



De la Taille's *Mysterium Fidei*: Eucharistic Sacrifice and Nouvelle Théologie

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Abstract

Maurice de la Taille's *Mysterium Fidei* (1921) was, as one of its reviewers remarked, a veritable 'theological event', both in terms of its methodology and its overturning of post-Tridentine theology on eucharistic sacrifice. De la Taille's work has been long overlooked in the history of theology in the early twentieth century. The paper demonstrates that de la Taille's work on the Eucharist proves an early example of nouvelle théologie and a catalyst for the the liturgical movement. Conciliar and pre-Conciliar documents presuppose his *Mysterium Fidei*. Through the retrieval of a patristic and medieval teaching about sacrificial oblation, de la Taille disperses the web of immolationist theories about the sacrifice of the Mass that had dominated baroque and early modern theology.

Keywords

Maurice de la Taille, *Mysterium Fidei*, sacrifice, nouvelle théologie, Chenu

In 1919, having returned from military service as chaplain in World War I, Maurice de la Taille handed over his three-volume manuscript¹ on the Eucharist to the Beauchesne printing house in Paris. The book, fruit of ten years of labour before the War began, was not expected to gain much recognition. In fact, de la Taille told his editor that he anticipated selling only about 30 copies: a few in Rome, a dozen or so in France, and perhaps a dozen more worldwide.² But within six years after the first edition of *Mysterium Fidei*, some 3,000 copies of the book had been sold. When a third edition came out in 1931, it is likely that no one was as shocked as de la Taille himself. De

¹ Maurice de la Taille, *Mysterium Fidei: de augustissimo corporis et sanguinis Christi sacrificio atque sacramento, Elucidationes L in tres libros distinctae* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1921, 1924, 1931).

² Maurice de la Taille, *The Mystery of Faith and Human Opinion Contrasted and Defined* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1930), 321.

la Taille's contemporary reviewers hailed the work as "a consummation," as "astonishing and accurate," and "as richly documented and yet personal." Adhémar D'Alès prophetically wrote that *Mysterium Fidei* "demeurra un signe de contradiction."³ Acknowledging both the interest and controversy that the book stirred, the *Dublin Review*, in 1931, called *Mysterium Fidei* the "most important and influential theological work since the Vatican Council." Given such an assessment, it is certainly puzzling that the name of de la Taille and his masterwork have all but disappeared from theological discourse. One is hard-pressed indeed to find mention of his name in chronicles of early twentieth-century theology. More surprising still, discussion of his work is conspicuously absent from recent presentations of modern eucharistic and sacramental theology—a footnote here and there, perhaps—if one looks closely, very closely.⁴

We could speculate about the reasons for this oversight and (perhaps intentional) silence about de la Taille's work on eucharistic sacrifice. Not long after de la Taille's death in 1933, German Benedictine Odo Casel's theory of liturgical celebration, founded in the concept of *mysterion*, was capturing the attention of theological minds across Europe. The excitement and concern over Casel's thought seemed to dominate the 1930s and 1940s. It is generally thought that Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Mediator Dei* (n. 165) witnesses to the tensile interest generated by Casel's theory. Certainly it is possible that Casel's thought so usurped center stage on questions about the Mass-sacrifice that de la Taille's own thought slipped into a curtained background. Apart from Casel's entrance onto the liturgical scene, we can also point to the lasting misperceptions of de la Taille's thought. *Mysterium Fidei* ignited a fury of reviews in theological journals across the globe (in the United States, Canada, Australia, Chile, as well as in many European countries). In fact, several theological

³ Adhémar D'Alès, 'Mysterium Fidei', *Récherches de science religieuse* 22 (1932), 594.

⁴ Edward Kilmartin's comprehensive *The Eucharist in the West* (Liturgical Press, 1998) does not acknowledge de la Taille's contribution to eucharistic theology. Robert Daly, in his last testament to a lifetime's study of sacrifice, *Sacrifice Unveiled* (T&T Clark, 2009), does not grant a footnote to *Mysterium Fidei* when treating modern theories of eucharistic sacrifice. James T. O'Connor, by contrast, does give a few brief pages to de la Taille in his *The Hidden Manna: A Theology of the Eucharist* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), but without accurately assessing de la Taille's teaching and significance (238–240). One happy exception to this oversight is a recent piece by David Fagerberg, "Divine Liturgy, Divine Love" (*Letter & Spirit*, Vol. 3, 2007, 95–112), where he retrieves de la Taille's thought in the course of connecting eucharistic sacrifice and divinization. Interestingly, de la Taille fares slightly better in British and Italian works of historical and eucharistic theology; but because this attention is curtailed, it unfortunately often misleads. See, for example, C. Giraud, S.J., *Eucaristia per la chiesa: prospettive teologiche sull'eucaristia a partire dalla "lex orandi"* (Morcelliana: Gregorian University Press, 1989); Aidan Nichols, O.P., *The Holy Eucharist: From the New Testament to Pope John Paul II* (Dublin: Veritas, 1991).

journals (e.g., *The Dublin Review*, *Blackfriars*, *Australasian Catholic Record*, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*) devoted a series of issues to a more extended discussion of the book's substance, and for periods which lasted two or more years. The judgment of the work ranged from praise that it was a veritable "événement théologique," to a denunciation that it represented "heretical" theology.⁵ Some critics⁶ of the book were particularly tenacious; rather poignantly, de la Taille was still attempting to correct misperceptions as he became ill and almost too weak to write in 1931. Often enough, false interpretations were perpetuated in theological manuals,⁷ and I suspect these erroneous reports remained uncorrected as *Mysterium Fidei* became less well-known—and certainly no longer read in its entirety. A contributing factor to the abandonment of de la Taille's thought on the Eucharist is the fact that his work remained untranslated from the Latin for many years. It was only in 1940 that Book I ("On The Lord's Sacrifice") of *Mysterium Fidei* was translated into English, with volume two ("On the Ecclesial Sacrifice"), not appearing until 1950.⁸ The third and important volume ("The Eucharist as Sacrament") has yet to be translated into English. De la Taille's work gradually became easy to dismiss, even as it became increasingly inaccessible to a younger generation of priests and theologians in the decade during and after the Second Vatican Council.

Thirdly, and most significantly, we can aver that de la Taille's thought on eucharistic sacrifice slipped more fully into oblivion as the perennial question about the Mass as a sacrifice ceased to be a theological problem. In 1952, Emmanuel Doronzo, O.M.I., could yet say to a gathering of theologians at The Catholic Theological Society of America that *the "vexata question"* for theology remained the issue of how the eucharistic liturgy is a "true and proper sacrifice." Eucharistic sacrifice, he claimed, was the cross of

⁵ The accusation of heresy referred to view that de la Taille's thought flagrantly denied the Council of Trent's teaching on eucharistic sacrifice (Session 22).

⁶ The Dominican Vincent McNabb was probably de la Taille's most unrelenting critic. See the following articles for a sampling of his objections: V. McNabb, "A New Theory of the Eucharistic Sacrifice," *Blackfriars* 4 (1923): 1086–1100; "A New Theory of the Sacrifice of the Mass," *Irish Ecclesiastical Review* 23 (1924): 561–73. See also M. Forrest, *The Clean Oblation* (St. Paul: Radio Replies Press, 1945), whose entire work is a tirade against de la Taille's *Mysterium Fidei*.

⁷ F. Wengier's *Eucharist-Sacrifice* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1955) for a sampling of mid-twentieth-century manuals that badly misconstrue de la Taille's theory of sacrifice.

⁸ Maurice de la Taille, *The Mystery of Faith: Regarding the Most August Sacrament and Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ*, Book I: The Sacrifice of Our Lord (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1940); *The Mystery of Faith: Regarding the Most August Sacrament and Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ*, Book II: The Sacrifice of the Church (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1950).

theologians (“*crux theologorum*”).⁹ Based on the digest of the engaged discussion which followed his paper, those present concurred with his assessment of the critical nature of this question. Doronzo’s paper identified a “great sea” of theological positions on sacrifice, a situation which, he judged, left the question of eucharistic sacrifice “imperiled” and without a safe harbor of “common opinion.” That situation has changed rather dramatically in the last forty years. It is not far off the mark to observe that the question of the sacrifice of the Mass has ceased to vex theologians. Indeed, a good deal of theological literature on the Eucharist since Vatican II can be fairly labeled anti-sacrifice.¹⁰ Renowned Jesuit scholar on sacrifice, Robert Daly, argues that the “consensus opinion” on eucharistic sacrifice judges the attempt to speak of the Eucharist in terms of a sacrificial ritual to be a “methodological mistake”—exogenous.¹¹ Louis-Marie Chauvet, considered by many to be the leading contemporary sacramental theologian, has, for his part, underscored the complete tear between ritual sacrifice in the Hebrew tradition and the Christian eucharistic rite.¹² Indeed, it appears that the cross Doronzo saw hanging about the necks of theologians has been all but tossed aside.

My hope in resurrecting the work of de la Taille is essentially two-fold. First, reintroducing de la Taille’s *Mysterium Fidei* (1921) re-animates current theological discussion about eucharistic sacrifice, appealing to the Church’s fuller tradition. De la Taille’s vintage presentation speaks wisdom and balance to post-Vatican II reflection on the Eucharist. I want, secondly, to correct a mistaken oversight in the historical narratives of twentieth-century theology, which largely bypass the significance of de la Taille’s 3-volume *Mysterium Fidei*. I shall argue that de la Taille’s thought not only marks a monumental shift in eucharistic theology, but also that his work is important for a fuller appreciation of *nouvelle théologie* and of the early liturgical

⁹ Emilio Doronzo, O.M.I., “On the Essence of the Sacrifice of the Mass.” *The Catholic Theological Society of America: Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Convention* (June 1955): 53–82.

¹⁰ I am thinking, for example, of theologians like Robert Daly (*Sacrifice Unveiled*), Louis-Marie Chauvet (*Symbol and Sacrament* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995)), and Kevin Seasoltz, (*God’s Gift-Giving: In Christ and Through the Spirit* (New York: Continuum Books, 2007)), all of whom admit to being influenced by the thought of René Girard. A recent exception must be noted: Matthew Levering’s book *Sacrifice and Community* (London: Blackwell, 2005) studies eucharistic sacrifice in the light of Hebrew sacrifice, suggesting that the sacrifice of the Mass achieves the end desired by the sacrifices of Israel, namely, perfect union with God. Levering’s book, which relies upon Thomas’s understanding of the Eucharist, marks a step towards the regeneration of the notion of sacrifice in eucharistic theology.

¹¹ See Robert Daly, “Robert Bellarmine and Post-Tridentine Eucharistic Theology,” in *Theological Studies* 61 (2000): 239–60.

¹² Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, see especially, 260; also 240–244; 248–249; 256–260; 298–299; 310–311 *et passim*.

movement. In the past several years, coinciding with hermeneutical questions about the Second Vatican Council, there has been a new current of scholarly interest in *nouvelle théologie* and its central figures.¹³ I have yet, however, to discover any reference to Maurice de la Taille in this literature. A brief portrayal of the historical context of *Mysterium Fidei*, drawing particular attention to de la Taille's methodology, will show him to be a proto-*ressourcement* theologian, ahead of Yves Congar, M-D. Chenu, Henri de Lubac and Daniélou. What fascinates about de la Taille is his desire and ability to weave together patristic and medieval theology, which is to say that his return to the sources reveals no anti-scholastic bias. In the second part of the essay, we shall turn our focus properly to a sketch of de la Taille's theory of sacrifice, to the end of revealing how his work changed the course of thinking on the Mass as a sacrifice. This theological opening, concurrent with the early liturgical movement, warrants a substantial place for de la Taille in the history of twentieth-century theology.

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The life of Maurice de la Taille straddles the turn of the twentieth century. He was born in 1872, seven years before the Leo XIII's *Aeternis Patris* and in a country where the Catholic Church in general, and the Jesuit order in particular, were yet suffering the aggressive secular legislation that unfolded after the French Revolution. De la Taille's thoroughly Thomistic studies were interrupted twice because of laws which prohibited the Jesuit presence in France; he, along with other Jesuit scholastics of his generation, including the better-known Pierre Rousselot, found themselves on English soils for much of their intellectual formation. Rousselot and de la Taille shared a deep love of Thomas, but they both also demonstrated a desire to "interiorize" scholastic thought, departing from a slavish or Suazerian rehearsal of Thomas's thought. Léonce Grandmaison, mentor to both of these young Jesuits, instilled in them a freedom of thought and method. After completing his studies, de la Taille's first teaching position was at the Theological Faculty of Angers. It was at Angers that he completed his encyclopedic *Mysterium Fidei* in 1915, just as the World War erupted. In 1919, de la Taille was invited to teach at the Gregorian University, alongside of such eminent theologians as Cardinals Louis Billot and Francis Ehrle. Both as a teacher and

¹³ See, for example, the recent collection of scholarly essays in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Thought*, eds. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); and, Jürgen Mettepenning, *Nouvelle Théologie New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (London: T & T Clark International, 2010).

scholar, he was noted for his wide competency in theological matters, for his challenging mental acuity, and for his vivid, “oratorical” style.¹⁴ De la Taille’s lectures on the philosophy and theology of Thomas, delivered at the Angelicum, drew audiences of over two hundred and from “all orders and ranks.”¹⁵ Because he and Garrigou-Lagrange would have been teaching during the same years at the Angelicum, it would be fascinating to know how the Jesuit and the brilliant young Dominican Garrigou-Lagrange responded to one another’s teaching and interpretation of Thomas. Garrigou-Lagrange, of course, was likely among the first, in the 1940s, to cast the aspersion of “nouvelle théologie” upon the French Jesuits.¹⁶ De la Taille taught at the Gregorianum until his health declined; he died of pulmonary problems in 1933, only 61 years of age, and twelve years after the publication of *Mysterium Fidei*.

What are the distinctive methodological features of de la Taille’s masterwork on eucharistic sacrifice, and does it stand as a harbinger to the new theology? The most significant *loci* for discerning how de la Taille understood his theological method is the “Preface” to *Mysterium Fidei*. In a few dense pages, he sets forth his view of theology and then details the way he shall proceed in his study of the Eucharist. I shall address here only three singular features of de la Taille’s approach, features which find a clear echo in the mid-1930s programmatic writings of one of the leading inaugurators of the new theology, Dominican Marie-Dominique Chenu. Juxtaposing de la Taille’s statements about theology and method with those of Chenu leaves little doubt that his work instantiates a way of doing theology that would find a full articulation in the *ressourcement* movement. Returning to the early Church Fathers, yet without shedding scholasticism like some useless outdated garment, de la Taille hails a richer, more living expression of eucharistic doctrine.

De la Taille’s reflection on theological method commences with a clear vision of the task of a theologian, a vision which perhaps sounds as refreshing today as it did when he wrote it in 1915. We do well to recall both the longer historical context, as well as the immediate context, in which de la Taille was composing his masterpiece. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Catholic theology was still breathing defensively, still ‘on its guard’ against the modern philosophical, scientific and social threats articulated in Pius

¹⁴ Bernard Leeming, “A Master Theologian: Father Maurice de la Taille,” *The Month* 163 (1934), 38.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁶ Aidan Nichols, O.P., “Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie,” *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 7–11. Nichols speculates that the phrase “the new theology” was likely “fed” to Pope Pius XII by Garrigou-Lagrange. In any case, Garrigou-Lagrange’s *Angelicum* article, “La nouvelle théologie, où va-t-elle?” (1946: 126–45), determined its negative associations, at least until the far side of Vatican II.

IX's *Quanta cura* (1864). To complicate matters for the theologian, Pius X's *Pascendi dominici gregis* (1907) sought to purge the modernist tendencies that had crept into Catholic theology itself—for instance, both in the methodologies and conclusions of Alfred Loisy and George Tyrrell. Theological method and discourse was fractured, in a state of dis-ease. De la Taille did not remain unaffected by these events and was himself pulled into theological, ecclesial and political tensions.¹⁷ And yet, he managed to rise serenely above the theological *melée* and produce a masterpiece that delivers a surprisingly contemplative picture of the nature of theology and of the vocation of the scholar-theologian.¹⁸

The theologian, he writes in the “Preface,” aims not to dispute, but to illuminate; not to display his own erudition or to “promote his own special findings,” but rather to augment the knowledge of faith, fostering piety and deepening the engagement of believers with the mysteries of Christ and the Church.¹⁹ In a word, theology is to serve the life of the Church. It turns the hearts of believers to God, massaging into fuller life, the faith of the baptised. Following Augustine and Thomas, de la Taille underscores that theology operates from faith and emerges from the documents of divine revelation: he accords Scripture first place, and explains that “as a rule” he will treat separately Scripture and the teaching of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. Likewise, he is keen to establish that his treatise does not advance any “new” theory of eucharistic sacrifice.²⁰ Rather, his desire is to provide a full account of eucharistic sacrifice by listening deeply to the sources of revelation and tradition, recording them, “co-ordinating and refining them,” and where necessary, “setting them down” for the reader. In fact, he apologizes for the prolix quoting of his theological sources—and he is marvelously

¹⁷ In 1907, for instance, de la Taille was invited by the Catholic Faculties of the West to give an opening lecture in support of *Pascendi gregis*, a lecture at which there would have been a number of bishops and other dignitaries. In regard to the political situation of the Church in France, in 1907–1908 de la Taille wrote several essays advocating the formation of a Catholic political party. These writings about religious liberty were collected and published as a book, *En face du pouvoir* (Tours: Alfred Cattier, 1910). When Pius XI later denounced the *Action Française* movement and its journal, de la Taille willingly withdrew his support from the Catholic politics in France.

¹⁸ There is, nonetheless, the occasional footnote excoriating Loisy's view of the Eucharist.

¹⁹ M. de la Taille, *The Mystery of Faith: Regarding the Most August Sacrament and Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ*, Book I: The Sacrifice of Our Lord. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1940, viii.

²⁰ Like many of the “new theologians,” de la Taille would spend much time and energy responding to those critics who claimed that his theory of sacrifice was *new*, and a departure from tradition. See, among others, Alfred Swaby, O.P., “A New Theory of the Eucharistic Sacrifice,” *American Ecclesiastical Review* 69 (Nov. 1923): 460–473, and Vincent McNabb, “A New Theory of the Sacrifice of the Mass,” *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 23 (1924): 561–573.

guilty of this practice. The necessity of listening closely to past voices, to those who were living, “historical witnesses” to the teachings handed down to them, is the head principle in de la Taille’s theological method. Notably, de la Taille also broadens the net of what, at the time of his writing, might usually be considered the sources of the tradition. If Scripture and the early Fathers predominate, de la Taille gives ample space to the witnesses of Thomas and his often conflicting commentators, he gathers testimony from the Church’s mystical writers, he attends to hymn texts and to both ancient and modern preaching, and he collects and consults liturgical texts. What is more, his early and medieval testimony comes from the *East* as well as the *West*—again, a rather bold and novel approach at the turn of the century. De la Taille does betray a hint of uneasiness about this turn to the East in his “Preface,” when he defends his use of someone like Cabasilas, whom he wishes had given as much fervor to issues of ecclesial unity as he did to the sacraments! Nonetheless, he is firm that retrieving Eastern voices is commendable, according to the “phrase of Moses: *O that all the people might prophesy*, provided, as St. Paul says, *Christ is announced.*”²¹ In other words, de la Taille is properly more concerned that the mystery of faith be explored and relished, than he is with any lingering anxiety about the ecclesial standing of certain Eastern Fathers. I suspect that it is to Matthias J. Scheeben, a German scholar of the second half of the nineteenth century, that de la Taille owes much of his distinctive and open theological method.²² Scheeben’s own work was striking in its retrieval of Eastern theologians, a retrieval oriented towards a synthesis of patristic and scholastic theology, and importantly, towards the spiritual life of his readers. Methodologically then, de la Taille’s his vision of theology and his embrace of Eastern theology may be most accurately said to be an intermediary link between Scheeben (and the Catholic School of Tübingen) and the distinctive theological practice of the *nouvelle théologie* movement.

If de la Taille sees theology emerging from the full treasure-house of a living tradition, and if he stipulates that theology must be primarily concerned with fostering worship and holy living, he is nonetheless emphatic that theology is a *science*, “a speculative science of revealed truth.” In his comments on the scientific nature of

²¹ “Preface,” viii.

²² De la Taille refers to Scheeben’s seven-volume *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik* (1873–1887) with obvious appreciation in *Mysterium Fidei* (see, for example, 156n3, 179n4, 265n3). Apart from a shared interest in Eastern theologians, de la Taille seems also to have been attracted to Scheeben’s sense of theology as an organic knowledge directed to the spiritual life of humans, and to Scheeben’s focus on Uncreated grace and God’s indwelling. De la Taille no doubt sympathized with the mystical temperament of this great German theologian.

theology, we hear a pronounced distaste for *systems* of theology—another mark suggestive of the sensibilities of *nouvelle théologie*. De la Taille is here eager to distinguish theology that is, *secundum naturam*, a coherent and organic body of knowledge, from theology that is beholden to a system. Theology is a science in the strict meaning of the word, an ordered group of knowledge,

resting on its own principles, with all its parts connected and coherent among themselves, after the manner of an organic body. Hence, no part of theology, no smallest portion of any province of theology, can be fully explored and founded without reference to its corresponding part and member. . . and no one element can be sacrificed without the loss of another. . .²³

This vision of an organic corpus of knowledge stands in contrast to a system. Systems are not deduced from intrinsic first principles, but rather are “artificially,” hypothetically-conceived moulds for arranging and co-adapting elements. De la Taille acknowledges that such systematic methods are helpful in sciences concerned with quantitative relations and physical properties. Theology, however, derivative of the articles of faith, inquires about the *nature* of things that come before the intellect and are concerned with faith. With pointed words, he avers that there is “no theology that does not reject systems.” Theology cannot be a frozen abstract system; yet, it must be articulated, and in a way that demonstrates its nature as an organic complexus.²⁴ Without dismissing scholasticism *tout court*, as *seems* to have been the desire of some later Jesuits like de Lubac and Daniélou,²⁵ de la Taille does express the need for theological science to be free of abstract systems of thought—free, we might say, to proceed in a way that accords with her nature as a science dependent on revelation from a living Principle, a revelation contemplated and witnessed to by Christians who encounter that reality within the history of an ecclesial community.

We turn now to the early writing of Marie-Dominique Chenu, attentive to similar soundings about the method of theology and its scientific nature. His 1935 essay, “Position de la théologie,” along with his 1937 book, *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*,²⁶

²³ “Preface,” ix. De la Taille’s the voluminous and web-like structure of *Mysterium Fidei* bears clear witness to this definition!

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ This project is much more evident in Daniélou than with de Lubac. See Nichols’ discussion in “Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie,” 4–6.

²⁶ Chenu, “Position de la théologie,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 24 (1935): 232–57; and *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir* (Kain-Les-Tournai, 1937). The question of the theological endeavor as a science would remain central to Chenu later in his life; see, for example, *La Théologie est-elle une science?* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1957).

together manifest a fairly striking blueprint for *nouvelle théologie*.²⁷ Though not originally intended for publication, Chenu's personal reflection on the distinctive character of studies at Le Saulchoir in *Une école de théologie*, provides a clear sense of his perception of theology and its task. The third chapter, "La théologie," is a kind of reprise of his earlier journal article, "Position de la théologie." As Chenu looks back to the formative masters of Le Saulchoir—Gardeil, Lemonyer—he notes that they were able, in the tumultuous years of 1904–1908, to carry on in their theological work and teaching with a kind of serenity removed from the 'violent polemics' of the period. He claims that they found their security in St. Thomas, that is, in his steady trust in the compatibility of revelation and reason, the truth of faith and historical truth.²⁸ In the same way that Thomas's work reveals a spiritual equilibrium, a spiritual freedom to investigate the theological questions of his day, Chenu maintains that Gardeil and Lemonyer could reflect upon the complex issues of the turn of the century without accepting simplistic solutions or taking the position of a thinker under siege.²⁹ I wager that it is from Thomas that de la Taille also discovered, in the midst of theological controversy, the contemplative posture towards theological work which allowed him to produce *Mysterium Fidei*.

As did de la Taille, Chenu is quick to defend the distinct nature of theology as a science originating in faith, motivated by desire for God, and persevering in hope of nourishing faith and satisfying the movement of love towards its object.³⁰ Chenu argues that he who does not understand the genesis of theology in the "radical" desire of faith, cannot comprehend its "purpose," "dignity," or "structure."³¹ Theology begins with the *given* of revelation and continues in a moment of "construction," "dilation," "fructification." Chenu, however, does not admit a strict separation between these two "axes" which determine the task and practice of theology. For, in reality, there must be a constant "*circumincessio*" of the datum of revelation and its dilation.³² De la Taille's *Mysterium Fidei*, I submit, remarkably captures the beauty of this theological movement: the author holds forth (and is held by) the given of revelation and tradition, weaving together, amplifying, kneading the dough, to the end of

²⁷ See also Jürgen Mettepenningen's analysis of Congar's significant programmatic piece, "Déficit de la théologie" (published in the French Catholic newspaper *Sept*, 18 January, 1935), in *Nouvelle Théologie New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II*, 43–44. I shall be focusing here on the connections between Chenu and de la Taille, though many of the same concepts appear in Congar's writing in the mid-1930s.

²⁸ Chenu, *Une école*, 39.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Chenu, "Position de la théologie," 231–236, 242.

³¹ "Position de la théologie," 235.

³² *Ibid.*, 232–233; see also, *Une école de théologie*, 51.

nourishing faith. Chenu vividly describes this reality of faith and the theological enterprise in a simple but profound phrase: “La foi aura produit une science, dont elle se nourrira elle-même.”³³

Just as, in 1915, de la Taille points to the inadequacy of systems in authentic theological science, Chenu sharply calls “still-born (*mort-née*)” the results of those systems motivated by a constrictive dialectic and theological apologetic. In his *Une école de théologie*, Chenu describes “theology” entrapped in neo-Thomist systems. When theological science morphs into a system, the gift of revelation has been taken captive by one who claims to know it, falsely suggesting some adequacy of the human mind in relation to that gift.³⁴ Chenu reminds the reader of Gardeil’s 1904 assessment about the bifurcation of theology that emerged in the Thomist commentators of the seventeenth century. Gardeil posits that theology was segregated into two regions: “the one purely intellectualist and scholastic, studded with formulas that the life of religious piety can perfectly ignore; the other positive and mystical,” where the latter is construed to be a kind of religious dogmatism or mystical theology that has little to do with the scholastic theological system.³⁵ Gardeil’s words about the separation of neo-Thomist systems from positive and mystical theology helpfully contextualises the urgency we heard above in de la Taille’s insistence about theology’s absolute relationship to the spiritual life. De la Taille’s effort to close the erroneous gap between neo-scholastic systems and positive or mystical theology is manifest throughout *Mysterium Fidei*, which on one page reads like a medieval disputation, while on the next reads like a historical study of sources, while again, a third page sounds like a spiritual discourse which rises to the height of mystical language.

Despite Chenu’s repugnance of systems, he maintains that Le Saulchoir firmly holds to the *science* and *logic* of theology. Like de la Taille, he does not hold that faith indicates a lack of coherence in theological knowledge. To the contrary, theology is, somewhat paradoxically, “La foi *in statu scientiae*.”³⁶ Is Chenu here doing violence to the concepts both of *faith* and *science*? Chenu rejoins that theological science is properly the integration of a “mystical perception of divine reality and the assent to a humanly formed proposition.”³⁷ The latter is the appropriate vehicle for perceiving faith, as well as

³³ “Position de la théologie,” 239.

³⁴ Chenu, *Une école de théologie*, 73.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 71: “. . . l’une purement intellectualiste et scolastique, hérissée de formules que la vie religieuse peut parfaitement ignorer; l’autre positive et mystique où les besoins surnaturels, travaillant sur les données révélées authentiquement reconnues grâce à la théologie positive, construiraient un dogmatisme enfin religieux, une sorte de théologie mystique qui n’aurait à tenir compte en aucune façon de la théologie scolastique.”

³⁶ “Position de la théologie,” 233.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 238.

the conceptual hardware needed for a science. A book written on the mystery of faith would thus require a conceptual framework, a “*régime organique*” through which it delivers an authentic theological witness. Chenu neatly summarises the nature of the theological endeavor, where the experience of faith seeks a logical, coherent articulation: “Une théologie digne de ce nom, c’est une spiritualité qui a trouvé des instruments rationnels adéquats à son expérience religieuse.”³⁸ A theology that exemplifies this truth of its spiritual and scientific nature will be one rooted in Scripture and the tradition of the Fathers. More, for Chenu and the school of *Le Saulchoir*, it is Thomas who most fully discloses how the theological vocation can be expressed as a living, organic, rational structure.³⁹

I have been trying to trace the connections between de la Taille’s theological method in *Mysterium Fidei* and Chenu’s later articulation of the programme for *nouvelle théologie*. When de la Taille’s work was published, the uniqueness of his method did not fail to strike readers. Dom Lambert Beauduin, the Belgian Benedictine considered by many to be the father of the liturgical movement in Europe, hails *Mysterium Fidei* as a “new point of departure” for the explication of doctrine, noting that the title alone announces a new spirit and method for theology. In particular, Beauduin praises the way de la Taille mines liturgical texts for what they reveal to us about belief. Granted, this may not sound terribly radical to the ears of contemporary theologians. Thanks to the work of liturgical theologians like Aidan Kavanagh, Alexander Schmemmann and David Fagerberg, we have become accustomed to—even jaded by—the perception of the liturgy as *prima theologia*. But that familiarity ought not to impede our recognition that de la Taille was clearly a pioneer in this treatment of liturgical texts in the early twentieth century.⁴⁰

I would like to close this section by noting that one twentieth-century Jesuit did take special notice of de la Taille’s methodology and his connection to *ressourcement*. Karl Rahner pays two high and memorable compliments to *Mysterium Fidei*. The first appraisal acknowledges de la Taille’s sensitivity and integrity when approaching the texts of the tradition, placing him in the same category as

³⁸ Chenu, *Une école de théologie*, 75.

³⁹ See Chenu’s discussion in *Une école de théologie*, 54–56, 71ff.

⁴⁰ *Mysterium Fidei* witnesses to—indeed, advocates for—several concerns linked with early project of liturgical renewal: e.g., an attentiveness to liturgical prayer texts, the renewal of a biblical fluency along with the retrieval of patristic sources; the desire for fuller lay participation in the offering of the sacrifice *and* in the reception of communion; and, the deepening of liturgical prayer and spiritual practices *tout court*. The dedication of his tome to Pope Pius X bespeaks his affection for this pope’s promotion of the Eucharist in the life of believers.

Henri de Lubac:

What is it that makes the properly historical in studies like those of de Lubac or de la Taille so stimulating and to the point? Surely it is the art of reading texts in such a way that they become not just votes cast in favour of or against our current positions (positions taken up long ago), but say something to us which we in our time have not considered at all or not closely enough, about reality itself.⁴¹

Mysterium Fidei does indeed read like a trustworthy compendium of the texts of the tradition; the voices which de la Taille presents are at once new and hauntingly, beautifully, like something always known. Rahner's later word of praise for *Mysterium Fidei* declares it to be the only Latin-written treatise of the early twentieth century which every theologian should read.⁴² We turn now to the theology of eucharistic sacrifice that emerges in this treatise which, sadly, was not widely read in the last half of the twentieth century.

Mysterium Fidei marks a historical watershed in post-Tridentine eucharistic theology. De la Taille's theology of eucharistic sacrifice radically challenged the still-prevailing neo-scholastic mindset which sought, in the sacrifice of the Mass, a realistic and repetitive "immolation"—a questionable essay, certainly, given that Trent did not define sacrifice as essentially immolationist, i.e., demanding a destruction or change in the victim. De la Taille denies a falsely objectivist immolation in the Eucharist and places *oblation* at the heart of sacrifice.⁴³ As noted above, we can gauge just how much de la Taille's theology upset the apple cart by both the excitement and anxiety elicited by publication of his work. I shall provide here a sketch of de la Taille's understanding of eucharistic sacrifice, and then make some brief observations about the "afterlife" of his thought in liturgical documents later in the twentieth century. Three critical

⁴¹ Karl Rahner, "The Prospects for Dogmatic Theology," in *Theological Investigations* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1965), 1:9–10.

⁴² "If I were asked which theological work written in Latin within the past generation ought to have been read by every theologian in the field of the new and actively researching theology, then I know of only one really indisputable example, viz. *Mysterium fidei* by M. de la Taille." K. Rahner, "Latin as a Church Language," *Theological Investigations* Vol. V, 397.

⁴³ In foregrounding the oblation element of sacrifice, de la Taille was picking up the threads of an earlier, seventeenth-century "French School" (P. de Bérulle, Charles de Condren, J.J. Olier) reaction to the oppressive focus on immolation. De la Taille, however, was the first to provide a full, systematic and historical defence of this approach to eucharistic sacrifice. See C. Giraud, S.J., *Eucaristia per la chiesa: prospettive teologiche sull'eucaristia a partire dalla 'lex orandi'*, 575–576; and M. Lepin, *L'idée du sacrifice de la messe s'après les théologiens, depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1926), 463–496.

aspects of de la Taille's theory will focus our explication. First, de la Taille's original depiction of sacrifice as rooted in the genus of *gift* dramatically shapes the whole of his thought on eucharistic sacrifice. Secondly, we shall attend to how he casts the Supper and the Cross as a *single* sacrifice. With these two aspects of his thought in place, we can address his theological parsing of the ecclesial sacrifice, with its focus on the Gift offered and the *affect* of those offering.

1. Sacrifice as Gift

De la Taille's notion of eucharistic sacrifice is built upon a rich edifice of sources, from scripture and the Fathers, to Thomas and conciliar documents, and even to the newly-burgeoning field of history-of-religions in the late nineteenth century. Though de la Taille clearly takes delight in using the latter to support his reflection on sacrifice, he acknowledges that the findings within this field are "in flux," and thus offer us only "conjecture."⁴⁴ De la Taille's hesitation about history-of-religions research, may be an timely reminder about the use of anthropological models to found a theology of the Eucharist. A clear hierarchy of "testimony" orders the unfolding of de la Taille's theology of sacrifice, with Scripture and "sacred tradition" as the arché.

The first and most striking element to emerge in the opening pages of de la Taille's treatise is the placement of sacrifice within the category of *gift*. He begins by first noting the obligation of human beings to offer sacrificial worship to the transcendent God, who is "the beginning and end of all things." *Latria* is the name given to this duty; it is an action in which the believer offers herself, submits to, and surrenders her life to God. Sacrifice is the superlative act of *latria* and can be given only to God—not to God insofar as He is all powerful, but rather, insofar as God is an all-good, all-holy and attractive Divinity who is Love.⁴⁵ Because humans are corporeal as well as spiritual beings, and because creation inhabits a fallen world, this surrender of *latria* naturally seeks fulfillment in exterior, sensible signs. With Thomas, de la Taille argues that it is through external signs that "the will of man is more greatly recalled to the divine (*hominis intentio magis revocatur ad divina*)."⁴⁶ Visible sacrifice is divinely instituted to meet the epistemological and psychological

⁴⁴ *Mysterium Fidei*, 7n1.

⁴⁵ *Mysterium Fidei*, 4 (see also note 1 on this page). De la Taille is emphatic here: it is God's high goodness and 'lovableness'—not His omnipotence—which elicits from humans the cult of *latria*.

⁴⁶ *Mysterium Fidei*, 5; SCG III, 119 §1.

needs of fallen human creatures. This sensible aspect of sacrifice is traced also to the social nature of worship: our *latria* ought to bear the social impress of being manifest publicly, by external “testimony” and witness.⁴⁷

But what constitutes the sensible, external sign of sacrifice? For de la Taille, sacrifice is the visible action of rendering something into the possession of the Divine. Properly speaking, then, sacrifice is a kind of *gift-giving*; it conforms to what pertains to the nature of a *gift*. We do well to pause briefly over this definitional statement, lest we overlook the striking value of de la Taille’s peculiar decision to construe sacrifice as a gift. This placing of sacrifice under the genus of gift effectively closes the centuries-long breach between “sacrifice” and “gift” that originated in Reformation debates, particularly with Luther’s refusal to acknowledge the Mass as a sacrifice.⁴⁸ This divorce between sacrifice and gift has only widened in the late twentieth century, with the emergence of a fascination with *gift* both in continental philosophy and eucharistic theology.⁴⁹ The predominance of gift, to the exclusion of sacrifice, has, I believe, diminished the capacity of the theological imagination to reflect fruitfully either upon *sacrifice* or *gift*. And this is certainly another reason why our current context is ripe for a retrieval of de la Taille’s thought.

De la Taille employs the phenomenon of gift-giving to indicate more fully the reality of eucharistic sacrifice. If sacrifice as gift-giving indicates *latria*—praise of and surrender to God, who is the giver of all good gifts—it perforce includes propitiation as well.

⁴⁷ *Mysterium Fidei*, 5–6.

⁴⁸ Luther maintained that the Mass could only be a *gift received*, and not offered. See “On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” in Martin Luther, *Three Treatises*, (Fortress Press, 1970), esp. 164–167. “When we ought to be grateful for benefits received, we come arrogantly to give that which we ought to take. With unheard of perversity we mock the mercy of the giver by giving as a work the thing we receive as a gift, so that the testator, instead of being a dispenser of his own goods, becomes a recipient of ours. Woe to such sacrilege!” (167).

⁴⁹ On the one hand, there are disciples of Heidegger and Derrida—themselves heavily influenced by a Foucaultian and Girardian critique of desire and power—who find in the category of gift, construed as ethical self-gift, not only the possibility for true human subjectivity, but also a defence against the onto-theological and idolatrous tendencies of modern thought. While Derrida’s own radical position upholds that the only “pure” gift, i.e., the only gift that can finally be given, is death, some theologians have negotiated a less nihilistic notion of gift based on an anthropological model of gift-exchange (Louis-Marie Chauvet) or an apophatic phenomenology of divine Agape (Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991)). On the other side, roughly speaking, are those like John Milbank, William Cavanaugh, and Catherine Pickstock, who want to reclaim what they fear is a far too secularised concept of gift. They counter with returning gift to its original, theological context, namely, to the site of the Eucharist (which invites the worshipper, by participation, into the ultimate reality of Gift: the Trinity). The work of theologians like Robert Daly, Chauvet, and Seasoltz, all point to a *gift-only* understanding of the Eucharist. What all these different articulations have in common, however, is the absence of an explicit effort to conjoin the concepts of sacrifice and gift.

Given that human beings are sinful, falling far short of the all-holy Divine, propitiation is a truthful acknowledgment of that distance and alienation from God. Put differently, the requirement of propitiation in sacrifice is exemplified within the dynamic of gift-giving, a dynamic that calls for goodwill, even friendship. To be a friend of God, to be one who offers gifts to God—be it in praise, thanksgiving, impetration, or all three—necessarily involves a testimony to sorrow for sin.⁵⁰ In the post-lapsarian world, sacrifice cannot genuinely escape the dual obligation of both *latria* and propitiation. The propitiatory aspect of the Eucharist could only be excised if the Church and all her members were completely conformed to Christ, the perfect Offerer and the perfectly acceptable Gift.

As an external, public offering of a gift, sacrifice requires a socially-recognised and deputed *liturgus*, a priest who performs this ritual handing-over, making sacred the victim/gift by transferring it into the hands of God. Crucially, this external act of gift-giving is a sign of the *interior* devotion of the offerer, the movement of the will to surrender to the divine. Thus, sacrifice is not a gnostic, extrinsicist exercise. Body and soul together share in the fallen condition and therefore an “incarnate” sign is demanded by sacrificial worship to signify the internal surrender and *devotio* of the offerer.⁵¹ The love and submission of the interior will is signified and actualised in the gift being handed over to God. To put this in sacramental language, the giving over of the gift is the *res et sacramentum* of sacrifice; but the *res tantum*, the reality itself, is found in the interior offering.⁵²

De la Taille underscores that this gift-giving ritual of sacrifice is constituted by two acts: oblation (offering) and immolation. Both are important to sacrifice, but it is the oblation which *determines* the immolation (destruction) as sacrificial. De la Taille is here departing sharply from the dominant immolationist narrative in post-Tridentine eucharistic theology: oblation, though it cannot suffice of itself to confer victimhood, nonetheless it is the central, gift-oriented action of sacrifice. The integrating element of sacrifice cannot be immolation because there is nothing in the destruction or change of the gift that signifies either interior devotion or the dedication of a gift to God. In sum, according to de la Taille, it suffices for a true and

⁵⁰ Without the element of penitential acknowledgement, along with an expression of the desire to make reparation, the offering in sacrifice of gifts or thanksgiving from sinful humanity to God would bear the “savour” of coming from one “both unworthy and unfriendly (*ab indigno et inimico*)” (*Mysterium Fidei*, 9).

⁵¹ “Since sacrifice belongs to the category of gift, it is necessary that some action be sensibly enacted in the presentation or rendering of the gift (Cum sit sacrificium in genere donationis, necesse est ut sensibiliter peragitur aliqua activa doni praesentatio seu redditio).” (*Mysterium Fidei*, 11)

⁵² *Mysterium Fidei*, 9.

proper sacrifice that a gift be offered either as to-be-immolated, or as already-immolated.⁵³ This leads us to our second point.

2. The Supper and the Cross as a Single Sacrifice

At the heart of de la Taille's eucharistic theology stands the claim that the supper and the cross *together* comprise the one sacrifice of Christ's passion. He discovers this sacrificial reality in Scripture and the Fathers; and it is, granted, a vision entirely consonant with his accent on sacrificial oblation. As we have just noted, the *ratio* of sacrifice requires that the direction of the gift to God be "outwardly manifested (*manifestata externe*)," for oblation is "the active tender of a gift."⁵⁴ We are brought inevitably then to posing this question: Where and when does Christ give clear sign of his intention to offer sacrifice? Where and when does he offer his death to the Father? Recall that though internal *devotio* is essential to sacrifice, it is incomplete without the exterior, ritual sign of that affect and desire. Willingness alone does not suffice. It is at the Last Supper, de la Taille argues, that Jesus visibly, ritually, offers himself as gift/victim to the Father. He does so by way of the bread and wine, which he declares to be His Body and His Blood poured out for many. Here is Christ's willing surrender of his life to the Father. Here is the new covenant in blood. The victim to-be-immolated is present and is offered; thus the sacrifice properly speaking has begun. It is consummated by Christ's bloody immolation and death on the cross. In a word, then, the supper *is* the oblation of the passion.

De la Taille's unicist theory was declared by his critics to be fundamentally "irreconcilable" with the declaration of the Council, a "denial of the mind of the Church."⁵⁵ Those who attacked de la Taille held to a dualist understanding of the sacrificial offering—one at the supper, another upon the cross—a position which de la Taille assesses as highly problematic and a "mainly post-mediaeval" assumption. The Fathers and the liturgies say nothing of a "dual sacrificial action" between the supper and the cross.⁵⁶ De la Taille

⁵³ *Mysterium Fidei*, 12. "Ad verum igitur sacrificium sufficet ut offeratur aliquid aut tanquam immolandum aut tanquam immolatum."

⁵⁴ "At voluntarietas. . . non sufficit qualiscumque, sed requiritur involvens directionem doni in Deum, et quidem, ut talis, manifestata externe. Oblatio enim est quaedam activa doni exhibitio; oblatio autem sacrificialis oportet ut sit sensibilis." (*Mysterium Fidei*, 29)

⁵⁵ Vincent McNabb, O.P., "A New Theory of the Eucharistic Sacrifice," *Blackfriars* 4 (1923), 1086–1100, esp., 1095; Alfred Swaby O.P., "A New Theory of the Eucharistic Sacrifice," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 69 (Nov. 1923), 460–473, esp. 467; see also A. Vonier, O.S.B., *A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist*, (Westminster: Newman Press, 1956), 156.

⁵⁶ *Mysterium Fidei*, 106. The crux of the difference between our author and his adversaries may be captured in this question: where does one place numerical distinctness?

expends considerable effort to show that his interpretation is, at very least, not excluded from the teaching of Trent; I think he is successful in his effort. The Council Fathers neither explicitly affirm nor deny a numerical sense of the connection between the supper and the cross. De la Taille's unicast position points to the third feature of his theology which we shall here highlight, namely, the significance of this supper-cross unity to understanding the Mass as a sacrifice.

3. The Church offers the same sacrifice that Christ offered at the Last Supper

We turn directly now to that *vexata questio*: how can the Mass best be conceived as a "true and proper" sacrifice? Given what we have just outlined, de la Taille predictably judges that the Mass is a true and proper sacrifice because the Church does what Jesus did at the Last Supper: it *offers* Christ as a gift to the Father, only now, in the Mass, the victim is offered as already-immolated.⁵⁷ At the Mass, there is a real offering of Christ's passion and death because the Body and Blood of Christ are present. The Mass oblation, as in the Last Supper, is *realis et praesens*; the immolation is mystical or *in sacramento*.

By a power derivative⁵⁸ of the priesthood of Christ, the Church can offer the same sacrifice which Christ offered at the Last Supper, for it is the same Gift offered (only now present as a Victim already-immolated). Christ gives the Church the power of presenting His Body and Blood to the Father *as its own gift*. It is the liturgical act of offering, the *modus oblationis*, which mystically closes the gap whereby the Church's sacrifice and the Supper-Cross sacrifice are one. This distinctive feature of de la Taille's eucharistic theology reveals a certain mysticism of sacramental action: the Mass is a sacrifice because, *sub actu oblationis*, it is the same to offer the past occurrence of a thing as to offer the thing itself.⁵⁹ In short, the Mass gains entrance as it were, to the supper-cross sacrifice by means of an identity of what is offered (*unitas ex parte rei oblatae*). The Gift offered by the Church is not new; everything that is new in the sacrifice comes from the particular intentional activity of the

Are there three sacrifices (supper, cross, and Mass—each with oblation and immolation), or are there but two (supper-cross and the Mass)?

⁵⁷ "Una enim eademque est hostia, idem nunc offerens sacerdotum ministerio, qui se ipsum tunc cruce obtulit, sola offerendi ratione diversa." (Council of Trent, Session 22, c. 2).

⁵⁸ The Church's offering is not a new, personal act of Christ—although the power is his and he associates the ecclesial sacrifice to his own. See *Mysterium Fidei*, 296: "Novitas tota est ex parte Ecclesiae, quanquam virtus tota est ex parte de Christi."

⁵⁹ *Mysterium Fidei*, 195.

offering ecclesia. De la Taille's understanding of sacrificial oblation and the reality of the Mass may be juxtaposed clearly with that of the dominant post-Tridentine position by this neat expression: if one looks in the Mass for the crucifixion or immolation—instead of looking for the *crucified*—then one seeks the Mass-sacrifice in vain.⁶⁰ In short, de la Taille all but declares mistaken the multiple efforts of many fine theologians to find a real immolation in the eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass. Indeed, this constitutes a sea-change in the waterways of eucharistic theology.

I have briefly outlined that de la Taille places sacrifice in the category of gift, that he elides the Supper and Cross in terms of sacrifice, demonstrating the primacy of offering in the oblatio-immolatio dynamic of sacrifice, and that he locates the sacrificial nature of the Mass as founded in the offering of the same victim, which Christ willing offered to the Father at the Last Supper. This new orientation (note: not a *new theory*, but one retrieved from the early Church Father) moves away from an immolationist-centered understanding of the Mass, thereby shedding a new and demanding light upon the authenticity and fervor of the sacrificial offering. That is to say, because de la Taille draws attention to the exterior sign of Christ's inner devotion and will at the Last Supper, he also insists upon the Church's—and the individual worshipper's—sincerity and *devotio* in her capacity as offerer. On the basis of *what* is offered, every Mass-sacrifice is infinitely and abundantly fruitful. The fruits of the sacrifice, however, are limited and 'restricted' by the offerers, that is, by the measure of their *affect* in offering the Gift. The affect of the Church is not a constant—even though the Holy Spirit guarantees that the Church will never lack the necessary minimal devotion to offer the sacrificial Gift. Daily Mass on Monday will not be the same as daily Mass on Thursday—even should the very same participants be gathered. The fervor of those offering the sacrifice will individually and collectively wax and wane. De la Taille's emphasis on oblativ *devotio* provides a fresh and needed balance to our eucharistic celebrations, where too often the focus is upon the reception of Communion, without due understanding of the Gift that must be offered with sincerity *before* it becomes the return-gift of Communion.

De la Taille's focus on the subjective affect of the Church anticipates not only the work of sacramental theologians like Karl Rahner, but also the major liturgical and doctrinal documents on liturgy and the Church in the twentieth century. For example, de la Taille's teaching is pointedly apparent (though in a very different tonality) in Pius XII's *Mediator Dei* (1947), both when the Pope

⁶⁰ See, Francis Wengier, *The Eucharist-Sacrifice* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1955), 271.

insists on the subjective character of worship, and when he articulates that the faithful offer, along with the priest, the Victim of the Mass-sacrifice.⁶¹ De la Taille's thought and spirit surfaces distinctively in Vatican II documents as well. In *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 48, for example, the Council Fathers declare that the laity ought to partake with such devotion in the "sacred actions" of the Mass that they learn to offer themselves, along with the Immaculate Victim, through the hands of the priest.⁶² Something quite similar is expressed in *Lumen Gentium* 34, where the laity are encouraged to consecrate the world through the coalescing of their daily spiritual gifts to God with the offering of the Lord's Body and Blood in the Eucharist.⁶³ This unmistakable call for a *participatio actuosa* can be justly heard as an echo of de la Taille's constant urging for a more devoted sacrificial-offering from the Church and her members. *Mysterium Fidei* was followed by *The Mystery of Faith and Human Opinion Contrasted and Defined* (1930), a collection of essays written in response to critics and in order to more fully explicate and clarify his eucharistic doctrine. De la Taille's forward-looking vision, his desire to see a theology of sacrifice-as-gift come alive again in the Church, may be discerned in his dedication of this volume "To the laity of the God's Church." The dedication is succeeded by these verses from First Peter 2:

*As living stones,
You are built up, a spiritual house,
a holy priesthood,
to offer up spiritual sacrifices,
acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*

*You are a chosen generation,
a kingly priesthood,
a holy nation,
a purchased people,*

⁶¹ See *Mediator Dei*, nn. 24,31, 35; 85–104.

⁶² "The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this Mystery of Faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God's Word and be nourished at the table of the Lord's Body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves; through Christ the Mediator" [n. 48].

⁶³ "For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ". Together with the offering of the Lord's body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God" [n. 34].

*that you may declare his virtues,
who hath called you out of darkness,
unto his marvellous light.*

Conclusion

Mysterium Fidei was written between the years 1905–1915, when most of the Dominicans and Jesuits who would intentionally cultivate a new school or *ressourcement* method of doing theology were yet in their youth—or infancy (M-D. Chenu, De Lubac, Congar, Daniélou). De la Taille seems to have worked alone, researching and writing while teaching during that pre-War decade at the Theology Faculty in Angers. We have no indication that he was in communication with theologians at Le Saulchoir, though in his later writing on mystical theology, it is clear that he is familiar with the work of Gardeil.⁶⁴ I have argued, however, that he stands as an undisputed precursor to *nouvelle théologie*. Like Congar and de Lubac (who lauded de la Taille's work),⁶⁵ de la Taille bristled at the suggestion that his work on the Eucharist might represent a “new theory” or exhibit a “new theology.” Rather, he saw himself as retrieving a tradition that had been obscured, as making the old live again in order to animate faith. De la Taille's theory of eucharistic sacrifice, with its emphasis on sacrificial oblation, disperses the web of immolationist theories that dominated baroque and early modern theology, and which constituted the teaching found in theological manuals at the turn of the twentieth century. To attend now, at this point in the Church's history, to the work of this forgotten theologian gives a more nuanced perspective to the early origins of *nouvelle théologie* and widens the context for understanding the theology of liturgical sacrifice articulated at Vatican II. While the concept of oblation, self-offering, remains important to contemporary eucharistic thought, its original potency and significance within a matrix of ritual sacrifice has been suppressed in the liberal adjustments of post-Vatican II theology, which, indeed, may go far in explaining why de la Taille's work remains to be mined. De la Taille's work, and the tone of his response to his critics, is noteworthy in that he demonstrates a

⁶⁴ Maurice de la Taille, “Théories mystiques: A propos d'un livre récent,” *Recherches de science religieuse* XVIII (1928): 297–325.

⁶⁵ Cf., for example, Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 4: “De la Taille's name brings to mind his *Mysterium Fidei* which might well be described as an essay in the liquidation of the over-complicated systems worked out in modern times, indeed ever since the Council of Trent, about the sacrifice of the Mass. . . . One need not agree on all points with his masterly study in order to recognize that embarking on criticism of this kind de la Taille was doing something most salutary.”

balanced care for right teaching as well as right worship. Unlike Doronzo's expressed fear about a "safe-harbor" for the doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice, de la Taille manifests a greater concern with the ongoing exploration and exposure of that rich storeroom of tradition. For again, his desire is to see piety, *devotio*, augmented through a theological-mystical treatment of eucharistic sacrifice—that font of all grace and virtue, and the site for the transformation of baptised life into the divine life of the eternal Victim and Gift.

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