

## WORSHIP IN THE SPIRIT OF LOGOS: Romans 12:1-2 and the Source and Summit of Christian Life

∴ Jeremy Driscoll, O. S. B. ∴

*Mount Angel Abbey and Seminary  
Pontifical Athenaeum San Anselmo*

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1–2<sup>1</sup>)

Within St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, the short passage contained in Romans 12:1–2 "has proved one of the most influential statements in the New Testament for Christian thought and spirituality."<sup>2</sup> Much has already been written on these verses and their influence on the Christian understanding of sacrifice, the moral life, and the liturgy. Anyone who attempts to write something further is stepping into a huge conversation that has been underway now for the nearly two thousand years since the letter was first written.

I step into that conversation, not pretending so much to add anything new as to express my own fascination with the questions. I propose to share my thoughts in two major steps. First, I will draw attention to some of the immediate exegetical questions raised by these verses. In a second step I will speak about what could be called the "liturgical realization" of these verses—that is, not so much what they may have meant in the immediate context in which Paul was writing, but their meaning after two millennia of the Church's meditation upon them and their application to the liturgy.

Several different moves will help us to deal with the preliminary exegetical questions. First, the verses should be located in their structural connection with the rest of the letter; in fact, as we will see, these verses function as a kind of turning point in the letter. Next, we must try to come to grips with some of the striking

---

1 Translations from Scripture are drawn from both the Revised Standard Version [RSV] and New American Bible, with occasional adjustments by the author.

2 Christopher Evans, "Romans 12:1–2: The True Worship," in *Dimensions de la vie chrétienne (Rom 12–13)* [Dimensions of the Christian Life], ed. Lorenzo De Lorenzi (Rome: Abbaye de S. Paul, 1979), 7–49, at 7. On the importance of the letter, generally, see, *Reading Romans Through the Centuries: From the Early Church to Karl Barth*, eds. Jeffrey P. Greenman and Timothy Larsen (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005).

concepts and vocabulary used in the verses themselves; here we will see that what Paul is saying becomes more clear when placed in relationship to other key verses in Romans and key verses in some of Paul's other letters.

### ***Paul's Project in Romans: A Brief Overview***

Despite the differences among scholars in how one should outline the structure of Romans, there are broad strokes of agreement about how Paul is proceeding in the letter. The verses with which we are concerned in this article clearly stand at a turning point—something critical to the whole letter is being said in these verses.<sup>3</sup>

Following the letter's opening salutation and thanksgiving,<sup>4</sup> Paul declares succinctly that the Gospel "is the power of God leading everyone who believes in it to salvation, the Jew first, then the Greek. For in the Gospel is revealed the justice of God which begins and ends with faith."<sup>5</sup> Virtually every word of these few sentences is freighted with meaning for Paul. The ordering of first Jew, then Greek, is significant, as is the announcement that salvation is for all. It is a salvation centered on justification, which is God's gift and not a human achievement. The human response to God's gift is faith.

All this is developed in the chapters that follow, based on Paul's striking reading of Israel's Scriptures in light of the mystery of Christ and the exegetical and interpretive techniques he learned as a totally dedicated Jewish believer. One of Paul's significant developments in the letter is his distinction between Jew and Greek. He distinguishes ultimately to unite. Gentiles are mired in sin because, though they could have known God "through the things he has made," instead they have "exchanged the glory of the immortal God" for a whole range of lies and, as a consequence, they have been delivered up by God to "disgraceful passions."<sup>6</sup> Jews, on the other hand, fare no better, but for a different reason. They are under the Law that God gave to their ancestors, but they are powerless to keep it.<sup>7</sup>

Toward both Jew and Gentile in their different predicaments, Paul announces that God has acted with justice and unaccountable mercy. Yes, it is true that "all men [Jews and Gentiles alike] have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God." Nonetheless, "all men are now undeservedly justified by the gift of God, through the redemption wrought in Christ Jesus."<sup>8</sup>

---

3 For a helpful summary of the letter that includes a discussion of major scholarly trends, see Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord. A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 338–411.

4 Rom. 1:1–15.

5 Rom. 1:16–17.

6 Rom. 1:20, 23, 26.

7 Rom. 2:17–25.

8 Rom. 3:23–24.

These dynamics are further explored throughout the first four chapters of the letter. Chapters 5–8 contain stunning explorations of the relation between the justification by faith<sup>9</sup> and the death of Jesus on the cross, including Paul's comparison of Adam and Christ, which he summarizes this way: "Just as through one man's disobedience all became sinners, so through one man's obedience all shall become just."<sup>10</sup>

From here, Paul develops his famous passage on baptism, which he describes as being plunged (the literal meaning of *baptism*) into the death of Christ, which "was death to sin, once for all." If that is so, Paul concludes, then "you must consider yourselves dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus."<sup>11</sup> We shall need to return to this passage in order to understand what Paul is saying in Romans 12:1–2. We shall see that "offering our bodies as a living sacrifice" is another way of describing the reality of being dead to sin and alive for God—a reality made possible "in Christ Jesus," into whose death we have been plunged.

In what follows, Paul contrasts life in the flesh and life in the Spirit. Sin is somehow lodged in the flesh, as a force working within each person.<sup>12</sup> But unexpectedly and undeservedly—this is Paul's gospel—we have been released from this fleshly predicament "in Christ Jesus," who has set us free "from the law of sin and death."<sup>13</sup> If the flesh tends toward sin and death, the new life of the Spirit is nothing less than the new life of Jesus' own resurrection in us, giving life to our "mortal bodies [Greek: *sōmata*] ... through his Spirit which dwells in [us]."<sup>14</sup>

This Spirit shows its presence in two major ways. He causes us "to put to death the deeds of the body [*sōma*]."<sup>15</sup> But the Spirit's presence in us also enables us to cry out "Abba! Father!" and to share in the inheritance of Christ, "provided we suffer with him."<sup>16</sup> The theme of suffering is magnificently developed in what follows. It is nothing less than "creation in agony," but an agony that has as its final outcome "the redemption of our bodies [*sōmatos*]."<sup>17</sup>

We must take note of one final development that precedes Romans 12:1–2. That is Paul's reflection on something that troubled him deeply—namely, Jewish unbelief that Jesus is Messiah. In Romans 9–11, Paul interprets this unbelief in light of his message that the Gospel is for the salvation of all, "for the Jew first, then

9 Compare Rom. 1:17.

10 Rom. 5:18–19; compare 5:1–21.

11 Rom. 6:10–11.

12 Rom. 7:18–19.

13 Rom. 8:1–2.

14 Rom. 8:11.

15 Rom. 8:13.

16 Rom. 8:16–17.

17 Rom. 8:23.

for the Greek.”<sup>18</sup> Paul suggests that Jewish unbelief makes way for the full number of Gentiles to come into this salvation and that God’s faithfulness to the promises he made to Israel plays a crucial role in that salvation.

Gentiles are a wild olive branch grafted onto the natural olive tree of Israel. But Jew and Gentile alike are guilty of “disobedience,” although each is guilty in a different way—Gentiles in their general disregard for the law written in nature and in the human heart, and Jews now in the “disobedience” of their failure to believe in Jesus as Messiah.<sup>19</sup> But again we see Paul distinguishing Jew and Gentile ultimately to unite. His conclusion: “God has imprisoned all in disobedience that he might have mercy on all.”<sup>20</sup>

### **“By the Mercies of God”: The Turning Point in Romans**

Thus we are prepared for Paul’s solemn declaration in Romans 12:1–2 which, as I have said, is a turning point in the letter. From these verses, Paul will begin to bring his letter to its conclusion. We see then that enormous weight must be assigned to the formulation with which Paul begins his declaration, a weight we often fail to notice when the verses are quoted apart from their fuller context.

When he begins, “I appeal to you, *therefore* [Greek: *oun*], brethren, by the mercies of God,” he means to draw behind him for what he is about to say all the authority and force of what he has developed up until this point.<sup>21</sup> He has a right to “appeal.”<sup>22</sup> Of course, he is addressing his “brethren,” that is, not merely the individual hearer of the letter, but the whole group of Jews and Gentiles alike to whom he has addressed it and whom together are offered this incomparable salvation. His appeal is based on “the mercies of God,” extended to both Gentiles and Jews in their respective disobedience and sin.

We may take this expression to summarize all that Paul has talked about previously—God’s response to the sin of the Gentiles and to Jewish inability to keep the Law; the justification worked through Christ’s death on the cross; the freedom from the law of sin to live in the Spirit; the enigma of Jewish disbelief which opens the door to Gentile belief. All of this, Paul calls the “mercies of God,”<sup>23</sup>

18 Rom. 1:16.

19 Rom. 11:30–31; compare 1:18–32; 2:14–15.

20 Rom. 11:32.

21 “The text is introduced by a solemn adjuration to its readers and serves as a transition from the doctrinal part to the exhortatory part of the letter. In this pivotal position there is every reason to consider these to be the most important verses of the letter.” Robert J. Daly, *Christian Sacrifice. The Judaeo-Christian Background Before Origen* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1978), 243. Not everyone agrees with this assessment; see, for example, Evans, “Romans 12:1–2,” 11.

22 On the rich semantic range in *parakaleō* (to appeal) as used by Paul here, see Raymond Corriveau, *The Liturgy of Life: a Study of the Ethical Thought of St. Paul in his Letters to the Early Christian Communities* (Bruxelles: Desclée De Brouwer, 1970), 165–166.

23 *Oiktirmōn* (“mercies”) in the plural reflects the influence of the Septuagint, which represents

and on the basis of this divine mercy, he can appeal for something that only this mercy can make possible for Jew and Gentile alike.

What God's mercies make possible is a new kind of sacrifice, a new kind of worship, a new cult. Paul urges—and the reader feels his solemn wonder—"Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, your spiritual worship." Let us examine this magnificent phrase, as well as what immediately follows it.

Some scholars, noting the unusual vocabulary in this passage, especially in the phrase *logikēn latreian* (roughly translated as "worship characterized by *logos*") argue that it must be understood apart from the rest of the letter and even apart from the rest of Paul's thought.<sup>24</sup> This seems an exaggerated way to resolve the problem of interpreting a phrase that is not found elsewhere in the Pauline body of writings. In fact, as we will see, the line of thought here is very much in accord with Paul's concerns to this point in Romans and it is also in line with what will follow from it. Indeed, Romans 12:1–2 represents an intense condensation of Paul's thought.<sup>25</sup>

Let us, then, break the passage into its constituent phrases in order to facilitate our commentary.<sup>26</sup> The first is: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice." It is striking that the verb Paul uses here, *paristēmi* / *paristanō* ("present"), is used some five times in a passage from Romans 6, where there is also a question of "presenting" bodies. He says, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not present [*paristanete*] your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves [*parastēsate eautous*] to God, as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness."<sup>27</sup>

---

the Hebrew plural *rahāmīm*. The general sense is *mercy* in the singular, but it can also easily fall on the Greek ear as a plural. Translations in the various languages have rendered it both in the singular and the plural.

24 Evans, for instance, says, "[The passage] has perforce to be taken on its own. It floats free, and has to be accounted for in its own terms." See "Romans 12:1–2," 14. He cites other authors who hold to a similar position. But I cannot agree, and my reasons will be set down in what follows. Heinrich Schlier, in his authoritative commentary, says that the verses must be understood in reference to all the foregoing, especially to Rom. 5–8. See *Der Römerbrief* [Letter to the Romans] (Herder: Freiburg, 1979), 351. So also Corriveau, *Liturgy of Life*, 159.

25 "[The verses] are surely among the most important verses in the Pauline corpus, for they present in brief span, as no other text does, the Pauline theology of Christian life." Daly, *Christian Sacrifice*, 243.

26 I am especially indebted here to Michael Thompson, *Clothed With Christ: the Example and Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12.1–15.13*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 59 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 78–86. Thompson summarizes the major commentaries and takes judicious positions on the various debated points.

27 Rom. 6:12–13. I translate the RSV slightly differently here in order to bring out that that same Greek verb, *paristēmi* / *paristanō*, is used here as in Romans 12:1; thus where RSV has "yield," I have "present."

In this passage, Paul's exhortation comes in the form of a conclusion—"Let not therefore [oun] sin reign"—as to what makes for fitting moral conduct based on his prior description of what baptism accomplishes in us.<sup>28</sup> In a similar way at Romans 12:1, but with even greater intensity, Paul is concluding with a solemn moral exhortation—"I appeal to you therefore [oun]"—based, as I have already suggested, on all that has gone before in the letter.<sup>29</sup>

If the idea and the vocabulary is similar in both passages, Romans 12:1 achieves greater intensity with the phrase "living sacrifice [*thysian zōsan*]"<sup>30</sup> This is often interpreted as a deliberate contrast with the dead rituals of Israel's animal sacrifices, which have been implicitly under discussion in the Romans 9–11. But here there is more to the sense of "living" than simply drawing that contrast. We have perhaps become too accustomed to the phrase to notice the paradox of the word "living" beside the word "sacrifice."

A sacrifice, by its very nature, is something killed and offered up. Paul urges here that believers offer up their bodies in sacrifice, not to be killed, but as a living sacrifice, living bodies. Romans 6 again helps our understanding of this passage, especially Paul's description of baptism: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and *alive* to God in Christ Jesus."<sup>31</sup> The "living sacrifice" of Romans 12:1 is possible for Christians precisely because they are *alive* in Christ Jesus, who himself "died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God."

It is surprising for me to find some scholars arguing that there can be no connection between the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice that Paul urges Christians to offer in Romans 12:1.<sup>32</sup> In addition to the passages from Romans 6 already cited, a number of other passages in the Pauline letters attest to the tight connection between Christ's sacrifice and the Christian life; these, too, can serve as a gloss on our reading of Romans 12:1.

28 Rom. 6:12: *mē oun*; compare Rom. 6:3–11.

29 Rom. 12:1: *parakalō oun*.

30 For example, Evans: "The verb is the same, but the imagery is not that of sacrificial offering but of ownership and servitude." "Romans 12:1–2," 24. But he makes too much of this difference; the different images express basically the same reality. Here a note from Thompson is useful: "Note also that to present one's body as a sacrifice is to give one's self away, that is, to 'lose one's life.' The thought links with Rom. 6 and shows that the idea here is a voluntary 'enslavement' to God under a different metaphor; the slavery / service imagery is not far in thought from the teaching and example of Jesus." *Clothed With Christ*, 82, n. 2.

31 Rom. 6:11.

32 See Evans' criticism of Phillip Seidensticker's classic study on this point; Evans also approvingly cites Lucien Cerfaux against Corriveau "in maintaining that the ideas of Rom. 12.1 are not linked thematically to the sacrifice of Christ." "Romans 12:1–2," 14, n. 40. But see the arguments in favor of connecting Christ's sacrifice with the sacrifice of Christians in Robert J. Daly, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 62–64: "Paul ... with a clarity beyond doubting, compares the life and death of the Christian with the sacrificial death of Christ."

For example, in 2 Corinthians 4:11–12, Paul states: “For while we *live* we are always being given up to *death* for Jesus’ sake, so that the *life* of Jesus may be manifested in our *mortal* flesh. So *death* is at work in us, but *life* in you.” Paul is insisting here on the paradox that life and death for the Christian are joined—the same paradox that Paul has condensed into the tightly packed phrase “living sacrifice.”

Again in Galatians 2:20, Paul exclaims: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” If Christians are able to offer their bodies as a sacrifice, this can only mean that they have, in some way, been crucified with Christ; and if they are a “living” sacrifice, it can only be because Christ lives in them. Indeed, Christ’s sacrifice—his being “dead to sin but alive to God”<sup>33</sup>—is extended as a single reality to the Christian, not only by means of baptism, but also in the whole of the Christian life lived in service. “For in my flesh,” Paul says elsewhere, “I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church.”<sup>34</sup> *In my flesh*, again refers to Paul’s body offered as a sacrifice. It is a living sacrifice because “death is at work in us, but life in you.”<sup>35</sup>

### *Living Sacrifices and Spiritual Worship*

But let us come now to the fuller phrase that Paul sets in apposition to “living sacrifice,” a phrase that he seems especially anxious to add—“*your spiritual worship* [*logikē latreia*].” It needs to be said from the outset that the common translation, “spiritual worship,” is inadequate. But it is very difficult to convey in other languages all that is suggested by the Greek adjective *logikos* as used here. Paul could have used the adjective *pneumatikos* (“spiritual”), but he did not. So we must find a meaning closer to the root *logos* as contained in the adjective *logikos*. Latin used *rationabile*, and English follows this with “reasonable” or “rational.” That is closer to the sense here, though we do not hear the echo of the word *logos*. A paraphrase would yield something to the effect of “worship that is marked by *logos*, characterized by *logos*.” But what more precisely would this mean, and why would Paul say this here, placing it in the grammatical position of a strong qualifying apposition to “living sacrifice?”

Paul’s concerns become clearer when we notice the connection between Romans 12:1–2 and Romans 1:18–32. In the overview of the letter we characterized these verses as Paul’s description of the Gentile predicament. Gentiles are mired in sin because, though they could have known God “through the things he has made,”

33 See the discussion above on Rom. 6:10–11.

34 Col. 1:24.

35 2 Cor. 4:12. For further defense of the connection between Christ’s sacrifice and the sacrifice of Rom. 12:1, see Thompson, *Clothed With Christ*, 80–81. In addition to the sacrifice being called “living,” it is also called “holy and acceptable to God [*hagian tō theō euareston*].” This is normal language from the cult that accords well with “sacrifice.” I have concentrated here instead on “living” because the word is unexpected alongside “sacrifice.” But for comments on “holy and acceptable,” see the discussion on Origen below.

instead they have “exchanged the glory of the immortal God” for a whole range of lies, and were delivered up by God to “disgraceful passions.”<sup>36</sup>

What is at issue here, among other things, is correct worship. The Gentiles were idolaters, exchanging “the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.”<sup>37</sup> Now in Romans 12:1 Paul is proposing a different kind of worship, not one based on these falsehoods but one that instead is *logikos*. In Romans 1, Paul says that God punished the false worship of the Gentiles by “giving them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.”<sup>38</sup> Now, in Romans 12:1, Paul calls for bodies to be offered in sacrifice, in obedience to the divine will, an obedience that would be true worship “of the Creator, who is blessed for ever!”<sup>39</sup> Midway between the irrational worship described in Romans 1 and the worship imbued-with-*logos* of Romans 12, we have already seen in Romans 6 what makes such worship in the *logos* possible: baptism into the death of Christ Jesus, on which account “you must also consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions ... but present yourselves to God.”<sup>40</sup>

The problem with worship and the passions that forms part of the Gentile predicament is a problem of rightly understanding God and God’s creation. These people, who should have known better, “became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened.” God gave them up to a “base mind” (*eis adokimon noun*), a mind unable to judge rightly.<sup>41</sup> Now in Romans 12:1 Paul proposes instead a worship imbued with mind’s best quality, with *logos*. It is the worship of those who are in their right minds, as opposed to the upside down world of the people who “exchanged natural relations for unnatural.”<sup>42</sup>

The importance of right thinking in shaping the Christian conduct is further brought out in Romans 8 with words clustered around the root *phronein* (“to think, to have understanding”).

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.  
(Rom. 8:5–6)

---

36 Rom. 1:20, 23, 26.

37 Rom. 1:23.

38 Rom. 1:24; this point is vividly developed in Rom. 1:24–32.

39 Rom. 1:25.

40 Rom. 6:11–13.

41 Rom. 1:20, 22, 28.

42 Rom. 1:26–27.

Again, we can see that the formulation in Romans 12:1 is a tightly condensed version of these more extended developments. When the mind is “set on the Spirit,” the bodies offered as a sacrifice can be a “living sacrifice,” for “the Spirit is life and peace.” And such a sacrifice can be *logikē latreia* because believers are not given over to a base mind (*eis adokimon noun*) but their thinking instead is set on the Spirit. We will not be surprised then when Paul says in the verse that immediately follows *logikē latreia*, “Be transformed by the renewal of your mind (*nous*).” We shall comment more on this shortly.

What we have said so far about *logikē latreia* is what can be said on the basis of the text itself and its immediate context. I have not entered into the background of the phrase in Stoic philosophy and the influence this had in the Jewish Diaspora, especially in the Alexandria of a Philo. It may well be that Paul is directly influenced by these, but it is impossible to say with certainty.<sup>43</sup> For this reason it seems safest to unfold its meaning from the context itself, as I have tried to do here. But on the basis of what we have said here in a close reading of the text itself, we must prepare ourselves now to face a question that will develop in the subsequent history of Christian theology and its attention to this phrase.

### *The Implied Christological Background of Romans 12:1*

The Greek ear hears the root *logos* in the adjective *logikos*, and the Christian ear hears a title of Jesus Christ in the word *logos*.<sup>44</sup> For this reason the meaning of Paul’s phrase grows through the centuries in which the text is pondered by the Christian community. In time the phrase *logikē latreia* will come to mean the Divine *Logos*’ own worship of the Father and the worship offered by the Christian made possible by Christ the *Logos*. If it is impossible to say whether or not some such christological sense was a part of Paul’s reason for the choice of the word *logikos*—and it would be safer to say it was not—there is nonetheless a tight christological meaning that reveals itself in the complex of texts from Romans we have been studying. I want to pursue that meaning first before going on to trace the influence of Paul’s concept on subsequent Christian thought.

43 All this has been thoroughly studied. See Schlier, *Römerbrief*, 356; Philipp Seidensticker, *Lebendiges Opfer (Röm 12, 1): Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des Apostels Paulus* [Living Sacrifice (Rom. 12:1): A Study on the Theology of the Apostle Paul] (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1954), 17–43. Evans, “Romans 12:1–2,” 17–21. Much of this work is nicely summarized by Corriveau, *Liturgy of Life*, 159–161. Corriveau’s conclusion seems correct: “Paul would thus be taking up, in quotation marks as it were, a religious slogan common in certain circles at the time. In so doing he completely transforms the saying, while opposing it to those conceptions of spiritual worship so much in vogue at the time. Certainly no more the bloody animal sacrifices of the past, but not either the pure interiority of the mystic. The Christian’s spiritual worship involves an extreme realism—the bodily offering of himself!” *Liturgy of Life*, at 179.

44 See John 1:1; Rev. 19:13.

I have drawn attention in some detail to the relation between Romans 1:18–32 and Romans 12:1–2. The *logikē latreia* for which Paul calls in Romans 12:1 represents a reversal of the depraved situation of human beings described in Romans 1:18–32. But behind this description of the condition of the human race stands the story of Adam, which Paul will develop in Romans 5: “Sin came into the world through one man.”<sup>45</sup> That sinful situation is what Paul has in fact analyzed in Romans 1. It is the predicament of the Gentile world. “Death reigned from Adam to Moses”—that is, until the giving of the Law to Israel, which is when the problems begin for the Jewish people.<sup>46</sup>

Adam is described as “a type [*typos*] of the one who was to come.”<sup>47</sup> With this technical term “type,” Paul describes how sinful Adam’s disobedience is matched and undone by Jesus Christ’s obedience.<sup>48</sup> The obedience to which Paul refers is, of course, Jesus’ death on the cross, a death which, elsewhere in the Pauline writings and in the broader apostolic witness, is understood as a sacrifice. Commenting on the texts we have been examining here, Michael Thompson says, “[Christ’s] sacrifice evokes the Christian sacrifice. The giving up of Jesus’ body as a sacrifice for the sake of others (1 Cor. 11:24) enables this reversal and provides the archetype for Christian self-offering in Romans 12:1.”<sup>49</sup>

So the first Adam, as the “type” of the last Adam,<sup>50</sup> stands in the background of Romans 12:1, and reveals an unexpected christological sense to Paul’s appeal for Christian self-sacrifice. He proposes that Christians offer their bodies in sacrifice because Christ offered his body in sacrifice.<sup>51</sup> The Christian sacrifice is Christ’s own sacrifice extended to the Christian as something the Christian offers in virtue of being “in Christ.” Thus it is a “living sacrifice” because in Christ Christians present themselves “as from the dead, alive ... slaves to obedience.”<sup>52</sup> Here at last is the right worship for which human beings were created—not the dead sacrifices of a material cult that slays animals, still less the worship of “images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles,”<sup>53</sup> but instead *logikē latreia*, the only worship worthy of human beings, the worship that can be offered now in the last Adam.

The christological dimensions of Paul’s formulation in Romans 12:1 have emerged by our “scratching,” as it were, the vocabulary employed. Just beneath the surface of *parastēsai* (“present”), of *sōmata* (“bodies”), of *thysia* (“sacrifice”), of it be-

---

45 Rom. 5:12.

46 Rom. 5:14.

47 Rom. 5:14.

48 Rom. 5:19.

49 Thompson, *Clothed With Christ*, 83.

50 See 1 Cor. 15:45.

51 1 Cor. 11:24.

52 Rom. 6:13, 16: *hosei ek nekrōn zōntas ... doulous eis hypakoēn*.

53 Rom. 1:23.

ing a *zōsa* (“living”) sacrifice, and of this being *logikē* worship, we have in every case found Jesus Christ as ultimate source for the logic of what is being said. This link with Christ is further strengthened by what Paul goes on to say in Romans 12:2, even if there too Christ is not explicitly mentioned. Let us examine what follows, taking it several phrases at a time.

### *Renewal of the Mind and Nonconformity to the World*

With the exhortation, “do not be conformed to this world,” Paul steps closer to rendering more concretely the way in which the living sacrifice and the characterized-by-*logos* worship will be formed. This worship will exhibit itself in a life that stands in utter contrast to the present age. The verb Paul uses *syschēmatizomai* is vivid—it evokes a sense of a life taking on a particular form.

When Paul says it should not be a life in the form of this age (*tō aiōni toutō*),<sup>54</sup> he draws his readers again to the upside down world described in Romans 1, and again contrasts those who live according to the flesh and those who live according to the Spirit, as he did in Romans 7–8. He is asking his readers to put aside the age “in which death reigned” as a result of Adam’s sin,<sup>55</sup> and to conform themselves to the last Adam, the age in which sin will not reign in their mortal bodies.<sup>56</sup>

So, as in the previous verse, when Paul says now, “Do not be conformed to this world,” he employs a new word to formulate his tight condensation of key ideas already developed earlier in the letter. And he does the same thing in the phrase that follows: “but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” Paul does not explain what it is that we are to be transformed into. But again by “scratching” the verb he uses (*metamorphōō*) we can again detect an underlying christological sense. In the New Testament, this verb is only used in the account of the transfiguration<sup>57</sup> and in Paul’s invoking of the transfiguration to describe the transformation that the Christian must await and strive for.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul says that “we all ... are being transformed [*metamorphoumetha*] into his [the Lord’s] very image from glory to glory by the Lord who is Spirit.” This transformation comes about by our “gazing on the glory of the Lord.” Paul conceives the goal of his own ministry as bringing about this change in Christians, as he tells the Galatians: “My children, for whom I am again in labor until Christ be formed [*morphōthē*] in you.”<sup>58</sup> What he expressed as his goal with

54 Compare 1 Cor. 1:20; 2:6, 8; 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 2:2.

55 Rom. 5:14.

56 Rom. 6:12.

57 Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2: “he was transfigured [*metemorphōthē*].”

58 Gal. 4:19.

the Galatians he urges also on the Roman community—that Christ be “formed” in them.<sup>59</sup>

In Romans 12:2, Paul further characterizes the transformation he seeks as coming about “by renewal of your mind.” Renewal (*anakainōsis*) is another word that in Paul’s writings describes the simultaneous presence of death and life in the Christian who is being conformed to Christ. “Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed [*anakainoutai*] every day,” he tells the Corinthians.<sup>60</sup> Renewal involves, among other things, understanding creation and the Creator rightly, that is, differently from the perverse understandings discussed in Romans 1:18–32: “You have put on the new nature, which is being renewed [*anakainoumenon*] in knowledge after the image of its Creator.”<sup>61</sup>

Following the line of thought that he also pursues in his other writings, Paul here speaks of the renewal of our minds, our inner nature, completing the sense of the offering of *bodies* mentioned in Romans 12:1, and following neatly upon all that we saw implied by Paul’s use of the word *logikos*. Both mind and body are involved in the sacrifice, in the worship.<sup>62</sup>

An author who so purposively uses the word “mind” after mention of the word “bodies” could not fail to intend somewhere in his meaning what was expressed by him with such awe in his letter to the Corinthians, where he exclaimed, “But we have the mind of Christ.”<sup>63</sup> Taking on the mind of Christ would be the mind’s renewal and transformation in opposition to the spirit of “this age.”

Finally, Paul specifies a purpose of the renewed mind. It is the last phrase of this intense condensation that we must examine here: “That you may prove [*dokimazein*] what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” The verb *dokimazō* is also in the vein of *nous* and *logikos*, concerned with understanding things and understanding them correctly. *Dokimazein* means coming to the right judgment about things through searching and testing. The renewed mind of which Paul speaks is the opposite of the “base mind” (*eis adōkimon noun*) he spoke of in Romans 1:28.

And so we have still another connection between Romans 12:1–2 and the upside down world described in Romans 1:18–32. Discerning the will of God is not possible to those of base mind, those who have the “form” of this age. But to those who are transformed into the very image of Christ, the will of God will be known

59 That the transformation of the Christian is always spoken of with passive verbs shows that it is effected by another agent. But the passive *imperative* of Rom. 12:2 indicates that the Christian has also to take responsibility for this transformation to be worked. It has to be allowed.

60 2 Cor. 4:16.

61 Col. 3:10.

62 “This totality of the self is what Paul solemnly adjures his Christian brethren to offer to God (that is, put at God’s disposition) as living, holy, and pleasing sacrifice.” Daly, *Origins*, 64. To be precise, this is a remark Daly makes in commenting on *logikos*, but it extends to *nous* as well.

63 1 Cor. 2:16.

as it was to Christ. That will, of course, is ultimately Christ's death on the cross, his sacrifice. And so we have come full circle. Paul urges the Romans to the same will: "Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice."<sup>64</sup>

In various places Paul speaks of the ultimate goal of our transformation. Jesus Christ will "transform [*metaschēmatisēi*] our lowly body into the form [*symmorphon*] of his glorified body."<sup>65</sup> But that ultimate transformation must begin in the present. It is a process that must be got underway, and getting it underway is rather more the object of what Paul is saying in Romans 12:1–2 and what we have examined here. Thompson offers a good summary of all that we have examined. He notes that in these verses:

Paul exhorts his readers to present their bodies to God as a sacrifice devoted to his will. But they will not be the first to do so. In giving themselves up to the *latreia* befitting God they demonstrate their unity with the One whose life was fully yielded to his Father's will, with the one who knew no conformity to this age but broke its power and inaugurated a new *aion* by his death and resurrection. Alive in the second Adam, Christians are to succeed where the first Adam failed.<sup>66</sup>

### *The Liturgical Realization of Romans 12:1–2*

We may presume that in their actual context Paul's striking formulations in Romans 12:1–2 had their immediate impact. But it is not many generations before we can observe patristic writers taking note of these verses and using them to develop a wide range of points.<sup>67</sup> Already in St. Irenaeus of Lyons the verses are used

64 I read the phrase "what is good and acceptable and perfect" as in apposition to "the will of God." It is not that we are to discern also what is good and acceptable and perfect, but rather that discerning the will of God is good and acceptable and perfect.

65 Phil. 3:21. Compare 1 Cor. 15:49: "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven." See also Rom. 8:29: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son [*symmorphous tēs eikonos tou huiou autou*]."

66 Thompson, *Clothed With Christ*, 85–86.

67 Among the first is Athenagoras in his *Legatio*, or *Plea on Behalf of Christians*, Chap. 13, where he uses *logikē latreia* in contrast to the bloody sacrifices of the pagans. Interestingly, he also associates it with understanding the creation in such a way that it leads to knowledge of the true God—the same basic concept developed by Paul in Rom. 1:18–35. Text in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 134–135. When Origen cites the gnostic Heracleon's commentary on John to explain the verse "worship in spirit and in truth," we see that Heracleon explains the verse by reference to Rom. 12:1. See Origen *Commentary on John*, Bk. 13, 148. In a letter to persecuted Christians sentenced to work in the mines, St. Cyprian of Carthage (*Letter 76*, 3) urges them not to regard it as a loss that in their present circumstances the bishop cannot "offer and celebrate the divine sacrifices," meaning the Eucharist. Instead, he says, they are offering a sacrifice by what they are suffering.

to refer to the Eucharist, and it is not long before the phrase *logikē latreia* enters into the liturgy itself. It is found in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom in a prayer immediately before the epiclesis, the invocation of the Holy Spirit, which repeats the phrase several times. The phrase also clearly influences the Latin of the Roman Canon in its prayer over the oblation immediately before the narrative of the institution of the Eucharist: "Be pleased, O God, we pray, to bless, acknowledge, and approve this offering in every respect; make it spiritual and acceptable."<sup>68</sup>

Paul's immediate meaning in Romans 12:1–2 is clearly moral, not cultic. The cultic word "sacrifice" is used by him as a metaphor for a holy life, for being "dead to sin but alive for God." The cultic word "worship" also is used not to describe an actual cultic act but the new life in Christ that involves not only the body but the renewal of the mind. It is a worship that is *logikē*. But when we find this word in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom and in the Roman Canon it is clear that the liturgical language is intended to echo the Apostle's words. It is also clear that these words are intended to refer to the cultic action now underway, indeed, to the "sacrifice" present on the altar in the Body and Blood of the Lord and to the "worship" this sacrifice constitutes.

So, we must naturally ask if this liturgical usage of Paul's language does not betray his original meaning or, in any case, go far beyond it. I answer that it does not. But can we uncover the steps, the deep spiritual logic, that lead from Paul's immediate moral meaning to the fuller sense revealed in the application of these to the Christian cult?

The application of cultic language to the moral life is not merely a rhetorically effective metaphor, though it is at least that. But we should not forget that the moral life itself is ordered toward perfect worship, that the worship of God is the highest moral act of human beings. For Israel the Law is ultimately ordered toward right worship, and the one is not authentic without the other. This presupposition lies behind the prophetic critique of the cult, upon which, to some extent at least, Paul is drawing here for his own use of the metaphor. So, Paul's immediate moral exhortation would not necessarily preclude the sense of real worship expressed in cult.

---

Then he cites Ps. 50:19, "An afflicted spirit is a sacrifice to God," and Rom. 12:1–2. Text in *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage, vol. 4: Letters 67–82*, trans. and annot. G. W. Clarke, Ancient Christian Writers 47 (New York: Newman, 1989), 97–98. St. John Chrysostom (*Homily 20, 1*) strongly connects Rom. 12:1–2 with all that precedes these verses in Romans; he then unfolds a moral interpretation that includes no reference to cult. But he is extremely eloquent as he catches Paul's metaphorical use of the word sacrifice: "Let the eye look on no evil thing, and it hath become a sacrifice; let the tongue speak nothing filthy, and it hath become a sacrifice." Commenting on the phrase *logikē latreia*, he says, "when you offer soberness, when almsgiving, when goodness and forbearance. For in doing this you offer 'a reasonable worship,' that is, one without aught that is bodily, gross, visible." Text in Philip Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. 11* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1997), 496–497.

68 "Quam oblationem tu, Deus, in omnibus, quaesumus, benedictam, adscriptam, ratam, rationabilem acceptabilemque facere digneris."

But we can go farther than that. Hidden deep inside these verses is a spiritual logic that is eventually worked out by subsequent generations. I mean the logic of the profound connection between the very possibility of the Christian moral life and the death of Christ on the cross. Christ's death on the cross is described, among other ways, with the language of sacrifice; and because the Christian moral life is possible only in connection with that sacrifice, then Christian moral life here is likewise called sacrifice. It is also possible to describe Christ's sacrifice and the Christian sacrifice with the same adjectives: living, holy, pleasing, and "characterized by *logos*." Christ is essentially all these. The Christian is these by participation.

### *Christian Sacrifice in the Life of Christ*

Origen expresses this Christ connection to Romans 12:1–2 in a passage that does not hesitate to render explicit the christological roots of Paul's moral exhortation. He begins:

But now Paul exhorts believers in Christ to present their "bodies as a sacrifice living, holy, and pleasing to God." He calls the sacrifice that bears life, that is, Christ, within itself "living," and he says, "We carry about the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus Christ might also be revealed in our body."<sup>69</sup>

We note that Origen comments first on the word "living." It is necessary to be familiar with Origen's exegetical style to understand his reasoning here and to take account of its significance. He immediately connects this word in Paul's text with Christ's words, "I am the life,"<sup>70</sup> and reasons that if the sacrifice is living it would be because it has Christ who is the life in it. He finds his reasoning confirmed in the next passage he cites, which comes from 2 Corinthians 4:10, a passage that suits his purpose for two reasons; first, because it mentions the body, as does Romans 12:1 on which he is commenting and secondly, because "in" this body is carried both the death of Jesus and so also his life, since "he is the life."

Origen goes on to comment on the next adjectives used to describe the sacrifice, "holy and pleasing to God." He says:

He calls a [sacrifice] in which the Holy Spirit dwells "holy," in accordance with what he has said in another passage, "Or do you not know that you are a temple of God and the Spirit of

69 *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* Bk. 9, chap. 1, 5. Text in *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6–10*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, Fathers of the Church 104 (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2002), 193. All citations of Origen are from this translation and this page.

70 John 14:6.

God dwells in you?" [He calls this sacrifice] "pleasing to God"  
because it has been separated from sins and vices.<sup>71</sup>

Origen is led to this citation of 1 Corinthians from the word "holy" in the Romans text, to the word "holy" in the name "Holy Spirit." He then associates the cultic word "sacrifice" with the cultic word "temple" because Paul calls believers a "temple of God" in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. He probably has in mind as well the even stronger text in which Paul makes this point in speaking of the body: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?"<sup>72</sup> Thus, for Origen the bodies to be offered in sacrifice in Romans 12:1 are a *holy* sacrifice precisely because each body is a temple of the *Holy Spirit*.<sup>73</sup>

Next he goes on to explain the phrase *logikē latreia*:

But all of this is the reasonable worship of God. For rational grounds can be given for worship of this sort, and it can be shown that to offer sacrifices of this sort is worthy of God. But no rational explanation that is straightforward and honest could support offering rams and goats and calves to the immortal and incorporeal God.<sup>74</sup>

Implicit in Origen's thinking here is that the sacrificing of material animals can only have been images of a sacrifice that was to surpass and fulfil them. That sacrifice here is called *logikē latreia* in contrast to the material sacrifice of animals; the word *logikē* inspires Origen to underline that the God to whom sacrifice is offered is "immortal and incorporeal."

With Origen's explanation of *logikē latreia* it may seem that we have simply returned to a merely moral understanding of the term. But what is important is to see how deeply that moral possibility is rooted in Christ and the Holy Spirit. Let us think through why Origen has rendered explicit this connection with Christ and the Holy Spirit. The foundation for this union between Christ and his members is begun in baptism, as Paul stated forcefully in Romans 6: "All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death."<sup>75</sup> What was begun in baptism was thoroughly deepened in the celebration of the Eucharist.

<sup>71</sup> Origen, *Romans*, Bk. 9, chap. 1, 5

<sup>72</sup> 1 Cor. 6:19. See Daly, *Origins*, 59–63 for the tight connections between Paul's understanding of sacrifice and the community as temple.

<sup>73</sup> In explaining the word "pleasing," Origen does not explicitly connect the word with either Christ or the Holy Spirit but simply expands briefly the moral consequences of Paul's exhortation.

<sup>74</sup> See *Romans*, Bk. 9, chap. 1, 4, for Origen's allegorical explanations of the material animal sacrifices in Leviticus.

<sup>75</sup> Rom. 6:3.

The Christian community realized early that its essential existential contact with Christ—indeed with the sacrifice of Christ which made the community's sacrifice also possible—was accomplished in the celebration of the Eucharist; for in that celebration the memorial of the Lord's sacrifice became at one and the same time the community offering itself as part of Christ's sacrifice.<sup>76</sup> "I urge you, therefore, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice," for Christ said, "I am the Life."

### *Eucharist, Sacrifice, and Compassion in "The City of God"*

In his well known and often commented upon discussion of sacrifice in *The City of God*, St. Augustine also takes up our passage.<sup>77</sup> Augustine defines sacrifice as "a divine matter," having in mind the two compound roots of the word.<sup>78</sup> Thus, a man who is *consecrated* in the name of God or vowed to God can be considered a sacrifice. Citing Paul, Augustine goes on to explain that this would come about "inasmuch as he dies to the world so that he may live for God." Here is a clear allusion to Romans 6:11, the same text that was so important to our exegetical unpacking of the phrase "living sacrifice."

Next he brings the concept to bear on the body, saying, "Our body also is a sacrifice when we discipline it by temperance." Such temperance must be done for the sake of God, on the basic principle that "sacrifice is a divine matter." In other words, the disciplining of the body necessary to develop athletic abilities or a more shapely form would not be a "sacrifice" in the sense that Augustine intends. He explains this by citing another text from Romans that was important in our exegetical exercise. Temperance, he says, is the discipline that would prevent us from "offering our bodily powers to the service of sin as the instruments of iniquity, but [instead to offer them to] the service of God as instruments of righteousness." Here we see Augustine moving immediately and naturally from an allusion to Romans 6:16 to a direct citation of Romans 12:1–2. In commenting on these verses he seizes immediately on the word "body" and says,

If then the body ... is a sacrifice when it is offered to God for good and right employment,<sup>79</sup> how much more does the soul itself become a sacrifice when it offers itself to God.

Augustine is moving from *body* to *soul*—not the language of the Pauline text, but language more suited to Augustine's discussion with the Platonists at this point—

<sup>76</sup> 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:26.

<sup>77</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. 10, chap. 6. Text in *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1972), 379–380. All the following citations are from these pages.

<sup>78</sup> He is not explicit on this, but he presumes his reader understands *sacer* ("sacred") and *facere* ("to do, perform") = *sacrificio*.

<sup>79</sup> This formulation combines "bodies as sacrifice" from Rom. 12:1 with the development of Rom. 6:12–23.

in order to capture Paul's movement from *body* to *mind*. As we discussed, Paul first urges offering bodies as a sacrifice, then urges the renewal of the mind. Augustine sees this as an even greater sacrifice than the sacrifice of the body. Instead of the word "mind" (*mens*) in the Latin text of Romans 12:2, Augustine is more struck by the possibilities in the word *forma*: "*Nolite conformari huic saeculo, sed reformamini in novitate mentis.* [Do not be conformed to this age, but be re-formed in newness of mind.]"

Augustine continues:

How much more does the soul itself become a sacrifice when it offers itself to God, so that it may be kindled by the fire of love and may lose the "form" of worldly desire, and may be "re-formed" by submission to God as to the unchangeable "form," thus becoming acceptable to God because of what it has received from his beauty.

This is a complicated thought, which Augustine explains as the meaning of Romans 12:2. Augustine's insight here is based on what we may call the ultimate *forma*, God himself. The world in its fallen condition is *de-formed* in reference to God, and so we must not be *con-formed* to it. Instead we must be *re-formed* by submission, in the sense of sacrifice, according to the *form* of "the fire of love," also an image of sacrifice or immolation; that is, we are to be reformed according to the "beauty" of the divine form.

On the basis of this reasoning, Augustine can conclude, "So then, the true sacrifices are acts of compassion." This comes from being reformed according to the form of God. He goes on to state that we are all called to such sacrifices as to a single sacrifice offered through Christ. Again, the word *forma* makes possible the link with Christ in the way Augustine expresses the idea.

This being so, it immediately follows that the whole redeemed community, that is to say, the congregation and fellowship of the saints, is offered to God as a universal sacrifice, through the great Priest who offered himself in his suffering for us—so that we might be the body of so great a head—under the form of a servant.

This is striking. The community of the redeemed *is* a universal sacrifice precisely because and only because its acts of compassion are in fact in the same *form* as the great Priest, Christ, who offered himself for us that we might be one body with him. With elegant insistence Augustine drills the point home that in the *form* of Christ the servant we ourselves can become that same sacrifice. "For it was this form he offered, and in this form he was offered, because it is under this form that

he is the Mediator, in this form he is the priest, in this form he is the Sacrifice." And the upshot of all this? When we are not con-formed to this age but re-formed in newness of mind, then "we ourselves are that whole sacrifice."<sup>80</sup>

Thus far Augustine has stayed very true to Paul's moral sense in Romans 12:1–2, and further he has grounded the possibility of Christians doing what the apostle urges in the sacrifice of Christ. With this moral sense of sacrifice firmly established, he concludes by making a brief but profound reference to the cultic celebration of Eucharist. Of all that he has said here, he simply remarks, "This is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, a sacrament well-known to the faithful where it is shown to the Church that she herself is offered in the offering which she presents to God." The transition from moral life to cult is seamless. Indeed, the one is the other, in Augustine's mind. "This is the sacrifice," he says, namely, all that has been said about "acts of compassion." And in the sacrament of the altar, the Church experiences what I earlier called the essential existential contact with the sacrifice of Christ which made the community's sacrifice also possible. "She herself is offered in the offering which she presents to God."<sup>81</sup>

### *The "Eucharist" of the Martyrs*

Long before Augustine was offering his profound reflections on the relationship between Christian living and the eucharistic sacrifice, the Church was already making this connection. One of the most vivid examples comes to us in the account of the death of St. Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, who died in 156. This is the oldest account of a martyrdom from the early Church, and especially striking is the connection made between the death of the bishop and the Eucharist.

The bishop's death is described with liturgical, eucharistic language. The warrant for doing so—the theological logic behind the text—lies in the theology we see in Romans 12:1–2. Paul describes Christian living and Christian dying with liturgical or cultic language, and so does the narrator of Polycarp's death. While we cannot claim the narrator had Paul's theology directly in mind, it is not impossible. What is important is the profound connection that is made between the Christian's death and the Church's worship.

80 With his use of *form* both in reference to God and in reference to Christ taking the form of a slave, Augustine is clearly relying on the term as defined by Paul in Phil. 2:6. He repeats this language again at *City of God*, Bk. 10, chap. 20. Augustine frequently uses this Pauline verse in his theology.

81 Useful for understanding Augustine's phrase "sacrament of the altar" is his comment in the previous chapter on sacrifices in religion in general: "The visible sacrifice is the sacrament, the sacred sign, of the invisible sacrifice." (*City of God*, Bk. 10, chap. 5) Augustine is brief here in *The City of God*, but he preaches this way regularly to his neophytes as basic catechesis on Eucharist. See especially *Sermons* 227–229.

Both Paul and the narrator of Polycarp's martyrdom make this connection; and we must conclude that the early Christians were able to make this connection on the basis of an understanding of their life as a sacrificial offering, an experience shaped by their worship, by the existential encounter with the power of Christ's sacrifice in the eucharistic memorial of his death.

From the narrative of Polycarp's death, worthy of note are the following "cultic" descriptions of how it unfolded. As the pyre is prepared, Polycarp is said to have "laid aside all his garments and loosened his belt," as well as preparing to undo his sandals. This language evokes a priest's preparation for the ceremony of offering. As the bishop's hands are bound, the narrator compares him to "an exceptional ram taken from a great flock for a sacrifice, prepared as a whole burnt offering that is acceptable to God."<sup>82</sup> And as the pyre is set aflame with his body upon it, the account describes his burning flesh as smelling like baking bread—a clear eucharistic reference. In addition, the burning martyr gives off "a particularly sweet aroma, like wafting incense," an allusion to an essential element of Old Testament sacrifices.<sup>83</sup> Most impressive of all is the prayer that Polycarp prays as he is dying.

The prayer is deeply eucharistic. Indeed, scholars are virtually unanimous in understanding this prayer as an adaptation of an early Eucharistic Prayer.<sup>84</sup> The prayer has the tripartite structure that characterizes the earliest ancestors of the eucharistic anaphoras, the prayers said when offering the bread and wine. The first part praises God for his creation and the work of redemption; the second is a prayer of thanksgiving; the third part is a petition, concluding with a doxology, an expression of praise for the glory of God. Polycarp prays:

I bless you for making me worthy of this day and hour, that I may receive a share among the number of the martyrs in the cup of your Christ, unto the resurrection of eternal life in both soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. Among them may I be received before you today as a sacrifice that is rich and acceptable.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 13–14. Text *The Apostolic Fathers I*, ed. and trans. Bart D. Ehrman, Loeb Classical Library 24 (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2003), 385–389.

<sup>83</sup> *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 15.

<sup>84</sup> See Pierre Thomas Camelot, "Introduction," in *Ignace d'Antioche et Polycarpe de Smyrne, Lettres; Martyre de Polycarpe* [Letters of Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna; Martyrdom of Polycarp], Sources Chrétiennes 10 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1969), 207. David Tripp, "The Prayer of St. Polycarp and the Development of Anaphoral Prayer," *Ephemerides liturgicae* 104 (1990): 97–132. For the most recent discussion, see Gerd Buschmann, *Das Martyrium des Polykarp* [The Martyrdom of Polycarp] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 226–257.

<sup>85</sup> *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 14.

Enrico Mazza compares this prayer with a portion of the eucharistic anaphora found in *The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus*, a manual of Church order that dates to the year 215:

Remembering, therefore, his death and resurrection, we offer to you the bread and the chalice, giving you thanks that you have counted us worthy to stand before you and minister to you.<sup>86</sup>

The parallel between Polycarp's prayer and the anaphora at this point suggests that there is some sense here that in its Eucharist the community is aware that it is now offering what the Lord himself first offered.<sup>87</sup> Polycarp understands his death as a "taking part in the cup of Christ" with a view toward resurrection. The anaphora of *The Apostolic Tradition* remembers the Lord's death and resurrection and, doing so, now offers the bread and wine. This prayer immediately follows the narrative of the Lord's Supper. The Lord offered himself; the community now gives thanks that it can offer itself together with the Lord. Polycarp, who had prayed this way in the cultic celebration of the Eucharist, now prays in a similar way as he is dying. Martyrdom is the acting out in flesh of what the Eucharist accomplishes ritually—but in both cases the offering is made in the pattern of what Christ accomplished. Christ's death, Polycarp's martyrdom, the Eucharist—all three are "a share in the cup of Christ unto the resurrection into eternal life."<sup>88</sup>

There are few linguistic parallels between Polycarp's prayer and the language of Paul in Romans 12:1–2.<sup>89</sup> But the parallels in thought are much closer. Polycarp lays aside his garments, belt and sandals; Paul would say he is presenting his body as a living sacrifice. Polycarp is described as a noble ram taken from the flock; Paul would specify that this is a sacrifice "holy and acceptable to God." Polycarp prays what amounts to a eucharistic prayer and asks that he himself be accepted in the sight of God; Paul would call this worship characterized by *logos*. As Polycarp is dying he is described as bread being baked; Paul calls this being transformed. Polycarp's death manifests "what is good and acceptable and perfect."

86 *Memores igitur mortis et resurrectionis eius, offerimus tibi panem et calicem, gratias tibi agentes, quia nos dignos habuisti adstare coram te et tibi ministrare.* See Enrico Mazza, *The Origins of the Eucharistic Prayer*, trans. Ronald E. Lane (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 153–161.

87 See also the suggestive line at the beginning of *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 1: "For Polycarp waited to be betrayed, as also did the Lord, (*periēmenen gar, hina paradothe, hos kai ho kyrios*) that we in turn might imitate him."

88 It is not difficult to recall here St. Ignatius of Antioch's understanding of his own martyrdom in similar terms. See his *Letter to the Romans*, 4, 1.

89 The closest is the use of the word *thysia* ("sacrifice"), in the petition to be received as a rich and acceptable sacrifice. But certainly the whole concept of Polycarp himself being received as a sacrifice is the same thought that Paul expresses in Rom. 12:1, "Offer your bodies as a sacrifice."

### *The Cross of Christ and the Goal of Human Worship*

By way of conclusion, I would like to focus on this question: what can Romans 12:1–2 tell us about our celebration of the Eucharist today? We have already seen that Romans 12:1 influenced one part of the oldest of our Eucharistic Prayers, the original Roman Canon.<sup>90</sup> But we can also see the influence in the other Eucharistic Prayers of the Missal of Paul VI.<sup>91</sup>

In Eucharistic Prayer III we find the words “living and holy sacrifice [*sacrificium vivum and sanctum*]” in a phrase that immediately follows the institution narrative and consecration and is part of the anamnesis and offering. In this context, these words, which clearly derive from Romans 12:1, refer directly to the Body and Blood of the Lord present on the altar.<sup>92</sup> That application continues in the prayer that follows: “Look, we pray, upon the oblation of your Church and, recognizing the sacrificial Victim by whose death you willed to reconcile us to yourself, grant that ... [*Respice in oblationem Ecclesiae tuae, et agnoscens Hostiam, cuius voluisti immolatione placari, concede ...*].”

Here *hostia* refers to the Body and Blood of the Lord present in the consecrated elements, but it is called also the *oblatio* (“offering”) of the Church. The prayer continues: “May he make of us an eternal offering [*ipse nos tibi perficiat munus aeternum*].” Here the Body and Blood of the Lord offered from the altar and the lives of believers exactly coincide. They are all together a holy and living sacrifice, offered as an everlasting *munus* (“offering”) to the Father. This most certainly is *logikē latreia*. Paul himself adds this expression as the climax of his sentence on living sacrifice, and we may do the same.

In Eucharistic Prayer IV we find the phrase “a sacrifice acceptable to you [*sacrificium tibi acceptabile*],” which also uses the same kind of sacrificial language that we find in Romans 12:1. Here the “acceptable sacrifice” refers directly to the Lord’s Body and Blood. The whole expression is: “We offer you his Body and Blood, the sacrifice acceptable to you which brings salvation to the whole world [*offerimus tibi eius Corpus et Sanguinem, sacrificium tibi acceptabile et toti mundo salutare*].” This direct application of the word *sacrifice* to the Body and Blood of the Lord present on the altar in the consecrated elements is extended in the next

90 “Be pleased, O God, we pray, to bless, acknowledge, and approve this offering in every respect; make it spiritual and acceptable [*Quam oblationem tu, Deus, in omnibus, quaesumus, benedictam, adscriptam, ratam, rationabilem acceptabilemque facere digneris*].”

91 For the Eucharistic Prayers mentioned here in Latin and English translation, see James Socias, ed., *The Daily Roman Missal* (Chicago: Scepter, 2006).

92 The Latin text of Rom. 12:1 is “*ut exhibeatis corpora vestra hostiam viventem, sanctam, Deo placentem*.” The word *hostia* is used in what immediately follows in the Eucharistic Prayer. The Eucharistic Prayers use a range of words that hover around the sense of sacrifice: *sacrificium, hostia, oblatio, munus*.

petition to the praying assembly, which asks: "Grant in your loving kindness to all who partake of this one Bread and one Chalice that, gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit, they may truly become a living sacrifice in Christ [*qui ex hoc uno pane participabunt et calice, ut, in unum corpus a Sancto Spiritu congregati, in Christo hostia viva perficiantur*]."

Here *hostia viva* is clearly applied to the assembly, but this application is based precisely on its participating in the one bread and one cup, the Body and Blood of the Lord. The assembly could not become a *hostia viva* without that participation.<sup>93</sup>

So much for the relation between the language of Paul's text and the language the Church uses in the densest moment of her cultic prayer. Now we must face a broader question. At key points in this paper we have raised the question of the intimate connection between the Christian moral life and the Christian cult. Throughout the centuries and into the present some commentators have opposed the moral life and cult and have done so on the basis of this very text of Paul. For such commentators the replacement of cult by the moral life is the distinctive Christian insight. But I have argued here that such an opposition does not get to the deepest sense of Paul's text and what it has come legitimately to mean in the Christian community's millennial long meditation on it. The deepest sense of Paul's text suggests that the moral act is not simply the perfect cult; it also suggests that the offering of a perfect cult could be in fact the highest moral act. But what is the highest moral act? What is the perfect cult? Armed with the theology of St. Paul, the Christian community will answer that the death of Christ on the cross is at one and the same time the highest moral act and the perfect cult.

We have seen that to use the word *sacrifice* to describe either the death of Christ or the Christian moral life is at first glance simply the application of a metaphor that delivers insight into the realities in question. In the broad context of religion in the ancient world and in the more specific context of the religion of Israel, *sacrifice* refers to a cultic act. The death of Jesus and the charitable deeds of Christians—which may include even their own deaths—do not take place in the context of a cultic act but in the actual dramatic and difficult world of everyday living. And so, to apply the word *sacrifice* to such non-cultic realities is to suggest that in some way what the cult points to is realized here. That is above all true for the death of Christ. What the Christian community came to realize with ever increasing clarity was that the death of Jesus on the cross in fact is the reality to which all cultic sacrifices point.

93 Eucharistic Prayer II does not echo Pauline language, but we have already drawn attention to the phrase from the eucharistic prayer in *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, on which Eucharistic Prayer II is based, the phrase *offerimus tibi panem et calicem, gratias tibi agentes, quia nos dignos habuisti adstare coram te et tibi ministrare*. In Polycarp's prayer, we saw that the eucharistic offering of the bread and cup coincides with Polycarp's offering of his own life.

But how did the Christian community come to realize this and continually deepen its grasp of this realization? It would have been above all under the force of the community's celebration of Eucharist in obedience to the Lord's command. On the night before he died, and already as part of the actual hour of his dying—so we can say now with hindsight—Jesus left his disciples the command to repeat in his memory what in fact is, among other ways of viewing it, a cultic act.

Jesus' action and his command to repeat it in his memory can certainly be called sacrificial language and symbolism, even if the word *sacrifice* does not appear in the accounts. His is "a body handed over." His is "blood poured out" to establish a "new and eternal covenant." The repetition of this sign and Jesus' words around it certainly prepare the way for the Church to describe both the Eucharist and Christ's death as a sacrifice, even if this application is in the beginning simply metaphorical. But the mystery is so dense at this point that the metaphor flips. Christ's death in fact becomes *the* sacrifice against which all others are measured and consequently eclipsed. And the Eucharist which remembers his death reveals, as St. Augustine would say, that "we ourselves are that whole sacrifice." There can be no other. And so the cultic act—the Eucharist—becomes the place where Christians encounter in all its force *the* sacrifice that eclipses all others, where they encounter *the* sacrifice of which they themselves are a part.

It is here that the desire expressed in other ancient Hellenistic texts about *logikē latreia* finds itself fulfilled, the desire to have the very *Logos* itself praying within the one who prays. But the Hellenistic religions conceive of this as an extremely rarefied and non-material form of worship.<sup>94</sup> Instead, Christianity proclaims that this deep human desire is fulfilled only in the incarnate *Logos*, in Jesus Christ, who is the *Logos* acting in human history. And if it is the *Logos* who is acting in Jesus Christ, then his self-surrender on the cross is the true and definitive *logikē latreia*. And if the celebration of Eucharist is the effective memorial of that death in such a way that Christians are caught up themselves into that self-offering, then the Eucharist too becomes true and definitive *logikē latreia*.

So how can we evaluate the fact that Paul's phrase *logikē latreia* and other phrases from 12:1–2 are used in the divine liturgy to refer to the Body and Blood of the Lord present in the consecrated elements? Far from replacing Paul's moral sense with a merely cultic understanding, the *logikē latreia* of Christ's death on the cross, rendered effectively present for Christians in the Eucharist, becomes the very foundation for Christian moral living.

When in the Eucharist Christians offer themselves with Christ to God as a holy and living sacrifice, they are encountering the *source* from which flows their

94 These questions are discussed, together with texts, by Schlier, *Römerbrief*, 356–358; Seidensticker, *Lebendiges Opfer*, 32–43; Evans, "Romans 12:1–2," 20–21.

actual dramatic and difficult world of everyday living and the *summit* toward which their actual dramatic and difficult world of everyday living tends. *Because* of the Eucharist, their everyday living is a life in which they really are dead to sin but alive to God, in which they offer their bodies to God as instruments of righteousness.<sup>95</sup> They live their everyday lives not according to the flesh but with their minds set on the Spirit.<sup>96</sup> They are not conformed to this age, but rather are being transformed by the renewal of their minds. In their everyday lives they are able to discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.<sup>97</sup> In a word, *because* they celebrate Eucharist, they are able in every moment to offer their bodies to God as a holy and living sacrifice. Here at last is that for which human beings most long and what is most pleasing to their Creator; here at last is *logikē latreia*.

---

95 Rom. 6:11, 13.

96 Rom. 8:5–6.

97 Rom. 12:2.

