

SESSION TWO

Summary of Previous Week:

- Sacrifice is not giving up some *thing*; it is giving of *oneself through* something that is one's own.
- Our self-offering is a response of thanksgiving and glory to God's self-offering.
- As humans created in God's Image, as royal-priestly creatures, we are "hard-wired" for sacrifice, for offering up to God ourselves and the whole created order in thanks and glory.
- The Fall does not eradicate this impulse to sacrifice; it only distorts it, such that what was once a *natural part of human life in the Garden* now must be externalized in ritual.
- These ritual sacrifices outside the Garden are performed in one of two "spirits":
 - The spirit of Abel—righteous, penitent, thankful, seeking communion with God as Person
 - The spirit of Cain—unrighteous, prideful, entitled, seeking to coerce God as "Power"
- Christian Sacrifice consists of and marks **the complete rejection and inversion of pagan sacrifice.**

Christian Reading of the Levitical Sacrificial System—the Letter to the Hebrews

The most transparent aspects of Christ's fulfillment of the OT cult (worship system) pertain to his high priestly role and his sacrificial self-offering: Christ is the eternal high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, who "entered once for all into the Holies [εἰς τὰ ἅγια] ... with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption" (Heb 9.12). That is, Christ performs the Cosmic Day of Atonement in His once-for-all self-offering, as both Priest and Victim.

St. Gregory, however, perceives that Paul is making the much more thorough claim that Christ Himself *is the Heavenly Tabernacle*. As St. Gregory opines in *Life of Moses* 2.174:

Taking a hint from what has been said by Paul, who partially uncovered the mystery of these things, we say that Moses was earlier instructed by a type in the mystery of the tabernacle which encompasses the universe. This tabernacle would be *Christ who is the power and the wisdom of God*, who in his own nature was not made with hands, yet capable of being made when it became necessary for this tabernacle to be erected among us. Thus, the same tabernacle is in a way both unfashioned and fashioned, uncreated in preexistence but created in having received this material composition.

Christ Himself is the Type/Paradigm in which the earthly counterpart participates. Paul signals this in Romans 3.25 when he says that Christ Himself is the ἱλαστήριον "mercy seat" (lid of the ark of the covenant), and in the passage of Hebrews that St. Gregory alluded to:

19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus [εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ], 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, **through the veil, that is, His flesh** [διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ], 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled¹ from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb 10:19-22 NKJ)²

¹ This verb, used also in Heb 9.13, 19, 21, connects interestingly with Lev 6.20 (27) and Psalm 50/51.9

² Grk: 19 Ἐχοντες οὖν, ἀδελφοί, παρρησίαν εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ, 20 ἦν ἐνεκαίνισεν ἡμῖν ὁδὸν πρόσφατον καὶ ζῶσαν διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ, 21 καὶ ἱερέα μέγαν ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ, 22 προσερχώμεθα μετὰ ἀληθινῆς καρδίας ἐν πληροφορίᾳ πίστεως ῥεραντισμένοι τὰς καρδίας ἀπὸ συνειδήσεως πονηρᾶς καὶ λελουσμένοι τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καθαρῷ.

What then are we to make of St. Paul's profound and perplexing statement that *heavenly things needed to be purified*?

23 Therefore it was necessary for the copies [τὰ μὲν ὑποδείγματα] of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but **the heavenly things themselves [αὐτὰ δὲ τὰ ἐπουράνια] with better sacrifices than these.** 24 For Christ did not enter into handmade holy things [εἰς χειροποίητα εἰσῆλθεν ἅγια], antitypes of true things [ἀντίτυπα³ τῶν ἀληθινῶν], but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

How does this relate to “a body you have prepared for me” (Ps 40.6 / Heb 10.5)? Christ acquires this body, as it were, when he “comes into the world” (εἰσερχόμενος εἰς τὸν κόσμον, Heb 10.5). It is “prepared” by God *Himself*, not “made with hands.”

The efficacy of Christ's purifying self-offering is contemplated in relationship to *Christians*, “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10.10). And similarly in Heb 10.14, “for by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (μᾶ ἅρ προσφορᾶ τετελείωκεν εἰς τὸ διηνεκὲς τοῦς ἁγιαζομένους).

This leads immediately to the question, how is it that Christ's sacrifice purifies the “heavenly things” and sanctifies “us”? That is, following the logic of the Day of Atonement and the sin offering generally, where the tabernacle complex is purified by sacrificial blood, the writer of Hebrews seems to open a field of connection whereby the “heavenly things” that are purified must be Christians themselves as constituents or members, participants, of Christ's own body. And thus, paradoxically, Christ's own body, inasmuch as he has assumed Christians into himself, bearing their sins and impurities, is the heavenly sanctuary that needs to be purified.

A translation note on Heb 10.19: English translations are in the habit of translating “to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus [εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ]” with a verbal construction, “to enter.” It is actually a noun: “for the entrance.” Translating as a verb perhaps obscures the liturgical “ring” of this action—this is the “Great Entrance” of the cosmic Liturgy! Also obscured in the English translation is the broader scope of reference possible in the expression, “for the entrance of the holy ones/things,” with the agency of this entrance *in/by* the blood of Jesus. Thus, it is quite possible to read “the holy ones/things” as both a Sanctuary reference (the “Holy Place”) and as “the saints,” those who are “in Christ,” in his body and blood, who are both simultaneously brought into the Holy Place and are the Holy Place itself which is sprinkled with and cleansed by Christ's blood.

This is in fact what the writer goes on to say: it is *we* who are brought into the Sanctuary, behind the veil of Christ's flesh, and it is also we who are cleansed by his blood, as the Sanctuary itself, or perhaps more specifically, the *altar*.

This corporate ecclesiology, of Body and House, whereby Christ is contemplated in connection with those participating in Him, is prepared earlier in Heb 2.10-14, and in Heb 3.1-6, where Christ's solidarity with his siblings is emphasized, and where Jesus Christ is contemplated as both Son in God the Father's Household and as the “builder of the house” (3.3), and thus as “God” as well (3.4)

³ Only used elsewhere in Scripture at 1 Pet 3.21: “There is also an antitype which now saves us-- baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (NKJV).

1) Isaiah 53: The Suffering Servant

The Sacrificial Logic of Isaiah 53: Not Retributive Punishment, but Purification & Parental Discipline

Proposal: What Isaiah 53 pictures is not God the Father expending pent up wrath or retribution onto his Servant in place of Israel/Humanity, but rather the Servant's assumption of Israel's/Humanity's condition, willingly and in obedience to the Father, to be perfected (as Representative) through sufferings and death so as to remove the curse of exile, renew the covenant, and reconstitute the True Israel, the New Humanity, in and through Himself.

1. The Narrative of Exile & Restoration

The Servant is part of national Israel that is *already in exile, already suffering for her sins*

- a. Isaiah says she has already been punished *twice over* for her sins (40.2)!
- b. The Parallelism between Israel's condition in Isa 1.4-6 & the Servant's in Isa 53
- c. Before the coming of the Servant, Israel is already suffering for her sins, but this suffering is not redemptive or restorative because of Israel's spiritual blindness and deafness—God's [parental] chastisement does not bring repentance because of Israel's spiritual sickness. Therein lies the difference with the Servant's suffering.

2. The restorative and revelatory nature of the Servant's work

The combination of the Servant's objective innocence, the unjust nature of his incrimination, and the shocking quality of his suffering and death and surprising return to life all contribute to bringing Israel—and/or her remnant—to its senses. Likewise, Gentiles and their rulers are converted by the Servant's work.

The revelatory, illuminating quality of the Servant's work is reflected in the third-person retelling in Isaiah 53. The speaker of Isaiah 53 is not the Servant himself, of course, but it seems someone who was an observer of the Servant who later became a disciple of his. This retelling itself opens up the significant question of the perspective from which the Servant's career is/was viewed—namely, in that the narrator admits to having an initial perspective on the Servant's suffering that was wrong:

4 Surely our sicknesses he bears, and our pains he carries them. And we regarded him stricken and smitten of God and afflicted. 5 And he was wounded from our rebellions, crushed from our iniquities. The discipline of our peace is upon him, and in his blows it/he is healed for us.

If vv. 4b and 5a are translated as contrastive, this change of perspective emerges: “We regarded him stricken and smitten of God and afflicted, but”—it was not God who smote and afflicted him, rather—“he was wounded from our rebellions, crushed from our iniquities.”⁴

This change of perspective is akin to the tension between the reader of Job and Job's friends: the narrator of Isaiah 53 viewed the Servant as Job's friends viewed Job, as suffering at God's hands for his own sin, but then through a dramatic reversal of fortunes this perspective is upset, and the observer of the Servant becomes as one who reads the story of Job and knows of his innocence and uprightness all along. This leads the narrator of Isaiah 53 to self-indictment which is part of a whole evangelical proclamation of the Servant's work.

3. The Servant's self-sacrifice—as “sin/guilt offering” and “scapegoat”—is a parabolic reenactment of Israel's exile.

⁴ Cf. Jerome, *Comm. Is.* 14.23 on Isa 53.4: “And the sense is, *We thought that* the one who was humiliated for our sake and crucified with thieves was *struck by God* for his own sins” (Scheck, 668). See also St. Cyril (Church's Bible, 418-19). In the modern scene, cf. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, 352-3.

First, in 53.10, the Servant's sacrifice is connected with a "sin" and "guilt/reparation" offering, though how these categories are to be understood is not at all clear, given the cryptic nature of the text:

Hebrew: "If his life is put [forth as] a guilt offering, he will see a seed (i.e., posterity), he will lengthen days."

Greek: "And the Lord desires to *cleanse* him of *plague/beating*. If you give a sin offering, *your soul* will see a *long-lived* seed."

The basic sense seems to be that the Servant's self-offering functions as a "reparation offering"—that is, he "becomes the curse" of the Old Covenant to destroy the curse in death (Gal 3.13)—and an "purification offering" that cleanses/restores the people of God as God's "Temple."

Second, allusion is made to the "scapegoat ritual" from the Day of Atonement:

The statement that the Servant bore the community's sin also echoes the scapegoat ritual (Lev 16), in which one of the two animals is sacrificed as an atoning sin-offering (*hatta't*), and the other carries all the community's iniquities into a solitary, literally, "cut-off land" (*'eres gezera*), recalling the Servant's being cut off from the land of the living (*nigzar me'eres hayyim* 53:8b).⁵

Of course, the prescribed animal for the scapegoat is a *goat*, and the Servant is compared to a *sheep*—all analogies "walk with a limp."⁶ That aside, the shared logic of the Servant's sacrifice and the scapegoat ritual is one of ritually enacting exile. The scapegoat is sent into exile bearing Israel's sin, cut off from the people of Israel, and this ritual annually resets the divine-human relationship of communion. So, too, the Suffering Servant, while in exile with Israel, re-enacts and epitomizes that exile by, ironically, being rejected by Israel herself, and thus as God's chosen instrument, bearing Israel's sin/guilt away with him unto death.

The basic logic is that sin—like ritual impurity—is a substance that contaminates and corrupts, and thus it must be transferred and borne away (and destroyed via death) for one to once again be in a state where (ontological) communion with God is possible. (Cf. 2 Cor 5.21)

4. Father Disciplining the Son

The overarching metaphor in which to understand the "logic" of Isaiah 53 is **parental discipline**, of God as Father instructing the Servant as "Son." This comes out more directly in the LXX where, in 52.13, the Servant is called "my child" (ὁ παῖς μου), which can mean either "son" or "servant." He is then called a "child" (ὡς παιδίον) in Isa 53.2 with reference to his growth in and before Israel. But the language of "discipline" is present in both the LXX and MT:

"But he was wounded on account of our lawless deeds, and was bruised because of our sins: the discipline of our peace was upon him [παιδεία ειρήνης ἡμῶν ἐπ' αὐτόν]; by his bruise we were healed." (Isa 53:5 LXX)

The *paidion* receives paternal *paideia*. The Servant is both one of Israel, God's corporate Child/Son, and yet the Servant is *the* Son who represents Israel. The Servant receives Yahweh's paternal instruction—namely, willing submission to unjust suffering—and is perfected as Son, on behalf of Israel, which then leads to life, peace, and blessing for all those who identify with the Servant and share in his life.

Again, the "logic" of covenantal blessing and curses, and the dynamic of individual representation and corporate solidarity, is not the same as abstract notions of justice and punishment—of God needing to meet out

⁵ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, 351. Cf. Childs, *Isaiah*, 418.

⁶ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, 355.

punishment to satisfy an external, abstract standard of justice/law, or needing to remove a “weight of sin” impinging on him (it is heavy on Israel, not God), and certainly not God’s “need” to expend some sort of pent up wrath on a passive substitute victim. Rather, God is working as Father to correct and restore his people, his corporate Child, and accomplishes this through the Servant who is *the* Child/Son of God perfected through suffering on Israel’s behalf.

Moving to explicitly Christological terms, even if God is understood as the or a causal agent in Jesus’ passion as the Hebrew of Isaiah 53 would support—which the Fathers, in connection with other Scriptures (e.g., Acts 2.23; Rom 3.25; 4.25; 8.32), certainly embrace⁷—God’s reason(s) for this are not to be found (for the Fathers *in general*) in the juridical, punitive terms of late medieval and Reformational soteriology. God’s “affliction” of his divine Son is not to placate a wrathful inclination, nor to satisfy some sort of debt—whether God’s own honor or a required “payment” for sin (as a cumulation of individual sinful acts)—but to perfect Jesus as the (priestly) head of a New Humanity.

This is the teaching of St. Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews, esp. Hebrews 2 & 5.

This is also the Martyr Theology behind the Maccabees and in Paul’s argument in Romans, esp. Rom 3.

4 Maccabees 17

¹³ Eleazar was the first contestant, the mother of the seven sons entered the competition, and the brothers contended. ¹⁴ The tyrant was the antagonist, and the world and the human race were the spectators. ¹⁵ Reverence for God was victor and gave the crown to its own athletes. ¹⁶ Who did not admire the athletes of the divine legislation? Who were not amazed? ¹⁷ The tyrant himself and all his council marveled at their endurance, ¹⁸ because of which they now stand before the divine throne and live the life of eternal blessedness. ¹⁹ For Moses says, "All who are consecrated are under your hands." ²⁰ **These, then, who have been consecrated for the sake of God, are honored, not only with this honor, but also by the fact that because of them our enemies did not rule over our nation, ²¹ the tyrant was punished, and the homeland purified [καθαρισθῆναι]—they having become, as it were, a ransom [ὡσπερ ἀντίψυχον] for the sin of our nation. ²² And through the blood of those pious ones and the propitiatory (sacrifice) of their death [διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν εὐσεβῶν ἐκείνων καὶ τοῦ ἰλαστηρίου τοῦ θανάτου αὐτῶν], divine Providence preserved Israel that previously had been mistreated.**

⁷ Offering a reading that combines the LXX and Hebrew readings, Jerome, *Comm. Is.* 14.24: “But the Lord willed “to purge him from the stroke,” which he had received when he was pierced by the soldier’s lance [cf. John 19.34], or to bruise him in infirmity and with a wound. He himself also spoke of this: “For they persecuted the one who you struck” [Ps 68.27/69.26]; and God says through Zechariah, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” [Zech 13.7]. Therefore it was not by necessity that he suffered, but by his own will and the Father’s, to whom he himself said, “God, I have willed to do your will” [Ps 40.8]. We have also read above about this, “He was offered, because it was his own will” [Isa 53.7]” (Scheck, 672-3). NB: Jerome’s quotation of Zech 13.7 is derived from Matt 26.31 which does not correspond precisely to either the MT or LXX, in which the verb “strike” is a 2nd person imperative. What, then, is the logic of the divine action Jesus is presenting in Matt 26.31 via Zech 13.7? There are certainly Passover echoes, of striking the firstborn of the Egyptians (Exod 12.12, 23), but how would that make sense in application to Christ? Perhaps the Exodus background ought to be sought in Moses’ striking of the Rock at Horeb (Exod 17.6), from which flowed life-giving water. More compelling as an explanatory framework for the Gospels, however, is the linkage in theme and context between Lev 26 and Zech 13. In both Lev 26.21ff and Zech 13, Israel’s obstinacy in the face of God’s paternal discipline leads to climactic judgment that scatters God’s people into exile and culminates in the destruction of, implied, Jerusalem and the Temple.

Romans 3.21-31: Righteousness of God & of Faith

NRSV (mod.)	My Paraphrase
<p>²¹ But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets,</p>	<p>Since the law brings knowledge of sin (Rom 3.20) and confirms that all are under sin's power (Rom 3.9), the law itself cannot and does not disclose God's righteousness, even though OT Scripture witnesses to God's righteousness (Rom 1.2; 3.2).</p>
<p>²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction,</p>	<p>Rather, God's righteousness is "disclosed" through faith in or faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe, for this basis of faith levels any distinctions within humanity.</p>

There is an important interpretive question here with the phrase "faith in Jesus Christ." It can be rendered in two ways:

1. Faith *in* Jesus Christ: that is, God's righteousness is disclosed when people believe in Jesus Christ
2. Faithfulness *of* Jesus Christ: that is, God's righteousness is disclosed through Jesus' faithfulness to his Father's mission for him (as Davidic representative for Israel, and Adamic representative of humanity)

The second is to be preferred. 1) The first reading creates a redundancy in the verse: "the righteousness of God is disclosed through believing in Jesus Christ for all who believe." 2) The second reading corresponds to and encapsulates the narrative of Jesus that Paul will be unfolding in subsequent chapters, and how humans come to participate in that narrative. The first reading can however be true when set within the second reading: God's righteousness is disclosed when people believe in Jesus.

<p>²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;</p>	<p>Since all, whether Jew or Gentile, have missed the mark and come up short when it comes to being God's image-bearers;</p>
<p>²⁴ they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,</p>	<p>Those who believe in Jesus Christ are set right with God and marked off as God's people, not through any claim they have on God, but through God's free and gracious redemption from slavery that is found in Jesus Christ.</p>
<p>²⁵ whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement [ὄν προέθετο ὁ θεὸς ἱλαστήριον] through faith by/in his blood. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed;</p>	<p>God offered the blood of Jesus Christ as a mediatorial mercy-seat (Exod 25.17-22), as a sin-dissolving, purifying sacrifice, which is actualized when humans believe. God offered his own Son to demonstrate his unswerving commitment to his own purposes for the created world and for his people, both of which found expression in God's promises to Eve, Noah, Abraham, and David. Because God "looked ahead" to the cure for the human predicament he had prepared in Jesus, God saw fit to not immediately judge human sin in former age.</p>
<p>²⁶ it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.</p>	<p>This "build up" of human sin and brokenness had the purpose and the effect of making the human situation plain for what it is. And so, when the cure is introduced in Jesus Christ, God's righteousness becomes apparent, not only by demonstrating his faithfulness to his promises, but in demonstrating</p>

	his impartiality and fairness—in that all who believe can be set right.
²⁷ Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith.	You see, fellow Jews, how misguided you are when you view God’s covenant with Israel as a special badge of privilege against the Gentiles (Rom 2.17). In light of what God has done in Christ, and the history of the Jewish people, this kind of understanding is completely ruled out.
²⁸ For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.	The “law” of faith means that humans are set right with God and shown to be a member of God’s people not through acts of piety and covenant-markers prescribed in the law, but through faith in and faithful response to God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ.
²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one;	Or is the God that Israel confesses only God of Israel? Is he not also God over all the nations? Yes, over the nations as well, for if not, then how could Jews confess that God is One and Creator (cf. Deut 6.4).
and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.	So, this God who is One God for all people does not relate to one group differently than the other. Rather, God’s one way of setting right humans and marking them off as God’s people—circumcised or not—is through faith in and faithful response to God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ.
³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.	Does this way of understanding and responding to God stand in conflict with or negate the law itself? Quite the opposite, as we will see now, our forefather Abraham provides the paradigm for both the Jewish and Gentile response to and relationship with God (cf. Rom 4).

What about “Propitiation”?

Semantic continuum of ἐξίλασκαμαι

Expiation/purification ← → Forgiveness “be merciful” ← → Intercession “make propitious”

1. Cultic usage:

Predominant OT usage is that of a *removal of an objective impurity/contamination perceived as a “substance.”* To expiate/atone is **not** to change God’s or anyone else’s subjective disposition to something else; it is rather to effect a concrete ritual cleansing that allows for the ongoing use of the sacred things which God has appointed to function as according to His purpose.

2. Usage as “Forgiveness of sin” in both ritual and non-ritual contexts:

God is never the object of the verb, thus indicating a complete reversal of classical Greek usage. In its non-ritual usage, the Hebrew word *kipper* refers to God’s active or passive forgiveness, removal, wiping away of sin. That is, God is either the direct or indirect agent for the expiation of sin. There is a fundamental continuity between the non-ritual and ritual usage of *kipper*, with the obvious distinction that the ritual usage involves a specific

blood rite. In this ritual usage, God is never the object of the verb, “but either sin which has to be wiped away (as in the common use) or a place which has to be cleansed, that is, from sin, as is stated explicitly at times” (Lyonnet, 130).

3. Propitiation as Intercession

There are three OT references to *ἐξιλιάσκομαι* that have God or “the face of God” as direct object (Zech 7.2; 8.22; Mal 1.9). In the Zechariah and Malachi texts, *ἐξιλιάσκομαι* is used to translate the Hebrew expression, *hillah panim*, “to render the face of someone agreeable.” What seems to be at work here, more than a bald notion of “appeasement/placation,” is an understanding of *ἐξιλιάσκομαι* as intercessory prayer to or entreaty of God. This sense explains quite well the instances in Exod 32.30, Num 17.9-13 recounted also in Wis 18.21-25, and the Phinehas incident in Num 25.13 as recounted also in Ps 105.30 and Sir 45.23(29), along with the translational tendencies of both Jerome and the old Latin to render *kipper/ ἐξιλιάσκομαι* with verbs of prayer/entreaty (*rogare* “to ask”, *orare* “to pray”, *deprecari* “to beseech”, *fundere preces* “to pour forth prayers”), including in the technical formula concluding expiatory offerings (e.g., Lev 4.20).⁸

This understanding seems clearly to be the logic behind St. Cyril of Jerusalem’s description of the divine Liturgy and Eucharist as “propitiatory”:

Lecture V.8: “Then, after the spiritual sacrifice is perfected, the Bloodless Service, upon/by that Sacrifice of Propitiation [ἰλασμοῦ], we entreat God for the common peace of the Church, for the tranquility of the world” ... “and, in a word, for all who stand in need of succor we all supplicate and offer this Sacrifice.”

Lecture V.10: “when we offer to Him our supplications for those who have fallen asleep, though they be sinners, [we] weave no crown, but offer up Christ, sacrificed for our sins, propitiating [ἐξιλεούμενοι] our merciful God both for them and for ourselves.”

The force of this “redefinition” of *ἐξιλιάσκομαι* as *intercession* is found precisely in how the Scriptural revelation stands apart from and disallows the pagan understanding of ritual sacrifice as a kind of “magical,” coercive rite whereby the will of God could be swayed, without any corresponding spiritual state or conversion in the offerer (cf. Lyonnet 121):

For the sacrifice of expiation, if it is understood in the way of an intercession, can by that very fact not be conceived as obtaining its efficacy from the value of the gift offered to God or as in some way fulfilling God’s needs; the sacrifice, consequently, cannot be conceived as placating God by itself, independently of the internal disposition of him who offers it. The notion of intercession rather indicates that the whole value of the act flows mainly from that disposition.⁹

First, we must note, again, the serious modification—indeed, *inversion*—that has taken place in the biblical revelation of the concept of “propitiation” from the pagan conception. God is *not* “propitiated” by sacrifice, in the sense of moved or coerced from one subjective/emotional state to another by human ritual means. Rather, what God desires is the *conversion/healing of the sinner*. God is “propitiated”—*made propitious to*—a human being, then, when they convert and repent, and thus begin to cultivate a form of life that is pleasing to God (i.e., consistent with God’s intentions for humanity as created in God’s Image, Christ himself).

⁸ Lyonnet, 142ff.

⁹ Lyonnet, 145.

Lyonnet briefly recounts the words of Aquinas and Cajetan to this effect—that God is “placated” by the passion of Christ, not in the sense that God “begins to love anew,” i.e., undergoes change, but rather in “the change found in us,” “from our side.”¹⁰ Expiation propitiates God, God’s “wrath,” inasmuch as the removal of sin entails the removal of that which “provokes God’s anger.”¹¹

It is in the light of Christ’s assumption and recapitulation of human nature completely and *in toto* that his self-offering can be most clearly and profoundly understood as “propitiatory.” Christ has *in truth* healed all of human nature and, in his death, has put to death the sin and death/corruption attached to humans “in the old Adam.” Because of this objective removal of that which evokes God’s wrath, Christ himself is the *propitiatory*—the locus of healed, restored humanity that is at peace with God ontologically and personally. God has not changed; God, in Christ, has reconciled all humanity to himself in Christ by healing and restoring humanity in Christ, thus removing the enmity, that in us which evokes God’s “wrath.”¹²

This principle of “propitiation by conversion” can be amply illustrated in the Fathers. We might look at Origen’s treatment of Numbers 25 where God says that Phinehas “has quelled my wrath” (Num 25.11, κατέπαυσεν τὸν θυμὸν μου)—*after* 24,000 Israelites have already perished! About this Origen says,

And if you see an Israelite thought prostituting itself with Midianite whores, that is, rolling about with devilish thinking, I do not want you to spare it, I do not want you to hesitate, but strike at once, destroy it immediately. Cut through the very womb too, by investigating the secrets of its nature and penetrating to that very seat of sin, lest it should conceive any longer, lest it generate any longer and the accursed offspring of sins should contaminate the encampments of the Israelites. For if you do this, immediately you will quell the Lord’s wrath; for you have anticipated the day of judgment, which is called a “day of wrath and fury” (Rom 2.5). And by exterminating the seat of sin from yourself, which here is called the womb of the Midianite woman, you will come through secure to the day of judgment.

And therefore let us rise up and pray that we may always find that “sword of the Spirit” (Eph 6.17) prepared, through which the very seeds and receptacles of sins may be destroyed, and God will become propitious to us through the true Phinehas, our own Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be “the glory and power in the ages of ages. Amen” (1 Pet 4.11).¹³

In his commentary on Prov 16.14, Pseudo-Procopius offers a similar understanding with regard to this more “profane” usage of ἐξιλιάσκομαι:¹⁴

14. *Θυμὸς βασιλέως, ἄγγελος θανάτου.* Ἡ κατὰ κρίσιν τοῦ Δεσπότητος τῶν ὄλων ἐπαγωγὴ πρὸς διόρθωσιν, τῶν κατὰ τὸ παρὸν θλιβερῶν, ὡς τις [M1385] ἄγγελος προμηνύει τὴν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀμετανοήτοις κατὰ τὸ μέλλον στέρησιν αὐτοῦ, τῆς ὄντως ζωῆς.

Ἀνὴρ δὲ σοφὸς, ἐξιλιάσεται αὐτόν.
Γενναίως δ’ ὑπομείνας τὰ ἀλγεινὰ, ὁ ἐντεῦθεν ἐν συναισθήσει γενόμενος τῶν οικείων πλημμελημάτων, καὶ τῆς ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς μελλούσης

14. “*The anger of a king, an angel of death.*” The introduction, in accordance with the judgment of the Master of all, to afflictions in the present that are for [our] correction [is] like a certain [M1385] angel indicating beforehand to the unrepentant that he [will] deprive [them] of the true life in the future.

“*But a wise man will appease him.*” But he who nobly endures grievous suffering, who thus becomes aware of his own resident errors,

¹⁰ Lyonnet, 122, n.5.

¹¹ Lyonnet, 122.

¹² There are of course some exceptions in the Fathers where they will countenance the notion of God’s “enmity” towards humanity. Cf. Chrysostom.

¹³ *Hom. Num.* 20.5.1 (Scheck, 131).

¹⁴ *Comm. Prov.* 16.14 (PG 87.1384-5).

κολάσεως, καὶ τὸν ἴδιον βίον διορθωσάμενος, τὸν μὲν θυμὸν αὐτοῦ ἀποστρέψει, ἐπισπάσεται δὲ τὴν εὐμένειαν. and of the punishment for them coming in the future, and so corrects his own life, he will turn away his anger, and will gain good favor.

In his apology against Celsus, Origen provides a fitting summary of the total picture of “propitiation” presented above, particularly because he is combatting a specifically pagan set of conceptions regarding sacrifice, spiritual powers, and fate. In *CCels* 8.62, Origen sets down a fundamental Christian axiom of sacrifice:

[W]e ought to approach Him who is in need of nothing [τῷ ἀπροσδεεῖ] whatever, except of the salvation of men and of every rational being, rather than those [daemons] who long for burnt-offering and blood.¹⁵

This axiom is well-established in the OT itself (e.g., Psalm 49/50), clearly articulated in Acts 17.25, and functions as a continual basis for early Christian apologetics against both Judaism and pagan religion. St. Justin Martyr¹⁶ and St. Irenaeus of Lyons,¹⁷ for example, offer fuller expositions of what the *Epistle to Diognetus* 3.3-5 here says:

3 For while the Gentiles, by offering such things to those that are destitute of sense and hearing, furnish an example of madness; they, on the other hand by thinking to offer these things to God as if He needed them, might justly reckon it rather an act of folly than of divine worship. 4 For He that made heaven and earth, and all that is therein, and gives to us all the things of which we stand in need, certainly requires none of those things which He Himself bestows on such as think of furnishing them to Him. 5 But those who imagine that, by means of blood, and the smoke of sacrifices and burnt-offerings, they offer sacrifices [acceptable] to Him, and that by such honors they show Him respect, — these, by supposing that they can give anything to Him who stands in need of nothing, appear to me in no respect to differ from those who studiously confer the same honor on things destitute of sense, and which therefore are unable to enjoy such honors.

Origen continues on in *CCels* 8.64:

We ought, then, to propitiate¹⁸ the one supreme God and to pray that He may be gracious, propitiating Him by piety and every virtue. But if Celsus also wants us to propitiate others besides the supreme God, let him realize that, just as a moving body is followed by the movement of its shadow, in the same way if the supreme God is propitiated it follows that all the angels who are dear to Him, and souls, and spirits, are kindly disposed as well. For they perceive who are worthy of God’s kindness; and they not only become kindly disposed themselves to those who are worthy, but also work together [συμπράττουσι] with people who wish to worship the supreme God; and they are propitiated and pray and intercede together with them. Consequently we dare to say that for

¹⁵ *CCels* 8.62 (Chadwick, 499; PG 11.1609).

¹⁶ *Dialogue with Trypho* 21-2 (ANF 1.204-6), which largely consists of extended OT quotations: Ezek 20.19-26; Amos 5.18-6.7; Jer 7.21ff; Isa 65.1.

¹⁷ *Against Heresies* 4.17 (ANF 1.482-86), quoting Psalm 49/50, he says, “rejecting, indeed, those things by which sinners imagined they could propitiate God, and showing that He does Himself stand in need of nothing; but He exhorts and advises them to those things by which man is justified and draws nigh to God” (482-3).

¹⁸ The word for *propitiation* and *kindly disposition* in the passage is ἐξευμενίζω and cognates, which is used only once in the LXX (4 Macc 4.11).

men who of set purpose put forward higher things when they pray to God, there are praying with them countless sacred powers who have not been invoked, assisting our mortal race. And, if I may say so, they strive with us because of the daemons whom they see fighting and working against the salvation especially of those who dedicate themselves to God and pay no attention to the hostility of daemons, if they savagely attack the person who avoids worshipping them by burnt-offerings and blood and who in every way by words and deeds earnestly attempts to draw close and be united to the supreme God through Jesus. For he overthrew countless daemons when he went about healing and converting those who were under the power of the devil.¹⁹

It is important to observe that for the early church, the Eucharist is presented as the antithesis of pagan sacrifice. St. Irenaeus reflects at length:

The oblation of the Church, therefore, which the Lord gave instructions to be offered throughout all the world, is accounted with God a pure sacrifice, and is acceptable to Him; not that He stands in need of a sacrifice from us, but that he who offers is himself glorified in what he does offer, if his gift be accepted. For by the gift both honour and affection are shown forth towards the King; and the Lord, wishing us to offer it in all simplicity and innocence, did express Himself thus: “Therefore, when thou offerest thy gift upon the altar, and shalt remember that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then return and offer thy gift” (Matt 5.23-24). We are bound, therefore, to offer to God the first-fruits of His creation, as Moses also says, “Thou shalt not appear in the presence of the Lord thy God empty” (Deut 16.16); so that man, being accounted as grateful, by those things in which he has shown his gratitude, may receive that honour which flows from Him.²⁰

That is, as we continue to say at the Anaphora/Epiclesis in the Divine Liturgy, “Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee, in behalf of all and for all” (cf. 1 Chron 29.14). The Eucharist is a “giving thanks” in which the *offerer is transformed and glorified* inasmuch as the Eucharist, in which the Church offers itself to God in Christ, effects communion with God Himself.²¹ The Pure Sacrifice of the Eucharist—which is a mystical participation in the once-for-all Sacrifice of Christ—is not a mechanism to placate or coerce God; it is the medium of thankful self-offering to God. Christians are, as it were, to become Abel, making oblation to God “with single-mindedness and righteousness” and not with evil, manipulative intent of Cain, “**since God is not appeased by sacrifice.**”²²

¹⁹ *CCels.* 8.64 (Chadwick, 500-501). See *CCels.* 8.57 (Chadwick, 495) where Origen discusses the Eucharist in these terms.

²⁰ *Adv. Haer.* 4.18.1 (ANF 1.484). Cf. *Fragment 37* (ANF 1.574-75).

²¹ Cf. *Adv. Haer.* 4.18.5-6 (ANF 1.486) where St. Irenaeus unfolds the Incarnational, transformative understanding of the Eucharist—that is, our mystical union with Christ through union of flesh and Spirit in the Eucharist.

²² *Adv. Haer.* 4.18.3 (ANF 1.485).