

## EARLY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Topic: Early Christian thought on Confirmation  
and the sacrificial language of the Eucharist  
Convener: Alexis James Doval, Saint Mary's College of California  
Presenters: Eugene Finnegan, Calumet College  
Robert Daly, Boston College

Professor Finnegan opened the session with a paper titled "The First Pentecostal Confirmation Homily." He presented his latest research on this 5th century Gallic text attributed to Faustus of Riez. Following Leroy Van Buchem against Gabriele Winkler, Finnegan decides in favor of Faustus of Riez (404-495) as the author of this homily. This Abbot of the monastery of Lérins and the bishop of Riez was influenced by his Gallican background in the fight against the Ostrogoths and Visigoths, the ascetic principles of the Lérins monastery, and the writings of St. Augustine. At the same time he was involved with the problem of Pelagius and came to be known as a semi-Pelagian because he opposed an excessive Augustinian view about predestination in his works on the Holy Spirit and Grace.

This homily was the first to use the word *confirmatio* as if the word was well known. Clearly the episcopal rite of confirmation was being separated from its original place in the initiation rites alongside the rite of baptism, so that it now needed an explanation. Faustus developed the classic military vocabulary that has come to be associated with confirmation, viz., that we were confirmed for the battle, *roboramur ad pugnam*.

This homily would have remained obscure had it not been for the Carolingian False Decretals of Isidore (847-852) that used it, but attributed it to Pope Melchiades (311-314). This in turn led the later canonists Ivo of Chartres (1090-1115) and Gratian (1140) to use Melchiades as the primary source and authority on the purpose of confirmation. These canonical documents further influenced Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas since these leading medieval scholastic theologians thought that they were using an early fourth century Roman bishop, pope as their authority. With this canonical and theological authority the strengthening for the battle became the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

Professor Daly followed with a paper titled, "Sacrifice Unveiled: Darkness and Light from the Early Church," in which he examined atonement ideas in early Christian anaphoras. He argued that while the Fathers offer fundamental insight into the essence of Christian sacrifice, only recently have we achieved a mature, trinitarian articulation thereof. "Sacrifice" has many levels of overlapping meaning: (1) a general secular meaning, (2) a general religious meaning, (3) a general Jewish/Christian meaning, (4) a general Catholic meaning, (5) a specifically Christian/Catholic meaning, (6) a full trinitarian meaning—and only here, where the Spirit empowers us to enter into the mutually self-giving love of Father and Son, do we find Christian sacrifice in the fullest sense of the word.

This insight, both veiled and unveiled, is contained in the early Christian eucharistic anaphoras, three of which we looked at. The "veiling" is strong in the Roman *Canon Missae*. A priest celebrating regularly in this rite would see himself as the primary agent in an intensely rubrical sacrificial action that had much more

to do with pre-Christian and general ideas of religious sacrifice than with its authentic trinitarian understanding. *Sharar* seems to be equally “veiling,” and in remarkably similar ways to the *Canon Missae*, exhibits an intense awareness of sinfulness along with a blatantly emphatic (almost proprietary) role of the priest-celebrant in bringing about the needed sacrificial redemption.

Chrysostom’s anaphora, however, has a much more trinitarian concept of sacrificial action and is much more apophatically reserved in the way it seems to conflate the language of “offering” with anamnestic praise and thanksgiving and epicletic impetration. Transcending narrow logic, it suggests a depth of authentic Christian (read trinitarian) meaning that transcends what is found, e.g., in the *Canon Missae* and most modern Eucharistic Prayers.

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