

## Vanhoye Chapter 13

### **Chapter 13 The Efficacy of Christ's Oblation (Heb. 10:1-18)**

Western society puts a huge emphasis and value on efficiency. Efficiency depends to a large degree on what level the operator makes contact with the reality s/he is involved. If the knowledge of a person remains at a superficial level they may be able to master the techniques involved but new obstacles and difficulties will always present problems to them. On the other hand a person who develops a deeper knowledge will obtain much better results with even simpler instruments and meet with little or no difficulties.

This principle is also true in the spiritual life. What is important here is not to be agitated and anxious about multiplying our efforts and means but to go deeper into the heart of the matter.

The letter to the Hebrews shows this kind of efficiency in the Christ's sacrifice. Hebrews tells us that Christ's sacrifice has changed the religious situation of all believers for all time. He begins in this way:

*'For, since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continuously offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near'. (Heb.10:1)*

Every year these sacrifices were offered but they did not have the hoped for results of cleansing the peoples' consciences. Hebrews explains it thus:

*'Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? If the worshippers had once been cleansed of sin they would no longer have any conscientiousness of sin. (Heb10:2)*

In other words once the outcome was achieved the efforts to attain it would also cease. These annual sacrifices were of value in that they reminded the people that they were sinners and needed to amend their relationship with God. But the sacrifices offered annually for this purpose did not have any positive effect in purifying sinners of sin or of amending their relationship with God. As Hebrew puts it:

*'But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year'*  
(Heb.10:3)

Already in the O.T. God rejected these sacrifices. In Psalm 49 (50):13 God asks: *'Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?'* And in Isaiah 1:11 *'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of he-goats'.*

The author chooses two verses of psalm 39 (40) which show both God's rejection of these ritual sacrifices and propose a solution:

*'Burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said. Lo in the scroll of the book it is written of me, I delight to do your will'*. [Heb. 39(40):7-9]

These verses tell us that the sacrifice that pleases God is a person showing that s/he is disposed to do the will of God. The author of Hebrews applies these verses uniquely to Christ who is the only person capable of carrying out God's will or plan with perfect freedom and love. He declares that "Upon entering the world Christ fulfilled Psalm 39 (40):2-9

*'He says first, You did not want what the Law lays down as the things to be offered, the burn offerings and the sacrifices for sin, and you took no pleasure in them; and then he says: Here I*

*am, I am coming to do your will. He is abolishing the first sort to establish the second'. (Hebrews 10:8-9)*

This text shows Christ's love for the Father which is seen in his perfect availability to God the Father all during his earthly life; his sole desire was that the Father be glorified as he deserved to be and that his will be done. Jesus did not look for any external sacrifice nor did he ask others to do something about the sad situation of the human race, aware of sin and the need of reconciliation, but unable to do anything about it. Instead he offers himself and makes himself available to God the Father to do whatever was needed to remedy the situation. Jesus showed that availability throughout his earthly life as the following texts illustrate:

*"Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49)*

*'Because I have come from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me'. (John 6:38)*

*'Father if you are willing take this cup away from me. Nevertheless let your will be done not mine. (Luke 22:42)*

This was not a prayer of resignation but an expression of his love; Jesus believed the will of God was for victory over evil and sin that was progressively engulfing both Jews and Gentiles leaving them with the awareness of sin and their inability to remedy the situation. Jesus also believed that his own faithfulness in living and teaching what he believed was God's plan was the means of rectifying the situation. He saw that his life and teaching was bringing him into conflict with both the religious and civil authorities; which he could foresee would most likely to his being eliminated from the scene. But he was willing to accept that and in fact did accept it even when it

turned out to be death through crucifixion. Jesus believed this is the best thing for the human race so he accepted it not out of resignation but out of love for his heavenly Father and solidarity with us humans. The author of Hebrews then shows that the sacrifice of Christ achieved our purification, and sanctification.

*'By that will we have been made holy by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all'. (Heb.10:10 )*

By offering his life on the cross for us Jesus has freed us from every obstacle along our way to God and has sanctified us. He has made true worship possible; he has brought about the perfect communion of us humans and God in his glorified body. We must maintain this strong conviction:

It is not the multiplicity of our activities, or of our personal initiatives that give fruitfulness to our life, but being faithful to the will of Christ. This faithfulness to the will of Christ must be in our heart and extend out, in a coherent, credible way to every area of our life. Our life-vision must be one that always favours love in thought and action. We must do what Jesus did, that is to hunger and thirst for the will God:

*'But Jesus said: My food is to do the will of him who sent and to complete his work'. (John 4:34)*

Jesus hungered for the will of God; but often we don't want to know the will of God, or we ignore it because we are afraid it may contrast with our personal agenda and not correspond with our vision. But we are mistaken because God's will is an expression of God's own personal love for each one of us. It is headline for each of us to follow and live our life by. So that even the simplest actions done with love, according to his will have much greater efficacy or

fruitfulness than many grandiose scheme of actions we plan according to our own ideas. Like Mary our aim is to live life quietly and in line with the will of God has more value than a multitude of truly extraordinary exploits achieved by human ambition.

The author continues to remind us that the offerings of the Old Covenant were continually repeated and inefficacious but the offering of Christ was a once off because it is 100% efficacious.

*'And every high priest stands at his duties every day offering over and over again, the same sacrifices which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sin, he sat down at the right hand of God, to wait until his enemies should be made his footstool. By virtue of that one single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. (Heb.10:11-14)*

The multiplicity of sacrifices offered annually amounting to great numbers of animals being slaughtered for the Pasch. The generosity of the people in providing such an abundance of animals for the pilgrims was loudly praised by the historian Flavius Josephus. But the author of Hebrews sees a sign of failure and unfruitfulness in whole event. For him the sacrifices have to be repeated because they never achieved their aim.

But Christ is now seated in glory and has no need to offer sacrifices for:

*By virtue of that one single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. (Heb.10:14)*

Here the author of Hebrews describes the primary effects or fruitfulness of Christ's sacrifice as forgiveness of sins and purification; but he also brings in the idea of "making perfect". He has made perfect those he is sanctifying.

In the Pentateuch the idea of making perfect was only used in the consecration of the High Priest. His Consecration was expressed by a word which means '*to fill the hands*'. The phrase was used because during his consecration the High Priest received in his hands a portion of the being brought to the altar so his hands were full. The translators of the Septuagint considered the phrase '*to fill the hands*' too profane, so they described the consecrated of the High Priest as *he who has been made perfect*. (Lev. 21:10). [It is also used in Hebrews 7:28].

The author of Hebrews agrees that it is right to speak of perfection with regard to the consecration of the priest because the priest must be made perfect if he is to enter into a close relationship with God. But the consecration of the High priest did not make him perfect because it involved only external rites which could not make one perfect internally.

But Christ was truly "made perfect" by means of freely undergoing the sufferings which he offered with love as we see in Hebrews 2:10 & 5:8-9.

*For it was fitting that he, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering. (Heb 2:10)*

*Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. Heb 5:8-9)*

His unique offering had a double effect; it conferred perfection on Christ himself and conferred. He received perfection and he communicated perfection to us and this perfection is priestly perfection. It is a perfection of a relationship of filial docility to God and fraternal compassion with us.

*he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*  
(Heb. 5:9)

*By virtue of that one single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.* (Heb.10:14)

The statement, *'By virtue of that one single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified'* contains something surprising. It indicates both something which has been achieved and something which is in a state of becoming achieved. In other words there are two aspects to our religious situation resulting from Christ's oblation. On his part all has now been achieved since he has made us perfect. It doesn't mean we are made perfect all at once; rather we are being sanctified and we are being made perfect progressively; we are God's work in progress; our sanctification and perfection continues to be achieved little by little.

We are in a situation that is both dynamic and serenely tranquil. Christ awakens a dynamic love in us and this requires our continued effort. He has already given us the peace and security in which we can make that effort. *'Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace which the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid'*. (John 14:27)

The victory has already been won. *'I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will find hardship, but be courageous, I have conquered the world'*. (John 16:33) But we need

to struggle faithfully and generously to achieve that victory in our spiritual and apostolic life. There is nothing lacking in the offering of Christ; only we are lacking in the commitment to make the fruitfulness of Christ's offering a reality in our lives.