

The Mass may very well be a re-enactment of the life of Jesus, who may well have made an offering of himself to God, but in what possible sense can the Mass be claimed to be offering him up as a sacrificial victim today? Even as a symbolic representation, the notion of sacrificial victim is not meaningful to most people in countries like the USA or Australia. Authoritative pronouncements on this matter, without effective engagement of the faith community, are not likely to convince people otherwise. Since the post-Vatican Council liturgical changes have been put into practice, the Church seems no longer to be making a major effort to engage the people with respect to the liturgy.

A presentation of the Mass as a sacrifice may have had meaning in the days when Old Testament sacrifices were commonly believed to change the mind of God and to procure divine intervention on behalf of those making a sacrifice. Would it not be preferable in the modern Church today to portray the Mass as a ritualised meal, helping contemporary people to become closer to the community of the faithful? Or, indeed, closer to Jesus and the first Christians? In that event, the words used in the ritual would need to be changed to better reflect such an understanding. On the other hand, recognition of the reality of diversity could enable church members in some countries to retain the present symbolism of sacrifice if that accorded better with their understanding.

If, as argued in chapter 1, substance is not a real entity, although it may remain a useful mental construct, there may have to be a redefinition of the Eucharist to replace the doctrine of transubstantiation. That should not be seen as a change in doctrine so much as a changed philosophic interpretation of what the doctrine means. Transubstantiation is really an explanation in Aristotelian terms of what the scholastics considered that the Eucharist entailed. It would be inappropriate, however, to retain a philosophic position simply because it provided a convenient explanation of a theological doctrine.

The practice of prayer in the light of contemporary beliefs seems more calculated to change the person doing the praying than to elicit anything from God to whom he or she prays, with the possible exception of prayer gaining God's gift of grace. Explicit acknowledgment of that could help make the practice less selfishly oriented and more concerned with drawing closer to God. It would require a more mature faith than seems to be commonly taught in the Church today. There is little evidence, however, of an effort in the Church in Australia to reinterpret the meaning of prayer or, for that matter, to preach a maturer concept of faith.

Clearly, the capacity to reach an understanding of prayer is relevant to anyone's efforts to arrive at a contemporary appreciation of God. All are constrained by the knowledge and language of the time. Prayers of petition no longer seem so efficacious as they did in earlier times. Even in the most recited ancient prayer, the Lord's Prayer, however, a very restricted place is given to petitions. In practice, nevertheless, it may well be virtually impossible to pray without, sometimes, asking for some favour either for oneself or for others. In a way, this acknowledges that people are not only rational but also have emotions. Nevertheless, it should be reasonable not to see requests as the main purpose in praying.

## Sexual Morality

In the opinion of very many members of the Church, the area in which it most needs to update its teaching is sexual morality. Church authorities have intruded into this area to a most unwarranted extent. They have reached conclusions which seem both ludicrous and at variance with the welfare of church members. Their concentration on sexual morality has resulted in a disproportionate significance being given to this one area of conduct. The inability to