CORRESPONDENCE

'PERE DE LA TAILLE AND THE LAST SUPPER.'

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS.

DEAR REVEREND SIR,

A fitting reply to Fr. McNabb's paper in your October issue, which has just been brought to my notice, might perhaps be in the shape of a kindly advice to the readers of your estimable Journal: 'Please, read the two articles in the *Ecclesiastical Review* (July and August, 1924), which for greater convenience have been published in pamphlet form by the Dolphin Press, 1305 Arch Street, Philadelphia, Pa., U.S.A., under the title, *The Last Supper and Calvary: A reply to Critics* (price 25 cents.).' But as it is hardly to be hoped that many will care to go to the trouble and expense connected with the purchase of a pamphlet from across the ocean, I find it necessary to crave some portion of your valuable space for a few remarks on the above-mentioned paper, *Père de la Taille and the Last Supper.*

In the first place, Fr. McNabb pleads that by means of a truncated quotation I have falsified the teaching of St. Thomas, while appealing to him in support of the widespread and classical opinion, according to which the Mass, although a real, true and actual Sacrifice, yet does not entail a 'real (as distinct from a figurative)' immolation or mactation or destruction or deterioration of Christ to be performed by us, but only a 'figurative (as distinct from a real)' immolation or mactation, etc.; whereas the Passion did contain that 'real (as distinct from a figurative)' immolation, the likeness of which, a sacramental likeness, is enacted by us at Holy Mass, in the very Body and Blood of Him, Who on His eternal altar is an ever ready-made Victim, to be offered up by us in the same rite that dedicated Him in the Last Supper. I had indeed quoted St. Thomas' well-known saying: 'Celebratio autem hujus sacramenti, sicut supra dictum est, *imago* quaedam est repraesentativa passionis Christi, quae [passio] est *vera* ejus immolatio; et *ideo* celebratio hujus sacramenti *dicitur* Christi immolatio' (3 S. 83, i). Whereupon Fr. McNabb: 'Here Père de la Taille stops short. But St. Thomas goes on. He says that not only is there an immolation in figure, which is common to the Old Testament sacrifices: sed proprium est huic Sacramento quod in ejus celebratione Christus immoletur. Thus St. Thomas

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holds an opinion opposite to the one Père de la Taille assigns to him' (p. 397). Who, on reading this, could help thinking that according to St. Thomas there was to be found in the Mass both a figurative (as distinct from a real) immolation, and a real (as distinct from a figurative) immolation: the latter being implied by the adversative sentence, 'sed proprium est,' etc.? Now here is an illustration of Fr. McNabb's methods. The Rev. Father has simply forgotten to tell his readers that the adversative sentence is the conclusion not of the paragraph just quoted, but of a subsequent one, which refers, not to the above comparison between the Passion and the Mass or old sacrifices from the point of view of figure and reality, but to another comparison, altogether different, between the Mass and the old sacrifices from the point of view of atoning efficacy. The Mass contains the atoning efficacy of the Passion, which those did not; and therefore, and in this regard, from this *second* point of view, not from the first, 'quantum ad secundum modum' (words simply suppressed by Fr. McNabb in that very portion of the sentence, which he purports to quote: Sed *quantum ad secundum modum* proprium est, etc.), we must say that there is in the immolation of the Mass (however representative, as above) something quite its own, which was in no wise verified in the representative immolations of Christ as exhibited in the Old Law. And thus, and in this sense, formally as efficacious unto the remission of sins, the immolation of Christ (however representative) is proper to the Mass, as contrasted with the old sacrifices. Such is the trend of St. Thomas' thought (which, besides being obvious, was laid bare, amongst many other commentators of old and modern times, by a most orthodox Dominican, a General Inquisitor of the Faith, Jerome of Medicis, in his classical *Formalis Explicatio Summae Theologicae*). Nothing, then, of what Fr. McNabb would have people believe just for the sake of exposing the unreliability of my handling of St. Thomas' texts.

A second illustration of my unreliability is supplied in the way I borrow from St. Thomas the enumeration of the progressive steps to be noted in the course of the Passion ('Est autem passio Christi quibusdam gradibus peracta,' 3 S. 83, 5, 3*m*), the third of which, after the 'traditio' and the 'venditio' was the Supper ('Tertio autem fuit praesignatio passionis facta in coena'). 'But,' observes my critic, 'Père de la Taille has (in charity we are obliged to say) forgotten to add: Quarto autem fuit IPSA PASSIO! St. Thomas here says the opposite of what Père de la Taille makes him say . . . These two commentaries of one who holds an official theological position in a Roman University are not reassuring' (p. 397).

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And thus is it proven, according to Fr. McNabb, that the first three items, Traditio, Venditio, Coena, were not to be looked upon as encompassed by St. Thomas within the bounds of the passion, as I had maintained (and as was pointed out long ago at Trent by one of the leading Fathers of the Council, see *Mysterium Fidei*, p. 114). But there is a difficulty. St. Thomas did not say 'quibusdam gradibus factus est accessus ad passionem,' but he says that by those steps the passion was enacted (peracta est). Secondly, if number four, under the name of *ipsa passio*, covers the whole of the passion, to the exclusion of the first three steps, what then of number five (*extensio corporis et effusio sanguinis*), and number six (*oratio . . . in cruce*), and number seven (*tres horae quibus pependit*), and number eight (*separatio animae a corpore*)? Will all these subsequent steps have to be located outside the passion? A thing which from their very description is incredible. Shall we then say that by *ipsa passio* ought to be understood not indeed the whole, but the first true part of the passion? but then, I ask, which part? and why does it remain undetermined, when all the other steps are determined with such precision? The solution of the riddle is very simple: to be taken, namely, from a little word, far from useless (there are no idle words in St. Thomas), with which is prefaced the above enumeration: 'Sacerdos in celebratione missae utitur crucis signatione ad exprimendam passionem Christi, *quae ad crucem est terminata*.' What St. Thomas is enquiring about is the fittingness of those signs of the Cross which at Mass are repeatedly made over the eucharistic elements. The repetition, he says, is not to be blamed, because in each case, the signs of the Cross designate one and the same thing, namely, 'the passion of Christ, which found its termination [we might say its climax] on the Cross.' This passion of Christ proceeded by degrees, 'quibusdam quasi gradibus.' The fourth of them is *ipsa passio*, the passion in as much as it fixed Christ on the cross, the crucifixion, the *passio crucis*, the passion κατ' ἐξοχήν, wherefore to this step correspond in the Mass, St. Thomas says, '*five* signs of the cross, to represent the *five wounds* of Christ.' And there remains room for the next items as parts also of the passion. But then clearly number four is not made to stand either for the whole nor for any first part of the passion, but for the culminating point of it, for the conjunction between Christ and that cross, on which the passion was to find not its *beginning*, but its *termination*; a termination which developed through four more stages, till the Resurrection came as a ninth step, to bring to a fitting conclusion the separation of body and soul. The starting point, the *beginning*, must then be looked for at

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some previous stage, previous I say to the place reserved for the 'termination.' Hence the fittingness of one or even more antecedent steps, which already before the fourth constitute so many episodes of the great drama, verging on its *termination*. The third of them is by St. Thomas identified with the Last Supper. And thus is the Last Supper exhibited as part of the *beginnings* of the Passion.

Is this interpretation borne out by any authorised commentators? There is more than a commentator; there is St. Thomas himself, who elsewhere (3 S. 46, 9, 1*m*) wonders why the true Lamb suffered on the fifteenth Nisan, seeing that the figural lamb was immolated on the fourteenth. His answer, after a careful discussion of other people's views which he rejects, is that of Bede; namely, that there was no lack of correspondence between the figure and the reality: for this reason, that although Christ was crucified only on the fifteenth, yet on the fourteenth, at night, by His Supper, His captivity, His chains, He had already hallowed the beginnings of His immolation itself, that is of His passion. 'Licet Christus, qui est Pascha nostrum, sit crucifixus sequenti die, hoc est quintadecima luna, tamen nocte qua agnus immolabatur, corporis sanguinisque sui discipulis tradens mysteria celebranda, et a Judaeis tentus et ligatus, ipsius immolationis, hoc est passionis suae, sacravit exordium.' Whereupon that great scholar, and great oracle of the Council of Trent, Casalius, Bishop of Leiria, in his famous treatise *De Sacrificio Missae*, adds this word of comment: 'Ergo ibi fuit exordium immolationis, quod ibi tunc sacravit. Alias, quomodo illud tunc sacrasset, si illud tunc non fuisset?' (Venice, 1663, fol. 56); and again: 'Tunc ergo fuit exordium immolationis Christi, quod exordium ipse Christus tunc sacravit. Quod enim non est, non sacratur. Exordium autem immolationis certe jam est immolatio, jam pertinet ad illam. Sic pertinet exordium lineae ad lineam, superficiei ad superficiem, corporis ad corpus, temporis ad tempus, domus ad domum, vocis ad vocem, orationis ad orationem, et similia' (fol. 59). It is clear enough that the Supper could not allow the *beginning* (exordium) of Christ's redemptive sacrifice, unless the redemptive sacrifice there and then began: which is all I maintain.

There was no twisting, therefore, of St. Thomas' words on my part, no sleight of hand, to make him say the opposite of what he says. Those methods are not mine.

I have no right to be treated better than St. Thomas; and therefore I must put up apparently with the gross mistranslation which makes me say (p. 396), that '*the passion of our Lord from this circumstance is not to be classed in the order*

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of sacrifice properly so called.' The words are italicised by Fr. McNabb, not apparently without some intention. The result is likely to be that some reader, unacquainted with *Mysterium Fidei*, will candidly believe that in my opinion, owing to 'this (?) circumstance,' the passion of the Lord is no 'sacrifice properly so called'; when the Latin phrase (*Mysterium Fidei*, p. 31), quoted in BLACKFRIARS, September, 1923, but not in this October issue of 1924, runs thus: 'Non igitur passio Domini ex complexu isto satis specificatur in genere sacrificii proprie dicti.' Namely, 'this complex of circumstances [from the Garden to the Cross] is not sufficient to mark the passion with the specific character of a sacrifice.' Whence, then, does this character arise? is the next question to be solved; and its solution shows that the passion is a sacrifice properly so called.

A last gem, which I respectfully commend to all theologians, or simply men of good sense. I wrote that on Calvary Christ's bloody sacrifice, the slaying of the Victim, 'is fully accepted and gone through by that Victim, who happens to be the Priest [not *a* Priest, as Fr. McNabb makes me say], never ceasing for a moment to ratify and carry out in a visible and tangible manner the obligation which He has incurred by His solemn oblation' (*The Last Supper and Calvary*, p. 6-7). In these words Fr. McNabb has discovered the 'repulsive doctrine' (p. 399), 'the (materially if not formally) blasphemous idea that the Saviour of the world was a priest only *per accidens*' (p. 399). One feels ashamed to have to meet such a piece of ingenuity. How could it escape even the most inattentive reader that the only possible meaning of this sentence was that, whereas in all other sacrifices the victim is different from the priest, here it happens to be the singular and most extraordinary case of a Victim who is the Priest by absolute substantial identity? A thought which was expressed later on in these words: 'This is a peculiarity owing to the fact, a fact quite unique in its kind, that the Priest is at the same time the Victim' (*The Last Supper and Calvary*, p. 28).

I beg, Sir, to thank you for the hospitality extended to this letter.

I am, dear Reverend Sir,

Your obedient servant,

MAURICE DE LA TAILLE, S.J.

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