

A Voice from the Past, Saint Ignatius' Thoughts on the Role of Sacrifice: Sacrifice Impacts Modern Ecclesiology via Church Ministry

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Abstract

There is notion that salvation is necessary. The Christian belief is that the nature of our world and our character requires that humanity be saved. This article explores the relationship between sacrifice and our call to ministry. We look to Saint Ignatius of Loyola to provide us with the major doctrinal underpinnings that have been adopted by the worldwide Church. The relationship between life, death, and temptation or what is part of the "human condition" is investigated. Saint Ignatius of Loyola, a prominent and influential European, used the Jesuit order to spread catechism that impacted the Christian world. Here, we see how his idea, discovered through his writings, are relevant to modern ecclesiology.

Keywords: Sacrifice, Message, Christian Identity, Ministry

1. Introduction

Christian sacrifice leads to salvation and this cheating of death is a spiritual gift from God (Pelikan, 1971). Christ preserves humanity as his death and resurrection atones for our sins (Romans, 1995). This notion of sacrifice translates into how the Church is structured. The concept of sacrifice is adopted to symbolize the Church as one worldwide Eucharistic community. It is asserted here that God's loving sacrifice is one pivotal defining characteristic that is central to Christian identity. In short, sacrifice is as central to Christian identity as baptism and confirmation, two major doctrinal underpinnings. We need only to look to Saint Ignatius of Loyola works, as a primary source, to shed more light about how Christians are protected from death and from Satan. For Ignatius, the Church exists solely to promote members' salvation as this endows them with eternal life (Ignatius, 2004). Therefore, it is difficult to imagine that salvation is possible outside the Church, since the importance of God's sacrifice, in the Christian identity paradigm, would have to be diminished or drastically altered. John Calvin's, "Salvation Outside the Church" explores Augustine's thoughts on salvation, and Augustine observes we cannot have salvation outside the Church (Galvin, 2000). Our church history and Christology is loaded with controversy. Given the peaceful nature of Christ, is it a contradiction for Christians to accept the extreme violence and brutality of the crucifixion?

1.1 Church Communities and Intimacy with the Divine

Hebrews 2:14-15 explains to believers that we are enslaved throughout our lives by Satan. We have a fear of death but Christ conquers death (Matera, 2000). Is this biblical passage enough to justify our acceptance of the violence toward Christ, a peaceful being. This message is powerful, as it serves to unify Christians everywhere. The message was that an innocent man was condemned by authorities under the law. This unifying factor identifies Christians because this is a core and central belief of Christianity that we have eternal life with Christ. This would mean an end to all worldly suffering and injustice, as we know and experience it. We would live in the presence of God. Hebrews 6:4-8; 26-31; 12:5-17 tells us it is an unforgivable sin to reject the sacrifice Christ has made for us. Theologians Huber and Mauss defined sacrifice as, "a religious act which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it" (Huber & Mauss, 1983). This informs us that the person, or rather the divine Christ, is changed by the sacrifice, there is a transformation in God, as well as to God's people. It is interesting to contemplate, how this sacrifice impacts God, since we believe that God is always in control. As a consequence, God seeks more intimacy with his creation inviting us in closer, individually, and as a Church community, through prayer and meditation. Ignatius writes, "it often happens that Our Lord moves us interiorly to one action or another by opening up our mind and heart, speaking inside us without any noises of voices, raising us entirely to His divine love" (Ignatius, 2004).

Although, we are separated from our maker, God being divine, and us being mortal creatures, we can grow closer to God through prayer and within our Church communities through worship. Another change between God and the flock resulted from the manifestation of the Holy Trinity, which is the direct result of God's sacrifice of his only son. Jesus takes on the role as prayerful intercessor and is the direct link to the Christian spiritual realm.

2. Sacrificial Violence and Its Impact on Church Communities

When we think of sacrifice, we often focus on flesh and blood type of sacrifices. These sacrifices are corporeal rather than spiritual in nature. Christians have a strong distaste for corporeal sacrifices (Girard, 1977). Christianity has clearly distanced itself from sacrificial practices that other religions had practiced. For many Christians, the belief that sacrifice of animals or humans is unacceptable and even outrageous. Interestingly, the traditional notion of a Christian faith featured at its core a flesh and blood sacrifice, though. Christ's crucifixion was anything but pretty: it was gory and amounted to a form of human torture. We should consider the violence involved in Christ's sacrifice. It involves forms of violence that are directed at one person and are carried out by so many soldiers. It is truly amazing, that such an enormous act of love, could be predicated on such senseless violence. This is the birth of the Church and her community within, and this violent sacrifice, is her history, so to speak. Our Church community inherits and embraces this extreme act of violence. This is the foundation from which our Church community springs up (Schmemmann, 1973). Christians will not inherit everlasting life, without a divine sacrifice (Ignatius, 2004). Ignatius describes the Christians role in the following statement, "the human person is created to praise, reverence, and serve God, Our Lord, and by so doing to save his or her soul" (Ignatius, 2004). Therefore, we cannot be Christians without accepting these acts of violence and this is somewhat controversial.

3. Role of Church Communities in Reconciling Humanity's Problems

Violence is not God's way since God is all about love. Saint Ignatius observes, "it is the Lord's wish, as far as He is able, to give me Himself...I ought to offer everything I have with great love" (Ignatius, 2004). God's world focuses on love and how God can care for these earthly creations and humankind's world is the opposite with injustice and oppression. We know that Church communities implement Ignatius' ideas by giving money through tithing and weekly collections at mass. Yet, violence is sadly part of our human condition and it is a human necessity, not a godly one. Humans can justify their acts of violence, in the case of preserving justice, and when preserving life, or for some greater good. Christianity is plagued by and linked to violence. There were violent acts directed at Christians. Christians even fought wars during the Crusades and they were the perpetrators of violent acts. The link between Christianity and violence persisted, as Christians were persecuted and martyred, throughout the ages. In the case of martyrdom, we see a glorification of violence as Christians had to sacrifice themselves. It was their belief in Christ and their unwillingness to accept to a pagan church that led to brutality. The Christian community, then and now, believed in a monotheistic God and sacrifice was defined by what Christ did for believers.

4. Mass as Sacrifice in Christian Church Communities

There are many characteristics that relate sacrifice to our Christian identity and that led to our current Church organization. Consider the 1566 catechism issued by Pope Pius V:

We therefore confess that the sacrifice of the mass is and ought to be considered one and the same sacrifice as that of the cross, for the victim is one and the same, namely Christ our Lord, who offered himself, once only, a bloody sacrifice on the alter of the cross. The bloody and unbloody victim are not two, but one victim only, whose sacrifice is daily renewed in the eucharist...The sacred and holy sacrifice of the mass is not a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving only, or a mere commemoration of the sacrifice performed on the cross, but truly a propitiatory sacrifice, by which God is appeased, and rendered propitious to us (McHugh, 1934).

A sacrifice that a Christian makes is done in the service of God. This gives rise to community service and the types of lay ministry contemplated by Vatican II. We face obstacles, and can stumble, as we try to serve God. Ignatius advises, in his letter to a good woman, "you have lost that very saintly friend, and in that place, there are many enemies and obstacles to the Lord's service, in addition to the constant temptation invented by the enemy

of human nature” (Ignatius, 2004). Here, Ignatius observes that it takes some form of sacrifice, as he assures us that all is not lost: there is hope that God will help us.

5. Handling the Sacrifice of Ministerial Service

Clearly, it is a good idea to overcome the obstacles that Satan places in the way, as we serve God. Saint Ignatius contends, “The enemy observes closely whether a person is of course or sensitive conscience: a sensitive conscience he tries to sensitize further to the point of excess” (Ignatius, 2004). Can the average person be effective as a ministerial leader without spiritual guidance and preparation? Saint Ignatius would likely argue, they need training to recognize the enemy, and how the enemy will try to place obstacles, in order to thwart their success. Our church congregations are not immune to the temptations of the enemy, as they try to carry out the instructions of Vatican II. Members of modern church congregations are struggling to find a place, within this new world church order, with Christians taking on even greater ministerial roles. These roles used to be reserved only for the ordained (Flannery, 2004). As a direct result, non-ordained Christians are facing greater pressure as they spread the message (Ford, 2000). These people face temptation that they may not be as well prepared for, since they have no formalized training that the ordained clergy had. There are spiritual, as well as secular issues, involved with this radical change brought about by Vatican II. It is not entirely clear whether the Church is completely ready for all the changes as it struggles to modernize and re-define itself to move with the times. There are great societal pressures that are being exerted on Catholics and on Church doctrine. The Church should change with the times, and certain reforms including the role of women, need to be modernized to strengthen and unify the Church ecclesiology.

6. Conclusion

There must be ways to know when parishioners are ready to serve in Church community ministerial positions. The person can begin to talk it over with another parishioner or with a priest, nun, or deacon. It should be something that someone prays about in order for the person to figure out which ministry to serve. We all have talents in different areas and it is hard to know what God wants for our lives. It takes time to discern God’s will in our lives and the average parishioner needs to understand that it will be a process. It will surely be a transition for Catholics to fulfill a holy role within the Church. Traditionally, these holy roles were filled by ordained clergy. We gain insight and understanding by incorporating non-ordained people to serve but we have to implement these plans with caution. There should continue to be restrictions for non-ordained persons serving in ministry. There are just some ministerial tasks that require an ordained minister and these tasks are normally associated with the administration of sacraments, because of their role and importance in Christian formation and faith development. My recommendations are to consider the role of sacrifice in a parishioner’s desire to serve. The main question is whether parishioners are attempting to offer, everything they have, just like Saint Ignatius chose to. Clearly, Saint Ignatius gives us a framework to follow when our time to serve the Church arrives. For Ignatius, God moves us in spiritual ways and God will guide us through gentle nudges. Therefore, we are to meditate and wait in prayerful silence for the recommendation to come from God. In this manner, there is really not much difference between preparation for ordained versus non-ordained ministry. Both require a discernment process and both feature an intimacy with God, as the parishioners seek to carry out God’s mission, in their lives.

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