taille reminds us that Thomas is following Gregory the Great in asserting the centrality of the will in contemplation. (cf. ST IIaIIae, 180, 1, c.)
loving affirmation'. The act of faith is 'commanded by the will' (even if, in the beginning, this is a love of the concupiscent will). Because contemplation is carried out in the light of faith, this admission is exceedingly significant for de la Taille:

Thus the light of faith, although residing in the spirit, did not enter man by way of the spirit, but by way of the heart: there is its door of entry; there is the passage through which God pours it more or less vividly, according to the degree to which love itself is living in us above every other affection or contrariwise is dominated or oppressed by self-love (CP, 9-10).

As with the modality of faith, so with the act of contemplation: de la Taille seems to be saying that, although contemplation is essentially of the intellect, an act of the intellect, it none the less 'enters' through the will, as does faith. Contemplation owes its existence to a 'pressure' arising from the will. To sum up the question, de la Taille writes that all the great spiritual masters can remain faithful to Thomas whilst claiming that the 'divine touch' of contemplative prayer is directly received by the will, and then communicated to the intellect under the mode proper to the mind, namely knowledge. 'Love prompts, carries, orients, and bathes the contemplative gaze' (Tm, 303). I suggest that this highlighting of the will, of the rôle of love in contemplation, is entirely keeping with what we have seen in his discussion of sacrifice and grace: sacrifice begins and is measured by the love in the obligatory action of the will, and sanctifying grace operates in tandem with the receptive capacity of the charity within the soul.

---

20 'Rien d'étonnant dès lors que les plus grands maîtres de la théologie mystique puissant sans infidélité à saint Thomas dire que la touche divine dans l'oraison contemplative atteint directement la volonté. C'est la volonté qui reçoit le don d'abord, sous la forme d'amour, et puis le communiqué à l'intelligence selon le mode de l'intelligence, et par conséquent sous forme de connaissance. L'amour lance, porte, oriente et baigne le regard' (Tm, 303).
Contemplation and the life of grace and purification

We have thus far established that contemplation is an exercise in and of the dark light of faith, and that the will is principle in this act of prayer. We now turn to the interesting question of how de la Taille envisions contemplation within the scope of the life of grace and spiritual progress. I want to address three queries here: 1] if faith and love exist in all the just, why are not all the baptized contemplatives? 2] is contemplation in fact an extraordinary phenomenon in the life of grace? and 3] what are the particular trials and perils of the soul undergoing contemplative purgation? Each of these topics provides a sharper angle on de la Taille’s theology of passive prayer, with the third issue opening directly upon the connection between sacrifice and contemplation.

De la Taille does not shrink from the question unavoidably posed by his description of contemplation. Charity exists in the souls of all the just, and as de la Taille has argued, it is that love which ‘actuates’ faith. Yet, it remains true that most persons of faith are not contemplatives; they enjoy meditative prayer and that ‘knowledge of faith’ upon which falls, discursively, the light of reason—but not the light of faith (CP, 11).

How does one theologically account for this divide? De la Taille discounts the possibility that it is simply or necessarily a matter of a greater degree of charity in the contemplative than in the non-contemplative. We cannot dismiss the likelihood that the Good Samaritan possesses more charity than a contemplative within whom the gifts of the Spirit are in play (CP, 11).21 De la Taille goes on to suggest that the difference lies in a

---

21 A contemplative must avoid at all costs, writes de la Taille, considering herself ‘superior’ in charity to non-contemplative brethren. However, de la Taille does assert the principle that—within a single pray-er—charity does ‘grow in proportion to the development of contemplation and vice versa’. Which is to say that
depth of awareness about the source of the love which precedes, holds, and follows contemplation. When asked, the contemplative frequently speaks of an ‘infused love’; but, as de la Taille neatly notes, the theologian knows well (from Scripture and tradition) that *all love is infused*—the ‘least clairvoyant’ to the ‘most developed’ (*CP*, 12). Still, the contemplative knows this reality from the strength and certitude of experience:

> The mystic has the consciousness of receiving from God a ready-made love, if such a phrase may be allowed, and this is why he says that he is passive, although love is an act, and the prayer proceeding therefrom also an act. Nevertheless, there is also passivity and conscious passivity in the fact that the soul knows and feels itself invested with the love of God (*CP*, 12-13).

Thus the contemplative knows a passively-received charity, and this passive love ‘swoops’ on the soul and lifts it above itself and toward the Divine, attaching it to the Divine ‘in a dark light’ (*CP*, 13). Put differently, the ‘infused’ love of all the just may be known by the non-contemplative as a theological datum in the knowledge of faith, but the *caritas* of the contemplative, on the other hand, is known in the dark light of prayer as seizing, attracting, and divine.

And this brings us to our second and more substantial query: how is contemplation understood in ‘the economy of the spiritual life’? Is it an extraordinary event in the normal course of the life of grace—something like a miracle found in the natural world? Or, is contemplation in fact a ‘normal development’ in the life of grace, rather like the flowering and bearing fruit of a living tree (*CP*, 20)? De la Taille’s a self-comparison is valid: ‘a mystic who notes his own progress in contemplation has the right to consider himself more highly endowed with charity than in the time in which he had not entered the contemplative path, and to believe in his further enrichment in proportion to his progress in contemplation’. But even this principle depends on remaining in the state of grace, which sin interrupts (*CP*, 11).
answer to this question, which draws critique from Bainvel, sheds new light upon his theology of sacrifice and grace. Like a well-trained disciple of Thomas, de la Taille suggests that we can consider this question in a two-fold way: first, from the prospective of the will of Providence, and second, with regard to the moral and intellectual limits of human nature. In relation to Divine Providence, we rightly maintain that contemplation is the ‘normal prolongation’ of the life of grace. All the just are destined for contemplation—whether that particular kind of purgative prayer begins here on earth or in purgatory (CP, 23). More on this fascinating point in a moment. However, considered in light of the reality of human nature—especially the human process of abstractive knowing (as we saw, contemplation is not this) and the limit of human virtue, contemplation clearly ‘transcends’ and exceeds human capacities. Progress in the spiritual life under grace reaches a point beyond which the Christian cannot proceed by the exercise of the virtues and supernatural gifts. At this juncture (certainly different for all souls)\(^{22}\), there is nothing left in the way of ‘regular and normal’ spiritual progress ‘except the path of passivity’ (CP, 22).

It is instructive here to listen more closely to de la Taille as he describes the nature of spiritual progress (which he terms a ‘Providential law’): progress is made incrementally by small victories over self-love ‘for the advantage of’ one’s love of God, so that this self-love ends, ‘if not by dying, at least in being separated from that inaccessible term by only a negligible distance’. Such a spiritual ‘conquest’ cannot sustain itself indefinitely, unless ‘by means of the inappreciable help furnished by

\(^{22}\) De la Taille explains that for some this juncture is ‘close to the beginnings of the Christian life’, whilst for others it occurs at a much higher spiritual level (CP, 22).
contemplative love' (CP, note on 21-22). The reality of our fallen human nature poses a limit to moral resources. In order to ‘surpass and advance beyond such a limit, ‘contemplation and increasing contemplation may well be needed’ (ibid.).23 For de la Taille then, it is the extraordinary grace of contemplative prayer that allows for greater victories over self-love, once (our even graced) moral capacities are exhausted.

Bainvel raises two related objections to de la Taille’s theory, both of which seem to resist the notion of a limitation to spiritual progress under grace. The first concerns de la Taille’s conclusion to passive prayer as the necessary ‘exceptional grace’ to human spiritual progress; and the second entails de la Taille’s implicit vision that progress over self-love becomes ever more difficult in the spiritual life.24 In short, Bainvel challenges de la Taille to demonstrate the truth of his position about grace and the rôle of contemplation in the spiritual life. We shall analyse de la Taille’s fairly extensive epistolary response to Bainvel, for it provides a clearer picture of relationship between ‘ordinary’ grace and contemplation, while also detailing in a more explicit and pastoral way the moral limits experienced in the battle over self-love.

To begin, de la Taille distinguishes that ordinary (‘non-mystical’) grace does ‘nothing more’ than engage and ‘supernaturalise’ the ‘means and resources’ of our human psyche—affections, dispositions, and the potentiality therein. But the sum total of

---

23 ‘This moral impossibility will appear at various points of growth, according to the vigour of the natural temperament and character, the relative richness of the individual’s sentimental and intellectual resources, the degree of abundance of external supports, etc.’ (CP, note, 22). De la Taille refers the reader here to the Dialogues of St Catherine of Genoa as a ‘sufficient’ text about the limits of human conquest over self-love.

24 J.V. Bainvel, ‘Introduction to the Tenth Edition’, Graces of Interior Prayer, op. cit., lxxxi. Bainvel suggests that, contrary to de la Taille’s vision of spiritual progress, it is the first steps that are most difficult and decisive: ‘The exercise of a virtue makes the virtue more easy; the will is tempered by its own activity and its victories’ (lxxxii).
these resources—'even when superaturalised'—must reach a limit. Otherwise, one would have to (falsely) suppose infinite potentiality and energy in the human being.25

Therefore, when an individual's maximum moral power (aided by grace) has been exhausted in the battle over self-centered love, 'normally' it is necessary that 'the divine action should bring into play something other than strictly human elements, and consequently call into being new and ultra-human states of soul'.26 Whilst Bainvel contends that grace supplies for the insufficiency of human nature, de la Taille hones the discussion. 'Ordinary grace' does indeed supernaturalise what is 'borrowed' from nature; still, such grace raises and strengthens what we have already acquired, or causes what was latent within us to 'spring forth', but it does not, tout court, increase the moral potential of our nature. Rather, it increases our moral forces 'only by comparison with our moral state at the moment'.27 In other words, writes de la Taille, ordinary grace must 'give way' to mystic or contemplative grace, which engages 'resources foreign and superior to our nature', thereby increasing 'the whole sum of psychological resources, whether actual or potential'.28 I suspect that de la Taille is forging an interesting synthesis here—though certainly leaning upon both Thomas and John of the Cross—in reflecting deeply about the realities of human sin and grace, and the more potently-transformative grace of passive prayer.


26 Ibid., xcix. De la Taille emphasizes the adverb 'normally', as he wants always to 'leave room' for the miraculous interventions of divine omnipotence, which belong to 'extraordinary Providence'. (cf. same Letter, c; and CP, 22).

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., xcix-c.
To summarise, de la Taille’s argument relies on these premises. First, grace aids, actuates, and strengthens our moral capacities, ‘supernaturalising’ them, in effect. To be sure, de la Taille is only sounding the solid Thomistic principle that grace builds upon and perfects nature. Second, this graced moral capacity and effort reaches a limit in the battle of *caritas* over self-will and love. Though the demarcation of this limit varies from person to person, it is ‘in all cases real’. Third, as Providence destines all the just for union with God, this limit must be passed, ‘under penalty’ of arrested growth in the ‘illimitable way of grace and holiness’. Therefore, de la Taille concludes, contemplation is ‘required’ to elevate humans beyond the limits of moral strength, and this particular and superior grace is infused by God. Has de la Taille ‘proved’ his thesis about the necessity of contemplation for ongoing growth in the spiritual life? Has he demonstrated irrefutably this providential law of the spiritual life? Bainvel is not convinced that he has done so.

It is not clear what sort of ‘proof’ would satisfy, or what sort could be given. De la Taille has formulated a sharp concept of grace and the moral limitations of our human strength and effort, depicting the need for assistance beyond ‘ordinary’ grace. Contemplative or mystic grace does not simply elevate our human moral capacities, it infuses divine, trinitarian love and power. De la Taille’s effort to ‘demonstrate’ his thesis gains additional momentum from his riposte to Bainvel’s second criticism, which casts doubt upon the portrayal of spiritual progress as one of increasing difficulty. Here de la

---

29 Ibid., c.
30 Cf. footnote on page lxxxiii in his ‘Introduction’, *Graces of Interior Prayer*. 
Taille invokes practical spiritual experience, the wisdom and experience of spiritual writers, the *lex orandi* of the Church, and also, we might add, the doctrine of purgatory.

De la Taille concedes to Bainvel that the long practice of a virtue will often grant a certain facility of action, action attendant upon that particular virtue. But, he argues, surely this principle applies only to that virtue *already acquired*, and not to a virtue which has yet to be possessed. More, Bainvel’s proposal would necessarily entail that the first ‘polishing of the soul’ and its labours towards ‘comeliness’ stand as the greater moral difficulty than those ‘last and sublime purifications from self-love’ in preparation for perfect union with God. ‘Who will believe this?’ de la Taille rhetorically asks. For, first of all, there is the fairly universal experience of ‘powerlessness’ that consumes us in a more striking way after years of effort than it did in those ‘first steps’ toward the ‘foot of that so rugged and steep mountain’. De la Taille acknowledges the appearance or ‘illusion’ of ease: when divine help is ‘poured’ so ‘abundantly and superabundantly’ into the soul, the feeling of difficulty all but vanishes. Still, the reality of the arduousness remains. Should that profuse divine aid be withdrawn—or ‘come in more sparing measure’—the soul again sinks ‘under its burden, beseeching grace’.

It is tempting to suspect that de la Taille is speaking from personal experience here, so robust and raw is his language. Yet, he posits this teaching as coming from two of the ‘most reliable’ spiritual doctors, Augustine and Francis de Sales. Both figures teach that the difficulty of overcoming self-love is so great that, ‘regularly speaking’, it is

---

31 Ibid., c.
32 ....the divine succour is so strong that in comparison the difficulty is a bagatelle’. Ibid, ci.
33 Ibid.
reserved for the next life. And why should this be the case if, in fact, the 'facility of progress' augments with that very progress? Liturgical prayer, moreover, also witnesses that the 'annihilation of self-love in favour of charity' is all but impossible in this life. The Church, de la Taille writes, constantly has the worshipper beseech God to purify the heart—'a perpetual paraphrase of the verse Cor mundum crea in me Deus, et spiritum rectum innova in viseribus meis'. The Christian is never finished, as it were, imploring divine aid to transform human and earthly desire into divine Love. Though de la Taille does not here connect this spiritual doctrine to his treatment of eucharistic sacrifice, the tenor of his comments in this letter are certainly heuristic. He writes that the first commandment—to love God with an absolute and sovereign friendship—is, finally, 'the business of heaven'. Here below, there is constantly 'some gap in God's empire over our mind, our soul, our strength, our heart'. Here below, in other words, the believer offers sacrifice in expression of her desire to close that gap and invite God's charity to reign over worldly and self-directed loves. The reader now familiar with de la Taille's theology of eucharistic sacrifice and grace might be curious if this exceptional grace of contemplation is analogous to, or identical with, the grace of union received in the eucharist. The question is of course central to this chapter, and we shall return to it in Section Three.

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
Contemplation and purgation

At this point, we can return to the intriguing suggestion introduced earlier, namely, that all will be contemplatives in purgatory. What is de la Taille intending here? First, and most obvious, he is underscoring the continuity of the soul’s purification in this life and the next. Yet, he is also reiterating that passive prayer is a purification, and one fueled by desire and love of God, one accomplished by divine love. For indeed, if every human reaches a point beyond which their moral efforts cannot extend, and if death often arrives before the moment of transition into passive prayer, both contemplative and non-contemplative alike pass through this final purification (which the Catholic tradition names purgatory). De la Taille maintains that in purgatory, charity ‘makes things equal’, no matter the soul’s state of prayer on earth. In purgatory, therefore,

the contemplation of the soul who possessed the highest degree of charity….will be incomparably higher, more lost in joy, and yet (all other things being equal) more rigorous and consuming, more painful as regards the purification which may remain to be accomplished; because love itself is the fire which attacks and devours the impurities of the soul, and that with a greater violence proportionately to its greater intensity and consequent hostility to them (CP, 23, italics mine).

For de la Taille, passive prayer resembles purgatory in that the purifying love of God is at work in the pray-er according to the measure that one stands in desire before God. As in his theology of sacrificial oblation, so here with the intensity of contemplative purgation: love determines efficacy. And perhaps de la Taille would add, the primary difference between the devotio commonly operative in liturgical, eucharistic offering and the love of contemplation is not that one is purgative and the other not, but, as we earlier noted, that contemplation possesses a deep consciousness of that transforming love as received.
On this question of contemplation and purgation, we can easily trace the influence of both Catherine of Genoa and John of the Cross. This genetic connection, I argue, 'raises' the volume on de la Taille's (understated) theology of desire. In one of the few footnotes in *Contemplative Prayer* (p. 22), de la Taille himself draws attention to Catherine's work; arguably, one of the more distinctive features of her writing is the notion of the soul's ongoing purgation by Pure Love—God's ecstatic, attracting and purifying love. Catherine attests that the soul's purgation, both in this life and the next, is primarily the work of God's fiery love, to which the soul, attending to God, need only freely consent.

But de la Taille's comparison of contemplation and purgatory is likewise remarkably sanjuanist—though here he makes no immediate reference to John's corpus of writings. Reference to a single passage from *The Living Flame of Love* (Comm. 261-267).

36 Commentators on the work of Catherine of Genoa have noted that she was significantly influenced by the Neoplatonism of Denys the Pseudo-Areopagite (cf. Benedict Groeschel's 'Introduction' in *Catherine of Genoa*, Paulist Press, 1979, pp. 24ff). This following passage sounds particularly Dionysian: 'When God created man, He did not put Himself in motion for any other reason than His pure love alone' (*Vita*, 61a, cited by von Hügel in *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1927, pp., 261-262).

37 For Catherine, the primary spiritual battle is that of the 'subtle' self-will of the soul against the grace of God's pure love. For example, see von Hügel's *The Mystical Element* I, p. 262-267. Von Hügel here quotes from Catherine of Genoa's *Vita* (49a), describing the purgation of our self-love as God's work: 'Every day I feel that the motes are being removed, which this Pure Love casts out...[A]ll the time God does not cease from continuing to remove them' (*Mystical Element*, 267). I find Catherine's vision of the battle against self-love instructive, since de la Taille so frequently uses language about the difficulty of conquering self-will and self-love.

38 See for example, *Dark Night* II.vi.6 (on the experience of 'purgatory' here on earth through contemplation) and *Dark Night* II.vii.7 (a comparison of contemplative purgation and purgatory). In *Dark Night* II.xii.1-4, John creates an extended analogy between the purgation of God's loving contemplation here on earth, and that of both spirits and angels in the next life. In these paragraphs, John asserts that God's purgative and illuminating fire is never infused without love. It is this love which 'David' calls out for in Psalm 51 (*Cor mundum creas in me Deus...*, cf. de la Taille's use of this verse above, p. 252); this loving wisdom that 'Jeremiah' describes when he says *He sent a fire into my bones and instructed me* (Lam. 1.13); this loving spiritual fire that cleanses souls in purgatory and this loving illuminating fire through which God 'purges the angels of their ignorances'.
Stanza I, §18-24) will no doubt suffice to mark the affinity—and to illumine de la Taille’s words about the intensity and violence of love in contemplative purgation. In this passage, John is reminding readers about the ‘afflictive’, ‘oppressive’, and far from ‘gentle’ love that wounds and attacks the impurities of the soul in contemplation. The ‘severe dryness’ of the intellect, the ‘distress of the will’, the ‘burdensome’ awareness of one’s sins: ‘A person’s sufferings at this time cannot be exaggerated; they are but little less than the sufferings of purgatory’ (§20-21). This purgatory ‘here on earth’ is not without purpose, for the soul desires ‘to be transformed in Him through love in this life’ (§24). John is also quick to underscore that the very fire of love (the Holy Spirit) which assails and purges the soul in contemplation, is not a different love than that which later unites with and ‘glorifies’ the soul (§19). Thus, both in John and de la Taille’s view, contemplation here and there is carried out by the same divine love, operative on the same desire and yet resistant will.

We segue smoothly now into our third query: the trials and sufferings of contemplation as portrayed by de la Taille. His language here, again sanjuanist in character, spotlights our thesis about passive prayer and sacrifice; for, if contemplation is purgative, its sufferings are a cruciform denuding. De la Taille speaks of the suffering inherent in contemplation as having ‘no proportion’ or ‘common measure’ with external suffering—particularly, but not exclusively, in that last suffering of the spirit before ‘perfect’ union with the divine (CP, 14, 19). Indeed, the very emergence of the contemplative light of faith involves a ‘tearing (déchirement)’—painful, alien, and unsettling. Like John of the Cross, de la Taille acknowledges two distinct stages in the
contemplative way to union, both of which demand continual sacrifice, requiring the oblation of misdirected desires.

The first stage, that occurring in the 'natural domain' of the pray-er, is the night of the senses. Here the senses—exterior and interior—undergo a deep 'confusion' and 'stripping'. The 'whole ensemble' of abstract knowledge, the judgements it fosters and the affections swayed by these thoughts, must all be subjected to a painful denuding by the light of contemplation (CP, 16). At the same time, the early 'work of contemplation' demands both a disciplining of the spirit, that it might remain still and attentive—rather than agitated and in flight, and, a 'cutting off' of those 'tendencies' developed in following one's own will, tendencies 'full of impurities and irregularities'. These mortifications are all the more painful because frequently carried out 'without any compensation' or promise of reward (CP, 16-17). De la Taille has this sober advice for directors guiding souls through this stage:

Once...contemplation has been constated, the soul should be urged to feed upon it and make progress in it, which means that she should devote herself to it and make the necessary sacrifices: the sacrifice of curiosities of the spirit, of wanderings of the imagination, of the futilities of conversation, of occupations not definitely ordained to charity towards God and neighbour, and, above all, of the liberties of the heart and sentiments, liberties which for charity are a slavery and fetters from which it has to be freed. It is most important to put the soul on her guard against self-love and egotism (CP, 25).

Discipline, sacrifice, and the shedding of intellectual and volitional habits thus mark this initial stage of contemplation. This dark night of the senses is typically a long, slow oblation (active and passive, we could say) of desire. The soul is, as it were, doubly in the dark, for light of the senses and abstractive knowing has 'gone out', whilst the pure
and supernatural light has yet to establish itself (‘le rayon purement surnaturel, n’a pas encore sa netteté ni sa familiarité’). This leaves the soul suspended, as it were, in its relations with God: for all light seems extinguished.

But the suffering of the first stage is normally less ‘severe’ than the ‘incomprehensible’ suffering of the spiritual night. This suffering occurs not in the ‘natural’ but in the ‘spiritual man’, in the ‘ultra-human’ sensibilities of the soul—its ‘peaks and hidden depths’—where the contemplative light resides and the Divine Gift is received and experienced (CP, 16-17). Why should this divine presence be experienced as intolerably painful? Because the Gift of Divine Goodness is ‘so great, so immeasurably lovable’, it can give birth to a ‘thousand tortures’ in the yet unpurified will. As the contemplative progresses in the night of the spirit, the light of purgative Love causes the soul to see with horror her own disordered desire and imperfect love. This illumination of the soul’s own ‘insufficient love’, as well as the painful consciousness of the sin of others, prompts the desire to flee the light and ‘to hasten to expiate’. For, as God’s goodness and love shines more potently, ‘the more crucifying becomes the soul’s impotence to return it’; she cannot escape knowing the ‘discord and incompatibility’ that she has permitted to ‘slip between her and perfect union’. Every shadow of self-love, and every ‘fraudulent dealing with God’, every egotistical pleasure alien to the divine will, causes a ‘magnum chaos’ (CP, 18-19). De la Taille’s language is striking, robust. The nearer to God, the greater the contemplative’s grief and sorrow for her own unbecoming

---

40 De la Taille adds that, as Jesus once did, the contemplative keenly feels the sins of others, feels ‘our every voluntary and culpable...injustice towards...Living Goodness’ (CP, note on page 18).
and dissimilar being before God—or, we could say, her incapacity to exchange a pure gift with God. Perfect union with God is here described in terms of the union between the three divine persons:

They are distinct in this sense only, that One is not the Other; but there is no diversity between them: All that One of them is, the Others are, without exception. So the soul is not lost in God, as long as there remains even the slightest backward look on the self which does not correspond to the manner in which God loves us and wishes us to love ourselves (CP, 19).

Hence, God’s exceeding goodness and attractiveness causes the soul, in her every movement of self-centered love or skewed desire, an excruciating pain.

For de la Taille, the perfect, trinitarian state of Friendship with God does not occur ‘in plenitude’ in this life; he sees the journey of the contemplative as one that perpetually includes sacrifice—one that involves the willing and painful oblation of yet unpurified love. Nevertheless, he is quick to add that contemplation is not thereby engaged without hope: indeed, hope keeps the soul ‘concentrated in the gaze of a filial love’ (CP, 20). More, like John of the Cross, de la Taille acknowledges that this suffering is both heightened and endured because of the love which simultaneously urges the contemplative to seek union with, and life in, that Divine Light. None of the willing oblation and surrender of desire happens without the fire of a greater and divine love.41

In fact, the movement of love and desire—even ‘impetuous movements’—definitively marks contemplative transformation. The Holy Spirit flames a desire that ‘longs to know more deeply’ how the Beloved is ‘more truly...beautiful, good, glorious, happy and

41 Cf. for example the classic statement in John’s Ascent I xiv. 2-3.
perfect' (*CP*, 19). Clearly, it is desire and hope which keep the contemplative at the altar of sacrifice.\(^42\)

We have now set forth the essential features of de la Taille's thought on passive prayer. We noted the relation of 'reciprocal precession' between love and faith which, for de la Taille, constitutes the beginning and increase of passive prayer. We saw, too, de la Taille's vision of contemplation as both connatural (a natural prolongation of progress in grace) and supernatural (the transformation and divinisation of man's limited moral and intellectual capacities). Finally, we established the purifying and sacrificial nature of contemplative prayer, showing that de la Taille construes contemplation (à la Catherine of Genoa and John of the Cross) as a painful, ongoing purgation of the ungodly desire that impedes our perfect union with God. The closer one comes to union with God, the more 'crucifying' the experience of contemplation and the more fired by love is the sacrifice of misdirected desire.\(^43\) We turn now in Part II to a more technical discussion of three different aspects of contemplative experience, a discussion that sheds light upon de

---

\(^42\) For the contemplative that 'suffers' the dark night of the spirit, even the penultimate *telos* of contemplation is depicted as a perfect sacrifice as gift. In his Commentary on the third stanza in *The Living Flame of Love*, John describes the soul's participation in a Trinitarian exchange of the gift of God's very Self. The purified bridal soul, loving God in God, now gives forth God to God 'by offering God the Holy Spirit'. Here is the sacrifice most like Christ's and most truly a genuine gift, for the soul possesses God 'as something of its own' (having so received God from God), and returns this gift in 'voluntary surrender'. And this gift of God to God is, at last, sufficient love. It *repays* God for all that He has given to the soul, and is 'gratefully' accepted by God (*LF* III. 78-79). If de la Taille stops short himself of describing such a reality, I would argue that it nonetheless informs his approach to contemplation and its sacrificial trials.

\(^43\) In *Contemplative Prayer*, de la Taille examines what happens to the contemplative who has 'fallen', i.e., who has returned to the illusion of pride and the ways of self-love. This is, he writes, a 'deplorable' and 'dangerous' state, one that can readily lead to despair (cf. *Hebrews* 4.4-6). Once one has 'tasted' the heavenly delights of contemplation, there is no beginning again at the beginning— with 'an initial rupture' from sin—but, only an attempt to 'resume' the course where it was left. And de la Taille details that this 'picking up again', when 'Grace knocks', will not be in 'the form of a union of delight'; rather, it will 'come as a union of crucifixion': God breaking down the pride which 'resists' him. De la Taille counsels an absolute cooperation with grace at this point, a complete surrender. In other words, the pathway back for the errant contemplative is even more 'crucifying' than her first entrance in the 'dark night' (*CP*, 26).
la Taille's serious engagement with the contemporary theological questions of contemplation.

Section Two: disputed questions in mystical theology

De la Taille's 'Théories mystiques' uses Butler's appended text to Western Mysticism as a springboard to engage some important and controversial questions on passive prayer. I want to attend to three of these questions, because they significantly nuance what we have already outlined about his thought on contemplative prayer. In a word, we have evidence here both that de la Taille was a highly competent thinker in the field of mystical theology and that contemplation is integral to his theory of eucharistic sacrifice and grace. We first will consider the question of an 'intermediate' state between common prayer and contemplation; if such a state exists, how is it defined, named, and related to passive prayer? Second, since Butler takes up the question of what John of the Cross signifies by the 'substantial touch' of contemplation, de la Taille offers his own astute gloss, illuminating the phrase with his theology of grace—'created actuation by uncreated grace'. Finally, de la Taille grapples with the issue of contemplative knowledge; he appears particularly eager to counter the position that intellection is 'annihilated' in genuine passive prayer. His defence of contemplative knowing neatly circles back to his portrayal of the relationship between the intellect and the affect in passive prayer.
The 'passage' between common prayer and contemplation

De la Taille joins Butler in reflecting upon the boundaries of common and passive prayer and presents his own solution for considering a middle or transitional state of prayer before contemplation. Butler, leaning upon the authority of John of the Cross, Francis de Sales and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, calls the intermediate state of prayer 'the prayer of loving attention', a terminology which de la Taille finds apt for Butler's theory (Tm, 297). De la Taille goes on to suggest that there is little *practical* difference between what Butler intends by this 'prayer of living attention' and the so-called 'prayer of simplicity', popularized by Poulain in his *Graces of Interior Prayer*. Even so, the crucial difference between the two thinkers lies in where this 'intermediate' prayer is placed. Is it really outside of passive prayer, properly speaking (Poulain's assertion)? Or, does it in fact lie within the interior of contemplation (Butler's position)? The distinction might appear to be without meaning, but de la Taille gives the 'two schools' their day in court: if Butler is correct, then the prayer of loving attention *belongs to* the 'body' of contemplative prayer, and one is 'already on the way' to the successive stages of passive prayer. Whereas, for Poulain, this intermediate state is yet distinct from contemplation: its physiology, one could say, is different from that of contemplation. It is yet a 'working' moment directed towards infused prayer. More, if Poulain is right, this 'inferior' sort of prayer can develop indefinitely 'according to its own rule' (Tm, 297-298, 300). De la Taille charts another course which seems to accept and critique both positions.
Drawing attention to the work of his own teacher, Maumigny, de la Taille accepts that there is some intermediate state or 'ligature' (a word he does not use) between common and contemplative prayer. However, he argues for a more salutary distinction, namely, that within the 'prayer of simplicity' or 'loving attention' there are actually two sorts prayer, which often appear so much alike that it takes a shrewd spiritual director to discern the difference. The first kind of prayer of simplicity occurs in 'favorable circumstances', emerging from a serendipitous temperament and effective pious practices. On the other hand, the second is pure gift: a special grace 'carrying the will' away to 'a habitual adherence to God'. The will is 'under the sway of a secret taste' for the uncreated Divine; its desire is purely set upon God, and the one praying is 'taken'—and in a sustained way (Tm, 298). Here, de la Taille argues, one has entered the mystical order,

characterised by an experiential knowledge of God, deriving from the single persistent power of divine attraction; and therein the experience is one in which spiritual thirst is satisfied (ibid.).

But if, in this second form of the prayer of simplicity, we have entered the order of mystical prayer, is this 'completely identical' to the passive prayer of contemplation?

Again, de la Taille wants to distinguish further. There is a passivity of which the subject is conscious, a passivity perceptible in the very act itself of attending to, gazing

---

44 'Elles peuvent se ressembler assez pour qu'il y ait quelquefois, pendant un temps au moins, difficulté à les reconnaître; et c'est où excelle le tact de l'homme spirituel' (Tm, 298). De la Taille encourages readers to consult Maumigny's *Pratique de l'oraison mentale*, vol. 1, part 3 (14th edition, pp. 183-212), for a clear description of these two kinds of prayer.

45 We need also acknowledge de la Taille's prejudice at this stage: he absolutely excludes from the mystical what he calls that radically affective 'feminine prayer'—almost always belonging to a female—which is not 'under the Holy Spirit's special action, inclining and grasping the soul' (Tm, 299).
upon, God. But there is also a passivity which 'only reveals itself' to the eye of an experienced director, a hidden passivity that finds expression 'in the continuity of the movement which carries the soul' (Tm, 298-299). Here the subject has no consciousness of the beginning of such a movement—of placing herself in such a vulnerable position—but only of the 'insistence' of the 'regard' for the Object 'by the force of divine attraction'. Whilst it is this passivity of the gaze that is common to both, in the latter case the passivity has not yet touched the pray-er's intellect in an appreciable way, that is, it has not yet revealed itself 'clearly as ultra-human' (Tm, 299). Consistent with what he wrote in his earlier essay (and in agreement with other 'grave authors')

46 De la Taille specifically names Libermann as one of those 'serious authors' (Tm, 299).

47 De la Taille does not give his approbation to the term acquired—as opposed to infused—contemplation, for this genre of affective, lovingly attentive prayer. Poulain made this term popular, though it has a lengthier history (Cf. Graces, op. cit., 61-62, 655-36). De la Taille stipulates that what is acquired in this intermediate prayer are concepts 'naturally' formed by the mind; as such, they are materials 'used' in this transitional state of prayer. By contrast, the 'spontaneous insistence of the gaze which pierces love is not acquired' (Tm, n. 3, 299-300; italics mine). In other words, the passivity of the prayer of loving attention, that force of divine attraction, cannot be called 'acquired'—even though the one praying is not fully aware of receiving love as divinely-infused.

So, what is the nub of de la Taille's distinction about the intermediate state between common prayer and contemplation properly speaking? Theoretically, de la Taille desires to reserve the term 'contemplation' to that prayer fully-aware of its
passivity; yet, he also wishes to underscore the continuity between the ‘prayer of loving attention’ and contemplation. Following the inclination of his practically-oriented mentor, Maumigny, de la Taille reminds us that this argument between Butler and Poulain has very little practical interest; for, whether one supports the Butler or Poulain thesis, counsel at this intermediate stage of prayer is necessarily the same: ‘repose, simplicity, passivity’, as opposed to ‘initiative and industry or multiplicity’ (Tm, 300). We could say that the repose and simplicity of this intermediate state of prayer disposes one towards contemplation—the infusion of God’s love, God’s transformative activity upon the soul.

More, it is salutary to underscore again de la Taille’s democratising predilection. In his concept of ecclesial sacrifice, we noted how he exalts the rôle of the devotio of all the offerers present at eucharist. So too, here: in considering the transitional state into conscious passivity in prayer, de la Taille casts widely the net of ‘mystical prayer’. Unlike Poulain, he insists that the transitional phase cannot proceed indefinitely and independently according to its own order; rather, the prayer of simplicity or loving attention is in via—it will reach that point, again defined by human moral limits, at which the path of passivity becomes necessary. But most significantly, de la Taille teaches the continuity\(^{48}\) between these different stages of prayer, because it is the same light of faith operative in this transitional prayer and in contemplation properly speaking:

In this prayer which marks the beginning of the mystical way, the indication of this being in the application of the look passively engaged, this is already, even though in a weak and imperceptible

\(^{48}\) On this question of the ‘continuity’ between the ‘prayer of loving attention’ and passive prayer, de la Taille claims the support of John of the Cross—‘highest authority’ (Tm, 300).
measure, the light of faith beginning to liberate the soul from the sensible, and, consequently from abstract concepts; otherwise said, the light has began to pierce in its nudity, but so feebly, that the soul does not know it, and thinks that she yet sees in the ordinary light of the intellect (Tm, 300).

In less formal language, all believers are on their way to becoming mystics. The pray-er may dispose himself for infused prayer, but the initiative will be God’s, and the growing awareness of this inflow of God’s burning caritas marks the state of contemplation for de la Taille.

I have belaboured this question for three reasons. First, in order to underscore the depth with de la Taille engages the controversial topics about contemplation in his day; second, in hopes of revealing a ‘generous’ pastoral and practical aspect of his theology of prayer; and finally, in order to begin to suggest an analogy between the grace of eucharistic union, with which the previous two chapters have dealt, and contemplation. In other words, the grace of union bestowed on those receiving the eucharist is not a reality absolutely distinct from what de la Taille has argued about the nature, work, and experience of passive prayer. We will spell this out in greater detail in the third part of this chapter, but we turn now to another topic that likewise illumines de la Taille’s theory of eucharistic grace.

The sanjuanist ‘substantial touch’

De la Taille addresses Butler’s concern—indeed, his surprise—that one would be so bold as to use John of the Cross’s phrase ‘substantial touch’ in relation to those ‘inferior’ states of prayer, namely, the ‘prayer of loving attention’ or the ‘prayer of
simplicity’ (Tm, 303). If de la Taille is sympathetic to Butler’s worry, he none the less impressively surpasses Butler in parsing the ‘touch’ of mystical prayer. His analysis rests, perhaps predictably, upon an understanding of divine indwelling and grace that we have already seen in this study. John of Cross’s ‘substantial touch’ is explicated within the template of ‘created actuation by uncreated grace’.

De la Taille begins by suggesting that one would be correct—‘and more than one thinks’—to assert a ‘touch of substance to substance between God and the soul’ in that inferior prayer which leads to contemplation proper. Why? Because, he argues, the indwelling of the Triune God in the graced soul is ‘a presence of their own essence to the proper essence of the soul’ (Tm, 303-304). De la Taille immediately qualifies that this is not the ‘substantial unity of being’ that obtained in the Word Incarnate; rather this is a habitual union—accidental, but nevertheless permanent. And though habitual, the union between the substance of the soul and God is real and immediate, made so by the created reality of sanctifying grace, a consequence of and disposition for the divine indwelling.

In fact, de la Taille advances here the notion that the grace of prayer is best understood in terms of this created reality deriving from the indwelling of God:

And if one wants to say more, that the whole apparatus of mystical prayer (like all prayer inspired by a living faith) is founded on this latent substructure, and that all grace of prayer, even ordinary grace, has its source and its root in this divine presence, one would be right in a thousand ways (Tm, 304).

---

49 Rowan Williams has recognised de la Taille’s effort to ‘distinguish’ the problem of toque sustanciales in his essay on ‘Butler’s Western Mysticism: Towards an Assessment’ (The Downside Review 102 (1984): 197-215). However, I would suggest that he too readily translates de la Taille’s effort into sanjuanist terms, without identifying the illumination provided by his theory of grace (cf. 205). Still, this easy compatibility is a tribute to de la Taille’s close and faithful reading of John of the Cross.
Still, having made this correlation between prayer and the ‘substantial’ union resulting from God’s indwelling in the soul, de la Taille is well aware that John of the Cross intends something more specific, if not entirely different. Indeed, de la Taille’s interpretative strategy here again shows him to be an astute and sympathetic reader of a Thomistic John of the Cross.

De la Taille acknowledges that John reserves the term ‘substantial touch’ for a state of passive prayer exceeding all intermediary stages of prayer, a state in which the soul is conscious of the ‘ray of light’ in which it sees the divine object. The contemplative light of faith not only ‘radically enflames’ the will, but now also enlightens the intellect with a new mode of knowing (Tm, 304). De la Taille explains further: in John’s concept of spiritual marriage, ‘for the first time...the direct union between essence and essence ends in a way that informs the eye of the mind’ (ibid., italics mine). Not surprisingly, de la Taille immediately underlines that he is not speaking of ‘the term of the union’, the uncreated Trinity, which is decidedly not changed or informed by this union of ‘substantial touch’. Indeed, this habitation of the Trinity—‘the presence or communication of the Trinity’—is not to be confused with the Trinity itself.50

More pointedly then, how does de la Taille interpret the ‘substantial’ in John’s ‘substantial touch’? This touch of the Trinity, this habitation and union of grace reaches beyond the acts, the virtues, and even the superior faculties of soul, into the very depth and ‘visual sphere’ of the soul. There, this ‘substantial touch’ ‘teaches the soul as

---

50 However, de la Taille goes on—crucially—to say, that the ‘touch’ is correlative to sanctifying grace: ‘L’habitation de la Trinité, la présence ou communication de la Trinité, ne se confond pas avec la Trinité, dont elle n’a ni l’éternité ni l’immutabilité; mais elle se confond en revanche avec la grâce sanctifiante, notre union habituelle à la Grâce incréée’ (Tm, 304-305).
much as the soul in this world can be taught about Him to whom she unites us essence to essence—or rather that by her [this touch] we are held in His essence, or rather He gives Himself to us by her’ (Tm, 305). Once this ‘substantial touch’ resides in the soul, ‘progress’ in this state is illimitable. To clarify, this progress is not further movement to something more interior or divine; rather, the soul moves towards greater and greater peaceful familiarity and intimacy with this substantial presence—a presence which always increases according to charity (Tm, 305).

De la Taille does caution that it would be a mistake to understand this substantial presence to the soul as revealing itself by some ‘mental substitute’, as if the union were not absolutely real and intimate. On the contrary, this substantial touch reveals herself, seize and grasps the soul, ‘by her reality alone’—a created reality, to be sure (ibid.). This seems to be quintessential de la Taille: the substantial touch of contemplative spiritual marriage is on a continuum of the created union of sanctifying grace, and yet it ‘informs’ the soul more intimately, more deeply. As in his doctrine of ‘created actuation’, de la Taille is compelled to underscore that this union with or touch by the Trinity, whilst created, is not thereby distant, or lacking in immediacy. Created, intimate, immediate: such is the presence of the Trinity to the soul in the created actuation of sanctifying grace and in the substantial touch of contemplation.

To verify this theologically, de la Taille turns to the experience of mystics, who themselves describe this touch as a ‘direct’ perception of God—however guardedly this

51 ‘Et c’est ainsi qu’en entrant dans le champ visuel de l’âme par delà les actes, facultés et vertus, elle renseigne l’âme autant que l’âme peut être renseignée en ce monde sur Celui à qui elle nous unit d’essence à essence, ou plutôt que par elle nous étreignons en Son essence, ou plutôt qui par elle Se donne’.
‘directness’ must be taken. The soul’s experience of the divine ‘touch’ in contemplation unique; the mystic knows this touch by its ‘inimitable originality’:

The sovereign Good penetrates them [contemplatives] with his sweetness, or arouses their desire with his odour; it is his savour which delights them, it is his fire which enflames them, it is his embrace which possesses them, his breath which refreshes them, his caress which touches them—or his reproach which turns them upside down, his holiness, his justice, his majesty which humbles them... They cannot not recognise Him by his touch, He who plunges into their depths where only He can write, with that radiance which is His alone, with the grace that He alone distills, and which has the taste of eternal life, so different from everything which is not this touch (Tm, 308).

Indeed, de la Taille’s own eloquent and impassioned expression affirms that the soul perceives this inimitable touch ‘directly’. These are the signs and traces and presence of the One who leaves his imprint upon all of creation, and more, who happily enough extends himself over the soul, ‘as the prophet over the body that he wishes to reanimate: feet upon feet, hands upon hands, mouth upon mouth’ (Tm, 309). And such traces, such touches cannot be experienced without leaving the pray-er ‘affected by Him’, and ‘without enjoying Him’. For de la Taille, this contemplative union does satisfy the pray-er’s desire. This intimate reality notwithstanding, de la Taille maintains that this experience of God is, properly speaking, yet an ‘indirect’ experience—as one experiences the rose by its scent, or the ‘heart of friend in shaking of her hand’ (Tm, 309). Even when the mystic enters the state of spiritual marriage, which de la Taille boldly calls a compenetration, even in this ‘commerce of essence to essence’, God is but ‘glimpsed’

52 What does de la Taille mean by this ‘compénétration’ of substances, this ‘échange total’? Why does he find this terminology most apt?

We have been speaking just now of the presence of God in the soul, as the means of contemplation proper to spiritual marriage; and this is quite true. But the mystics speak
in a sort of ‘prelude’ to the beatific vision. But contemplative union is not the perfection of the lumen gloriae.

Is de la Taille merely splitting hairs here? If not, what is at stake? First and foremost, no doubt, de la Taille is concerned to ‘guard’ divine transcendence, to explicitly keep before the eye the distinction between Creator and creature. We reiterate: God’s presence to the soul in contemplation remains a fact of the created order, even though that presence is immediate—that is to say, the divine essence proper to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is present to the essence of the soul. God does not send an ‘ambassador’ for the divine presence. God is the Gift he communicates, but this advent in the creature is something created (Tm, 311; cf n. 13, 311-312). At stake, secondly, is the contentious early 20th-century question as to whether or not the highest contemplative vision was in fact intuitive vision, i.e., the immediate vision the divine essence to the intellect. Apparently, there were some thinkers (e.g., Maréchal and Gardiel) who were inclined to argue for this—and by employing Thomas and his

almost as often of the presence of the soul in the divine essence; and that is perfectly true as well, and in some regards more expressive. But the full truth is that this substantial presence is reciprocal; God is in the soul and the soul in God. However, since this event poses something new in the soul, subject of the sanctifying grace, without posing something new in God, who cannot be the subject of any modification, we prefer in this study to regard the dwelling or habitation from the aspect of the soul, and from the aspect of God the Guest, who is received (n. 10, 309).

De la Taille provides a neat analogy of the difference between the direct experience of God in heaven and that of the ‘substantial’ touch of passive prayer: ‘Dieu fixé directement dans la pureté de son essence, c’est le ciel. Dieu entrevu dans le prélude de cette vision, qu’est le commerce d’essence à essence, c’est le mariage spirituel. Il y a un abîme infini entre les deux, bien que l’une soit comme une répétition de ce que sera l’autre, mais une répétition où l’acteur principal reste voilé; à peu près comme on répète le couronnement des rois sans que du roi s’aperçoive autre chose que le trône’ (Tm, 310).

At one point, de la Taille suggests that one mark of the height and purity of contemplation is that the prayer bestows a ‘certitude that God is other than’ that which was experienced (Tm, 313).
interpretators.\(^5\) By contrast, de la Taille sharply argues that both Thomas and John of the Cross are quite clear that seeing the essence of God is reserved for the next life. He specifically cites three short passages from the *The Spiritual Canticle* (Str. 36.5, 38.3, and 39.13), the substance of which are this: even at the highest limits of spiritual marriage, the soul has yet to experience the ‘clear transformation of glory’, at which time, ‘in the strong union of glory’ she will know God face to face and love him perfectly. Only then will the ‘night of contemplation’ take place in the full and open light of day. For de la Taille, the entire question is reduced to what he calls the ‘first principle’ for the ‘science’ of mystical theology, a principle taken from the Prologue to John’s *Spiritual Canticle*: Mystical wisdom proceeds according to the mode of faith (Tm, 315). Therefore, even the ‘substantial touch’ of nuptial contemplative union is not yet the intuitive vision of God.

**Desire and contemplative unknowing**

We return now to the epistemological question raised early in this chapter about the nature of knowledge in contemplation. If de la Taille rejects the thesis of a contemplative intuitive vision of God, he likewise discounts the suggestion that all intellection is excluded in passive prayer—an exaggeration, he writes, by those ‘most affective mystics’ who are ill-disposed to analysis (Tm, 315-316). The question interests de la Taille, I submit, because it provides him the opportunity to spell out more carefully

---

\(^5\) Cf. Butler’s ‘Afterthoughts’ in *Western Mysticism*, op. cit., pp. lxxiii-lxxix; and de la Taille’s lengthy footnote 14 (Tm, 312-314), in which he critiques Gardiel and expresses support of Garrigou-Lagrange’s position.
the dynamic between the intellect and love in contemplation. He paradoxically asserts, and with the authority of many spiritual writers (especially John of the Cross), that contemplation is knowledge 'sans savoir ce que c’est que l’on connaît'. This is so because, although it is the intelligence that knows, this knowledge is procured under a 'borrowed light', i.e., the light of the soul's desire, or, 'more profoundly yet', a light which is the union of the soul to uncreated Love (Tm, 316). What sort of knowledge is this, a knowledge that emerges in this ecstatic light where the 'central object is neither represented nor conceived'? The knowing of such contemplation is suffered (subi); it is felt (palpé); it is possessed, or better yet, possessing; it holds us in the grip of its hand, and carries one—corps à corps—to Life Eternal, which is Himself' (Tm, 316).

De la Taille's description is remarkably, physical, if one may say so. It is a spiritual knowledge that ravishes the soul in a tactile manner. Put otherwise, it is a passive, 'learned ignorance'—the more learned as it is unknowing. The more the soul experiences divine transcendence the less she knows of the object of her knowing—and therefore, the more she loves God for his very being: 'and this is that divinely-infused knowledge, which is the highest knowledge' (ibid.).

On this topic of a 'suffered' knowledge, de la Taille again turns to 'our teacher', Thomas. When Thomas addresses the passions and their 'locus' in the soul (IaIae, 22, 3), he explains what Denys the pseudo-Areopagite meant in writing that his teacher and bishop Hierotheus was instructed in a Godlike way, that is, that he 'suffered' divine

56 Cf. de la Taille's short piece on Thérèse Hélène Higginson, in which he provides a lengthy passage from her writing about the experience of spiritual marriage to the divine, an account which he finds thoroughly authentic ('Une mystique anglaise d'aujourd'hui : Thérèse Hélène Higginson'. Études 193 (Nov.1923), 474-477).
things (cf. *Divine Names*, II.9). For Thomas, this *patiens divina* indicates an affection ‘towards things divine’ and a ‘union of love’ with them (Tm, 316, n.17). In fact, Thomas goes further and suggests that it is loving *passio* or desire itself which instructs: *Ex ipsa enim divinorum affectione provenit manifestatio eorumdem* (*de Veri.* 26. 3, ad 18). De la Taille can thus claim that contemplative knowledge is surely not nothing, but rather an affective knowledge. This knowledge is suffered *in the love* the mystic possesses for God, and in the ‘dark’ light of that union which is God’s gift of himself. It is a *scientia* weighted with a significance ‘proportioned’ to the desire that bears it (Tm, 317). What theology, he asks, is better matched to its subject than this contemplative knowing? In this school, where love and knowledge are always companioned, the soul is taught by ‘the mysterious Love of which she is the student’ and in a classroom of silence: in the ‘denuding of every false notion of knowing’, every idolatry, by the ‘unique embrace of the Friend’ (Tm, 317).

De la Taille concedes that mystics portray this affective knowledge of contemplation differently—some accentuating its emptiness, some its plentitude. But such variation is only a matter of ‘temperament’ or circumstance: for in truth, he writes, the ‘plentitude is in the void (*vide*)’ and ‘the void fills the plentitude’—a paradox engendered by love, since it is *by love* that the ‘caverns of the intellect’ are both hollowed-out and filled up (Tm, 317). In a word then, de la Taille heralds contemplation as theology *par excellence*. There is no ‘higher lesson’ than the possession of, the *passio* of, Divine Love (*ibid.*).
To be sure, this joining of eucharistic sacrifice and contemplation begs a thorny question: is there not an unavoidable tension between prayer that is active and involves the senses, i.e., the sacrifice of the Mass, and prayer that is passive, i.e., prayer that dislodges the senses and sense-knowledge, prayer that is, as it were, divine action upon the soul and its desire? I suspect that de la Taille might respond to this perceived tension in a two-fold way. First, he would remind us that love is the activity and measure of both ordinary and contemplative prayer. As we have seen, even in the highest states of passive prayer, even in that perfect bridal union, the soul’s desire is yet active, only now it offers the pure love of God Himself, perfected and divinised in Holy Spirit. Secondly, is not God’s purifying activity also at work in the prayer of the sacrifice of the mass? De la Taille would no doubt respond in the affirmative, for the altar of our earthly sacrifice is ‘contiguous’, so to speak, to the ascetic altar of contemplation (see discussion below). In fact, perhaps we could suggest that the eucharist may be, for some more advanced in prayer, that transitional stage of contemplative prayer discussed above. Indeed, what prevents the translucent prayer of ‘holy souls’ at the altar\textsuperscript{57} from becoming that liminal moment between ordinary prayer and passive prayer? If we hold to de la Taille’s criteria, a depth of awareness in the subject of being grasped, stunned, ‘taken’ in the loving regard of the heart, is the requirement of contemplation proper. At some point, and perhaps in the ‘inferior’ states of contemplation, the ‘active’/‘passive’ distinction dissolves in the movement of divine desire pulsing through the pray-er.

\textsuperscript{57} Cf. Clement of Alexandria’s depiction below (p. 281) of holy Christians praying the eucharist.
We are compelled here to mark one final and revealing point, to which de la Taille dedicates some not indifferent prose—a topic that will move us seamlessly into the third part of this chapter. We have seen de la Taille’s effort to underscore the powerfully affective, passive knowledge of contemplation, and to highlight the vital, gripping and unique nature of the ‘substantial touch’ of the Trinity in contemplation. Before closing his ‘review’ of the new edition of *Western Mysticism*, de la Taille gives attention to a subject within the main text of the book itself (and not Butler’s appended ‘Afterthoughts’), to wit, the question of whether Augustine is truly a mystic. *In nuce*, he surprisingly takes issue with Butler, arguing that whilst Augustine is undoubtedly one of the more ‘attractive’, affective and ‘sympathetic’ of saints, it is doubtful that he was a contemplative in the specific sense of attaining, in any significant measure, the gift of passive prayer. The scope of this project prevents a close rendering of the long history of this controversy among Augustine scholars, along with an attempt to properly place de la Taille within this debate. Instead, I must to highlight the particular theo-logic with which de la Taille seals his case, leaving Augustine outside of the purview of contemplation.

Most certainly, de la Taille grants that Augustine’s writings reveal—and in abundance—a man with ‘a highly delicate and spiritual affective gift’ (Tm, 320). But at the same time, he underlines the two theological realities necessary for contemplation (as opposed to philosophical meditation): 1) prayer—prayer that is passive; and 2) a singular quality of participation in the object that one seeks. In Augustine’s methods and in his theoretical expressions of attaining to knowledge of ‘unchanging reality’ or ‘supreme truth’, de la Taille contends that the prayer of contemplation is absent (Tm, 320).
Contemplation, he distinguishes, is not 'an object' of prayer, but rather is prayer—or the state of prayer—and it is only in prayer that one attains, or better, is 'united to God' (ibid.). More, it is the very nature of this union to God in passive prayer that ultimately, and radically, separates contemplation from philosophical speculation. De la Taille articulates this divide with a precision of language that is likewise singularly erotic.

Philosophical speculation is 'a work' of our mind, one which may surely be a truth—even a truth about God. But to possess a particular 'created truth' is far different than holding—or being grasped by—uncreated Truth, a 'privilege of the supernatural order' (Tm, 321). In philosophical meditation, one may attain a certain relationship of 'likeness' to the original, 'as effect with its cause'; yet this is not the intimacy of contemplation, a relationship of union as close 'as an embrace with that which is embraced, as a kiss with the mouth being kissed' (Tm, 321).

Interestingly, and in way that returns us to his eucharistic discourse, de la Taille likewise distinguishes philosophical speculation from contemplation in terms of the theologico-philosophical concept of participation. He argues, employing a greater rigor of language, that we must mark the difference between participation (μετοχή) and communion (κοινωνία). All creation, material and immaterial, enjoys a participation in the Creator as its Cause; and, all creation has some 'resemblance' to God's perfections. By contrast, communion (κοινωνία) describes a relationship in which God communicates himself to the soul, in which God is the 'term of the union', and in which God desires to 'lodge' himself as an act within a potency (Tm, 321). More boldly put, it is only the souls of the just that 'are united (associés) to his nature and to his life (θείος...
Korua’uoi qiioeo)’ (ibid.). Unmistakably, de la Taille is here echoing his theology of eucharistic grace, in which he strongly underscores that the eucharist forges a communion of our human nature with the divine nature of Christ. Indeed, as we saw, he urges that the divine life of Christ becomes our life in the eucharist. De la Taille’s work in mystical theology forges an alliance between the union of passive prayer and the transformative union of grace bestowed in the eucharist—a relationship we shall now explore in greater detail.

Section Three: Contemplation and the eucharistic altar

In the course of this chapter, I have pointed to an emerging analogy between contemplation and eucharistic sacrifice and union. We will now attend to de la Taille’s more explicit reference to this comparison. At a most basic level, de la Taille insists that the eucharist, as the sacrament of caritas, cannot be incidental to the life of contemplation. In fact, he argues in Contemplative Prayer that children ought to receive the eucharist at an early age, because love ‘is the force which initiates the soul into contemplation’ (CP, 15). But de la Taille has a good deal more in mind when he considers the relationship between prayer and the eucharist. Before we return to some

58 Cf. supra, Chapter Four.
59 I suspect that de la Taille surely would have us add: if, by his own strict criteria, Augustine did not achieve the heights of contemplative κοινωνία with God, certainly he did enjoy that union in the sacramental reception of the eucharist.
60 De la Taille defines ‘early age’ as that point at which a child can ‘profit’ abundantly from God’s gift—at the age of ‘knowledge of God’. Not surprisingly, de la Taille advocates the same early reception of the Holy Spirit (with his seven-fold gifts) in the sacrament of confirmation—for in contemplation the Holy Spirit the plays upon this octave of gifts (CP, 15).
revealing passages from *Mysterium Fidei*, I want to highlight the closing christological reflections from ‘Théories mystiques’, which prepare us for de la Taille’s synthesis.

Before ending his extensive review essay, de la Taille applauds Butler’s hope that *Western Mysticism* might spark a desire among ‘young clergy’ to read to Bernard’s Commentary on the Song of Songs (and in its ‘inimitable Latin’). He reasons for advocating Butler’s wish are heuristic. In fact, de la Taille provides here a clear *apologia* for his theological gathering of contemplation and eucharistic sacrifice. Bernard’s *Song of Songs* is critical reading because

one finds there a taste of Jesus, and looks upon a precious lesson about the place that the incarnate Word occupies in the whole life of contemplation: He is the originator, the initiator, the mediator who takes us all the way to the Father, and who opens the eyes of the soul to the infinite repose of the Holy Trinity. It is his mysteries, the mysteries of his life and of his death, through which it is necessary to pass in order to arrive at the foretastes of eternity and glory. The Word in the flesh is also the Word within the Father, from which proceeds the Holy Spirit, the source of life in our souls. Nothing is more traditional than this view. For what did Clement of Alexandria intend by ‘epoptic contemplation’—knowledge of the divine Power and Essence’— *if not union, spiritual as well as sacramental, to Christ* (Tm, 323; italics mine)?

I have cited this passage at length to demonstrate the train of de la Taille’s thought. Bernard is particularly attractive to de la Taille because his contemplative writing is indisputably Christo-centric. Just as there is no grace but that which flows from the incarnate Word who became the Lamb of sacrifice, so too there is no contemplative or eucharistic union apart from the mysteries of Christ’s passion.

But should we require a more distinctive pronouncement than this reference to Bernard and Clement (to whom we shall return to momentarily), de la Taille continues with a potent endorsement of Ignatius of Antioch’s crystalline language about
contemplative purgation, sacrifice, and eucharistic union. For example, de la Taille cites the Letter to the Trallians in which the faith and love necessary for contemplative union is connected to the eucharist: “‘Refresh yourself in faith, which is the flesh of the Lord, and in charity, which is the blood of Jesus Christ (Tral. 8.2)’” (Tm, 323-324). More to the point, we cite the well-known passage from his Letter to the Romans, where Ignatius memorably describes the sacrificial purification of his desire (‘every passion is crucified in me; there is no longer any fire of earthly desire in me’), an ascetic purgation that now grants him a pure desire for perfect union to Christ: ‘I desire the Bread of God, which is the flesh of Christ, son of David, and for drink I desire the blood of Jesus Christ, which is immortal charity’” (Romans, 7, 2 ff; Tm, 324). De la Taille contends that the ‘divine wisdom’ here expressed by Ignatius is one gained through the activity of longing prayer, or, as Ignatius writes to Polycarp, by devoting oneself unceasingly to prayer and asking for “a greater wisdom yet”, for the unveiling of “invisible things” (Polyc. 1.3; Tm, 324). Ascetic prayer, the cruciform purification of desire, longing for the eucharist and union to Christ: Ignatius articulates this layered theological vision in a way, de la Taille argues, that looks forward to Bernard’s work, and backward to St. Paul.\footnote{De la Taille recognizes that Paul ‘says it all’ in one short phrase: ‘My life is Christ’ (Tm, 324).} What is the common thread uniting the vision of these three Christian thinkers? De la Taille marks the double theme of a contemplative piety ‘concentrée sur le Christ’, and of a thought pattern in which ascetic prayer and the eucharist coalesce (Tm, 324).

These important comments in ‘Théories mystique’ provide an interpretive lens to several passages in \textit{Mysterium Fidei} where, drawing upon the early Church Fathers, de la
Taille forges a connection between prayer, sacrifice and eucharistic union. As mentioned earlier, *Mysterium Fidei* does not provide an Elucidation solely devoted to contemplation and its relationship to the eucharist. This fact alone may be a significant indication that de la Taille sees the activity of prayer, sacrificial offering and eucharistic reception as seamlessly bound together. In any event, the passages on prayer and sacrifice that de la Taille elects to rehearse for his readers are hardly arbitrary. I can present perforce only two illuminating examples from *Mysterium Fidei*, one which engages the thought of Clement of Alexandria, and the other which sets on display Gregory of Nazianzus's thought.

De la Taille examines Clement's writing on the eucharist and contemplation at a particularly rich moment in Book II, one well-laced with references to eucharistic sacrifice and prayer—the prayer of the liturgy, meditation on the Word, and a more elevated contemplation. In this particular Elucidation (XVIII), de la Taille's objective is two-fold: to demonstrate that the earliest Fathers of the Church understood the ecclesiastical sacrifice to be an offering of the body and blood of Christ (and not simply an offering of prayer, or an offering of bread and wine), and to show that our offering is

---

62 I have referred in Chapter Two to de la Taille's well-supported interpretation of key passages from Ignatius, Origen, Justin, Irenaeus, and Clement, in which he argues that the *eucharistic sacrifice* (the sacrificial action) is understood as the prayer of community (which includes the consecratory words over the bread and wine); and that the *sacrifice offered* (understood in a passive sense, i.e., of the thing offered) is the body and blood of Christ—who is the sacrifice. The sacrificial action and the sacrifice are not two distinct things; for the prayer which gives thanks and praise contains the words which 'makes' the sacrifice, is also the oblation.

De la Taille's interpretations stand in opposition to the work of Robert Daly, S.J., whose study of many of the same passages which de la Taille brings forward, concludes differently. For example, Daly contends that Justin's notion of sacrifice is 'primarily the spiritualized sacrifice of prayer'—without any clear indication of a ritual action over the bread and wine, or an offering of the body and blood of Christ (Compare Daly, *Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice* op. cit., pp. 87-90, to *MF II*, 60-64).
joined to Christ's in the prayer of the Church. Clement of Alexandria figures centrally in this Elucidation, and de la Taille takes a palpable enjoyment in interpreting Clement's thought on contemplation and the eucharist. We can summarize how de la Taille significantly weaves together the excerpts from Clement's work by noting: 1) that the Church's eucharistic action includes a prayer that is external (oral action) and internal (the prayer of those willingly vulnerable to God) and 2) that union with Christ by contemplation and by the eucharist are not divisible, for both are 'won' for us by the same sacrifice.

De la Taille contends that, for Clement (and for many other early Fathers, including Justin and Irenaeus), 'prayer' and 'sacrifice' were frequently synonymous, or at the least, interchangeable, and that an inner transparency of desire before God is brought to the altar of sacrifice. The following passage from Stromata 7.6 situates de la Taille's own concept about the ideal purification for eucharistic praying and the purification of such prayer:

'The altar, therefore, which is with us here on earth, is the congregation of those who are devoted to prayer, having one voice and one mind, so to speak....For the sacrifice of the Church is the prayer which is breathed

Similarly, when Daly treats Clement of Alexandria, he is less likely than de la Taille to grant that Clement, especially in passages from Stromata 7.6, has the eucharist 'in mind at all' (Daly, op. cit., 118).

De la Taille provides a remarkable citation from Tertullian's Apologetics, 30, in which Tertullian vividly links prayer and sacrifice:

'I offer him a richer and a greater victim, the victim he himself demands, prayer from a pure flesh, from an innocent soul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, not grains of incense to the value of one as, or the sap dripping like tears from an Arabian tree, or the blood of a wretched ox.... And so let nails pierce us whose hand are outstretched to God; let us be hung on the cross, let fires lick our flesh...the Christian with the habit of prayer is ready for any torture'.

De la Taille is not suggesting that this passage directly refers to the eucharist, but he does underline that Tertullian's words state what other Fathers stress 'over and over again', namely, 'that the visible sacrifice avails nothing without the invisible sacrifice, and the whole efficacy of the invisible sacrifice is found in prayer and the adoration of a devout soul' (MF II, 68-69, n. 1; italics mine).
by holy souls, when sacrifice, and at the same time *our whole mind, is exhibited to God* (MF II, 75; italics mine).

De la Taille underscores here an essential link between the offering of the body and blood of Christ and a certain nudity of soul before God, a conjoined oblation made possible by the ‘internal sanctity’ of the Church bestowed upon it by Christ (ibid.). To step into this action of the eucharistic sacrifice is, as it were, to place oneself willing into the path of prayer—with its graces, risks, and ascetic demands.

For de la Taille, the reality of this connection between the worship of prayer and the eucharistic altar is crucial. Contemplation—a metaphoric immolation of our desire to God—64—and the ‘spiritual’ worship of prayer is possible only because of the perfectly ‘spiritual worship’ of Jesus. His sacrificial worship, de la Taille reflects, was perfectly pure and *spiritual* because carried out by the power of the divinity, and, because only the eyes of faith would be able to see the ‘divine things offered beneath the sensible signs’, i.e., only faith knows that in the offering of bread and wine at the supper, Christ was priest, altar and victim (MF I, 218; cf. n. 5). In the sensible worship of our earthly existence—beholden to the limits of our human nature and means—priest, altar and victim are different, necessarily distinct. And yet, worship carried out ‘according to the divine power of God’ transcends ‘the whole order and differentiation of sensible things’ (ibid.).

It seems, therefore, that Clement’s depiction of the eucharistic altar as the congregation, the people who offer transparent prayer, is a liberty of worship (and language) possible because the Church’s sacrifice is carried ‘in the divine power’ of

---

64 Cf. de la Taille’s comments in MF I, 202.
Christ’s pure offering. In other words, de la Taille’s argument above (in Chapter Three) that the ecclesial sacrifice depends upon the power of Christ uniting our sacrifice to his, holds here as well. *For once we begin to argue for a continuity between the ascetic practice of prayer, contemplation and eucharistic sacrifice, once we begin to speak of the ‘altar’ of holy souls offering prayer and of our ‘priestly’ immolation of unpurified desire to God at the eucharist,* this conflation of the ‘distinct’ things of earthly worship depends upon the grace poured out by the acceptable offering of the Victim, which is to say the grace that intimately unites the prayer to Christ.

Clement’s second theological observation supplements what we have just proposed. Clement sees Christ and his sacrifice as ‘purchasing’ for us the opportunity to contemplate the divine things of God and, more, that feeding upon the eucharist is the way that Christ imparts the mysteries of divinity to us. In a passage from *Stromata* 5 (§10), having suggested that Paul’s reference to ‘milk for little ones’ indicates our first instruction in the faith, Clement identifies the ‘solid food’ as the eucharist, which grants contemplation and the entrance into the realm of divine things:

‘food [will be understood] as the contemplation of those fully initiated in the mysteries (*epoptica contemplatio*): the very flesh, I mean, and blood of the Word; that is, knowledge of the divine power and essence... “Taste and see, for Christ is the Lord”. *For it is thus that he imparts himself to those who are more spiritually partakers of this food: namely when the soul nourishes herself...’* (*MF* II, 83-84).

Hence, Christ provides in the eucharist—at least for the more ‘spiritual’ or purified souls, those who have progressed further in the discipline of prayer—a fuller initiation into the

---

65 Our next chapter shall explore this further in addressing the question of our baptismal obligation to offer sacrifice, having been given a share of Christ’s priesthood in baptism.
mysteries of contemplative union. De la Taille further accents that eucharistic eating is not simply the sign and symbol of 'spiritual eating which is done in a living faith', but rather that contemplation is procured by the eating of the body and blood (or, at least, by the desire for it).66

We have noted earlier de la Taille’s deep appreciation of the Eastern Fathers, which repeatedly surfaces in Mysterium Fidei. Here again he manifests a predilection for Gregory of Nazianzus, and especially for Gregory’s strong and ‘graphic’ language about prayer and sacrifice. I draw attention to two passages that highlight the Cappadocian’s own interweaving of contemplation and sacrifice. In Book I of Mysterium Fidei, at a point where de la Taille is reflecting on Christ as the eternal altar, he cites an Oration in which Gregory preaches defiantly against those who seek to expel him from the eucharistic altar and take away his bishopric. Gregory proclaims that the violence of his enemies cannot successfully drag him from the altar of sacrifice:

‘What then? Will they forbid us their altars? Even so, I know of another altar, and the altars which we now see are but the figures of it; neither axe nor hand of man had been raised above that altar...all the activities round about that altar are spiritual, one ascends to it by contemplation. At this altar I will stand, upon it I shall make immolations pleasing to God... The great David seems to be thinking of this altar, when he says: “I will go up to the altar of God, to God who giveth joy to my youth”. No matter who he be, no one shall cast me out from this altar (Oratio, 26.16; MF I, 225, n. 18; second italics mine).

In these marvelous, impassioned words from Gregory the eucharistic altar at which we offer sacrifice is intimately associated with that celestial altar upon which we make our

66 MF II, 76. 84. De la Taille acknowledges that some scholars would doubt that Clement is referring here to the eucharist—even indirectly; but defends textually his own reading as the 'more probable opinion'. Cf. also our discussion in Chapter Four on the desire for the eucharist as the possession already of its grace.
‘sacrifices’ in contemplative prayer—and both altars are Christ. De la Taille applauds this theological analogy, along with Gregory’s exhortation that we immolate ourselves to God upon this celestial altar (MF I, 225; cf. Or. 26.16). Keeping one’s gaze ‘fixed’ upon this invisible altar is desirable even as we offer at our earthly altars.

Furthermore, Gregory robustly states that prayer—at either altar—is a participation in the sufferings of Christ. In the second volume of his work, de la Taille invokes Gregory’s distinctive articulations about our divinisation in the activity of offering sacrifice. He first cites Gregory’s early work, *Invecta contra Julianum*, where we are named sharers [συνεργούν] in Christ’s passion and divinity by our sacrifices (Or. 4.52). How, specifically, does Gregory envision this ‘sharing’/mingling/co-working? We could say that the *passio* of our suffering in contemplation and in eucharistic sacrifice is a sharing in that of the incarnate Son. In his autobiographical *Carmina*, Gregory affirms that we are ‘partners’ in the incarnation of God and his suffering when we offer the eucharistic sacrifice (Carm. I. 1. sect. 2, poem 34). Our offering is, as it were, ‘mixed’ with Christ’s. When sick, Gregory laments that he can no longer mingle his prayer with the sufferings of Christ: “‘No longer do I lift up my hands to the holy sacrifices, taking my part in (admixtus) the dread sufferings of Christ’” (I, 2, sect. 1, poem 50, vv. 49-50). For Gregory then, even though the ‘philosopher-ascetic’ ascends to the heavenly altar of sacrifice in contemplation, the prayer of sacrifice at the earthly altar is not only integral to that immolation of contemplative sacrifice, but makes us to be sharers in Christ’s suffering and in his divinity.
Although de la Taille does not expand upon Gregory’s theology of contemplation and theosis, I want to address two aspects of Gregory’s thought that provide an added dimension to de la Taille’s project—and to the thrust of my argument in this study.

First, according to Gregory, the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church is a parallel path to the contemplative, ascetic endeavor: in both, we may be purified and ascend to union with the God-man, who descended that we might be deified. They are not two opposed paths to becoming god-like. Secondly, if the altar is indeed a ‘mystical table’ leading the worshipper into the ‘mystery of deification’ (Or. 25.2), Gregory also underscores throughout his Orations that baptism is central to the spiritual life: it purifies, deifies and commences a life of Christic imitation. I accentuate this feature of Gregory’s sacramental thought because, as we shall see in the following chapter, de la Taille’s theory of eucharistic sacrifice is rooted in a vision of baptismal life that includes ascetic practice and prayer.

In this third section, I have attempted to elucidate how de la Taille imagines the connection between prayer at the eucharist, the purgative process of passive prayer, and the contemplative fruits of receiving the eucharist. We have underscored that Christ is the initiator of contemplation, that his sacrifice and the gift of his body and his blood procures the gifts of contemplation, taking the more purified into the very heart of the

---

67 Whilst Gregory often expresses a preference to withdraw from—indeed flee from—his active ministry in the Church, that he might again live the ‘deifying’ life of an ascetic monk (e.g., Oratio 1.5; Carm. 1, 2, poem 10, v. 630 passim), he likewise proclaims an integrated vision of ecclesial sacramental life and ascetic-contemplative life. For instance, Gregory seems to understand baptism and ordination as the beginning and facilitating deification (cf. also Or. 39. 13-14). Sharing in the priesthood of Christ, the priest is deified and deifying (cf. Or. 2. 22, 73). Cf. Norman Russell’s discussion in The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition, op. cit., 216-220.

68 Cf., for example, the Festal Orations 38-40 (esp.), and Or. 7. 23; Or. 14. 23;
Trinity. Bringing forward the thought of Ignatius, Clement and Gregory of Nazianzus, de la Taille discloses how the earthly altar of sacrifice is united to the heavenly, spiritual one, and how the purgation of desire at one is related to immolation at the other. What secures this dynamism between liturgical, sensible worship and contemplative sacrifice? Christ secures it—and as priest and altar and victim. The oblate prayer of Christian worshippers is mingled with his pure and acceptable offering, so that their sacrifice might be both material and spiritual. Christ secures this relationship between ritual and contemplative sacrifice because, through his eucharistic flesh, he grants to the worshipper a 'taste' for and of things divine, thereby exciting and purifying the desire for them.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that de la Taille casts the contemplative way as a purgative and sacrificial one. In the soul's movement toward union with God, a movement fired by desire, the ascetic battle against misdirected and unholy love is waged in a (frequently) long and painful process of oblation and purgation. This purification of desire only intensifies when progress in the virtues and charity reaches a human finis, and the soul awaits transition from ordinary to passive prayer (be it in this life or in the next purgatorial state). Recall how, with John of the Cross, de la Taille describes this purification in the light of faith and divine love as a crucifying suspension, a denuding of the self. We also witnessed de la Taille weaving his concept of 'created actuation' into an understanding of the divine indwelling of contemplation—accenting the intimacy of union whilst preserving divine transcendence.
Finally, we illustrated how de la Taille’s focus on Christ as altar, priest, and sacrificial victim, is *the hinge*, the ‘cardinal’ reality which holds together these various threads of prayer, grace, and the eucharist. The purgation of eucharistic praying, the purifying path of contemplation, the divinising grace of eucharistic union and the final states of passive prayer (the bridal union of the soul to God): all are made possible and efficacious through the grace of the incarnate Word, Christ who willingly became the pure oblation of desire. It remains for us now to examine more closely how the undertaking of purgative prayer is the *baptismal* obligation of all Christians. De la Taille’s theology argues that baptism and the eucharist constitute, respectively, the willing *mortification* of ungodly desire and the enflamed desire for the life and union of Christ.
**Chapter Eight: Baptismal mortification and the eucharist**

In this final chapter, we shall gather the threads of this study under the *topos* of baptism, the sacrament which, for de la Taille, decisively orients the Christian to the ritual offering of sacrifice and to the reception of the eucharistic gifts of divine life and union. We have just seen that the contemplative places herself willingly in the path of purgative prayer, to the end that her desire for the divine beloved may be ever more purified. In de la Taille’s theology, the continual mortification of disordered love falls under the purview of our baptismal profession—for contemplative and non-contemplative alike. Recall that we showed above, in Chapter Five, that *all* sacramental grace hangs upon a *desire for* the eucharist, from which flows all healing, elevating and unitive grace—through the sacrificial Lamb. This dynamic of desire and dependence is especially and most illustriously true of the ordering of baptism to the eucharist, and for reasons we shall now explore. In other words, we conclude our presentation of de la Taille’s thought on eucharistic sacrifice by elaborating a critically formative theological comparison. De la Taille aligns baptism with death, with the mortification of desires (through ascetic prayer and practice), with the cross, and with priestly oblation and *sacrifice*; and, he positions life, grace, union, peace, and purified love under the fruits of eucharistic banquet. What connects these two lines of parallel realities? Desire, or the movement of the will’s affection, constitutes the bond. As we shall see, de la Taille argues that no one undergoes baptism, no one enters the way of ascetic prayer or offers sacrifice, *apart from* a desire for the eucharist and its divinising union to God.
Our central task is to explicate de la Taille's vision of the dynamic of desire between baptism and the eucharist, underscoring how baptism is necessarily *generative* of sacrifice and mortification. There are two primary sources for our analysis here: a lengthy and rich section of *Mysterium Fidei* (Liber III) which details the relationship between baptism and the eucharist, and an address entitled 'The Eucharist and Mortification', a lecture given by de la Taille at the 1924 International Eucharistic Congress in Amsterdam.\(^1\) I shall begin with a discussion of how de la Taille casts the relationship between the two sacraments of baptism and eucharist—a relationship based both upon the signification operative in each sacrament and upon a movement of desire within the believer. We need then turn to de la Taille's explication of the sacramental *character* of baptism, for it is this sacramental effect of baptism that initiates the faithful into the sacrificial and oblative activity of Christ. This second point prepares the way for an unfolding de la Taille's salient portrayal of the connection between baptismal mortification and the eucharist, a connection clearly spelled out in the congress address.

'**Baptismus ad eucharistiam**'

In the third part of *Mysterium Fidei*, having just established that the primary effect of eucharistic grace is incorporation to Christ and his body, the Church, de la Taille raises the question of the sacramental effect of *baptism*. Is it not also the case that the principle effect of baptism, like that of the eucharist, is incorporation? If so, could it not be argued that they are, *essentially*, one sacrament? More, this identity in the efficacy of baptism

\(^1\) This address was translated from the Latin and included in *The Mystery of Faith and Human Opinion: Contrasted and Defined* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1930), pp. 407-419. Hereafter cited as EM.
and eucharist would likewise indicate an identity of *signification* (*MF*, 557). De la Taille entertains this legitimate ‘objection’ only in order to devote significant resources (and a good deal of type) to exploring the ‘profound mutual relationship’ between these two distinct sacraments. The discussion here captures a theologically potent moment in the whole of de la Taille’s *Mysterium Fidei*. Two critical aspects of his sacramental theology surface with clarity: we begin to see that baptism is integral to sacrifice, and we hear de la Taille’s unmistakable articulation of a theology of desire, operative in the sacraments and in the economy of the spiritual life *in toto*. How then does de la Taille respond to the ill-perceived theological conflation of baptism and eucharist?

De la Taille argues that the incorporation effected by these two sacraments is ‘neither procured nor signified’ in the same way. We are asked to recall, in the first place, that the eucharist signifies *‘in itself (per seipsum)’*—and through the apt sign of a meal—incorporation to life, to ‘an existence in the vital and living body of Christ’ (*MF*, 557; cf. Chapter Four *supra*). Baptism, on the other hand, signifies union to this life only *‘through its intrinsic ordering to the eucharist’*, or put differently, in a secondary or oblique way. De la Taille suggests that baptism be understood as possessing a double signification. First and foremost, and ‘by act’, baptism signifies *death*. This death is *directly* signified: we show forth the death of the first Adam, which is life of sin—just as Christ ‘died on the cross to a corruptible and passable life, bearing the likeness of sinful flesh’. Whilst Christ endured a real death in the likeness of sinful flesh, we who are held
by the reality of a sinful flesh endure a death in similitude, 'buried' by the 'flood waters' of baptism, in which we die and are entombed with Christ (MF, 557-558). 2

Yet, if this is the direct signification of baptism, baptism also signifies life—indirectly and 'by intention'. For in baptism, we do not die 'any death whatsoever'; we are not baptised into some anonymous death. Rather, we die the death of Christ, a death taken up 'for the purpose of changing corruptible life into incorruptible life':

Therefore the true Priest, Christ the Lord, dedicated to God through death his holy and expiating gift, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, so that it might be raised to glory by God, the sacrifice being consummated. By that death there is only the transitus into life; for it is the passover of the Lord. And so also our baptismal death, implanted in the death of Christ, is nothing but the way to life, that life which Christ lives in God (MF, 558).

In other words, we are conformed in baptism to a death that is itself intrinsically ordered to life. If baptism, according to it own 'demonstrative power', signifies death, its 'co-symbol (consignificatio)' is the desire for life (ibid.). In a revealing simile, de la Taille purports that the designation of death, accompanied by the intimation of a 'coming forth' of life, is like sacrificial oblation: for *the act of offering sacrifice marks the beginning of its reception*, in which the consummated victim is returned to the participants, bestowing

---

2 In two different footnotes, de la Taille takes up the objections that 1) our resurrection to new life is the primary symbol of baptism, and 2) that burial is only represented in baptism by immersion—but not through infusion or aspersion. To the first, de la Taille grants that many Fathers 'unfolded' symbolic meaning in the emergence from the baptismal waters; he contends, however, that this emergence is not itself properly 'sacramental', i.e., it is not essential to the signification of baptism. The very source of this teaching is Romans 6, about which Suarez definitively states: "'In Romans 6, only the sepulcher is said to be properly and formally represented through baptism; the resurrection is only represented consequentially, in so far as that death is ordered to it, so that we might walk in the newness of life'" (De baptismo, disp. 20, s. 7) (MF, 557, n.3). De la Taille likewise discounts the objection that burial is only represented in baptism by immersion. Here, Thomas and Chrysostom are cited as auctoritas. In ST III, 66, 7, 2m, Thomas writes: "'In whatever way the ablution happens, the body of a man, or some part of him, is put under water, just as Christ's body was placed under the earth'". And before Thomas, Chrysostom had also answered the question eloquently: "'For as the head is dipped in water, immersing us in a tomb, so the old man is entirely buried or cast down'" (In Joan. hom. 25.2) (MF, 558, n. 1).
heavenly gifts (ibid.) Here we have the first indication of a vital alliance between baptism and sacrifice, both of which are perfected in the fruits of the eucharist.

We shall return to this explicitly in a moment, after first attending to the tenor of de la Taille’s writing on this subject. Half apologetically, he ‘heaps up’ a number of patristic authorities, eager to convey the spiritual wealth behind this teaching about the double signifying reality of baptism—death, in the first place, conjoined to wished-for life; or, mortification and the beginning of vivification. He notes upfront that these ‘authorities’ stand upon Paul’s own theology in Romans 6.2-10: we are baptised into Christ’s death, buried with him, so that the ‘old body’ of sin might be destroyed—a death aimed at life with Christ. However, it is the passage from 1 Pet. 3.21-4.2 which, once again, we see potently highlighted by de la Taille. Baptismal death is endured so that one might live ‘not for the desires of men, but for the will of God’, living unto God ‘according to justice’ and with a ‘good conscience’. For de la Taille, this passage from 1 Peter suggests that the sacramental rite by which ‘we are conjoined to Christ’s passion’ is the petition for, the longing for, a life of pure desire before God, a longing fulfilled in sharing the resurrected life of Christ. It is ‘not surprising (non mirum)’, he writes, that ‘our death thus offered in the death of Christ’ is the desire for life, for, ‘every sacrificial offering is a

---

3 Cf. MF, 561: ‘Excusatum me habeat lector, quod tantas congero auctoritates, ut Augustini, ita aliorum Patrum’.
4 De la Taille provides, a passage from Chrysostom’s Commentary on Romans (P.G. 60, 480), which dramatically links baptism and the cross: “‘What did [Paul] intend by the words We are baptised into that death of His? The meaning is that we are to be among the dead, just as he was also. For the cross is baptism (σταυρός γάρ ἐστι τὸ βάπτισμα). Thus, what the cross and sepulcher was for Christ, baptism is that for us—even if they are not the same things in reality; for he died and was buried in his very flesh, whereas we died and were buried in sin’ (MF, 559, n. 4; italics mine).
prayer for divine consummation, and the consummation of an acceptable gift, is life in the presence of God' (MF, 559).

I shall address only two of the more striking patristic passages collected by de la Taille, both of which indicate a distinction-in-connection between the double signification of mortification and new life in baptism. First, we hear the enflamed language of Zeno of Verona, who vividly portrays the death of baptism:

‘O great power, great knowledge, great love that judges us! —to which the whole race of sinners hastens to be chastised so that they might live in blessed happiness. For the merciful sword [of baptism] descends into the bowels of the sinner and in one and the same stroke, with the material of the body remaining unharmed, it slays the old man and creates the new, and buries the old in the element of the sacred waters...O necessary damnation! Man is slain, that he might live! ...’ (Tractatus 2, tract. 39-42; MF, 560).

If Zeno highlights that baptism is a violent—though merciful—chastisement oriented to life, de la Taille also cites the more familiar words of Basil (De Spiritu sanctu, 15.35), which underscore the necessity of death prior to the life-giving work of the Spirit. For Basil, there is no baptismal newness of life without the definitive interruption of a previous, sinful life. To be buried with Christ clearly intends the ‘end’ and ‘destruction’ of a prior life, so that a new one may emerge:

‘Thus there are two ends proposed by baptism, namely, that the body of sin be destroyed, lest it later bear the fruit of death, and then that it be vivified by the Spirit, and bear fruit in holiness. The water exhibits the image of death, the body, as it were, being received into the tomb. But the Spirit sends forth vivifying life, renewing our souls from the death of sin into pristine life. This is what it means to be born from water and the Spirit. Indeed, because death is accomplished in the water, the Spirit thus effects our new life’ (MF, 562; italics mine).
We can readily discern what de la Taille hopes to accomplish in bringing forward these and similar passages from the Fathers. Through an accumulation of witnesses, he demonstrates a strictly ordered, two-fold signification of baptism: life, resurrection, and union in Christ is consequent to the mortification directly and primordially signified in baptism. Near the end of his discussion, he suggests that the tradition ‘distinguishes’, though not always with rigor, between what is ‘induced by the baptismal rite itself, that is, death, and that which enters from another direction, namely life from the Spirit’ (MF, 563). Put differently, baptism is ‘set towards’ mystical death, mystical immolation, penance, the cross, and the tomb, from which the ‘new man’ emerges (ibid).

To this point, we have allowed de la Taille to enunciate a baptismal theology that aligns baptism with death and sacrificial offering. We have seen how he underscores the direct and principal signification of baptism—death and the mortification of desire, but without divorcing it from the secondary, indirect signification of the sacrament of life unto God, a life of ‘good conscience’—purified desire. Yet, de la Taille challenges the reader further. In an effort to disclose the full import of the relationship between the dual signs of baptism, and between the rite of baptism and the eucharist, he analyses the sacraments in terms of cause and efficacy.

Since sacraments also cause what they signify, de la Taille pushes the question of causal efficacy in regard to the double signification of baptism: can we say that baptism

---

5 A too literal reading of this distinction would err in surmising that the Spirit is not also engaged in the ‘first’ act or signification of baptism—that of the slaying of the sinful creature. We shall return to this interesting question momentarily, when the theology of Sarah Coakley is engaged. In the meantime, recall that de la Taille sees the Spirit operative in the sacrificial oblation of Christ (cf. Chapter Two); thus, one would suppose the Spirit to be present as well in the believer’s baptismal offering of the death of sinful flesh and desire.
causes both death and life? To be sure, he writes, there is nothing surprising about the suggestion that baptism in fact occasions death, for burial is clearly represented (MF, 558). But how does baptism, through an ‘indirect’ sign, also effect new life? De la Taille’s answer to this question takes us into the heart of his theology of desire. In short, baptism causes life because baptism specifically desires the life of the eucharistic banquet, desires that vivification which comes from a participation in the sanctified victim, from union to Christ. Now, to desire that life is already to possess it in some measure: ‘there is no death without the desire for life and there is no desire for life which entirely lacks life (non sine appetitu vitae mors, non appetitus vitae sine vita)’ (MF, 558). Let us see in greater detail how de la Taille unfolds this principle of desire.

We have already noted that the death of baptism is ordered to life, since it is an imitation of Christ’s passion and transitus to life and glory in the Father’s presence. De la Taille proposes something more: that baptismal mortification is ‘taken on (assumitur)’, not as an end itself, but on account of the life of eucharist (MF, 564). Eucharistic vivification, he writes, perfects baptism and ‘belongs to those who have already come to know what it means to die’ (ibid.). But is it indeed the case that every baptism into the death of Christ is received with a longing for the eucharist? It is, de la Taille argues, because baptism—‘unless it be false’—is administered ‘according to the desire of faith (secundum intentionem fidei)’ (MF, 566). This Christian faith believes that death, signified by baptism, ‘exists in order to obtain life, the communication of which is the
proper fruit of the eucharist’ (ibid.).

We are again reminded of the reciprocal ordering which marks Thomas’s theology, here applied by de la Taille to the dynamic of desire between baptism and the eucharist. Baptism does signify and ‘cause’ a desire for eucharistic life, but this it does through a ‘prior’ desire for the eucharist:

Indeed, no man receives baptism unless he desires the eucharist according to faith. To that point, the desire for the eucharist is prior to the desire for baptism, just as St. Thomas believes: ‘Now the sacrament of eucharist, although it be posterior to baptism in its being received [understand: sacramentally], it is nevertheless first in the order of desire’ (ST III, 73, 5, ad 4). Therefore, no one would desire baptism unless she had already desired (in some way/ aliqualiter) the eucharist (ibid.)

What becomes increasingly evident in de la Taille’s discussion of baptism and the eucharist is that the attractive power of eucharistic grace, of union to Christ and a sharing in his divine life, is the efficient cause of all movement of desire towards divine life, and especially of the willingness to offer sacrifice. No life of graced union to God’s life is embraced except through death.  

---

6 De la Taille does not ignore the question of desire in infant baptism. Doubtless, infants are not capable of the desire—either elicited or actual—for the eucharist in baptism. However, they can possess a ‘habitual desire’ for this life. For adults, there is both elicited and actual desire, for they express their desire in actu; by their desire for and their submission to the sacramental rite, they consent to its signification and publicly declare an intention to conform their desire to the faith of the Church. Infants, on the other hand, are said to desire the eucharist by the faith of the Church, which orders death to life. They can ‘conform’ to this faith only by a habit. Indeed, since baptism effects what it signifies, it ‘imprints upon infants the habitual desire for the eucharist, by which they receive the fruit of the eucharist’ (MF, 568). Cf. ST III, 73, 3.

7 Not surprisingly, de la Taille here notes Thomas’s marvelous discussion of the rôle of desire in the justification of the sinner (ST IaIIae, 113, 5). Thomas argues that a sinner enters the life of grace only by some movement of the free will away from sin (hatred) and toward grace (desire): ‘It is necessary, therefore, that in the justification of the ungodly there be two movements of the free will: one by which it leans (tendat) toward the justice of God through desire, and the other, by which sin is detested’ (MF, 564, n. 1). The analogy here is salutary: the willingness of baptismal death marks a movement away from the deathly life of sin and includes a movement of desire toward the life of grace in the eucharist. In the unjustified, the will’s movement away from sin also marks a movement of desire toward life in God’s saving grace. In both cases, the double movement of intentio is requisite.
Yet, none of this makes sense without an explication of the *efficacy* of this desire for the life of the eucharist. Why is the desire itself for this life already a partial attainment of it? In fact, this basic principle of a theology of desire is applied in a pre-eminent way to the eucharistic food. A desire for the life of the eucharist is a 'movement of the mind and spirit toward the living flesh of Christ—the source of our life' and, just as any 'genuine and powerful' movement toward life is already a 'movement of life', so 'Christ is not absent to those who fittingly move toward (*tendunt*) Christ' (*MF*, 565; italics mine). Crucially, de la Taille asserts the transformative power of the end desired: the good end changes into itself the desire for that end.\(^8\) Hence, in terms of the desire for life which is present in every baptism, that desire is efficacious because any movement toward divine life—'which derives from Christ through his flesh'—is itself 'divine', transformed by him who is the terminus of that hunger.\(^9\) For de la Taille, desire is not only the key to linking baptismal mortification and the life of divine union offered in the eucharist, but also the key to understanding how baptism may be said to *effect* that incorporation into Christ's divine life.

De la Taille is keen to show that tradition supports this notion of the operative power of the eucharist in baptism. He suggests that one of the more potent symbols of this can be found in that common teaching of the Fathers of the Church about the fittingness of Christ's baptism, i.e., of the Jordan waters receiving the power of life from

\(^8\) De la Taille provides an informative footnote here, one that gives us an epistemological example of this principle: namely, the human mind, which takes in concepts that exist outside of itself, as it were, is thereby ennobled or defiled by that which it desires to know—for every 'motion is specified by its terminus' (*MF*, 565, n. 1).

\(^9\) 'Sed motus sincerus et efficax in vitam jam est motus vitae; nec deest Christus iis qui in Christum debite tendunt: propterea quod bonitas finis transit in ipsam finis appellantionem' (*MF*, 565).
their contact with the *flesh* of Christ. Ephraem, for example, provides a potent symbol of this eucharistic reality in his poem about Jesus’s baptism. Here he portrays the eucharist itself as the ‘leaven [fermentum]’ of our baptism: “‘Behold, God mingled his leaven in the water. That leaven raises up those formed from the dust, and joins those beings to God. For the leaven of the Lord flowed into his servant and lead him to freedom’” (Hymns on the Feast of the Epiphany, 4. 5-6; *MF*, 567). Baptismal incorporation into the divine life of Christ happens through the ‘eucharistic flesh’ of the Lord. In Augustinian language, just as the eucharistic bread changes us into Christ’s body (we do not change the sacramental food into our own bodies), so the baptismal waters of the Jordan effected no change upon Christ’s flesh but were transformed by the presence of his body.

Indeed, de la Taille would argue that if baptism were ‘perfectly (*perfecte*)’ desired, then one would ‘already eat spiritually the flesh of Christ and drink from the wound in his side’ (*MF*, 566). However, we shall presently see more clearly that baptism

---

10 ‘Ecce Deus in aquis suum immisciit fermentum. Istud fermentum attolit plasmatos e pulvere, eosque Deo coadunat. Fermentum enim Domini illapsum est in servum, eumque in libertatem adduxit.’ My translation is from the Latin, which de la Taille is reading from the Lamy edition (Syriac-Latin) of Ephraem’s work. I am indebted to Syriac scholar James F. Coakley for the following translation of these two verses from the original language—a translation in which, I suspect, de la Taille would rejoice:

- Divinity has mixed its leaven in water;
- The leaven raises the dough of dust
- and causes it to mix with divinity.

The leaven of the Lord, which can bubble up in the servant and raise him to freedom, has joined his servant to his family, that of the Lord.

Thomas, less poetically, attributes the efficacy of baptismal water to the sanctifying power of Christ’s flesh: ‘That it may touch the body and cleanse the heart, this power the water of baptism possesses by contact with the flesh of Christ (*ex tactu carnis Christi*)’ (4 D. 26, 2, 3, ad 1; *MF*, 567-568).
is, after all, the critical beginning of a long purification of our desire for the eucharist and union to God. Still, de la Taille emphasizes that baptism, even as it is ‘the sacrament of death’ vis-à-vis the sinful flesh of the ‘old Adam’, may likewise be called ‘the sacrament of desire’, in relationship to the ‘flesh of life’ found in the ‘new Adam’ (MF, 566; italics mine). In other words, baptism and the eucharist ‘hang together’, baptism itself being ‘sacramental movement’ toward the eucharist, which is the perfection—completion or end—of baptismal mortification. We conclude this section with these utterly transparent words about the sacrificial character of baptismal death as oriented to the eucharist:

> For just as no immolation is celebrated except in view of its consummation, nor is this consummation approached apart from the sacrificed victim; so neither shall we be assimilated to the atoning death of the Lord unless it be for the end of our being conformed to this heavenly life. Through baptismal death we are united to the Lord’s death and make our own the propitiation of his death for us so that it may obtain for us union to the life-giving victim (MF, 565; italics mine).

We now turn to a brief discussion of baptismal character—the means through which the baptised are granted a participation in the sacrificial action of Christ.

**Baptismal character and interior immolation**

If desire for union with the divine absolutely unites baptism and the eucharist, de la Taille nonetheless introduces another illuminating connection in terms of the *res et sacramentum* of baptism, namely, the *character* of Christ’s priesthood. We have already discussed above that the sign and reality of the eucharist is the very body and blood of Christ—a sacramental reality most proper to the eucharist, in which the ‘victim of salvation unites himself to us’, so that the Christian might live a divine life in him. (MF,
But in baptism, the sacrament of the Lord’s passion and death, it is enough that we are ‘touched’ by the power of his passion. That is to say, between ‘those being mortified, and the one slain [Christ], no union in esse is required’; rather, it suffices that the death ‘pass from one to the other’ (MF, 570). Again, whereas it is fitting that in the eucharist something sacred would be hidden and contained in the sacramental material of the bread and wine, nothing sacred need be held in the material element of baptism—‘except as ordered to something else and in a passing way’, as signifying the power of Christ’s death (ibid.). De la Taille underscores that, unlike the material reality of the eucharist received in communion, it is not the water that one receives in baptism, but the res et sacramentum:

I mean, one receives the character of Christ, which is impressed upon us who, in baptism, profess to have received some share in the priesthood of Christ (in as much as it pertains to the priesthood of Christ that the death and immolation of Christ is brought to God, a death to which we are symbolically conjoined in the water.) (ibid.).

In speaking of the ecclesial sacrifice in Book II of Mysterium Fidei, de la Taille has already given witness to this traditional doctrine concerning the character of baptism and a participation in Christ’s priesthood. Here he is most concerned to underline the baptismal dynamic and signification of receiving this priestly character. Put in Thomistic terms (4 D, 26, 2, 3, ad 2), the water and verbal formula of baptism do not effect grace

---

11 De la Taille continues here: ‘There would not be a practical signification of this reality unless the flesh and blood of the victim himself were placed before us as something to eat and drink, or as something to be taken up within us (intussusceptibilis). For to participate in vivification requires union to the principle of life, in so far as it is union to the cause formal and intrinsic, as it were’. In other words, the res et sacramentum of the eucharist is the formal and intrinsic cause of our deification in sacramental eating (MF, 570).
12 Cf. MF II, 236 passim. Also, see Chapter Three, supra.
directly; rather, they bestow the priestly character. The character, however, 'immediately introduces, just as it immediately signifies, our spiritual immolation, which does happen through grace' (MF, 570, n. 2). This is no minor point. De la Taille draws to the fore the baptismal reality of the Christian's immolation in the sacrificial death of Christ. This baptismal character, 'indicates in us an interior immolation to God (in terms of an immolation of the life of sin, of the flesh, and of the death-dealing world, in order that we might live unto Christ through grace)' (MF, 570). For after all, de la Taille reminds us, every visible sacrifice is a sign or sacrament of an invisible sacrifice. Baptism inaugurates Christic life, impressing the priestly character which allows the believer, in grace, to offer his own interior immolation with that sacrificial death of Christ.

An epistolary passage from Fulgentius (Epist. 12, 11, 26. P.L. 65, 392), summoned to give an eloquent statement of our participation in the priestly death of Christ, illuminates de la Taille's theological point. Fulgentius is assuring the recipient of the letter that baptism begins a participation in the one bread of the eucharist; this is specifically the case because the faithful are inserted in the sacrificial immolation of Christ at baptism:

"Though we are many, we are one body in the one bread". When anyone begins to be a member of that one body, at that point one begins to participate in the one bread, because, for any member, when joined in baptism to Christ the head, that one is already immolated to God in the living victim...Therefore, whoever becomes a member of the body of Christ, in what way does that one not receive what he himself becomes, when indeed that one becomes a true member of the body, the sacrament of which is in the sacrifice' (MF, 569).
De la Taille explicates two lines of thought from this passage. First, because one is inserted into the death of Christ at baptism, that mystical death also possesses an immolational and sacrificial character. Secondly, because baptism marks a union to the living and eternal sacrifice, the initiated are given a share in Christ’s priesthood. This very baptismal character allows the ecclesial sacrifice of Christ’s body to be a true sign of the believer’s interior immolation. In this next section, we shall more clearly see how the whole of spiritual life, including prayer and ascetical practice, is a prolongation of baptism oriented to the eucharistic sacrifice, an unfolding of the grace of Christ’s priestly character.

The eucharist and mortification

In 1924, de la Taille addressed an international eucharistic congress in the city of Amsterdam, announcing that the purpose of his ‘instruction’ would not engage speculation about ‘sublime and recondite’ eucharistic questions. Rather, his aim would be pastoral and practical: he desired ‘to propose…a simple form of eucharistic life’ derived from the Church’s genuine sources for spiritual improvement (EM, 407). The substance of de la Taille’s ‘proposal’ caps the argument building in the course of this study, weaving together the two threads of sacrifice (oblation, baptismal death, contemplation) and sacrament (grace, charity, divinising union). The point of departure for his lecture is taken from I Corinthians 9.27:

‘I chastise my body and bring it into subjection’.
Again, de la Taille is not interested in a critical, contextual scholarly exegesis of this Pauline verse; instead, he wishes to examine it in light of the sacrificial dynamic of eucharistic life.

De la Taille begins by alerting his hearers to the two concepts contained in this verse. He points out that Paul is enunciating both a) the mortification of the body, reflected in the words *I chastise my body*, and b) the intrinsic end of that mortification, seen in the words *bring it into subjection*. De la Taille’s lecture first treats the mortification of body, demonstrating how it is ‘bound up together’ with the offering of the sacrifice. He then shows how the subjection of the flesh—or its *adjustment to the spirit*—is ‘traced back’ to the *fruits* of participating in eucharistic banquet (EM, 407). I want to outline here the salient features of de la Taille’s two-fold exposition—especially those elements which remarkably clarify what we have been arguing about the intersection of his theory of eucharistic sacrifice with the spiritual life of the baptised Christian.

**Mortification and sacrifice.** De la Taille closely parses Paul’s *I chastise my body*, noting first that the Apostle does not say that he ‘bridles’ or ‘checks’ the passions of the flesh, but rather that he chastises (‘castigo’) them. De la Taille argues that the former pair of words suggests only a sort of restraint, or the ‘resistance’ that falls under the ‘negative precepts of the law’. Castigo, however, implies a sort of ‘violence’ against natural—‘and by no means dishonourable’—human desires (EM, 408). Chastisement indicates something ‘contrary’, something ‘repugnant’ and painful to the appetites that move the will. Such action against our desires is not, he specifies, an ‘obligation that
presses upon us at every moment’—even though, as we shall soon hear, the baptised cannot escape it altogether.

De la Taille presses the question of chastisement further, inquiring more deeply into the motive and purpose of such ‘aggression’ against our desires, and into its methods. He contends that such action presupposes ‘guilt’ or ‘sin’, and that it derives from a recognition of transgression—either of mortal sin ‘directed against that charity of God or of our neighbour’ or of the ‘venial’ sin of disordered desire, by which one moves and chooses in a direction opposed to ‘what the pursuit of the last end commands’ (EM, 409). De la Taille depicts disordered desire as carrying out ‘violence’ against the spirit and ‘right reason’. Within this state of warfare, the chastisement of which Paul speaks is that of a ‘medicinal’ correction—the kind which aims at drawing nearer to the goal of the ‘empire’ of divine charity in the whole of the human being; or, in a word, the finis is ‘the sweetness of peace’ (EM, 409-410). What of the weapons of ‘chastisement’? De la Taille acknowledges that this chastisement will ‘at certain times’ be ‘afflictive punishment’; but it is to the ‘privative’ form of chastisement that he devotes his attention. Such chastisement is the withdrawal of ‘pleasurable, though licit’ things from the senses and mind, and ‘in order that there may be room for the sole enjoyment of God, loved in himself and for himself, above all gifts, whether bodily or spiritual, that are not God’ (EM, 411). De la Taille’s words here potently echo the sanjuanist perception of the

---

13 John of the Cross, in a letter addressed to a Prioress of a Carmelite monastery in Cordoba, strictly cautions against the ‘discipline of the rod’, a practice which has all but ‘expired’ from the ferial Carmelite office (cf. Letter 13, *Collected Works*, op. cit., 695). (I am indebted to Sarah Coakley for pointing me to this reference on John’s letters.) I suspect that de la Taille is attuned to John on this question, for he clearly
dark night of contemplative purgation, and he names this mortification ‘the purest love of 
God’. Such purgative and ascetic love can accomplish the perfection Paul had in mind in 
this Corinthian verse (ibid.).

Yet, how does all of this turn about the eucharistic sacrifice? In this lecture, de la 
Taille’s articulates a crucial theological correlation, one less-explicitly stated in 
Mysterium Fidei. In short, he provides an account of how to understand the atoning, 
propitiatory nature of sacrificial oblation of the ecclesia, while at the same time revealing 
how the ascetic practices of the baptised are absolutely integral to this sacrificial offering. 
In a fallen world, de la Taille writes, every eucharist is an ‘atoning sacrifice’ and bears 
the ‘sign of mortification’, represented and ‘pledged’ to God. Recall what we have 
outlined in Chapter One about the nature of gift-giving between creatures and the all-
Holy God: each gift must be accompanied by a sign of sorrow or regret. The offering of 
eucharistic sacrifice is, therefore, a sign, a ‘sacrament’ and ‘vow’ before God of ‘personal 
immolation’, of a willingness ‘to undergo hardships’ and to offer oneself ‘in expiation’ 
(EM, 411). De la Taille calls upon Gregory the Great, that ‘Doctor of the spiritual life’, 
for a description of our penance and ascetic prayer practice as a kind of ‘sacrificial 
celebration’. I quote the passage at length, for it captures well the spiritual dynamic of 
sacrifice envisioned by de la Taille:

‘Mindful of the eternal judgement, the saints daily immolate 
themselves to God as a sacrifice by the weeping and wailing of 
compunction. They, as foretold, chastise their bodies, and thus 
fulfill what is said by the Apostle to the Gentiles: That you 
present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto

recognises that ascetic practice and contemplation ‘touch’ the body with the purifying ‘rod’ of the Spirit, 
and, often enough, with a cruciform suffering.
God (Rom. 12.1). For a victim is slain that it might be offered. But a living victim is the body afflicted for the Lord: and it is called a sacrifice...because it is already dead to the this world, being free from evil deeds; but a living one because with all the might at its disposal, it performs good deeds' (In Ezech 1.2, Hom. 10.19; EM, 412).

De la Taille glosses Gregory’s sacrificial metaphor as a positive reference to the Church’s eucharistic liturgy. Without a doubt, he argues, Gregory teaches that penance and mortification hang together with the offering of ecclesial sacrifice; indeed, propitiatory sacrifice intends this penance—internal and external (ibid.). But, significantly, the theological ratio for this correlation is founded upon Christ’s atoning sacrifice—the Lamb ‘slain for our salvation’, and upon a baptismal participation in that passion and death. In baptism, the believer has died in Christ mystically, but the sincere offering of eucharistic sacrifice (an obligatory act for the baptised) perpetuates the ‘very profession of baptism’ practically—or to employ de la Taille’s language—‘pragmatice’ (EM, 412). Hence, a ritual participation in baptismal death radically commits the believer to a life-long battle against disordered desire, to a ‘mortification of the concupiscences’ that must ‘be made a reality in the newness of our life’. In Christian sacrifice, then, the believer aligns herself ‘with Christ stripped, in death, of the likeness of sinful flesh’ (ibid.). To participate in the Church’s ritual oblation indicates an ‘amen’ to disposing oneself for death and mortification: he or she offers sacrifice like a ‘true Christian’ who is willing to suffer the slaying of inordinate appetites and the ‘crucifying’ (de la Taille claims Paul’s language here) of that desire which yet resists the divine will (EM, 412-413).

Yet again we are alerted to John of the Cross’s influence upon de la Taille. John likens the long, sacrificial purgation of contemplation to baptism, suggesting that
contemplation is the unfolding of a baptismal promise and grace. In the *Spiritual Canticle* (23.6), he describes the relationship between contemplative espousal and the espousal of baptism in this way: baptismal espousal, 'made on the cross', is accomplished 'immediately' when God gives the first grace at baptism; contemplative espousal, on the other hand, 'bears reference to perfection', and is attained 'gradually and by stages'.

Even so, John makes the remarkable statement that the two espousals are but one. De la Taille, I submit, preaches this sanjuanist vision of baptism and the sacrificial spiritual life. He would add, no doubt, that all our ascetic practices leading up to and disposing us to passive prayer are included in this baptismal-contemplative espousal, an espousal renewed as often as we celebrate the eucharistic sacrifice. To sum up what we have argued thus far, because baptism inserts the believer into Christ’s propitiatory death, the Christian 'contracts' the obligation to offer the ecclesial sacrifice and to immolate soul and body to God.

Still, de la Taille is intent to underscore a further reality: this chastisement of desire lacks full meaning and efficacy *apart from* the sacrificial oblation of the eucharistic liturgy. Ascetic practices not only acquire their 'highest value' and 'attain a liturgical dignity' in the eucharistic sacrifice, but they also 'invest' the celebration with 'truth and sincerity', giving it 'fullness and perfection' (EM, 413). Assuredly, de la Taille stipulates that nothing we do—whatever chastising practices we engage—can, of themselves, 'wash away' sin and expiate guilt. However, when these practices are 'laid with Christ upon the altar of sacrifice', when the purgations of prayer have been 'grafted upon the atonement of our Head', when the mortification of desire has been mingled with
the chalice of Christ's blood—changed 'like the water at Cana' 'into the wine of salvation'—then do they share the liberating efficacy 'that belongs to the Cross' (EM, 414).

We do well to pause at this rather astounding passage from de la Taille's lecture. He announces here a sharp theoretical vision of how the whole spiritual life is oriented to and completed in the ecclesial offering of Lamb of sacrifice. He depicts how ascetical practices—the believer's 'pragmatic' promise in the ritual of baptism—lend authenticity to that ecclesial oblation and thereby become efficacious and expiatory through a participation in Christ's sacrifice. De la Taille posits that our mortifications, transformed by being united to the immolated and acceptable Victim, cannot but have some bearing upon the flow of redeeming gifts from the source of salvation. For those sacrifices are conjoined to that one acceptable Gift which always 'opens' the divine fount of grace. We can revisit here de la Taille's impassioned plea in Book II of Mysterium Fidei for an ecclesial sacrificial oblation that would be offered with such great devotio (enflamed hearts and pure lips) that the river of redeeming grace would flood all of humanity. We are in a better position now to see how this affect, so fundamental in the dynamic of sacrifice, is caught up with the willing purgation of worldly desire, a will manifest in a whole set of ascetic practices, especially and including that vulnerability of passive prayer, as well as the liturgical practice of offering sacrifice. All of this—a discipline of desire, prayer, love—are brought nakedly to the altar of sacrifice, where they are

---

14 De la Taille would have us remember that sacrificial oblations are made not simply for the reparation of our own sins, for the straightening of our own crookedly-directed desires, but also, and 'nobly', for the sins of others and the self-centered, unholy loves of the world (Cf. EM, 414).

15 MF II, 240-241. Cf. also Chapter Three supra.
sanctified in being conjoined to the death of the pure Victim offered to God. However, this is yet only half of the 'equation' in de la Taille's lecture to the Eucharistic Congress.

We turn now to his reflections on eucharistic reception, which he links to the second part of Paul's verse: *and bring it into subjection*.

**Eucharistic banquet.** We have seen how the chastisement of worldly desire is integral to the offering of the sacrifice; de la Taille now explores how participation in the eucharist—the communion of the body and blood—bears upon this baptismally-motivated oblation. In brief, the fruits of the banquet operate upon the disordered appetites of the flesh and spirit, providing peace in the midst of the normal earthly warfare of bodily existence. The proper grace of the eucharist, he reminds us, is that of the union of the soul to Christ. This union is maintained through a fervent bond of charity, a charity intended to so suffuse the believer as to promote an ordering of desire in the body and in the soul; a charity, moreover, that reflects God's own Trinitarian love.

Put differently, that eucharistic grace of union to Christ transforms desire with satiation and peace—of the sort, to be sure, 'compatible with our human and earthly condition', which is only a shadow of what will be enjoyed 'in our Father's home' (EM, 415).16

Echoing what we have suggested earlier in regard to the dynamic of sacrifice-as-gift, de la Taille also underscores that eucharistic nourishment and peace correspond in a significant measure to the 'generosity' of the oblation, to the love with which the baptised

---

16 Our peace here below, de la Taille cautions, must be an 'armed' one, for the household cleared of demons by Christ cannot grow 'drowsy and slothful', lest 'the foe return with sevenfold fury' and 'tear down the structure...and abandon it to unclean spirits' (EM, 415).
offers his own ‘mortifications’, joined to the Gift of the High Priest. For the more ecstatic and pure is the desire in the offering of sacrifice, the more efficacious is the removal of every obstacle to the ‘inrush’ of eucharistic grace.

Therefore the eucharist will bring the body into subjection so much the more, as it finds that body more perfectly adorned with the sacrificial marks of Christ, and more generously immolated, through mortification, as victim with Him. *He who soweth sparingly* of that sacred and sacrificial wheat, *shall also reap sparingly; and he who soweth in blessings, shall reap blessings* (2 Cor. 9.6) (EM, 415).

Once again, if the sacrificial oblation of Christ is fully efficacious, the *devotio* of the worshipper participating in that offering figures centrally in determining the power of the banquet gifts received.

Above and beyond the ‘settling’ or ordering of desires, the blessings of the eucharist may entail the ‘delight’ and ‘enjoyment of peace’. De la Taille qualifies this delight as a spiritual one ‘born of charity’, ‘whereby the friend rejoices for the sake of his friend, and a son delights in the goodness of his father, a bride in the bridegroom’s comeliness’ (EM, 416). This fruit of eucharistic grace is preparatory, readying the believer for the beatitude of heaven. More, this delight is poured with increasing abundance upon those whose ‘taste becomes estranged’ to earthly delights by the ‘spice of mortification’. De la Taille turns to the Church’s liturgy to demonstrate the pattern of many of the liturgy’s post-communion prayers: there is an express petition that the received eucharistic food, which sets us free from earthly desires, might also *adapt* us to heavenly gifts (ibid.). For those who have entered the sacrifice marked by the purifying practices of ongoing baptismal death, and marked as well by a vulnerable desire for God,
eucharistic grace bestows with greater abundance a foretaste of eternal things and ‘a thrill of divine life’ (EM, 417; italics mine).

I should like to clarify two matters before offering some concluding remarks. First, whilst de la Taille does not explicitly say to his audience at Amsterdam that the very offering of sacrifice is, in and of itself, purifying of desire, he nevertheless implies that this is the case. He insists here on an oblation aware of its baptismal promise to prolong an imitatio of the death of Christ. This disciplining of desire, a mortification which occurs in the Christian’s daily life (though, as specified, it is an obligation which presses upon spiritual existence only with unequal and intermittent force), is part and parcel of the devotio with which the ecclesial sacrifice, the acceptable Gift to God, is offered. But if this is so, then each time we offer the sacrifice, however generously or sparingly, our oblation is being mingled with that one death which redeems all (minimal) efforts and failures of love. In the very activity of ecclesial offering, our desire encounters that ‘sharp knife’ of being adjoined to the perfect love of the Priest and Victim, which gift attains to the bosom of the Father. A refusal to participate in the offering of the ecclesial sacrifice is analogous to dismissing that cleansing efficacy which derives from contact between the body of Christ and the cleansing waters of baptism. For, in baptism the believer is inserted into the purifying death of the Lord and thereby marked with the Christic character of priestly oblation. In offering the only truly acceptable death and mortification, the believer intimately touches that very sacrifice whose purity circumcises and transforms misshapen loves, and raises up that Gift which converts impure desire into the holy image of the Son’s desire for the Father.
The second issue to address concerns the frequency of receiving the eucharist, a question I postponed intentionally in Chapter Five in order to take it up in this more illuminating context. Recall that we showed there how de la Taille defends the necessity of receiving the eucharist, a position founded upon a theology of desire: one who sincerely\textsuperscript{17} desires the eucharistic grace of union to Christ does in fact receive this grace \textit{in voto}. At this point, I wish to explore briefly why de la Taille proposes the necessity of frequent reception, a proposal elegantly interwoven with his thought on grace and the movement of desire. Significantly, his argument for frequent reception corroborates the obligation of the baptised to offer sacrifice and reiterates that the ritual sacrificial banquet is integral to growth in grace and spiritual perfection.

De la Taille begins his treatment of the question by reminding us of the fact—'noticed by theologians everywhere'—that Jesus instituted this sacrament in the form of a meal, so that by the sacramental signs of ordinary bread and wine, repeated partaking is indicated (\textit{MF}, 612). Earlier in this chapter, we have seen that the first grace of baptism is always received with a desire for the grace and life of the eucharist. This desire, de la Taille argues, is formed and shaped after the original form of the sacrament: hence one is justified not by 'a once-for-all desire' for the eucharist, but rather by a desire 'to receive it again and again' (ibid.).\textsuperscript{18}

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{17} A desire is deemed 'sincere' and efficacious if, when the opportunity to receive sacramentally presents itself, one would hasten to receive.  
\textsuperscript{18} De la Taille cites Thomas in support of this view (\textit{ST III}, 80, 11, c). Moreover, he does not hesitate to argue that 'incorporation to Christ' and 'living communion' with the Church 'slips' when the believer does not receive the sacrament with a corporeal frequency (\textit{MF}, 612).
But there is a second intrinsic reason why the eucharistic banquet should be frequented often, a reason based upon utility (utilitas) and the necessity of growth in the spiritual life. From the eucharistic fountain 'pours forth' both 'first grace' and the increase of grace: 'every sanctifying grace, which is the grace of union with Christ, flows from the eucharist as from a proper cause' (MF, 612). Frequent reception of the eucharist would not be necessary if an increase of grace were superfluous to the human being. To the contrary, however, the necessity for Christian perfection in grace aligns with a repeated sacramental participation in the eucharist. De la Taille's argument to this effect proceeds in this manner. First, he asserts that human nature itself dictates this lengthy process of perfection. Unlike angelic nature, 'perfected at once from the beginning', humans are not complete at creation—either according to nature or according to grace (MF, 612). Rather, by divine ordination the human creature must 'stretch forth toward his perfection little by little' and according to his 'mixed intelligence', that is, discursively. De la Taille's anthropology dictates that the believer cannot escape the 'law' of the human condition simply by a desire to do so. Indeed such a 'law', which continually works to subvert creatures from the order of God, is only gradually 'excised' by grace—and increased grace (MF, 613).

Vitally pertinent to our purpose here is the 'authority' de la Taille invokes to support his claim for frequent reception of communion. He cites an extraordinary passage from Francis de Sales's On the Love of God, in which Francis insists that the Lord's words, 'Be holy, because I am holy,' are without ambiguity in the spiritual life:

'The words by which our Lord exhorts us to strive and stretch toward perfection are so strong and urgent that we can only lie
to ourselves if we ignore the obligation we have to engage ourselves according to [that] design... The one who is holy, let him be yet more sanctified; and he who is just, let that one be more justified! Be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.... In regard to spiritual goods, he has not sufficient who is satisfied with what is enough; and sufficiency is not sufficient, because true sufficiency in things divine consists partly in the desire for affluence’ (VIII, 8, cf. 9; MF, 613).

De la Taille underscores not only Francis’s precept about the necessity or obligation of spiritual growth, but he also reflects at greater length upon the notion of increased desire, or a desire for affluence in the love of God (a desire, I would argue, that this passage hopes to arouse). De la Taille urges that sincere love desires more love; in fact, in rather robust language he writes that the one who ‘lacks’ the desire for more love is deficient ‘in the beginning of love’ (ibid.). More, when this desire for an affluence of love (a charity which we know de la Taille sees as flowing from, and being enflamed by, the eucharist) ceases, that one is cut-off from love and life: ‘“Now if you would say it is enough, you have died”’ (Augustine, Sermo 169, xv.18; ibid.). Permitting Augustine the last word, de la Taille reiterates that unless one is inclined toward progress and perfection in the spiritual life, there is a danger of losing grace and charity. Whereas, a desire for the increase of love, holiness, and perfection, is a desire aimed at the frequent reception of eucharistic grace.

De la Taille posits a second, similar reason for the necessity of progress in grace, an argument that takes seriously the ‘wounded’ human condition and the consequent need for a perseverance granted only through grace. Because the wound of original sin is never entirely erased from the human condition, the moral strength of the believer is not indomitable; rather, that strength will likely weaken or grow weary over time. Constancy
('constantia'), de la Taille submits, is the 'most difficult and arduous' challenge in the spiritual life. A perpetual victory over the same evils and temptations would require the continual stirring-up and augmenting of love by the Holy Spirit (MF, 613). The grace of union to Christ in the eucharist is needed 'at each step', writes de la Taille, so that love may be extended throughout the soul, making whole and keeping intact its broken powers. The eucharist is necessary for growth and for the protection of that new life (MF, 613-614).

Predictably, de la Taille brings forward from the tradition a number of sources that corroborate the necessity of repeated eucharistic reception. I refer only to a single historical witness, Rupert of Deutz, whose thought on the matter de la Taille highlights with relish. He overlaps two writings from Rupert's corpus, a passage from his Commentary on the Gospel of John, and a section from On the Victory of the Word of God, in which he contrasts the food of the tree of life with the food of the cross—the eucharistic banquet. De la Taille remarks that the Fathers frequently record how fitting it is that the earthly paradise of the Church provides a food 'to fill that portion' which once came from the tree of eternal life in Eden. I suspect that Rupert's witness to this doctrine particularly appeals to de la Taille because it suggests how the grace of the eucharist 'corrects' errant human desire. Rupert begins by explaining Jesus's words 'Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you shall not have life within you' in terms of a physician's prescription of an herb or potion, an antidote against a particular illness.

According to Rupert, Jesus is offering fallen humanity the opportunity to believe and to
desire in rectitude what was falsely believed of, and wanted from, the deceiver. The eucharist is provided from the cross

’so that [man] may eat the bread and drink that chalice of Christ with as much faith as he once ate with great infidelity the fruit of the tree of life, that he may believe about this [food] more than he can see, and who from the eucharist will be able to see more and will be able to be altogether more and something else—all of which he had not believed possible by any stretch of the imagination’ (In Joan., VI, PL 169, 455; MF, 615-616).

If the tempter promises and excites desire for ‘a godlike’ life through the eating of the fruit of the tree of life, with the eucharist Christ re-orders that desire toward a truly divinising and eternal banquet. He tests the believer’s faith in ‘what the eye cannot see’—namely, the living flesh and blood of Christ, which alone communicates divinity. In this way, faith and desire is found acceptable, for one believes in the words of Christ no less than Adam and Eve believed the words of the devil (MF, 616; cf. De victoria Verbi Dei, XII. 13). Salvation comes, de la Taille concludes, through the one and eternal victim of the new supper, and therefore through that ecclesial sacrifice, that mysterium fidei in which faith and desire is attracted to the life-giving flesh and blood of the eucharist (ibid.).

I have added these two points concerning the reception of the eucharist both to exhibit the balance of de la Taille’s thought and to underscore how his theory of eucharistic sacrifice is concomitant with a vision of progress in the spiritual life. The baptismal obligation to offer sacrifice in the rite of the Church, and to offer one’s own mortifications along with the Victim, is counterpoised with the necessity of receiving from that sacrificial banquet the fruits of grace that promote and protect spiritual growth.
To sum up, this last chapter highlights those distinguishing and defining marks of de la Taille’s theory of eucharistic sacrifice. I have shown that it is a theory which cannot be fully understood apart from a thick description, as it were, of how he conflates a lifetime commitment to the dynamic of baptismal death and spiritual growth with the liturgical action of sacrifice and a theory of graced union to Christ. As we have suggested here and in the proceeding chapter, contemplation and the transformation of desire which occurs therein, is the destiny of all the baptised. Such purgation and transformation is a prolongation both of baptism’s mystical death and of its desire for sanctifying grace—for the eucharistic food which intimately unites the believer to Christ. Baptism, ascetic practice, passive prayer and the ritual sacrifice of the Church: all of these actions (wondrously) both inaugurate and enflame desire for eucharist, and, are a response to the divine life and grace which flow from that sacrificial banquet table.
Conclusions

De la Taille’s early-twentieth century work on eucharistic theology accomplishes a new (and not new), forward-looking (and ancient) vision of sacrifice through a retrieval of biblical and patristic sources, through a careful attention to the best history-of-religions research available at the turn of the century, and with an impressive integration of Thomist thought as well. His methodology aligns him closely and nascently to the spirit of nouvelle théologie emerging in the second quarter of the twentieth century, but not to the increasingly trenchant refusal of scholastic categories tout court. As we have seen, his work on grace also demonstrates that he was a creative thinker deeply interested in the questions about the supernatural, questions which would polarise theology in the 1940’s and which perdure even in our own decade.

I have suggested at the opening of this study that the contemporary situation in Catholic theology seems divided, presenting two divergent tracks for envisioning eucharistic sacrifice. The first may be described as the ‘official’ magisterial view, which still articulates the Church’s theology of sacrifice in the language of Trent, employing scholastic categories and deriving central concepts from a history-of-religions approach to sacrifice. The second ‘option’, which finds the first outdated and mistaken in its approach to the eucharist, is that taken by a majority of post-Vatican II theologians who seek to transform the concept of ‘sacrifice’. In large part, they want to sever the temple-

---

19 In his article, ‘Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie’, Aidan Nichols highlights that some voices within the movement, J. Daniélou for instance, suggested that scholastic theology had reached an ‘obsolete’ point in the future of Christian thought (op. cit, pp. 4-6). Such a sentiment is far beyond de la Taille’s own methodology.
ritual denotation of sacrifice—along with its accompanying aspects of violence and propitiation, preferring instead to think of ‘sacrifice’ in terms of an ethic of gift, of self-offering. In general, these theologians focus their attention on ‘sacrifice’ as the self-Gift of God (and not as a human action directed to God), and upon the transformation of the people gathered at the eucharist (rather than upon the conversion of the bread and wine).

I have hoped to demonstrate that de la Taille’s own mystical-theological synthesis leads a nuanced way through the horns of this dilemma, so to speak. Whilst he refuses (and rightfully so, I think) to ‘disown’ the ritual-liturgical context of sacrifice, he also argues that oblation—and not immolation—stands at the heart of sacrifice. De la Taille underscores that sacrifice falls under the genus-definition of gift, and thereby attends closely to the nature of gift-giving between creature and creator. Critical to his endeavor is a careful parsing of the external-internal signifying function of the gift dynamic, emphasizing the necessity of an exterior sign of the inner desire and longing for the divine. By way of conclusion, let me enumerate these central aspects of de la Taille’s proposal which, I argue, carve a viable third alternative for contemporary eucharistic theology, and one that embraces a wide spectrum of the tradition.

First, de la Taille does indeed ‘spiritualize’ sacrifice, but he does so without divesting sacrifice of its temple-ritual context. He engages the history-of-religions context (as does the recent ‘official’ teaching voice of the Roman magisterium)\(^\text{20}\), and in fact, finds therein the central key to his theory, i.e., the distinction between oblation and immolation in sacrificial acts. De la Taille contends that oblation—specifically an

\(^{20}\) Cf. for instance John Paul II’s *Ecclesia de Eucharistia.*
external, ritual offering—and not destruction, is the central and determining element of sacrifice. However mundane this may sound to contemporary ears, de la Taille’s insight marked a critical shift away from post-Tridentine immolationist theories. This insight allows de la Taille to argue that the last supper and the cross are a single sacrifice: the priestly actions of Jesus with the bread and wine in the cenacle manifest the oblation of the sacrifice; his violent crucifixion represents the immolation of the sacrifice. The supper-oblation is fundamental for two principal reasons. First, it is critical as the outward sign of Christ’s interior devotion, that is, it is Christ tendering his gift to God: here is the Son, voluntarily and with love, offering his death to the Father. We can recall how de la Taille drew heavily upon the Eastern Fathers to demonstrate the reality of this oblation at the supper. The priestly offering at the supper is important, secondly, because it is the crucial sign of the believer’s own intended mortification and the conversion of desire from the worldly to the godly. (Repeatedly, we have seen the centrality of de la Taille’s reading of 1 Peter 3.18 – 4.1.)

His theology of eucharistic sacrifice is thus distinguished by the modus oblationis which, as it were, closes the impossible divide between Christ’s sacrifice and that of the Church—and the impossible divide between the Son’s pure love of the Father and the believer’s yet unpurified desire for God. To exalt the action of oblation, giving primary place to Christ’s words, his gestures and the external manifestation of his will, lead us to the next two features of de la Taille’s distinctive teaching.

Placing the accent on oblation theologically 1] provides a rich understanding of how the mass is a ‘proper’ sacrifice, and 2] underscores the rôle of the will in the offering
of sacrifice—in other words, I argue, this is de la Taille modern ‘subjective’ turn. To the first issue, once theology ceases to look for immolation in the eucharistic liturgy and focuses instead upon oblation, a new and striking answer to the Tridentine ‘true and proper’ sacrifice comes to the fore. De la Taille argues that the mass is a sacrifice because, doing as Christ did at the last supper, and doing such through his power, the Church offers a Victim to God—the signal difference being that, unlike Christ’s offering, when the victim was yet to be immolated, the Church now offers a victim already immolated. Such a theory need not strain to discover in the mass an (unbloody) immolation, though de la Taille is content to acknowledge that the separated species could signify a mystic immolation; rather, the ritual offering of a present Victim already-slain suffices to constitute a sacrifice. The ecclesial sacrifice is one with Christ’s sacrifice, on account of a unity between what is being offered (unitas ex parte rei oblatae).

 Furthermore, a second ramification of this emphasis on oblation reveals the important dynamic between the external and internal action of sacrifice-as-gift-giving. In the early chapters of this study, we saw that de la Taille’s sophisticated idea of sacrifice includes a salutary tension between the external sign of ritual sacrifice, a necessary component because, in fact, sacrifice belongs to the category of gift, and the internal reality (res tantum) of sacrifice—the loving disposition to surrender or dedicate one’s own will to the divine. Both are necessary for the integrity of sacrifice: without the ritual sign of the gift being handed-over into the possession of God, or, without the accompanying devotio for this gift-giving, there is no sacrifice. The eucharist is a
sacrifice because the Church offers to God, in sign and word, the *hostia*, the gift once-immolated. But de la Taille, and rather boldly for his theological era, asserts that the truth and efficacy of this Gift-giving corresponds to the sincerity and desire of those offering this sacrifice. Not that the redeeming power of the Gift, already eternally accepted and infinitely efficacious, can ever be diminished; nor that the Church’s offering can ever be inefficacious—since the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit never entirely withdraws. However, de la Taille establishes a clear subjective correlative: the *affect* of those offering the gift can limit or restrict the fruits flowing from the sacrifice. Even if, to be most theologically precise, the whole Church offers any eucharistic sacrifice, de la Taille yet attaches a vital significance to the individual worshipper’s *devotio*. In other words, the believer’s own affect ‘impacts’ that of the *totius Ecclesiae* (which, he emphasizes, is not an unchanging reality). What makes the mass-sacrifice celebrated at a parish on Monday, different from and more efficacious than that celebrated on Thursday? According to de la Taille, the *intentio* of those offering—from the presiding priest and

---

21 De la Taille’s interest and emphasis upon the centrality of the *sign* is a feature of his thought that caught the attention of the 20th-century English artist and poet, David Jones. De la Taille’s theology suggests that Christ is not only a sign-maker par excellence in the last supper-cross sacrifice, but that at the supper the God-man willing ‘placed himself’ in the order of signs:

he placed himself in the order of signs, in the order of symbols, to have the joy of symbolizing, and by symbolizing it [his body], of building up the mystical Body of which we are members (*MFHO*, 212).

That the very ‘goal and term’ of all creation should himself become a sign and figure bespeaks an ennobling of, a radical potentiality in, human sign-making. To borrow the language of Catherine Pickstock, Christ’s words and gestures at the last supper supply the truth to all signs, give them ‘to-be’, and allow there to be ‘concelebrants’ in that original and supplementing oblation-event (*After Writing*, op. cit., 261-263). In other words, de la Taille’s focus on the nature of sacrifice as sign and gift, his theology of the intimate and signifying link between the rite of the last supper and the cross-immolation, proves generative of postmodern thought about signs and reality. Indeed, one could say that it leads the way to a theological alternative to deconstructionism. For a discussion of David Jones’ indebtedness to de la Taille, see Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity* (Morehouse, 2005), pp. 82-90; and John Breslin, S.J., ‘David Jones: The Shaping of a Poet’s Mind’, *Renascence* 38 (1986): 83-102.
ministers, to the one who offered the stipend, to those assisting from the pew—
constitutes the difference.

We come now to the fourth distinguishing feature of de la Taille’s thought: this
focus on the will and desire of those offering the sacrifice highlights the scope of de la
Taille’s theology of sacrifice, one that encompasses the whole spiritual life of the
baptised Christian. I have argued that grace, ascetic practice and contemplative prayer
are integral components to de la Taille’s theology of sacrifice—integral, and held
together by this theologian’s understanding of human life as directed to union with the
divine, directed to theosis. But this life with and in the divine, beginning with sanctifying
grace of God’s intimate presence to the soul, is one of continual growth and maturation.
This in-process deifying existence, moreover, needs the eucharistic sacrifice and banquet.
De la Taille argues that it is the eucharist which attracts the believer and is the object of
desire when one longs for grace and union to God. One the other hand, from baptism to
the highest levels of contemplation, a purification and enflaming of desire for God is
being effected in the offering of sacrifice. The eucharist sacrifice is thereby the site in
which the promise of baptism (ongoing death in Christ) is repeatedly re-enacted, the site
in the which ungodly desire is offered and purified in the oblation of the eternally-
accepted Victim.

But let us clarify further why, for de la Taille, this spiritual growth depends upon
the eucharistic sacrifice, an effort which responds to the predominate concern in
contemporary eucharistic theology with the connection between ethics and the eucharist.
De la Taille would argue that both the offering of the sacrifice (the obligation of the
baptised) and the reception of the eucharist 'operate' upon human desire; and, that both are fountains of ascetic virtue and caritas. A believer may make a private promise to God to curtail an ungodly desire or behavior; a believer may give a dollar or two to the homeless woman sitting outside the subway station, considering his act one of charity or almsgiving; a believer may decide to fast on a certain day each week or pray the Liturgy of the Hours; a believer may, in the course of the day, stop and offer up a word of thanks and praise to God for the beautiful day in Boston, or, spend part of an hour in silent prayer. According to de la Taille, these are not sacrifices, properly speaking, though they are certainly praiseworthy acts of devotion, ascetic discipline, or virtue. Yet, when the smallest efforts of a Christian to direct her life and love to God are lifted up and exhibited to God in the ecclesial sacrifice, when they are joined with devotio to the external ritual offering of Christ's sacrifice, then they not only invest this ecclesial oblation with truth, but are transformed into 'wine' and share in the 'liberating efficacy' of the cross. In the Church's oblation of the body and blood of Christ, those efforts (or mortifications, to use de la Taille's language) are transformed by the end they seek. There they claim their full significance; there they grant sincerity to the ecclesial rite, and, by the sign of their interior desire to fully love God, they 'determine' the efficacy of the fruits received in the sharing of the sacrificial banquet. Plainly said, all ethical and ascetic practice is oriented to the oblation of the eucharistic sacrifice.

Before moving to a fifth and (perhaps most controversial) point about de la Taille's eucharistic theology, I want to briefly rehearse the distinctive place that passive prayer holds in his overall vision of sacrifice and the spiritual life. For I submit that de la
Taille is rather unusual in his explicit conflation of the eucharist and contemplation. Recall his assertion that all Christians are contemplatives-in-the-making. Prayer and desire of God here is on a continuum of the prayer and love of a purgatorial life after death, as the believer readies for the beatific vision. Contemplation, sacrifice, and the reception of eucharist is integral to the purgatorial process of the spiritual life. De la Taille’s sanjuanist writings on mystical theology present the passive purification of contemplation as analogous to the baptismal promise of mortification and oblation; more, the practice of such prayer is a pragmatic and real moment of the offering of love and desire in conjunction with Christ’s own oblation. By the same token, union with divine, which is the grace of contemplation, is likened to that intimate communion of grace and peace bestowed in eucharistic reception. The food of contemplation and the food of the eucharist derive from the same source: the grace which flows from Christ, incarnate God and reconciling Lamb of sacrifice. As the worshipper at the eucharistic liturgy would not expect to enjoy the fruits of the sacrificial banquet without a participation in oblation, so the contemplative would no more expect to enjoy the fruits of communion to the divine without the discipline, and indeed risk, of passive prayer—that naked vulnerability in faith to God’s fiery love.

Fifthly, then, we can enumerate de la Taille’s distinctive treatment of the propitiatory nature of theory of eucharistic oblation. The Church’s sacrifice is, of course, *latreutic*—giving thanks and praise and worship to the beginning and end of all things, to the holy and highest Good. And it is also a sacrifice of impetration, that is to say, those offering the infinitely acceptable Gift may ask for particular blessings and favors, either
for themselves or for others (living and dead). But it is the aspect of propitiation that meets with pointed contemporary rejection—even as the magisterium continues to speak in these terms. How does de la Taille’s theory of sacrifice ‘address’ this impasse?

I have suggested that it does so in a two-fold way: first, through his analysis of sacrifice-as-gift in the context of human sin; and second, by his vision of eucharistic sacrifice in terms of the entire spiritual life and growth of the baptised. De la Taille’s definition of sacrifice as belonging to the genus of gift demands that any genuine gift-giving to God in the fallen world of humanity must bear the mark of sorrow for the impurity of desire and lack of charity in the giver. Put differently, in a fallen world, a gift-theology is incomplete without the sacrificial, propitiatory element. Christians are indeed being made godly by a sharing in the grace of Christ in the sacrificial banquet. But this is a divinisation in via, just as the baptised Christian is on the way to a contemplative existence.

Concomitantly, we saw that reception of the gift of the eucharist in this fallen (if redeemed) world, is a possibility thoroughly entangled with the will to offer and undergo the mortification of desire—a willingness and devotio to which the believer was mystically committed in baptism. De la Taille argues that the oblation of eucharistic sacrifice aligns neatly with baptism and contemplation, both of which express the willingness to undergo, more completely, the conversion of those desires which curtail an ever-purer and more single-hearted love of God. Clearly saturated in the sanjuanist description of the dark night of the spirit, where the advanced contemplative is painfully, acutely aware of her distance from the all-Good divine, de la Taille vividly portrays the
desire to unite (in expiation) this failure in love to the pure oblation of the one acceptable Gift. That is the path of transformation and spiritual growth.

In sum, to pass too quickly over the ‘abrasive’ penitential and propitiatory character of the Church’s offering and that of the individual, to focus exclusively on the reception of the gift—as happens frequently in contemporary eucharistic theology, is not only to skirt the reality of gift-giving between creatures and an all-Holy creator, but also to bypass the question of the pragmatic continuation of the mystical death of baptism. De la Taille provides a theology of the eucharistic sacrifice that supplies a robust ratio for the ecclesial oblation—as opposed, for example, to a communion service. The moment of sacrificial oblation is charged with divinely-transformative power, and it is this moment into which the individual believer and the entire ecclesia is invited to enter—and indeed ‘marked’ to enter in baptism.

---

22 Were we to mark a singular limitation in de la Taille’s theology, it would have to be the absence of a fully developed theology of how, in Trinitarian terms, the purification of the believer’s desire occurs—in contemplation and in sacrificial oblation. The thought of theologian Sarah Coakley provides a striking systematic understanding of this purgative transformation. Coakley suggests that the Christian eucharist is an unavoidably vulnerable site. It is that site, as in the silence of passive prayer, in which the believer is ‘invited’ into the circle of divine desire, the point of entry being that of the Spirit. But that invitation arrives with risk: it is inevitably ‘sacrificial’. In what Coakley calls a ‘double-pressure’, the Holy Spirit breaks open and purges sinful desires and the conceptual idols of soul, and also intensifies desire for the divine. Coakley provocatively illuminates this dynamic in Trinitarian terms: the Spirit—‘homousian’ with the Father and Son—cannot circumvent the reality of Gethsemane and Golgotha. ‘One might say, she writes, ‘that the Spirit progressively “breaks” our sinful desires, in and through the passion of Christ’ (‘Prelude’ in God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay ‘On the Trinity’, Vol. 1, Cambridge Univ. Press, forthcoming in 2009, pp. 15-16; cf. also, The Hensley Henson Lectures, 2004-5, Oxford University: Flesh and Blood: The Eucharist, Desire and Fragmentation, Lecture III, ‘Gift Retold: Spirals of Grace’, Conclusion). Coakley’s sanjuanist suggestion that the Spirit’s work upon human desire leads the believer through the cross would likely have been found attractive to de la Taille; however, he would no doubt add that even before Gethsemane there is the decisive oblation at the supper (and thus also at the ecclesial offering), in which the will is surrendered in love and ‘given-over’ to the Father’s divinizing and purifying acceptance.

23 This is not an insignificant point for theological reflection, given the growing situation in some areas where a shortage of priests has resulted in a greater frequency of such communion services.
Finally, and sixthly, it is not the case that de la Taille’s theology ignores God’s *initiative* in salvation and the eucharist—a concern frequently raised by contemporary eucharistic theologians who advocate the ‘suppression’ of sacrifice in favor of ‘gift’. We have substantiated this both in showing how God *operates* upon human desire in sacrifice, and in detailing how de la Taille’s theology of grace is driven—and in remarkable way for his time period—by the priority of God’s self-Gift, namely God’s divinising indwelling in the soul.

Recall that in de la Taille’s theory of sacrifice-as-gift, God is implicated in the exchange, an implication theologically admissible because, for de la Taille, it is the divine who *stirs up* the desire and love with which the sacrifice is offered. This is equally true, as we saw, of the sanjuanist gift-exchange between the purified soul and God in the bridal union of contemplation, which may well be the inspiration behind de la Taille’s theology: the purified soul, fired by the love of the Spirit can offer God to God, and God returns the gift, further stirring up the soul’s desire. In fact, from the subjective viewpoint of the worshipper (or the Church) and her desire, the eucharistic sacrifice is oddly proleptic of that perfect union and gift-exchange between the purified soul and God. In the mass then, it is God who both evokes the gift-giving and purifies the desire of the ecclesial offering. And, as we have been saying, the return fruits of the sacrificial banquet are received in accord with the measure of the offerer’s desire. God’s initiative saturates the entire sacrifice—but without nullifying or usurping the directionality and *real* oblation of the worshipper’s gift—even as that intention is taken up into Jesus’s eternal and pure offering of his death at the supper-cross.
On the other hand, we have noted as well that de la Taille’s theory of ‘created actuation by uncreated Act’ and eucharistic grace reveals how, in eucharistic sacrifice, the initiative lies with God and in the Victim. In at least two distinctive ways, his theology of grace revolves both upon God’s self-Gift, the divine desire for union with the human soul, and upon the grace poured forth from the flesh of the sacrificial victim.

First, sanctifying grace, or ‘created actuation’, is the means, the last disposition, and the very union itself between the divine and the human. In that presence of God to the soul, God communicates his caritas, his divine desire for the creature, which in turn becomes the measure of the soul’s own desire for God. But it is not divine initiative alone. For in this real union of potency and act (a real relation in the creature only), there is a possession of the Act by the soul—even as she is possessed by God.

De la Taille posits, secondly, that all grace flows through Christ, and in particular, through his eucharistic flesh. We have seen his lengthy demonstration that habitual grace in Christ was summa because of the grace of union between the Word and human nature. Every grace that the human enjoys is thereby a participated grace in that highest grace of Christ, the ‘Head’ of the human race. It is a grace communicated to those who eat of his glorified flesh, now ‘returned’ to the ecclesial altar in the Church’s sacrificial banquet.

For de la Taille, the primary effect of receiving the sacrament of the eucharist is the union ad Christum, a grace of union which divinises even as strengthens the believer’s love of God. Every desire for life and union to God is essentially a desire for the eucharistic victim, for the grace that unites the believer to Christ and thereby to the divine Trinity. Contact with that eucharistic flesh divinises and initiates within the recipient the vital life
of resurrection. Such is the understanding of theosis which emerges from de la Taille's theory of eucharistic grace, a theory he gleans from a deep reading of the Eastern Fathers especially.

But the sinner, and the ecclesia, must offer. Attraction to the grace of the eucharist does not bypass sacrifice and oblation. Sacramental theologians such as Chauvet and Seasoltz have placed an emphasis upon the reception of the Gift—and then the 'return' of that gift in ethical action to one's neighbours in the world. De la Taille would surely agree that the caritas communicated in the eucharist manifests itself in works of virtue and charity. However, his thought distinctly refocuses theological attention to the transformative potential of the offering of the ecclesial sacrifice. In baptismal death the believer already desires and is 'touched' by that life-giving and transformative flesh of the eucharist; indeed, baptism orients the believer to share in Christ's priestly oblation of his sacrifice. The devotion with which the sacrificial Gift is ritually offered, the movement of the will which reflects Christ's own commitment at the last supper, is ineluctably bound up with the measure of grace poured forth and received at the banquet table, a measure needed to persevere in the longed-for union with the Lamb of God.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


———. ‘La Médiatrice de toutes les grâces, d’après une publication récente’. *Gregorianum* 7 (1926): 393-396.


Secondary Sources on de la Taille


D’ALES, ADHEMAR. 'Mysterium Fidei'. Récherches de science religieuse 22 (1932), 594


GAUDET, A. 'Chronique de théologie dogmatique: L'idée du sacrifice de la messe d'apres quelques publications récentes'. Revue des sciences religieuses 7 (1927), 325-357.


JAMOULLE, EMILE. 'L'unité sacrificielle de la cène, la croix et l'autel au Concile de Trente', Ephermerides theologicae Lovanienses XXII (1946), pp. 61-62.


La Piana, George. 'Recent Tendencies in Roman Catholic Theology, Harvard Theological Review 15 (1922), 233-292.

Lebreton, Jean. 'In memoriam. Le Père Maurice de la Taille'. Récherches de science religieuse 24 (1934): 5-11.


Sheehan, M. 'Mysterium Fidei'. Australasian Catholic Record 5: 31 (1928), 272-274.

Sheehan, M. 'Mysterium Fidei'. Australasian Catholic Record 8: 2 (1931), 168-171.


Sacrifice. Gift, and the Eucharist


AQUINAS, ST. THOMAS. Summa Theologiae. Blackfriars Translation.


______. ‘The Woman at the Altar: Cosmological Disturbance or Gender Subversion?’, The Anglican Theological Review 86 (2004): 75-93.


JOHN PAUL II. *Dominicae Cenae*. Apostolic Letter. 24 February, 1980

________. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* Encyclical, 17 April 2003.


______. ‘Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic’.


Grace, Contemplative prayer, Mystical Theology, Thomas


