

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

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## I Consecrate Myself

In the heart of the word “consecrate” lies hidden the word “sacred”. It can be translated as “sanctify”; but I would think of *sanctifying* as done to something which had been, so far, profane, common, unordered to holiness. *Consecration* means something more: it implies a *total* signing-over of something to holiness, to God: there is a finality about it. So something already holy can move into consecration. It is the mystery which was touched in the awe-filled rite of animal sacrifice. We despise the thought of this tremendous tradition, because we cannot reconcile ourselves to the cruelty to the animal (despite the fact that I enjoy roast lamb), to the spectacle of ceremonial death (more properly confined to a discreet abattoir) or to the thought of a God who apparently needs a wasted life to keep him fed, or placated, or distracted from his (habitually malign?) response to humanity. This, I hear people say, is part of the horrendous inhumanity of the Old Testament. How we misread our past!

### A Pure Sacrifice

We hear that “we all need to *belong*”, which sounds typically twentieth-century bland and bourgeois: it would be a good explanation of membership of the local Tennis Club. I need something more than that. A man and woman marry: what sort of belonging do *they* think they are choosing? Some may be quite sentimental and soft about it; most, speaking the solemn words of their promises, will sense something more serious; and if all goes well, they will find themselves at last *offering their living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing to God*. Our vocation from God is not to make friends or be matey. It is to pour out our lives in a gift that carries our full commitment, “with all your heart, all your mind, all your strength”; and if our gift is greeted with rejection, derision, or even punishment, no matter. The honour we give to martyrs is based on exactly this pattern, and that sort of giving or belonging is symbolized, dramatized, even incarnated, in the act of sacrifice. The sacrifice of animals was *vicarious*: the animal stood in place of the people who sacrificed. But they were involved: their turn came in the life they went on to live, as they gave, shared, suffered, forgave, and sacrificed: for each other, because life is costly - and, if no-one understood or received them,

still for God. It was to symbolize this absolutely real belonging that a prized animal was made over to God.

### The Sacrifice of Christ

is the heart of our worship. He bridged the chasm between the world’s failure to accept God’s gift, and its absolute need of it. He offered himself, and was rejected. He became one with all rejects, and at the same time one with the rejected God. When we look at the crucifix, we see ourselves. When we look at the crucifix, we see God. This is what filled the heart of Christ as he broke the bread and said *This is my Body*. It is to make this ikon of eternal love that he consecrates himself; and in this moment the body of Jesus moves from the holiness it had always had to a *consecrated* state, the state of being given, poured out totally, a sacrifice, *the* sacrifice that takes our sin away. Our following of him must thus open our lives to the possibility of sacrificial love, and to the recognition of mysterious meaning in the dark side of our lives. I mistrust our superior distaste for the bloodsoaked altars of our forebears. I don’t trust fussy feelings. My fastidiousness about the concept of sacrifice seems awfully close to my distance from the squalor of the famine-fields, and from the reeking heaps of papers, rags, and human flesh in the city’s shop doorways tonight. *Fr Philip*