

attempt at asserting presence. The land that covered the blood will cover itself from the murderer; it will no longer open its treasures and fertility to Cain.

An attentive analysis of the terms designating sacrifice—*minchah* and *korban*—unlocks the meaning of the practice of sacrifice as an offering brought before God and aimed at establishing the bond of the gift cycle. Given within a hierarchical structure, sacrifice is an offering as opposed to a gift, thus opening a possible gap between giving and receiving. The trauma of rejection and its violent outcome is at the root of ritual as a protocol of approach that attempts to bridge the abyss of offering. Why is rejection inherent in approach? A more nuanced look at the problem will reveal another relationship between violence and sacrifice, this time in the form of the trial: the relationship between sacrifice and love.

Sacrifice, Exchange, and Love

I

Love is a noninstrumental relationship outside of what appears to be the sphere of exchange. The other is loved for his own sake, for what he is, rather than for what can be derived from him. The mark of love as noninstrumental is attentiveness. Lust or contract, love's rivals, are not attentive to the other; their focus is on satisfaction and interest. Attentiveness as a form of affirmation is what makes love so precious.

Love is a difficult task within relationships of power asymmetry and total dependency. God wishes to be loved, not only feared or admired—a nearly impossible quest, given the total dependency of humans on him. With such dependency, the human temptation to form an instrumental relationship to God will always lurk in the background. Can someone love a person on whom his fate and that of his loved ones are dependent? The tendency to instrumentalize is in fact immanent in the nature of this great asymmetry of power. Given this, God suffers from the rich-spouse predicament: he can never be sure that he is not loved for his money, or to put it more bluntly, he will always be in doubt as to whether he is loved altogether.

In the Job narrative, this divine self-doubt is what made God so vulnerable to Satan's seduction. When God praised Job to Satan, he was actually inviting Satan's challenge: Maybe Job's loyalty is all about the goods that you bestowed on him? Take away the goods and let us see what happens. The poisonous drops that Satan spilled were effective. He was granted permission to embark on the road of tormenting Job, because he echoed a deep-seated inner doubt. Trial has its roots in the quest for love's proof within an asymmetrical relationship of dependency and power.

Suffering and withdrawal can be one unfortunate way out of this dilemma of love, but there is another, more awful path. Given the noninstrumental nature of love, sacrificing for the sake of someone is a mark of love. Yet

assuming the dependency on God, is a genuine sacrifice possible here? What sort of offering can be brought to God—a gift that will not be considered part of the exchange relationship? With the Almighty, who can always reciprocate something greater and better, as the addressee of such an offering, any offering to him might as well become a piece of the economy of exchange rather than an expression of love. The other foundational narrative of sacrifice in Genesis—the binding of Isaac—refers to such a gift outside the realm of exchange.

All sacrifices might be a form of exchange—offerings to ensure the gift cycle—and yet sacrificing a son could not serve that purpose. Someone might sacrifice all his property, but based on a calculated expectation of getting a greater share in return. A person might sacrifice all that he has and in turn receive more. This isn't the case with the sacrifice of a son. For Abraham, nothing could compensate for his son's loss, since a child has ultimate value. God, in his trial of Abraham, wished to ascertain that Abraham didn't worship him simply because he had given him a son at such an old age. He tested that premise by demanding that Abraham sacrifice his Isaac. In this way, the same anxiety of instrumentality gave birth to this horrifying request. The urge to bestow is essential to love, but the loving partner wants that bestowing to be *part* of the relationship and not the *reason* for it. The trial's purpose is supposed to guarantee giving as part of the relationship, rather than serve as a rationale for

it. The gift will be haunted by this imbalance, especially within an asymmetrical structure of power.

When Abraham showed his willingness to offer something that could never be reciprocated, God renounced his desire for the gift's actualization. God, who promised Abraham descendants and life, commanded him not to touch the child. Abraham instead sacrifices a substitute for Isaac: a ram, caught in the bushes. This act establishes another meaning to the exchange implied in the sacrifice. The animal sacrifice is a symbolic replacement for self-sacrifice, or the sacrifice of a son.²³ In its place as a foundational narrative of the sacrifice, the binding of Isaac outlines the meaning of the sacrificial gesture: *the sacrifice that as a gift seems to be part of an exchange cycle, is actually a symbol for a gift that cannot be reciprocated*. This substitution allows the operation of the gift cycle. God will respond to such sacrifice since it ensures symbolically that his bestowing is part of the relationship rather than the reason for it.

The role of sacrifice as a substitute might be connected to another attempt to distinguish a gift exchange from a market one. This distinction involves the different form in which the duty of reciprocity is viewed in these practices. In the market, the receiver is legally bound to reciprocate; with the gift, reciprocity is only a moral duty. If it were a legal duty for a person to reciprocate a gift, a duty that can be enforced by law, this would taint the act of giving, turning it into something driven by an

instrumental calculation in the first place. The divide between the legal and moral duty for a receiver to reciprocate is anchored in the fact that in gift exchange, giving is considered a part of the relationship, not the justification for it. In the market, the exchange is the rationale for the encounter, not its expression. In the gift cycle, therefore, a lack of reciprocity on the receiver's part doesn't serve as a legal reason for a claim to return the gift or demand reciprocity. It might be cause for a more severe reaction, with the receiver opting out of the relationship altogether, since he views it as exploitative and asymmetrical. The giver whose gift was not reciprocated might feel that he had been betrayed as well as fooled into believing there was a relationship apart from the giving.

In order to underscore the distinction more clearly, let me draw attention to the microstructures of gift giving. Imagine that a guest comes to a dinner party bearing the gift of a sum of money equivalent to the giver's estimation of the cost of his meal. The host would most likely be offended by this gift, because it would turn the occasion of a friendly dinner party into an instance of market exchange. A more socially acceptable gift here would be something that served as a substitute, a kind of token for the guest's appreciation of the host's kindness as well as a sign of the guest's future intention to reciprocate. The gifts that families of patients present to hospital staff are made in a similar spirit. These gifts are regarded not as a form of compensation for the nurses' and orderlies'

work but rather as an expression of gratitude for the patient care they provided. Such tokens have no place in a market exchange, in which the purchaser of a commodity must offer up more than a sign of thanks. The sacrifice, on the contrary, ought to exemplify just such a sign, and if it does, it is marked as belonging to the domain of gratitude and love expression instead of the very different sphere of the market economy.

This line of reasoning allows us to understand why the giving of cash can be perceived as an insult versus a tribute. In bringing an object rather than cash to a dinner party or any analogous occasion, the giver expresses her attentiveness to the recipient's tastes, which is the ultimate mark of care. The best gift, moreover, is something superfluous—that is, something that the recipient wouldn't necessarily have bought for herself with her own resources. (For this reason, it would be strange to bring a bag of groceries as a gift.) Yet the gift's redundancy is always in danger of deteriorating to a functional exchange.

The line between gifts and commodities is never firm and sometimes blurs, leading some theorists of the gift to regard gift giving as a form of market exchange. Pierre Bourdieu offers one description of the gift cycle:

Gift exchange is an exchange in and by which the agents strive to conceal the objective truth of the exchange, i.e. the calculation which guarantees the equity of the exchange. If “fair exchange,” the direct swapping of equiv-

alent values, is the truth of gift exchange, gift exchange is a swapping which cannot acknowledge itself as such.²⁴

This is a mistaken reading, I would argue, since gifts function as ritual symbols that aim at solidifying and expressing a variety of relationships.²⁵ The gift certificate, exchange slip, and bridal Web sites for retail department stores posting engaged couples' lists of desired household objects before weddings are all examples of such blurring. All are attempts to impose indirect market efficiency on a practice that rests fundamentally on redundancy. Yet even in such cases of market intrusion, efforts to avoid cash payments and approximate superfluosness still preserve a semblance of gift giving. (Of course, cash giving is not unheard of, but it is most common when the relationship between the giver and recipient is primary and close. A close relative such as a brother or an uncle may write a check as a wedding gift, since the solidity of the relationship isn't in question.)

The three sacrificial acts examined thus far—Cain and Abel, the sacrifice brought by Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu along with their deaths, and the binding of Isaac, or the *akedah*—attest to the complexities of sacrifice as an offering and the possibility of rejection inherent in the act; the function of ritual as a protocol presumed to overcome the anxiety of rejection, and the subsequent lethal price of any attempt to divert from this protocol via false intimacy; and the inherent fragility of sacrifice as a gift, given its potential to degrade into a mere mar-

ket exchange owing to the asymmetry of power, and the subsequent trial of love that springs out of that tension.

The particular concerns that arise from each of these constitutive moments also depend on an underlying diversity, assumed by each of them, in the image of God. In Cain's and Abel's offerings, God appears as an inscrutable sovereign whose love and rejection is delegated mysteriously. In the *akedah*, he emerges as "the rich husband," a tormented, dependent personality who is needy precisely because of his metaphysical superiority. Finally, with the development of the priestly protocol, God is an all-powerful being approached by procedurally agreed-on forms. This variety of images defining the different aspects of the offering doesn't pose a contradiction but rather, when put together, attests to the multifaceted nature of the divine being as experienced in the biblical tradition.²⁶

II

In establishing a connection between sacrifice and substitute, I can now point to a central feature of sacrifice: atonement. Atonement is a procedure through which the initially deserved retributive punishment is revoked based on the fact that the punishment can be transposed to the symbolic realm. The symbolization of the punishment can be achieved by two means: directing the punishment to a representation of the subject (such as the sacrificial animal), or replacing the punishment itself

with a lesser symbolic pain administered on the same subject.

Scholars of biblical sacrificial ritual have identified two functions of the sacrificial blood that are key to atonement (*kaparah*) in the biblical tradition. The first is that of cleansing. The Hebrew verb *le-khaper* stems from the Akkadian *kuppuru*, which means to clean, to purify. The sin, which takes on an ontological quality, accumulates in the midst of the community and causes the withdrawal of God's presence from the temple. The sacrificial ritual, and in particular the Yom Kippur one, is a cleansing of sin from the temple, ensuring the return of God's protective presence. The blood of the sacrifice, when sprinkled on the altar, serves as a cleansing agent, purifying the temple from the stain of sin.²⁷

The second function of the sacrificial blood, connected to the second meaning of *kaparah*, is that of ransom. In the book of Numbers, God forbids people from accepting "a ransom (*kofer*) for the life of a murderer who is guilty of capital crime; he must be put to death" (Num. 35:31). Another ransom reference occurs in the book of Leviticus in the prohibition against drinking blood: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you for making expiation for your lives upon the altar; it is the blood, as life, that effects expiation" (Lev. 17:11). As Rashi notes in his commentary on this passage, blood as a representation of life can serve as a ransom—that is, a symbolic substitute for the sacrificer's life.²⁸

If the sacrifice is to work in this second sense, as a symbolic substitute, it is essential that the one who brings the sacrifice designate it as a substitute. The presenter thereby creates a representational relationship between himself and the sacrifice. This relationship is implied in the act preceding the sacrifice's offering, as in this passage: "He shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, that it may be acceptable in his behalf, in expiation for him" (Lev. 1:5). In this gesture, the gift and expiation are mingled. Atonement is achieved through the symbolic substitute of the self. Alternatively, ritual expiation might involve yet another procedure in which a victim is not brought to the altar but rather sent away, as the one who carries the sin. In such a case, the animal is not a symbolic representation; it is a vehicle for projection:

Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat and confess over it all the iniquities and transgressions of the Israelites, whatever their sins, putting them on the head of the goat; and it shall be sent off to the wilderness through a designated man. Thus the goat shall carry on it all their iniquities to an inaccessible region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness. (Lev. 17:21–22)

When Aaron holds the goat, and combines that with the speech act of confession, he transfers the burden of sin to the animal, which then carries it away. Confession in its most primary sense is not an act of disclosure or

admission; it alleviates the burden and passes it on. This sense of confession has been preserved to this day, even in secular contexts such as psychotherapy that are bereft of the assumption of the ontology of sin being passed from one subject to another. Confession is often experienced as an act of letting go, or liberating the self from a hidden burden. And yet the contemporary therapeutic context still retains the idea of transference, if only as a metaphor when the secret's burden is passed on to a shared carrier—as if the weight of secrecy is greater than the possible shame of disclosure.

The substitution characteristic of sacrifice in its biblical sense is also an attempt on the offerer's part to deflect violence away from him toward the sacrificial object or being. The offerer is thus motivated by fear and anxiety (rather than, as Girard suggests, anger). He does not postulate the sacrifice as a substitute for venting his anger and rage, thereby satisfying his desire for revenge without opening a new cycle of violence, as understood by Girard. Instead, the sacrifice is a substitute for the violence that the offerer himself might deserve. This function gives rise to a second kind of anxiety, which is an outcome of the sacrificial logic. Previously I examined the offerer's fear of rejection; substitution raises another worry. This anxiety is predicated on a firm sense of one's own guilt or criminality—that one has done wrong; that some act of violence must occur in retribution; and that one's proposed substitute—the victim or scapegoat on which one hopes the violence will be directed—is ba-

sically innocent. Criminals themselves cannot become sacrificial victims. The victim's innocence is what makes him capable of becoming a vehicle for ultimate projection. For this reason, the biblical rules guiding the choice of the sacrificial victim prescribe that one find an innocent, unblemished creature. A crime against an innocent substitute has to occur in order to allow for atonement.

The innocence of the sacrificed subject is at the root of an important linguistic development in the term *korban* in Hebrew and other languages. In Modern Hebrew, *korban* designates not only a sacrifice but also a crime victim. The media and law, for instance, both describe rape victim as *korban ones*. In biblical, rabbinic, and medieval Hebrew, by contrast, no such use exists. *Korban* only means an "offering."

The idea of sacrifice was first expanded to include crime victims as well as offerings in languages other than Hebrew. The Arabic term *adcha* indicates a sacrifice to God as well as a crime victim (*dachiya*), and the German term *opfer* and the Spanish word *victima* are further examples along these lines, as is the word "victim" in English, which according to *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* means "a living being sacrificed to some deity in the performance of religious act" (in religious usage), or "put to death, tortured or mulcted by another." In both the Hebrew and Latin, the primary meaning of "victim" was an offering to God, and it was extended to include victims of crime. Although the contemporary use in the first sense—as a sacrifice—is

now rare, this was not always so. In Latin, the extension never occurred, and the term *victima* is solely used for an offering to the gods and not for crime victims. The same is true of Greek, which uses different words to designate an offering and a crime victim. The essential commonality between the two senses, and perhaps the source of the extension from the primary to the secondary meaning, is undeniably the victim's innocence. The one who is attacked and violated is as innocent as the object offered to the gods.²⁹ A criminal killed in a gang war will not be portrayed as *korban*, or a victim, since he lacks innocence.

The expansion of the term from sacrifice as an offering to the description of crime victims is not only a linguistic phenomenon; it coincided with the development of the Christian tradition. Jesus was simultaneously an innocent victim of a crime, put to death for no justified reason by Jews and Romans, and the ultimate atoning sacrifice.³⁰ The foundational narrative of the sacrifice in Christianity, in other words, merges the crime victim and the sacrifice into the same persona. Why is this so? I would suggest that this came about in an attempt to overcome the inherent tension in the substitution idea.

This point needs further explanation. As we have seen, in order to serve as a substitute, the sacrifice has to be innocent. The necessary innocence of the sacrifice creates an inherent crime in any sacrifice; the atoned party achieves atonement through an innocent substitute. The act of atonement seems to need atonement in itself.³¹

When a human being—such as Jesus—is the substitute, tension escalates, and indeed in certain trends within the Christian doctrine, the people blamed for Jesus’s death are those he atoned for, since he died because of their sins.³² The claim that a different party, rather than those who achieved atonement, performed the killing, may in an improper fashion defuse such difficult stress. Whereas Jews and/or Romans executed Jesus, those who had been expiated by his sacrifice constitute another group—one that remained faithful to his mission, and mourned and resisted his death. The Jews and/or Romans, we might say, committed the crime whose collateral benefit was the atonement of the faithful.

Jesus had to be both a victim and a sacrifice. Had he been a “pure” offering instead—without having suffered victimization at the hands of his Jewish and Roman betrayers and tormentors—the atoned party would have been in an intolerable situation. This group would have made amends through its own murderous act. The solution was to introduce a third party as the guilty, criminal element responsible and blamed for the crime. Thus, the desire to avoid violence toward the innocent substitute leads the atoned party—the party of the faithful—to construct and blame a guilty party for the victim’s killing. The guilty group, tragically, will serve repeatedly in the history of Christianity as a future target of Christian-generated violence.

The presumed guilty ones—at first understood as Jews and Romans, but over time, seen as the Jews alone—

will remain associated with and a target of violence, since without such violence and blame the sacrifice itself is tainted. This logic forces the emergence of a double scapegoat: first, Jesus, who is the innocent carrier for the community's sin, and second, the Jews, who designated the former to be the scapegoat. Anti-Semitism serves as a mechanism to absolve the troubling guilt stemming from the necessary innocence of the sacrificial victim.

Within their own history of thought and practice, however, Christians have dealt with the paradox of innocence in a theologically far deeper and richer way—involved a reversal of the offering. God himself offered his son for everyone's sake. The New Testament and patristic literature has depicted Jesus by using a variety of sacrificial analogies—the Pascal lamb, the scapegoat, the *tamid* (the daily sacrifice), Isaac to God's Abraham in a replay of the *akedah*, and the high priest sacrificing himself instead of the sacrifice. If there is a problem with the sacrificial victim's innocence, it is a problem of the God who offered him, rather than of the atoned party that accepted the offering.

This reversal represents not only a resolution of the issue of innocence; it is also an upheaval in the offering's basic structure. Recall that the very concept of an offering as distinct from a gift entails the traumatic possibility of rejection. Ritual is the attempt to bridge the traumatic gap between giving and receiving. Since it is God who initiated the offering of his son—thereby reversing the hierarchy of giving through an act of love—there