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Sacrifice, Social and Sacramental: The Witness of Louis Billot, S.J.

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The Setting: Social Sacrifice

ON MONDAY, October 3, 1927, a national magazine's headline blasted the breaking news: "Billot v. Pope." This piece in the "Religion" section continued: "Turning against Rome a face that looks like a vise with two deep sockets for eyes, Louis Cardinal Billot, eighty-one-year-old Frenchman, a foremost theologian, renounced his red hat and repaired last week to France to enter a monastery as plain Father Billot. The alleged cause of his resignation was the Pope's placing Leon Daudet's newspaper *L'Action Française* on the *Index Expurgatorius* (thus banning it at once from all Roman Catholic homes). His Holiness' policy was based on the conviction that the wily, obstreperous editors of *L'Action* were using their paper (devoted to the royalist cause) as the organ of a school of thought whose doctrines are absolutely irreconcilable with Catholicism."¹ Thus, did the editors of *Time* magazine opine in the fall of 1927.

Who is this Frenchman, Louis Billot (1846–1931)? One twentieth-century Jesuit author, Gerald McCool, flatteringly describes him as "the first really distinguished Neo-Scholastic theologian to be appointed to the Gregorian," where Billot arrived in 1885, not long after the issuance in 1879 of *Aeterni Patris*.² His Roman service

¹ "Billot v. Pope," *Time*, October 3, 1927. Billot, in fact, had wanted to return to France, close to *Action Française*, but the Jesuit General thought it better to keep him in the Roman countryside.

² Gerald A. McCool, S.J., *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of*

to the Holy See, which included a stint as president of the Pontifical Academy of Saint Thomas Aquinas, persuaded Pope Pius X to create him a cardinal in the consistory of November 27, 1911. In a testimonial to Louis Billot, his contemporary, Sulpician Henri Le Floch, cites a letter of Cardinal Merry del Val, then Pope Pius X's Secretary of State, to the Archbishop of Lyons that refers to "L'Eminentissime cardinal Billot honneur de l'Église et de la France."³ Whom, then, do we encounter in this avant-garde example of *démissionner*? What personal qualities does Louis Billot possess? Three, I suggest, pertain to the present discussion: he is a Frenchman; he is a Jesuit; and he is a student of Saint Thomas.

One may ask: why discuss Cardinal Billot in the context of a symposium devoted to the virtue of religion? In a word, the intellectual biography of this octogenarian Frenchman includes a snapshot of one of the twentieth-century's best-known Catholic conflicts about the place that the virtue of religion and its acts, including sacrifice, ought to hold in the political life of a nation. Gallic in temperament and appearance, Louis Billot sacrificed ecclesiastical prestige, though not his priesthood, for political and theological convictions that had caused fissures in pre-World War II French society. Or perhaps, one may also say, Billot resigned for politico-theological views that still inspire large numbers of believers in France and, one must admit, beyond.

Louis Billot understood hierarchy; he embodied reverence. Thanks to his reading of Saint Thomas, Billot had come to grasp profoundly, though perhaps also unbendingly, the relationships between certain virtues that Aquinas designates as potential parts of the cardinal virtue of justice. Specifically, Billot's life and witness illustrate those virtues that the "commentatorial" tradition calls the virtues of veneration: *religio*, *pietas*, and *observantia*.⁴ Billot took seriously a premise that Aquinas employs when he begins his inquiry into whether the rites of infidels are to be tolerated: "Human government derives from

Thomism (New York: Fordham University Press: 1989), 33.

³ R. P. Henri Le Floch, S.SP., *Le cardinal Billot: Lumière de la Théologie* (Paris: Beauchesne et Ses Fils, 1947), 5. The addressee of the letter was Hector Sévin (1852–1916), Archbishop of Lyon and later cardinal.

⁴ See *Summa theologiae* (hereafter, *ST*) II-II, q. 80, a. unic. For a discussion of the virtues of veneration, see T. C. O'Brien, "Virtues of Justice in the Human Community," in *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 41 (Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1972), xv–xxi. (Unless otherwise noted, all citations of and quotations from the *ST* are from the Blackfriars edition [1964–1981].)

divine government and should be modeled on it.”⁵ Accordingly, Billot lamented loudly those who wished to create a humanity without need of God.⁶ To function well, Billot was persuaded, nations required of their members a religious disposition toward God and participation in his true worship. Billot also followed Aquinas’s argument for the fittingness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. In his *Summa theologiae*, Saint Thomas appeals to the similarities that spiritual life enjoys with corporeal existence, for example, that the upholding of the common good requires some persons to perform public actions that perfect all the members of a political common good. In the spiritual order, this perfection of Catholic life occurs, writes Aquinas, when “priests offer sacrifices not merely on their own behalf but for the people as well,” and thereby perfect the supernatural good of all God’s holy Church.⁷

Are the rites of infidels to be tolerated? While he makes special provision for the Jews, Aquinas clearly teaches that “although infidels may sin in their rites, they may be tolerated on account of some good that results or some evil that is avoided.”⁸ After all, “God permits some evils in the universe which he could prevent, lest without them greater goods might be lost or greater evils ensue.”⁹ Can a nation survive without the Catholic Mass and Catholic priests to celebrate it? Billot, one reasonably assumes, favored Aquinas’s view of tolerance, not that advanced by Roger Williams.¹⁰ So, we turn to consider what Louis Billot, both by his example and his instruction, taught us about religious sacrifice, both social and sacramental.

To grasp fully the social dimensions of Cardinal Billot’s unique brand of Thomism requires some indication of how the Holy See regarded France during the latter half of the nineteenth century and

⁵ ST II-II, q. 10, a. 11.

⁶ Louis Billot, S.J., *Tractatus De Ecclesia Christi sive Continuatio Theologiae De Verbo Incarnato*, vol. 2, *De habitudine Ecclesiae ad civilem societatem* (Prati: ex officina Libraria Giachetti, filii et soc., 1910), 42: “Volumus, inquit, organizzare humanitatem quae possit carere Deo.” Billot thus translates a phrase that he ascribes to Jules Ferry, “Nous voulons organiser une humanité qui puisse passer de ‘Dieu.’”

⁷ ST III, q. 65, a. 1.

⁸ ST II-II, q. 10, a. 11.

⁹ ST II-II, q. 10, a. 11.

¹⁰ Roger Williams (d. 1683), a founding settler in what is now Rhode Island, was a pioneer promoter of American-style religious liberty. This essay was originally delivered in Providence, Rhode Island at the 2013 Rev. Robert J. Randall Conference on Christian Culture, “The Virtue of Religion,” April 19–20, 2013, held at Providence College under the directorship of Professor Reinhard Hütter, the 2012–2013 Visiting Randall Professor.

into the twentieth century. Pius X's successor, Pope Benedict XV (r. 1914–1922), expressed succinctly an enduring Roman aspiration for France: “Regnum Galliae, regnum Mariae nunquam peribit.”¹¹ Because France belongs to our Lady, France will never suffer extinction. Though Louis Billot spent more than half his life in Rome—forty-six years all told—he never lost his *observantia*, his respect, his reverence for the homeland, Catholic France, Our Lady's France, the France that remains to this day the eldest daughter of the Church, *la fille aînée de l'Église*. Because of this virtuous characteristic, Billot developed strong views about how French Catholics should both shape and influence post-revolutionary, republican France.



Louis Billot was born in 1846, two years before the Revolution of 1848 that ushered in the French Second Republic at Sierck-les-Bains, a city located in the Lorraine (north-eastern France), which borders on both Germany and Luxembourg. Young Louis—it may be useful to observe—grew up during the period of the Second French Empire (1852–1870) led by Napoleon III. In 1869, at the age of twenty-three, Billot was ordained a priest, and after having joined the Jesuits, he took up pastoral work in Paris and Laval. His intellectual acumen earned him a teaching post at the Catholic University of Angers, and afterwards, he taught exiled Jesuit scholastics on the Channel Island of Jersey, whence they had sought refuge after their banishment in 1880 by the Third French Republic. When Pope Leo XIII called Father Billot to Rome, the Pope placed him at the service of the intellectual renewal of Catholic life that we know as Leonine Thomism. There on the Italian peninsula, Billot remained until his death at the Jesuit novitiate located at Ariccia, just outside Rome in the Alban Hills. (Today the structure serves as a retreat house attached to the seventeenth-century “Santuario di Santa Maria di Galloro.”) He died on December 18, 1931, about a month shy of his eighty-sixth birthday.

By apostolic commitment, Billot was a teacher, a professor, and an intellectual. His published scholarly works include articles and theological manuals. He wrote on the topics that comprise still the theology curriculum of a Catholic seminary: Scripture and Tradition, God and the Trinity, Christ, the Church, the sacraments, the last things, original sin, grace, the infused virtues, and the Parousia. Billot, to be sure, was a Thomist of the Leonine revival, but he was not, I

¹¹ Floch, *Billot*, 132.

underline, a Thomist of the commentatorial tradition. Those whom he considers authoritative guides for doing theology inhabit mainly the thirteenth century; his list of approved authors comes to an end with Giles of Rome, who died in 1316. The standard commentators, however, Billot for the most part disregarded.¹²

In order to illustrate Billot's outlook on the commentatorial tradition, we are fortunate to possess the eye-witness testimony of a convert to Thomism, Jacques Maritain. In his *Notebooks*, Maritain recalls a visit in 1918 that the Pope, Benedict XV, had asked him to pay Cardinal Billot for the purpose of reviewing a manuscript about the Marian apparition at La Salette: "The Cardinal," writes Maritain, "receives me very graciously, speaks to me of [Ernest] Psichari,¹³ of [Charles]

¹² Jules Lebreton, "Son excellence le cardinal Billot," *Études* 189 (1911): 514–525: "Dans les discussions philosophiques par lesquelles il prépare ses thèses théologiques, le P. Billot oppose fréquemment les docteurs modernes, les recentiores, comme il les appelle, aux anciens scolastiques, qu'il salue volontiers du nom de *veteres Scholae principes*. A ceux-ci vont toutes les préférences, tandis que ceux-là sont jugés sévèrement, parfois durement; ceux qui accusent les Jésuites de trop sacrifier à l'esprit de corps devront reconnaître que ce reproche ne saurait atteindre le P. Billot. Les recentiores, pour lui, ce sont tous les théologiens à partir de Cajétan ou même de Scot; les principes, ce sont, tout d'abord, saint Thomas, puis saint Bonaventure, Albert le Grand, Alexandre de Halès, Gilles de Rome. Son atmosphère intellectuelle est celle du treizième siècle; les conceptions du seizième siècle lui sont manifestement peu sympathiques" (519). Billot, however, did exhibit sympathy for certain views of the fifteenth-century *Principes Thomistarum*, John Caprelous, as Jean Galot, S.J., points out in *The Person of Christ: A Theological Insight*, trans. A. Bouchard (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1984), 16. See also, Francis Courtney, "Billot, Louis," in *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology*, ed. H. Francis Davis et al. (London: Nelson, 1962–1971), 1:268–270, at 270.

¹³ "Ernest Psichari. Novelist and soldier whose writings combine militaristic sentiments with a semi-mystical religious devotion. Born on 27 September 1883 in Paris, France; died on 22 August 1914 in Rossignol, Belgium. Grandson of the historian Ernest Renan. Son of a Greek philologist, Jean Psichari. Psichari grew up in an atmosphere of liberal intellectualism. After a period of acute emotional and mental stress, he started on the long journey toward an acceptance of religious faith, encouraged by the French Catholic intellectuals Maurice Barrès, Charles Péguy, and Jacques Maritain. As an artillery officer in the French Colonial army in Africa from 1906 to 1912 he first found the satisfaction of a rigid moral commitment. Having converted to Roman Catholicism in 1913, he resolved in 1914 to join the Dominicans, but was killed in the opening days of World War I. His novels *The Call to Arms*, *The Voyage of the Centurion* and *The Voice that Cries in the Desert* are spiritual autobiographies." *New Catholic Dictionary* (slightly altered, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Ernest-Psichari>).

Péguy, blasts the adversaries of St. Thomas, says much evil about the Jesuits, attacks Suarez and Cajetan, and displays much bitterness.”¹⁴ Fortunately, Jacques Maritain had been alerted to Billot’s views about the early modern commentators on Aquinas. In the same *Notebooks* entry, Maritain recalls the bleak reception that Cardinal Billot earlier had given another French Thomist: “A few days previously,” continues Maritain, “[Billot] had received Father Garrigou-Lagrange, and, discussing theology with him, had declared that Cajetan was ‘a bastard’ and John of Saint Thomas a ‘double bastard.’ Upon which Father Garrigou, not being able to tolerate this offense to the great Commentators, had taken his hat—and the door.”¹⁵ It would afford a pleasant thought to suppose that Pope Pius XI took away Billot’s red *galero* on account of the latter’s views on the Thomist commentatorial tradition. That is not what happened, however.

What did precipitate the dramatic turn of events that *Time* magazine reports in 1927? The cause was not Billot’s idiosyncratic outlook on Thomism, but his well-known views on French politics and the Catholic Church. Like most Frenchmen of his period, Billot held strong convictions about what would make for the proper governance of *la belle France*. On the other hand, the Holy See throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century exhibited divided views on how the Catholic Church should best survive in the *Regnum Galliae*. French Catholics, too, were not of one opinion about how to keep France under the *Regnum Mariae*. For his part, Louis Billot unwaveringly favored *Action Française*. Achille Ratti, Pius XI, Pope from 1922 until 1939—and, one assumes, his Curia—did not.

Today, one should not conclude from the unpleasantness that befell Louis Billot that this eminent churchman was a rebel! On the contrary, he himself held to the rule of submission to the sovereign pontiff’s will that characterizes Jesuit obedience. He likewise counseled others who shared his politico-theological views to avoid anything that would smack of resistance to or revolt against the Holy Father: “J’ai toujours répondu, soit de vive voix, soit par écrit, à tous ceux qui me consultaient sur la ligne de conduite à tenir, qu’il leur fallait non seulement éviter avec soin tout ce qui aurait un semblant d’insoumission ou de révolte mais encore faire le sacrifice de leurs idées particulières pour se conformer aux ordres du Souverain Pontife. Pour ma part personnelle,

¹⁴ Jacques Maritain, *Notebooks* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 94.

¹⁵ Ibid.

je me suis, tout le premier, tenu à cette règle.”¹⁶ In this admittedly touching personal testimony, we discover the true mind of the Jesuit, Louis Billot: sacrifice one’s particular ideas to conform to the orders of the Pope. What fueled these “particular ideas” that Billot cherished?

One may infer from his disapproving reaction to the condemnation of *Action Française* that, at the very least, Billot was not a partisan of nineteenth-century political liberalism. In fact, he wrote critically about those revolutionary and secular views on Church-State relations that had developed throughout the nineteenth century. As early as 1909, Billot published in Latin a treatise that would later appear in English as *Liberalism: A Critique of its Basic Principles and Divers Forms*.¹⁷ He held no better view of the less structured nineteenth-century movement that goes by the name of “Modernism.” In fact, it was Father Billot who denounced Alfred Loisy’s *L’Évangile et l’Église*, published at Paris in 1902, and Billot too who played a leading role in its condemnation.¹⁸ One, then, best approaches Louis Billot’s apparent intransigency within the historical context of late nineteenth-century political liberalism and theological heterodoxy. His style of Thomism better helped him to rebut the latter than it did to combat the former.

Action Française first places us in the political and ecclesiastical environment of pre-World War I France. 1899 marks its formal beginning as a nationalist group formed in response—the nationalist response, moreover—to *l’affaire Dreyfus*. The late French historian and *politologue*, René Rémond (1918–2007), authoritatively reports that the majority of the members of *Action Française* came from Catholic families for whom the values of order, authority, and tradition formed part of their religious and intellectual upbringing. *Action Française*, in a word, “stood for the restoration of Catholicism as an integral part of the French State.”¹⁹ As Rémond also confirms, the adherents to *Action Française* found inspiration in the study of Saint Thomas Aqu-

¹⁶ Henri du Passage, “Réponse à une calomnie,” *Études* 210 (1932): 491–492.

¹⁷ See Louis Billot, *Liberalism: A Criticism of Its Basic Principles and Divers Forms* (Beatty, PA: Archabbey Press, 1922), title page: “The present treatise [is] . . . an excerpt from the *Tractatus de Ecclesia Christi* rather than an independent monograph. It comprises, in fact, all the subject-matter treated under Question XVII of that work.”

¹⁸ See the review by Harvey Hill of *La Censure d’Alfred Loisy (1903): Les Documents des Congrégations de l’Index et du Saint Office* in *The Catholic Historical Review* 96.4 (2010): 850–851.

¹⁹ Michael Walsh, *The Cardinals: Thirteen Centuries of the Men Behind the Papal Throne* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 221.

nas.²⁰ It is noteworthy that a scant twenty years after its launching, the Leonine revival of Thomism had already begun to influence Catholic life outside of both seminary walls and university classrooms.

In 1905, France of the Third Republic enacted the law on the Separation of the Churches and State—an arrangement which came to be known as *laïcité*. In matters religious, the French Republic is expected to remain neutral, that is, lay. Not all Catholics in France, however, were *intégristes*. Certain French Catholics followed a progressivist program that sought to promote harmonious coexistence between the Church and the French Republic. Take, for example, *Le Sillon* (“The Furrow” or “The Path”), which was founded by a loyal though modernist-tinged Catholic layman, Marc Sangnier (1873–1950).²¹ As a French political movement, *Sillon* attracted many Catholic political progressives. The members supported one another from within a communitarian setting—they were, for instance, among the early practitioners of the “circle” as a means for disseminating their notions.²² The Sillonists, as the followers of Sangnier’s movement were called, professed to provide a viable alternative to Marxism and other anticlerical labor movements. In short, they sought—using grassroots community organization (the “study circles”)—to bring Catholicism into a greater conformity with French republican and socialist ideals.²³

²⁰ In his “Préface” to Véronique Auzépy-Chavagnac, *Jean De Fabregues et la Jeune Droite Catholique: Aux Sources de la Revolution Nationale* (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2002), René Rémond wrote that the members of *Action Française* “retrouvent les valeurs d’ordre, d’autorité, de tradition qui définissaient le catholicisme intransigeant du xix^e siècle, héritage du combat contre la Révolution et ses principes jugés pernicieux, réactivé par Maurras et légitimé par une lecture fondamentale de Saint-Thomas d’Aquin.”

²¹ For one account of this movement, see Denis Lefèvre, *Marc Sangnier, l’aventure du Catholicisme social* (Paris: Mame, 2008).

²² See *ibid.*, 71–85. Priests became involved in the circles, but with uneven results (see 112–113).

²³ “Leurs convictions républicaines leur valurent d’être les cibles de l’Action française dès 1906. C’était au temps du “plus grand Sillon” ouvert à des non-catholiques de bonne volonté partageant les mêmes préoccupations sociales et politiques. Dans le contexte de la crise moderniste et de la Séparation des Églises et de l’État, cette évolution d’un mouvement catholique fut largement blâmée par les évêques français déjà réticents à l’autonomie des laïcs et refusant l’indépendance d’esprit du jeune clergé sillonniste. Tous ces éléments et des maladresses de langage—l’emploi d’un vocabulaire néo-kantien—suscitèrent la lettre pontificale “Notre charge apostolique” du 25 août 1910: les chefs du Sillon furent invités à s’en retirer et celui-ci, épuré de ses erreurs doctrinales, à se placer sous la direction des évêques pour l’action catholique. Marc Sangnier et ses amis se soumirent sans discussion, abandon-

At its start, *Sillon* resembled what, later in 1933, Peter Maurin (1877–1949) and Dorothy Day (1897–1980) began in the United States: The Catholic Worker Movement, with its “Friday night meetings” and sassafras tea. In fact, Peter Maurin’s philosophy and practice bears the imprint of the *Sillon* to which he belonged roughly from 1902 to 1908.²⁴ In any event, the *Sillon* movement in France flourished officially from 1894 to 1910.²⁵ In his encyclical letter of August 25, 1910, *Notre Charge Apostolique*, that put an end to *Sillon*, Pope Pius X stated that “it is an error and a danger to bind down Catholicism by principle to a particular form of government.”²⁶ He meant the democratic form of government.

It is difficult to imagine that Father Billot did not in some way affect *Sillon*’s condemnation.²⁷ The year before, 1909, Pope Pius X appointed him a consultor for the Holy Office (the predecessor of today’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith). By that time, Billot’s political views, as his 1909 essay on *Liberalism* demonstrates, were well formulated. When the Holy See condemned the *Sillon* movement for its cosmopolitan social action and religiously undifferentiated political activism, *Action Française* acquired a new allure.²⁸ Indeed, the Holy See’s rejection of the *Sillon* approach to French politics and economics seemed, in 1910, to have left the *Action Française* as the only standing Catholic alternative to *laïcité*. Louis Billot and many

nant l’action religieuse pour l’action politique” (Olivier Prat, “Biographie,” *Marc Sangnier*, <http://www.marc-sangnier.com/biographie.html>).

²⁴ Le.Sillon.net, <http://www.sillon.net/heritage/peter-maurin>.

²⁵ In the French Catholic newspaper, *La Croix*, Marc Sangnier (1873–1950) wrote in 1905: “Le Sillon a pour but de réaliser en France la république démocratique. Ce n’est donc pas un mouvement catholique, en ce sens que ce n’est pas une œuvre dont le but particulier est de se mettre à la disposition des évêques et des curés pour les aider dans leur ministère propre. Le Sillon est donc un mouvement laïque, ce qui n’empêche pas qu’il soit aussi un mouvement profondément religieux” (see http://www.europeana.eu/portal/record/9200408/BibliographicResource_3000118410728.html).

²⁶ Pope Pius X, *Notre Charge Apostolique* (1910) (CatholicCulture.Org, <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?id=5456&C-FID=48271314&CFTOKEN=79825374>)

²⁷ Ibid.: “The breath of the Revolution has passed this way, and we can conclude that, whilst the social doctrines of the Sillon are erroneous, its spirit is dangerous and its education disastrous.”

²⁸ For further information, see Jacques Prévotat’s 1994 PhD dissertation, “Catholiques français et Action française: Étude des deux condamnations romaines” (Lille: Atelier National de Réproduction des Thèses, 1994), 422 (dissertation done under the direction of René Rémond, a founding member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in 1994).

others, of course, took encouragement from the Church's high-profile censure of Catholic liberalism.

The attraction of mainly young French and Belgian Catholics to the *Action* grew, despite the strongly secular bent of the man whose name remains identified principally with *Action Française*, Charles Maurras (1868–1952). Though the Congregation of the Index passed an unfavorable judgment on several of Maurras's theses and his journal, the *Revue de l'Action Française*, on 16 January 1914, Pope Pius X "reserved the right to decide when the decree should be made public. . . . And the Pope, though well aware of Maurras's paganism," as one author opines, "seems to have remained sympathetic toward him and the rowdy activists of the *Action Française*."²⁹ It is generally supposed that it was Louis Billot who effectively persuaded Pope Pius X (and Merry del Val) not to condemn *Action Française* for the questionable theses of Maurras. "Les livres de Maurras n'ont rien à voir avec l'Action française," argued Billot.³⁰ His stratagem, however, failed to take account of the fact that the condemnation of *Sillon* had left *intégriste* movements liable to similar reactions. Eugen Weber has observed, "little change in the wording [of *Notre Charge Apostolique*] was needed to show that what was sauce for Sangnier was equally savory sauce for Maurras."³¹ As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us, "The Church, because of her commission and competence, is not to be confused in any way with the political community."³²

What may one conclude from these events? The Holy See banned a progressive socialist movement that enjoyed the support of more than a few Catholics. The *Sillon* leaders loyally obeyed the Pope's instruction. *Action Française*, for a certain time at least, prospered. The "guns of August" were being prepared to sound. The pontificate of Pope Benedict XV was too short and too preoccupied with the troubles attending the First World War to allow the Pope's meddling in French political life. The next pontificate, however, brought a change of ultramontane Roman views about how Catholics should involve themselves in Gallican politics. On December 20, 1926, Pope Pius XI condemned the *Action Française*. Then on December 29, 1926, as *Time* reported, several of Maurras's writings, including the movement's newspaper, were placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. In fact,

²⁹ Eugen Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962), 222.

³⁰ See Prévotat, *Catholiques français et Action française*, 422.

³¹ Weber, *Action Française*, 252.

³² *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter CCC), §2245.

L'Action Française was the first newspaper ever placed on the Church's list of banned books. This papal action dealt a devastating blow to the high-spirited movement. On March 8, 1927, the *Action* members were prohibited from receiving the sacraments. Many of its members quit, including the award-winning authors François Mauriac and Georges Bernanos.³³ *Action Française* and its residual membership entered into a decade of doldrums.

Louis Billot, Thomist theologian, even though a highly eclectic one, sacrificed his cardinalatial dignity in order to defend what he thought best served French society. In retrospect, some may find little to sympathize with this Jesuit cardinal. At the same time, it is difficult to gainsay a simple though puzzling generalization about the French. To this day, there remains in France a group of people who do not accept the French Revolution, and who, as a result, consider themselves dispossessed of their authentic nationality by reason of their citizenship in the French Republic. "*Regnum Galliae, regnum Mariae.*" The old *Action Française* still provides for this group of alienated French people a memory and a sense of identity. In 1939, Pope Pius XII lifted the condemnation of the *Action Française*.³⁴ Maurras died fortified by the sacraments of the Church the same year, 1953, that he published his last book, *Le Bienheureux Pie X, sauveur de la France*.³⁵ A political party, *Centre royaliste d'Action française* (CRAF), operates today in France. On November 18, 2012, this party joined a demonstration in Paris against gay marriage and adoption of children by same-sex couples. Billot, man of veneration, surely would have approved.

Not all French clerics agreed with Billot's buoyant optimism for *Action Française*. In fact, some notable French Dominicans, for example, had grown fond of cosmopolitan social action and lay initiatives in political organization.³⁶ During the period between the two World Wars, several theological and social movements found seedbeds in various religious settings of France and Belgium. These men and movements would reappear at mid-century: "The Dominicans of the Saulchoir," so one trustworthy report runs, "were very deeply involved in both the life of the Church and the world of that period

³³ See "Action Française," *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action_Fran%C3%A7aise.

³⁴ See Ralph McInerney, *The Defamation of Pius XII* (South Bend, IN: St Augustine's Press, 2001), 41.

³⁵ Charles Maurras, *Le bienheureux Pie X, sauveur de la France* (Paris: Plon, 1953).

³⁶ For further information, see André Laudouze, *Dominicains français et Action française: 1899–1940: Maurras au couvent* (Paris: Editions de l'Atelier, 1989).

[1925–1939]. Among the masters [Yves] Congar would meet at Le Saulchoir was the philosopher A. D. Sertillanges, a Thomist philosopher who had been close to the *Sillon*, the pioneering lay movement created by Marc Sangnier that would become the prototype for the Y[oung] C[hristian] W[orkers] and other specialized Catholic Action movements.”³⁷ The aforementioned references to Dominicans such as Antonin Sertillanges (1863–1948) and, especially, Yves Congar (1904–1995), whose views on the laity and their roles in the Church are said to have influenced the documents of the Second Vatican Council, open up a pathway for further research. Some have even suggested that certain documents of the Second Vatican Council were intended to rehabilitate Marc Sangnier and his *Sillonist* political and ecclesiological positions.³⁸

One observation from our present period, the pontificate of Pope Francis, may prove instructive. While nowadays one can recognize in France (and elsewhere) successors of the young voices that swelled the ranks of the *Action Française*, it is more difficult to find among Catholic churchgoers individuals who claim *Le Sillon* or, for that matter, the Young Christian Workers as their forebears. “Catholicisme d’action,” to borrow a phrase from the Breton author, Yvon Tranvouez, has ceded in fact to a religious crisis of enormous proportions.³⁹ This estimate remains sadly true. It is no wonder that traditionalist Catholic authors puzzle over what Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, when he served as Papal Nuncio to France (1944–1953), wrote to the widow of Marc Sangnier on the occasion of his funeral: “The powerful fascination of his words, of his soul, had thrilled me, and the liveliest memories of my entire priestly youth are for his person and his political and social activity. . . . the example of Marc Sangnier will remain as an instruction and an encouragement.”⁴⁰

³⁷ See Stefan Gigacz, “Congar and Cardijn at Vatican II,” blog entry, <http://www.stefangigacz.com/congar-and-cardijn-at-vatican-ii>; “In 1916, Sertillanges had already published his major work *La philosophie morale de Saint Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1916) which would contribute greatly to providing a philosophical foundation to Cardijn’s see-judge-act method.” Joseph Leo Cardijn (1882–1967) was a Belgian priest and, later, cardinal who was the founder of the Young Christian Workers.

³⁸ Guy-Th. Bedouelle, O.P., (d. 2012) in a personal communication with the author.

³⁹ For further information, see Yvon Tranvouez, *Catholicisme et société dans la France du XX^e siècle. Apostolat, progressisme et tradition* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2011).

⁴⁰ Solange Hertz, *Beyond Politics* (Arcadia, CA: Tumbler House, 2002), 116.

Louis Billot exemplifies the strong characteristic of individualism of the French people. When in 1879 Leo XIII issued *Aeterni Patris*, Billot figured, albeit eclectically, in the launching of this renewal of Catholic theology. After all, it was Leo XIII who put Cardinal Cajetan's commentary in the edition of the *Summa* that bears the Pope's name. When the same Pope issued, in 1892, the encyclical promoting *Ralliement*, *Au milieu des sollicitudes*, Billot also received this expression of the Pope's will, but somehow found a way—an eclectic way—to read between the lines in order to discover in this papal pronouncement a preferential endorsement for constitutional monarchy.⁴¹ So, we turn from this brief survey of the historical fluctuations that surrounded the life of Louis Billot—sacrifice in private and social life—to what he taught about sacramental sacrifice.

★ ★ ★

The Doctrine: Sacramental Sacrifice

Billot's work illustrates the status of Catholic theology during the early period of the Leonine revival of Thomism, roughly 1879–1939. We know that *Aeterni Patris* launched this successful renewal of Catholic theology ninety years after the French Revolution had erupted (1789–1799).⁴² Thomism, however, had entered into something of an eclipse well before July 14, 1789. In fact, the doctrine of Saint Thomas stood under a cloud from early in the reign of Louis XV (1710–1774). The seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century battles between the Holy See (often strongly influenced by Molinist theologians) and the Jansenist party left European Dominicans and other Thomists somewhat confused about the standing of Aquinas's theology. The misun-

⁴¹ See Thomas Storck's review of Roger Aubert, *Catholic Social Teaching: An Historical Perspective*, ed. David A. Boileau (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2003): "Leo XIII had stated that the Church was indifferent as to a nation's type of political regime, provided that it sought the common good; but in specific instances, as in the case of France, he counseled Catholics to accept the republic instead of engaging in what he saw as a hopeless quest to restore a monarchy" (*New Oxford Review* 73, no. 2 [February 2006]; <https://www.newoxfordreview.org/reviews.jsp?did=0206-storck>).

⁴² For further discussion on the relationship between modernism, politics, and Leonine Thomism, see Russell Hittinger, "*Pascendi Dominici Gregis* at 100: Two Modernisms, Two Thomisms: Reflections on the Centenary of Pius X's Letter Against the Modernists," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 5, no. 4 (2007): 843–880.

derstanding reached such a point that Pietro Francesco Orsini, Pope Benedict XIII (1649–1730), was persuaded to proclaim that the teaching of Saint Thomas and the Thomist school had nothing in common with the errors of Cornelius Jansen and Pasquier Quesnel.⁴³ Despite the best efforts of this Dominican Pope, fluctuations in papal policies and outlooks that began with Benedict XIII's successor, Clement XII, left (especially) Dominicans wondering about the approved status of the teaching of Thomas Aquinas. This period of disquieting trial and confusion runs from the 1730s until *Aeterni Patris*—that is, for about 150 years.

In a remarkable study, *La Puissance et la Gloire*, Sylvio Hermann De Franceschi describes in detail the various maneuvers that put orthodox Thomism at risk of being tarred with the same brush as Jansenism. The author claims that, in order to dispel the view that Thomism had been outlawed by the papacy, Joachim-Joseph Berthier (1848–1924) included in his first volume of *Sanctus Thomas Aquinas Doctor communis Ecclesiae*, published in 1914, a complete list of the approvals that the Roman Pontiffs had given to Aquinas and his school.⁴⁴ This golden chain of continuous papal endorsements was meant to counter something like a Thomist “Black Legend.”⁴⁵

As the widespread flourishing of Leonine Thomism reveals, the fortunes of the Thomist commentatorial tradition changed dramatically in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Billot himself published six volumes before the end of the century. As already mentioned, Louis Billot, exemplifying the Jesuit spirit of practicality

⁴³ J. N. D. Kelly, *Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 295. Also see Charles-René Billuart, O.P., *Le Thomisme triomphant par le bref 'demissas preces' de Benoit XIII, ou Justification de l'Examen critique des Réflexions sur ce bref contre une lettre anonime adressée à l'auteur de l'examen, par un théologien de l'ordre de Saint-Dominique; (Lettres en forme de bref de N.T.S.P. le Pape Benoist XIII à tous les religieux de l'ordre de FF. Prêcheurs contre les calomnies dont on a voulu flétrir la doctrine de S. Augustin et de S. Thomas, traduites du latin. [avec le texte latin]. [6 novembre 1724])* (S.l.: s.n., s. d. [circa 1730]).

⁴⁴ For a similar exercise later in the century, see Santiago Ramirez, O.P., “The Authority of St. Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 15 (1952): 1–109.

⁴⁵ Sylvio Hermann de Franceschi, *La Puissance et la Gloire. L'orthodoxie thomiste au péril du jansénisme (1663–1724): le zénith français de la querelle de la grâce* (Paris: Nolin, 2011), 471–472. The phrase “Black Legend” arises in the early twentieth century to describe what are considered distortions about Spanish autocracy as propagated by those who were political enemies of Spain. For further information, see Julián Juderías, *La Leyenda Negra* (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 2003 [Madrid: Tip. de la “Rev. de Arch., Bibl. y Museos, 1914]).

for which the Society of Jesus is well known, produced a complete set of dogmatic treatises.⁴⁶

Billot proceeded in a fashion altogether comprehensible for a man who had absorbed the principles of French Romanticism. He favored strongly a return to the sources, which for Billot, as Maritain discovered, meant returning to the texts of Aquinas to re-source, as it were, theological instruction. It is useful to recall that Billot arguably stands in continuity with French Romantics like François-René de Chateaubriand (1768–1848), Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814–1879), and even Henri-Dominique Lacordaire (1802–1861), although Billot would not have shared the latter's impenitent liberalism. As Father Garrigou-Lagrange learned from his fateful visit to Billot, this Jesuit Cardinal had no use for the commentaries that were written after the start of the sixteenth century.

So much did Louis Billot eschew the anterior tradition that he even skirted the celebrated controversy between Dominicans and Jesuits on divine grace and human freedom. Billot gave no quarter to the penetrating insights of Dominic Bañez (1528–1604), and instead chose to remain agnostic, according to one favorable account, about the divine movements that bring free men to beatific vision.⁴⁷ Though he

⁴⁶ On the relationship of study to Jesuit life, see Rivka Feldhay, "Knowledge and Salvation in Jesuit Culture," *Science and Context* 1 (1987): 195–213.

⁴⁷ Lebreton, "le cardinal Billot," 517: "Il écarte donc résolument et les décrets prédéterminants de Bannez et la vérité objective des futuribles telle que l'imaginent les disciples de [Leonard] Lessius, et à ceux qui demandent où Dieu voit nos déterminations libres, même hypothétiques, il répond simplement en lui-même, dans son essence, cause exemplaire de tous les êtres. Mais, insiste-t-on, quelle connexion peut-il y avoir entre l'essence divine et cette détermination hypothétique? Ce lien existe, répond le P. Billot ([*De Deo*,] p. 210), mais nous ne pouvons le distinguer." Dominic Bañez, O.P. (d. 1604) and Leonard Lessius, S.J. (d. 1623) represent opposite poles of the debate about predestination. For a slightly different, though compatible, interpretation of Billot, see Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book, Co., 1939), 358: "I am happy in coming to a better understanding from the texts just quoted that Cardinal Billot, 'though retaining the mental attitude imposed upon him by his Jesuit training,' was more like a Dominican Thomist in his doctrine [on the divine motion] than at first sight he appeared to be. My conversations with him induced me to see considerable differences of meaning in the terms he employed and not sufficiently to perceive certain profound similarities in doctrine, which I am very happy to note. I noticed especially that he defends the theory of the *scientia media*, but it must be admitted that in this explanation of it, he seeks to approach as near as possible the teaching of Dominican theologians."

proceeded eclectically, Billot nevertheless showed how the “common doctor’s” basic teaching explicates divine and Catholic faith on grace and freedom. One’s mind wanders to the old adage that even a blind squirrel finds a nut once in a while. At the same time, an author like Billot who ignored the commentatorial tradition is destined to miss the fine points that its carriers articulate.

So we turn to Billot’s views on religion. His *De Ecclesiae Sacramentis. Commentarius in Tertiam Partem S. Thomae* includes his presentation of what Aquinas teaches about the nature of the eucharistic Sacrifice.⁴⁸ Book 1 (*tomus prior*) covers questions on the sacraments in general (*in communi*), Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist. In other words, the first volume discusses those sacraments whose treatment Saint Thomas had completed before he stopped composing his *Summa theologiae*. In the *Summa*, sacrifice finds its initial discussion among the moral virtues. Following the Catholic tradition, Aquinas places sacrifice among the acts of religion: “The acts by which men give things to God are sacrifice, oblations, first fruits of the harvest, and tithes.”⁴⁹ The Church of Christ considers the holy sacrifice of the Mass as the supreme expression of the worship due to God.⁵⁰

In the pages that Billot devotes to “De Sacrificio Missae,” he provided a summary of what Aquinas treats in questions 82 and 83 of the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa theologiae*, which consider, respectively, the minister of the Eucharist and the rite by which this sacrament is celebrated. The initial section of Billot’s treatise discusses the natural law requirement to sacrifice inasmuch as sacrifice constitutes the principal exterior act of religion.⁵¹ Religion, of course, falls among the human virtues: natural law dictates the exercise of some public cult. The exercise of this cult is not abandoned to each one’s choosing, since cultic actions must befit the God who abides as giver of all good gifts. Sacrifice signifies an internal disposition of soul that gains its excellence from the destruction of what is offered, most perfectly by killing it. This essential feature of sacrifice remains in the sacramental dispensation through the enactment of what Billot will describe as a mystical slaying or “mactation” (“*destructio mystica*” or “*mystica illa*”

⁴⁸ Louis Billot, S.J., *De Ecclesiae Sacramentis. Commentarius in Tertiam Partem S. Thomae*, 5th ed. (Rome: Ex Typographia Pontificia in Istituto Pii IX, 1914).

⁴⁹ ST II-II, q. 85, prologue.

⁵⁰ For further information, see Romanus Cessario, “‘Circa res . . . aliquid fit’ (*Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 85, a. 3, ad 3): Aquinas on New Law Sacrifice,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 4 (2006): 295–312.

⁵¹ Billot, *Commentarius*, 580–592.

mactatio”). This requirement is satisfied sacramentally, *ex vi sacramenti*, in the double consecration of the bread and wine. Only a person duly constituted to accomplish this public cult can do so effectively. In short, Billot gave us an imaginative way to understand basic Catholic teaching on the eucharistic sacrifice and on the priest who does the sacrificing.

The priesthood is instituted for sacrifice, not sacrifice for the priesthood. Billot responds to objections made against a sacrificing priesthood by appeal to the Council of Trent: “*Sacrificium et sacerdotium ita Dei ordinatione coniuncta sunt, ut utrumque in omni lege existeret.*”⁵² When sacrifice is joined to sacrament, Billot further tells us, something new arises from the fact that a sacrament is a sign of the cause of our sanctification, whereas sacrifice is a sign of our interior worship. Thus sacraments do not arise from the natural law, nor can they depend on human institution, nor must they always be confected by a priest—for example, baptism and matrimony—nor do they receive their efficacy from man’s earnestness. No, sacraments work by the mode of efficient cause—“*per modum efficientiae*”—that is, they accomplish what they do by the “very fact of the action’s being performed.”⁵³ Billot concludes this introductory section with a definition. Sacrifice, he says, is an “oblation made to God of a corporeal thing by means of its real or mystical destruction enacted by a priest, as a legitimately instituted sign of the honor and the reverence that man owes to his Creator.”⁵⁴

The second section provides Billot’s account of Thomist teaching on the various kinds of sacrifices that exist within the Old and the New Covenants. Sacrifices are specified by their objectives: they exist for the purposes of praise, forgiveness of sins, thanksgiving, and petition God. The Passion of Christ, however, introduces a new line of causality into sacrifices. In the sacrifice of the Cross, the worth of the sacrifice depends exclusively on the “infinite *ex opere operantis* of Christ,” whereas “the sacrifice of the Mass finds its value *ex opere operato* inasmuch as no human unworthiness can make it unacceptable to God.”⁵⁵

⁵² Billot, *Commentarius*, 589 (citing session 23, ch. 1 of the Council).

⁵³ CCC, §1128.

⁵⁴ Billot, *Commentarius*, 592.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 595. For further discussion about the unique views of Billot on the immediate relationship between the infinite dignity of the Word and the value of the works of Christ’s human nature, see Alberto Cozzi, *La Centralità di Cristo nella Teologia di L. Billot (1846–1931)*, *Dissertatio*, Series Romana 24 (Milan: Edizione Glossa, 1999), 342–344.

This summary of Tridentine teaching on what makes the Mass efficacious introduces the third section, “De proprio sacrificio Novae Legis.”⁵⁶ Billot stresses the relationship between the sacramental Body of Christ and the Mystical Body of Christ. He sees in the sacramental signs, the bread and the wine, representations of many elements coming together to form one body. Wheat and grapes give symbolic expression to the Mystical Body that the shedding of Christ’s blood animates. Catholics recognize this doctrine. They find it beautifully expressed in the Preface that the Church prescribes for the Feast of the Sacred Heart—a Jesuit-inspired feast: “For raised up high on the Cross, he gave himself up for us with a wonderful love and poured out blood and water from his pierced side, the wellspring of the Church’s Sacraments.”⁵⁷

Following the pedagogical practices of his day, Billot constructed finely developed theses to present the principal points of Catholic doctrine under discussion. If the student of Catholic theology does not follow the argumentation, the Neo-Scholastic theologian provides the truth in bite-size form, namely, the conclusion. This practice of the Neo-Scholastics aims to achieve more than providing students with an *aide-mémoire*. The recapitulatory theses also safeguard the integrity of the Catholic faith. Recall that Modernism sought to adapt Catholic truth to cultural fashions. As his denunciation of Loisy suggests, Billot was alert to the dangers of undermining the sources of Catholic doctrine. This explains why the first of Billot’s theses on the eucharistic sacrifice, thesis 53, runs thus: “From those things which are handed over in the Scriptures about the priesthood of Jesus Christ, and from the well-known prophecy of Malachi, and also from the words of institution for the Eucharist, as well as by theological reasoning, the truth of the sacrifice of the New Law, for which Christ as Head of the body of the Church, is both victim and principal priest, is demonstrated (*demonstratur*).”⁵⁸ Pope Saint John Paul II captured this thesis as follows: “The Eucharist is indelibly marked by the event of the Lord’s passion and death, of which it is not only a reminder but the sacramental re-presentation. It is the sacrifice of the Cross perpetuated down the ages.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Billot, *Commentarius*, Loc. cit.

⁵⁷ *Roman Missal*, Preface for the Solemnity of The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

⁵⁸ Billot, *Commentarius*, 601.

⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia De Eucharistia* (2003), §11 (Vatican Website: http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecc-de-euch.html).

Secondly, thesis 54 proceeds to explicate how this sacrifice of the new law comes about within the Mass celebrated within the Church of Christ. The language initially sounds foreign. The truths that Billot defended, however, find support in the most recent disciplinary and liturgical legislation of the Church. Billot recapitulated his teaching: “The Mass with respect to its essence consists solely in the consecration of both species. At the same time, this consecratory action—from the nature of the thing (“*ex natura rei*”)—ought to be joined to the communion of the celebrant, which for that reason is prescribed as indispensable by the law.”⁶⁰ Today the Church instructs as follows: “The Communion of Priest concelebrants should proceed according to the norms prescribed in the liturgical books, always using hosts consecrated at the same Mass [cf. *Missale Romanum, Institutio Generalis*, 237–249, 85, and 157] and always with communion under both kinds being received by all of the concelebrants.”⁶¹ This provision that priests receive from the Eucharist that they have consecrated and under both species relates to their role as sacrificers. “The definition of a formal sacrifice,” Billot continues, “is said to be preserved purely and simply in the mystical slaying, that is, in the sacramental separation of the Body from the Blood under the distinct species of bread and wine.”⁶² Bishop Bossuet embellished the rhetorical quality of this expression by comparing the words of consecration spoken by priests to a “sword” that brings about the slaying or mactation.⁶³

Billot then proceeds to examine two questions related to his thesis 54. First, he researches the opinions of others about the action that constitutes precisely the sacrifice of the new law. Secondly, he inquires about what characteristics may be assigned to this action in order to verify the sacrificial character of the Eucharist. The first question occupies seven pages of inquiry that include detailed replies to objections drawn from the liturgical practices of the Latin liturgy. Billot insists again: “*tota immolationis ratio inveniatur in consecratione.*”⁶⁴ He repeats the same method of inquiry about what safeguards the formal

⁶⁰ Billot, *Commentarius*, 617.

⁶¹ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, §98 (Vatican website: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20040423_redemptionis-sacramentum_en.html).

⁶² Billot, *Commentarius*, 617.

⁶³ Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), *Méditations, la Cène, 57ème jour*, as cited in Billot, *Commentarius*, 629n1.

⁶⁴ Billot, *Commentarius*, 622.

definition of a sacrifice in the sacrifice of the Mass. Again, while he shows himself conversant with the opinions of early modern theologians, Billot returns always to the text of Aquinas: “the Eucharist is . . . a sacrifice inasmuch as it makes present Christ’s Passion.”⁶⁵ Billot discovers only one formal constitutive of sacrifice in the eucharistic action. This constitutive action occurs in the “*mactatio mystica*,” the mystical mactation that the priest effects. Billot meets no fewer than five objections to his view that come mostly from theologians of the modern period. Today the Church puts it this way: “In the ‘memorial’ of Calvary all that Christ accomplished by his passion and his death is present.”⁶⁶ Or again, “The sacrificial nature of the Eucharistic mystery cannot therefore be understood as something separate, independent of the Cross or only indirectly referring to the sacrifice of Calvary.”⁶⁷ How else can this happen than by Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet’s “mystical separation” (*la séparation mystique*) of the Body and Blood of Christ?⁶⁸

Thesis 55 treats the satisfactory character of the Eucharistic sacrifice. The Mass not only serves to praise and to thank God. The Mass also propitiates for the sins of both the living and the dead: “*Sacrificium missae . . . est ex opere operato et propitiatorium*.”⁶⁹ Students of Catholic theology recognize how the satisfactory character of the Eucharist figures in the history of Christian heresies. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* includes two paragraphs that affirm this foundational teaching about the eucharistic sacrifice. Paragraph 1366 teaches that Christ willed that the “salutary power [of his sacrifice] would be applied to the forgiveness of sins we daily commit.”⁷⁰ Paragraph 1371 teaches that the “Eucharistic sacrifice is also offered for *the faithful departed*,” who linger in Purgatory.⁷¹

Thesis 56 treats the fruits of the sacrifice. How does the priest who offers the Mass apply extensively and intensively the fruits of the Mass? When Billot ponders the question of a Mass being offered for one or many intentions, he totters. Though he admits that the priest

⁶⁵ ST III, q. 79, a. 7.

⁶⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §57.

⁶⁷ Ibid., §12.

⁶⁸ See Billot, *Commentarius*, 629n1.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 633.

⁷⁰ The text comes from the Council of Trent (*Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, ed. Peter Hünermann, Helmut Hoping, Robert L. Fastiggi, Anne Englund Nash, and Heinrich Denzinger [hereafter *DS*], 43rd ed. [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012], 1740).

⁷¹ The text comes, again, from the Council of Trent (*DS*, 1743).

can assign a “special” fruit to a given Mass, Billot finds it difficult to analyze how this special intention of the priest would bring a different effect than that of the general intention for which each Mass is offered, for members of the Church living and dead. Billot envisages no limits to the efficacy of a Mass considered in itself. To illustrate this point, Billot turns to metaphor: the same sun warms the whole earth. Billot also allows the intensive effects that flow from the Mass to differ from one person to another: for the sun melts wax more efficaciously than it does stone and iron and so forth.

Observe that the intensity of the efficaciousness of the Mass arises only from the dispositions of those who participate in its offering. Billot cedes nothing to the *sacerdos* who slays mystically. Another and earlier Roman cardinal, Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469–1534) was of a different position. Cajetan developed an explanation that corresponds to the common view of the faithful and the received practice in the Church: “intention is proper to the priest. Devotion, however, is common to him and to others.”⁷² While expounding the delicate

⁷² Thomas de Vio, Cardinal Cajetan, *Opuscula Omnia Thomae De Vio Caietani*, vol. 2 (Lugduni: I. Iuntae, 1562), 147b, lines 20–75. A portion from Quaestio II (*Utrum sacerdos celebrans pro pluribus, satisfaciatur pro singulis*) in Tractatus Tertius (*de Missae celebratione, in duas quaestiones divisus*) reads: “CONCLUSION [Thesis] If a priest who has accepted a stipend to celebrate Mass for someone accepts stipends [for the same Mass] from other people, he makes satisfaction for all in keeping with the degree of their fervor.

The Mass includes two components, viz., prayer and the eucharistic sacrifice. Hence, in this discussion, we must speak first about the sacrifice (which is primary in the Mass) and then about prayer. Furthermore, because the effect of both is manifold, viz., merit, impetration, and satisfaction, the effects must be determined separately. In addition, because the effect arises from a twofold source, viz., from *opus operatum* and from *opus operantis*, in order to have a complete understanding of the matter, only after an examination of each aspect will it be decided what straightforward answer should be given on the issue.

The sacrifice of the Mass is twofold. It is a sacrament and a sacrifice, and as a sacrament it is not relevant to our thesis, because its effect pertains only to its recipients. However, as a sacrifice it is relevant and is distinguished as *opus operantis* and as *opus operatum*. And taken as *opus operatum*, this sacrifice is looked at in two ways, viz., as taken in itself absolutely and as taken in itself and applied to someone. If this sacrifice is considered as *opus operatum* taken absolutely, then it is the immolation of Jesus Christ so that what is offered is Jesus Christ. And the value of this sacrifice is infinite, so that it is infinitely impetrative, meritorious, and satisfying. Hence, the effect is infinite as is that of the passion of Christ. . . . However, the infinity of the satisfaction of Christ crucified is in its sufficiency and not in its efficacy, and in its nature as an

question of how Mass intentions work, Billot would have done well to attend to the Thomist commentatorial tradition, even to the views of that “bastard,” Cajetan.

The witness of Louis Billot on the sacraments, especially on the Holy Eucharist comes to completion with a short epilogue that draws (in a *ressourcement* mode) on the writings of both Gregory of Nyssa and Saint Augustine. In order to point out the great mystery that the sacrifice of the Mass enacts, Billot composes a plea for humility. This humility takes as its starting point the manger of the infant Christ. Billot makes his own the thought of Saint Augustine: “Are you not ready for the wedding banquet of the heavenly Father, then acknowledge in faith the lowly manger of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” Humility leads to sacrifice. Billot lived this sacrifice in his social engagement and

indeterminate universal cause, i.e., not determined to any person. Thus, this sacrifice of its very nature is of infinite sufficiency and indeterminate efficacy. And as the efficacy of the passion of Christ is determined by the sacrament received, so the efficacy of this sacrifice is by one’s degree of fervor. And since fervor determines the application of the sacrifice, in speaking of the effect of this sacrifice as only *opus operatum* taken in itself, it is clear that it has no concrete effect in anybody, but only in relation to God does it have acceptability, thanksgiving, commemoration, and the like. Here we see the error of many who think that this sacrifice as only *opus operatum* has a determined merit or a determined satisfaction which is applied to someone; that this is not true is already clear. This is confirmed thus: since as *opus operatum* it is of infinite power, there is no major reason from the nature of making satisfaction why it should give only limited satisfaction and not much more.

If, however, this sacrament is understood as applied to someone, then its effect is finite in proportion to the degree of fervor of those making the offering or of those for whom the offering is being made. Therefore, because in the application of this sacrifice there are two factors, viz., the application itself to someone and the concrete effect in that someone, two acts also contribute to the determination of this application, viz., intention and fervor. For intention applies this sacrifice to someone, but the effect corresponds to the fervor. Hence, intention is proper to the priest, while fervor is common to him and others. Thus, in the canon of the Mass the priest in exercising this increase of the applicative intention of this sacrifice says: *Tibi offerimus pro ecclesia tua sancta papa nostro &c, &, Meme[n]to Domine famulorum famularumque, &c. & omnium circumstantium*. Then he adds an act of fervor: *Quorum tibi fides cognita est, & nota devotio*. This refers not only to those present but also to others. With these words he is making known that the application of this sacrifice is made not only by an intention but also by added fervor, so that the greater is the fervor of those [by and for whom the intention is made], so much greater is the satisfaction applied to them from that infinite satisfaction.” (The translation of Cajetan’s Latin was done from the 1562 edition by Rev. Msgr. Laurence McGrath of the Archdiocese of Boston).

instructed others about it in his, albeit eclectic, Thomism. What best distinguishes Louis Billot, however, remains his example. When it came to submitting to the will of the Pope, this Jesuit embraced the humility of the manger. No wonder he moved away from central Rome in order to end his days close by a sanctuary devoted to Our Lady.

Even when allowance is made for his personal religious dispositions, Thomists should generally conclude that, all in all, Billot remains a tragic figure. Had he read the Spanish Thomists, Francisco de Vitoria, O.P. (c. 1483–1546), for example, Billot might have developed a more nuanced view about modern political forms of government. Had he followed Cajetan, Billot would have made a better contribution to understanding the intimate relationship of the priest to the sacrifice of the Mass. What perhaps offers the most instructive illustration, had he paid attention to Dominic Bañez (1528–1604), Billot may not have left the intensive efficaciousness of the Mass to be explained completely from the side of the communicant.

Some who read Billot may conclude that he appears much saner than do many theologians today; indeed, some may even have found him helpful at points.⁷³ Ultimately, however, Billot's eclecticism does not fully ensure the integral vigor of the *sacra doctrina*. To examine, however, what guarantees this vigor, would require that we undertake a fuller examination of the Thomist commentatorial tradition than time now allows. So we best leave the witness of Cardinal Billot with his meditation on humility.

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⁷³ See Giancarlo Vergano, *La forza delle grazie. La teoria della causalità sacramentale di L. Billot* (Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, 2008), as reported in Filippo Rizzi, "Louis Billot. Il Cardinale del Gran Rifuto," *Avvenire.it*, <http://www.avvenire.it/Cultura/Pagine/cardinale-rifiuto.aspx>.