

Christian Spirituality as Sacrifice?

Ivan Platovnjak*

ivan.platovnjak@teof.uni-lj.si

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Sacrifice together with its various focuses and forms is present in every religion, including Christianity. It is also a part of every spirituality that constitutes a lived religion in every dimension of human life and work. Jesus Christ and his one-time sacrifice of himself on the cross have abolished all types of sacrifices present in the Old Testament and other religions, because he ultimately redeemed every person and the entire world. A justified question arises regarding this fact: Can we talk about Christianity, i.e. Christian spirituality as a lived faith in Christ's Spirit as sacrifice? If the answer is no, why not? If yes, why so? What type of sacrifice is present in Christian spirituality if it is lived in Christ's Spirit (Rom 8: 4.14)? In the first section of the discussion, the questions are answered by analyzing the results of the author's survey entitled Sacrifice in Christian Spirituality (Survey 2016). The second section provides answers to the above questions based on the analysis and on certain authors' opinions demonstrating the two fundamental conceptualizations of sacrifice as giving up and self-giving.

Keywords: spirituality, Christianity, sacrifice, survey, giving up, self-giving, ascetic spirituality, Eucharistic spirituality.

Introduction

Sacrifice together with its various focuses and forms is present in every religion, including Christianity. It is also a part of every spirituality that constitutes a lived religion in every dimension of human life and work.

Jesus Christ and his one-time sacrifice of himself on the cross have abolished all types of sacrifices present in the Old Testament and other religions, because he ultimately redeemed every person and the entire world. He says of himself: »For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone

* Ivan Platovnjak, PhD, Assist. Prof., Spiritual Theology, Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana; Address: Poljanska 4, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia.

who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life« (Jn 3:16). »No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends« (Jn 15:13).

A justified question arises regarding this fact: Can we talk about Christianity, i.e. Christian spirituality as a lived faith in Christ's Spirit¹ as sacrifice? If the answer is no, why not? If yes, why so? What type of sacrifice is present in Christian spirituality if it is lived in Christ's Spirit as briefly defined by the apostle Paul (cf. Rom 8:4.14; 1 Cor 2:14–15; Gal 5:18)?

The author tried to answer these questions in the following discussion. In the first section, the questions will be answered by analyzing the results of the author's survey entitled *Sacrifice in Christian Spirituality* (2016).² The survey was conducted among those who try to live Christian spirituality in their lives. The second section will provide answers to the above questions based on the analysis and on certain authors' opinions on this topic. Two fundamental conceptualizations of sacrifice as giving up and self-giving, their presence in the ascetic and Eucharistic Christian spirituality as well as the basic criteria for judging the realization of sacrifice in Christ's Spirit will be discussed.

1. Aspects of Sacrifice in the Light of Sacrifice in Christian Spirituality Survey

By analyzing the results of the *Sacrifice in Christian Spirituality* Survey in this section, the author demonstrates how Christians who try to live their faith understand the presence of sacrifice in their spirituality: Is Christian spirituality sacrificing or not? How should sacrifice be realized in Christian spirituality?

1.1 Who Were the Survey Respondents?

The survey (2016) entitled *Sacrifice in Christian Spirituality* as drafted by the author consisted of 28 questions. It was active on the website <https://www.lka.si> from April 10 to May 8, 2016. 1298 respondents answered the questions only partially, whereas 1093 of them completed the entire survey (30% males and 70% females). The lowest number of respondents were aged under 25 (9%). Every age group of 26–35, 36–45, 46–55, and the group with people above 56, corresponds to about 20% of the entire survey sample. The largest proportions of respondents were married (52%). Twenty-two percent were single. Among these, 10% were seminarians, consecrated persons, and priests, 5% were divorced and

¹ Cf. Philip SHELDRAKE, *Spirituality. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, University Press, 2012., 4-6.

² Raziskava. Žrtvovanje v krščanski duhovnosti. Avtorjev osebni arhiv [Survey. Sacrifice in Christian Spirituality. Author's personal archives], 2016.

4% were widowed. Based on their education, the respondents were grouped as follows: 37% obtained a pre-Bologna reform university degree, 24% earned a higher education degree, 22% graduated from a high school, whereas 9% hold a Master’s Degree or a PhD. 11% of respondents graduated from the Ljubljana-based Faculty of Theology. Most survey participants were employed (58%) at the time. In respect to their religiousness – regardless of whether they practice their religion – most respondents replied that they are religious (60%), whereas 30% claimed to be very religious. Only 2% of all respondents were not religious.³

Most survey participants attend services once a week or more (75%). Only 4% replied they do not attend service. At the same time, the following is very important to most respondents: personal prayer (74%), the Blessed Sacrament (63%), the Sacrament of Penance (53%), reading and contemplating the Word of God (47%), attending faith meetings (35%), and meditation and contemplation (35%) (Chart 1).

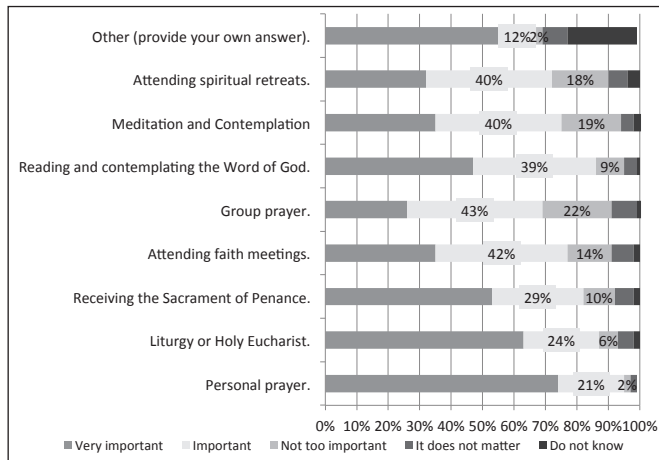


Chart 1: How important are the above notions in your life?⁴

Most survey participants relatively strongly believe in God (89%), forgiveness of sins (85%), the triune God (81%), heaven (80%), and resurrection (78%), whereas only 52% believe in Church. At the same time, many strongly believe in the existence of soul (88%) and Mary (83%). More than a half believe in power of prayer to the saints (63%), miracles (60%), devil (59%), and hell (57%). Only a few believe in reincarnation (8%) and fortune-telling (12%).

Chart 2 shows the answers to the questions on what the respondents have put or are still putting into practice in their spiritual lives. More than a half of 1074 respondents attended religious classes from primary school (64%) to young adult/student age (53%). Almost the same number of respondents is

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

now actively participating in the pastoral work of their parish (54%) and are members of various spiritual groups (prayer, biblical, marriage groups etc.; 53%). Many of them regularly read spiritual literature (66%), while 47% have obtained some degree of education in the field of religion, theology, spirituality etc. (Chart 2).

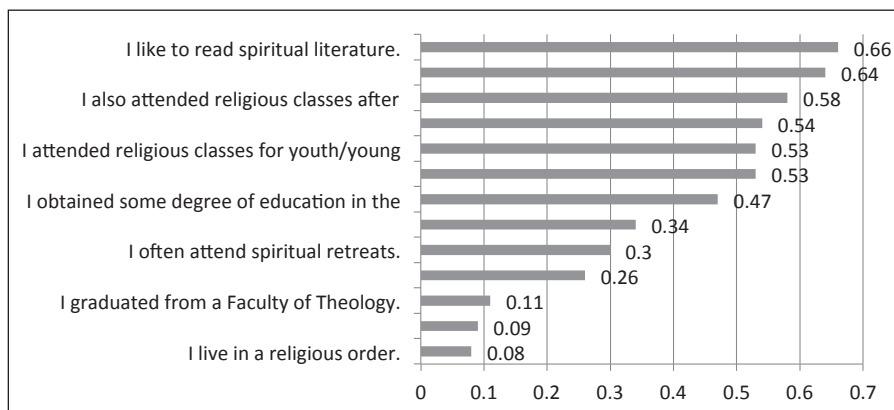


Chart 2: To date, I put or have put into practice the following.⁵

To conclude, the largest proportion of survey respondents were very religious Christians who practice the Christian faith and believe in its core truths. The sample is relatively large and adequately represents very religious and active Christians in the Slovenian Church. It covers all age groups of adult Christians approximately equally, and includes both genders, every status, and education level. However, this survey does not reveal the opinion of marginal and distanced Christians on the subject matter.

1.2 Common Meaning of Sacrifice

In the first part of the survey, the respondents were asked to write short answers as to what comes to their mind first when they hear the word *sacrifice*. The author introduced this question to explore what meaning is ascribed to this word by the respondents (1216 replies), i.e. how this word is »internalized« and latently present in them. Many of them noted several meanings of this word, which is why 1480 »meanings« of the word *sacrifice* were recorded.

Chart 3 illustrates that the word *sacrifice* was associated with *giving up* together with its various aspects 412-times: »To give up yourself/something that is important to you/bad habits/egoism to the benefit of the other/community«.

⁵ Ibid.

This statement represents slightly less than a quarter of all records. Among other things, some noted: »Giving up a certain wish to achieve a higher goal«. »Giving up myself and giving something, I like most«. »To give up something I prefer, but to sacrifice this for the good of something or someone«.

In 203 cases, the respondents recognized something *negative* in this word: either themselves or others as *sacrifices*, human or animal sacrifice. Some of them noted: »To sacrifice yourself for somebody else, to be a sacrifice«. »It means to be an offering, something negative«. »Something negative: Something that is forcibly taken away from you (including life), something unjust and something that causes suffering«. »I give up something for the benefit of other. But, personally, I prefer the expression self-giving, because I associate sacrifice with non-voluntary, lamenting, blaming giving of yourself. Jesus has sacrificed himself with unconditional love, whereas a man is not capable of such sacrifice. People can make a gift of themselves to a greater or lesser extent. Jesus was sacrificed for us as a sacrificial lamb once and for all. I cannot picture myself as being capable of sacrificing for the others: Such self-image would seem conceited«.

The meaning of *sacrifice* as *self-giving* was mentioned 166-times: »to make a gift of yourself, to live for something, to devote something you have (life, time, talents, etc.) to the others/community«. »Free, unselfish giving, serving, love« as a meaning of the word *sacrifice* was noted on 138 occasions (Chart 3). Thus, the second most common meaning of the word *sacrifice* was *self-giving*. Among such records, the following were found: »When I hear the word sacrifice, I first think of sacrificing out of love«. »To give my life, my suffering«. »To give my time, my work for someone else; this actually means that you give yourself to be at disposal for others«. »I experience the positive meaning in the word self-giving which is something that a person gives freely out of love (as an answer to love that this person receives), which may also include life and is thus not unjust«.

This word reminded them of *Jesus' sacrifice* only in 133 cases. Only 15 answers reveal the association of this word with *following Jesus Christ*, living your life according to the gospel (Chart 3). This was noted in this regard: »The only true sacrifice is Jesus Christ. If I live in the spirit of the resurrected Jesus Christ and follow him, then I can sacrifice myself out of love to him«. »Primarily, Christ was the victim (offering) of the people, but his love to the people transformed his sacrifice into a self-gift«. »I first think of Jesus as a person who is my role model in giving of yourself for others so that others may have life«.

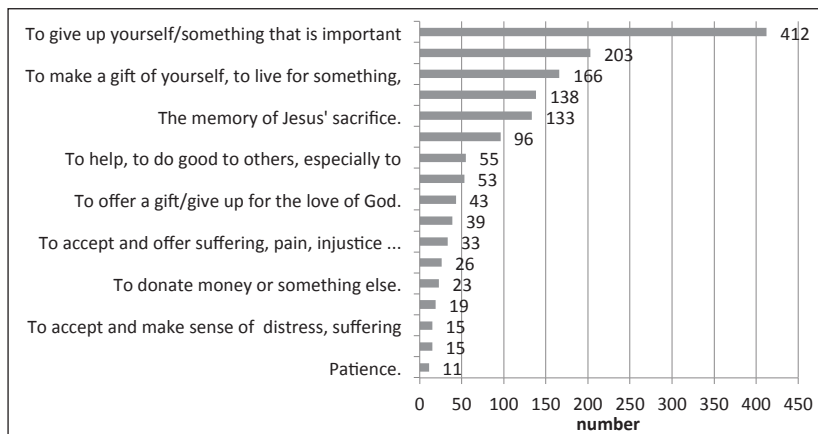


Chart 3: What comes to your mind first when you hear the word *sacrifice*?⁶

1.3 Sacrifice in the Light of Lived Faith or Spirituality

The respondents were invited to provide short descriptions of what the word/notion *sacrifice* means to them in the context of their lived faith/spirituality. Many of the 1142 survey participants included definitions with several meanings of the given word (Chart 4).

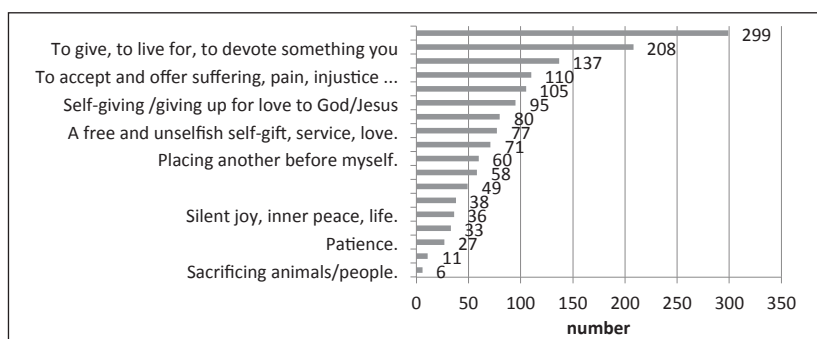


Chart 4: What does the word *sacrifice* mean to you in the context of your lived faith or spirituality?⁷

Some fundamental meanings of *sacrifice* can be observed in the answers to this question. Again, the most frequent response was the concept of *sacrifice as giving up* (299-times): »To give up yourself/something that is important to me/bad habits/egoism to the benefit of the other/community« (Chart 4). The

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

following explanations of this meaning are found in the answers: »To give up something for the benefit of other person«. »To give up or change the plans I have made in line with my wishes, needs, and expectations when I see a need of the other person; to give up in order to be at disposal of others«. »To give up yourself, your own will, and the search for your own pleasure so that you can recognize other persons' needs, so you can love«. »To give up sin and weaknesses and to start a new life in the felt pain for something beautiful, just like birth, when in a moment you forget everything and start to live something new«.

The second most frequent response was the concept of *sacrifice as self-giving* (208-times): »To give, to live for, to devote something you have (life, time, talents, etc.) for others/community« (Chart 4). This meaning appeared in 30% fewer answers compared to *sacrifice as giving up*. The respondents often listed words such as: self-giving, to live for something, to be in for something, to persist in faithfulness or in accepted mission, to be at disposal, to devote your life, time, talents, skills... They often also clearly state that they do this for the betterment of others (their close ones within their marriage or in the family circle or others they live with, as well as work colleagues, fellow Christians, those in need, the sick, the elderly etc.) and to the better of various groups they belong to (most often within the parish). This is reflected in the following two answers: »To me, self-giving is to make a gift of myself or my time, talents, and work for the good of others and the community that I am entrusted with«. »The meaning of life is in self-giving, because there is no point in living only for yourself«. In 49 answers, it was absolutely clear that the reason for *sacrifice as self-giving/giving up* are spouse or family members, and oftentimes children. The next answer simply demonstrates this fact: »To be at disposal of my family«.

In 95 responses, the explicitly stated reason for *self-giving/giving up* was the love to God/Jesus Christ (Chart 4). This reason was summarized in the following responses: »I too try to transform every sacrifice into a self-gift together with Jesus Christ... This is the only way for the sacrifice to lose the devastating power and to give purpose to self-giving«. »Jesus' sacrifice is the example and he is the path«. »I have to live sacrifice as self-giving, because this way my gift (out of love and freedom) is a result of love with which God (or a human) loves me. This love is valuable, because it is not because of my own will, but from the mercy of God«.

Seventy-seven answers emphasized that *sacrifice* must be a truly free and unselfish *self-gift*, service, or love put into practice. »Only within love does the sacrifice obtain its true purpose and meaning«, noted one respondent. Otherwise, such sacrifice is only fictive or false, as the others claimed. *Sacrifice* is »an opportunity to make a gift of yourself that brings/gives passion to life, it helps you overcome yourself«.

80 respondents considered *sacrifice* as »regularly taking the time to pray, attend the holy mass, fastening, and performing other ascetic exercises«. Many thought of *sacrifice* as »accepting and giving a purpose to your own ordeal, suffering, or problems because of the others or the community they live in« (58-times).

In 105 cases, the respondents emphasized that *sacrifice* means »following the example of Jesus Christ«. *Sacrifice* is the fruit of life in accordance with gospel and Jesus' example. This is effectively illustrated in the following responses: »Sacrifice is actually a self-gift: of your efforts, work, giving up... for the better of others following the example of Jesus who gave his life for us; we can do this by his help«. »You need to put Jesus in the first place and ask yourself in every situation what would he do: Should I and how should I put a certain person first, or a situation requiring something beyond my powers (to give up something, e.g. to be right all the time); to give myself, time, means...).«. »Sacrifice means an active life in accordance with the gospel«. In only 38 cases, the respondents explicitly stated that this word reminds them of Jesus' sacrifice. There were 33 instances of considering *sacrifice as personal and spiritual growth*, whereas others experience silent joy, inner peace, life (36 instances). This is reflected in the answers such as: »Sacrifice in the context of lived faith means joy«. »By giving a purpose to sacrifice, my soul is filled with joy«.

In 71 responses, the survey participants stated that they find this word challenging and difficult to understand its true meaning (Chart 4). Many consider the word »*sacrifice* as negative«. Although they do not explicitly mention this, they tend to automatically replace/swap it with the word *self-giving, service, love, giving of yourself* etc. The word *sacrifice* reminds many of *sacrifice as offering* what nobody likes. At the same time, they believe that God does not want them to be *offerings*, because He himself is Mercy and Love.

This is aptly illustrated in the following answers: »I understand sacrifice as dying to something, to give up something, meaning that you yourself are the sacrifice. This is not free and I see no virtue in this. What I really like, what brings me joy that only heaven can give, is self-giving. Freely chosen sacrifice for a new life. Like a grain dying joyfully. The death of this one grain brings many new grains resulting in more life«. »I experience sacrifice more like setting your teeth, no freedom, being forced into something which is what I do not want to live. By contrast, I do want to practice self-giving«. »To me, sacrifice is a notion that describes an unaccepted suffering which burdens a person, in contrast to self-giving where a person consciously accepts such suffering. Self-giving is God's way of accepting evil, the burden of life. Sacrifice is merely a human aspect with no forgiveness, encompassing only embitterment and inner suffering, being angry at everybody...«. »To me, the word sacrifice means to love and not to expect any payment in return for my love. Love for free, just like St Maximilian Kolbe: To choose death voluntarily so that others may live«. »In

the first place, I consider sacrifice as Jesus' sacrifice on the cross which is an expression of love to the Father and to all people and a tool of redemption. I understand sacrifice better or accept it easier if I consider it as self-giving, as a free act of someone for the better of the others, but not in terms of reconciliation of the Father's anger...«

If these answers are compared with the answers that the respondents chose at a later point in the survey, the results are somewhat different (Chart 5). *Sacrifice as giving up* has been pushed aside by *self-giving* and *accepting problems*. The following is to be considered at this point: a) this question emerged later in the survey; b) the respondents already reconsidered this topic in one of the previous questions; c) they already formed a broader opinion on sacrifice. At the same time, this reveals that most respondents emphasize the positive aspect of sacrifice, i.e. the aspect of giving of yourself and everything you have as well as accepting everything that life brings and not searching for anything special. It should be highlighted that only 4% of respondents stated the following in relation to the meaning of sacrifice: »To afford as little as possible and to give as much as possible to others« (Chart 5). From this perspective, giving up yourself is not emphasized in the sense of entirely giving up everything that fills a person with joy and happiness, or because of the feeling that they do not deserve this.

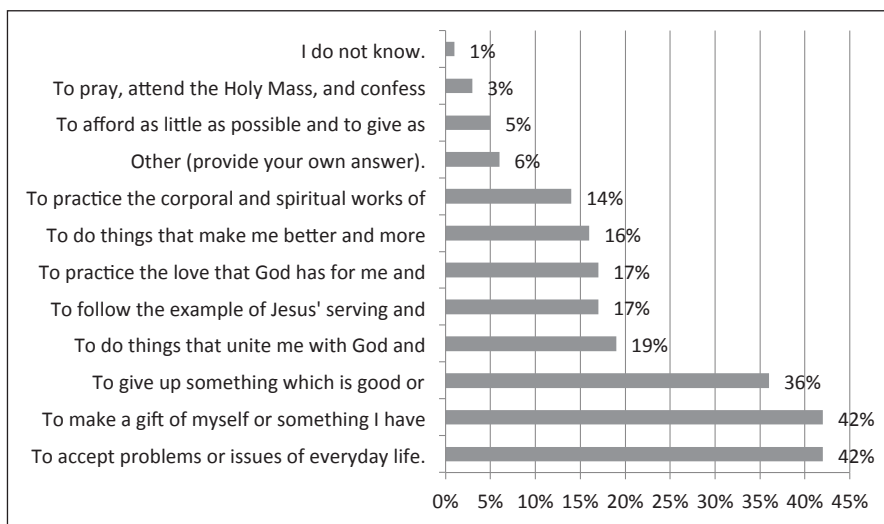


Chart 5: What does sacrifice mean to you in practice?⁸

God's mercy and love are the fundamental reasons when deciding for sacrifice. This is revealed in the two answers that were to be selected by the respondents as a response to the question of »Why do you sacrifice yourself to God«? (Chart

⁸ Ibid.

6). In 1668 responses, 399 respondents chose: »Because God’s mercy and love encourages me to do so«. In 365 cases, the answer was: »Because this is a gift to the others and one of the profound abilities of being in a relationship with others«.

On the one hand, the survey results very clearly demonstrate that Christian spirituality is sacrificial. On the other hand, it also shows that Christians hold very different perceptions of sacrifice in the context of Christian spirituality. In the second part of the paper, the two aspects of sacrifice that emerged in the survey will be described in more detail. The paper will conclude by highlighting what a person should pay special attention to in order to live these aspects truly in Christ’s Spirit, i.e. in the spirit of the gospel.

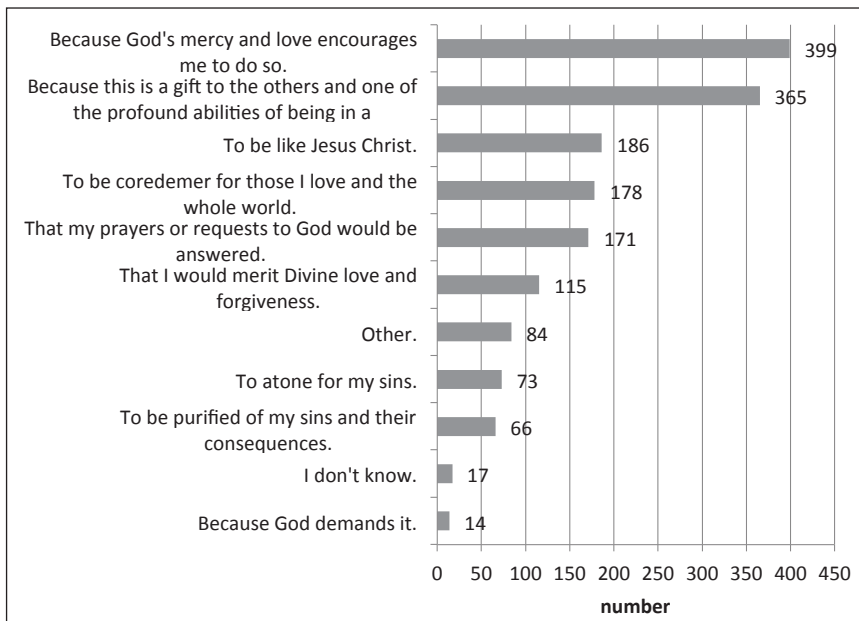


Chart 6: Why do you sacrifice yourself to God?⁹

2. *The Two Aspects of Sacrifice and Their Role in Christian Spirituality*

In the analysis of the *Sacrifice in Christian Spirituality* survey results, two aspects came to the fore: *giving up* and *self-giving*. Each of them is more strongly present in one of the two forms of Christian spirituality: ascetic and Eucharistic spirituality. This section explores their roles and highlights what a Christian should pay special attention to in order to live his life according to the gospel.

⁹ Ibid.

2.1 Sacrifice as Giving Up in Ascetic Spirituality

In the first place, the survey respondents understand sacrifice as *giving up*. This can be observed especially in the answers to the first question of »What comes to your mind first when you hear the word *sacrifice*«? (Chart 3). This aspect of sacrifice was also emphasized when the respondents described the meaning of sacrifice in terms of their lived spirituality, though to a lesser extent (Chart 4). At the end of the survey, this meaning of sacrifice comes after *self-giving* and *accepting* (Chart 5). A conclusion can be drawn that most respondents unconsciously or spontaneously bear in mind the perception of sacrifice as *giving up*: I have to give up something, I cannot retain this for myself, I have to place the needs and wishes of others before mine. When the respondents started to go deeper and became aware of sacrifice in terms of their lived Christian spirituality, the image of sacrifice as self-giving, accepting, living love slowly came to the fore.

However, it can be noted that the respondents are under the strong influence of today's secularized world and its perception of sacrifice as giving up something which has a certain value to gain something of a greater value. This secular and self-seeking meaning of sacrifice and its inevitable negative connotation is also deeply ingrained in their mindset.

Obviously, the perception of sacrifice as giving up among the respondents implies two beliefs.

Firstly, the respondents are aware that giving up is a part of the path following Jesus Christ, thus being a part of Christian life. Jesus says: »Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me« (Mt 16:24). Jesus encourages every person to repent (cf. Mr 1:15), to turn away from themselves and their fear of their future so that they can live the gospel entirely focused on him, Jesus, the Father.¹⁰ Giving up yourself liberates the person to such an extent that, together with Jesus in the power of his Spirit, they can live out the Father's self-giving love to every person. This awareness of the importance of giving up was substantiated by respondents' answers showing that many understand their sacrifice as following Jesus and cooperating with him. Many answers also reveal that giving up your bad habits and egoism as well as various possessive attitudes – above all, for the better of others and community – is an important aspect of giving up yourself. M. J. Osredkar provides a very good explanation that »Giving up your wish to own the other person«¹¹ is essential to facilitate and maintain a relationship that enables a person to live a full life, both in relation to other people and God. If giving up

¹⁰ Cf. Roman GLOBOKAR, Lebensentscheidung als endgültige Bestimmung der eigenen Zukunft: zur Stellung der Lebensentscheidung in der Moralthologie Klaus Demmers, *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 75 (2015) 3, 453.

¹¹ Mari Jože OSREDKAR, Darovanje kot najintenzivnejša oblika odnosa [Sacrifice in relationship], *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 76 (2016) 2, 276.

is considered in this sense, it also lays the foundations for a healthy Christian spirituality.

Secondly, giving up themselves can also indicate a person's disrespect and non-acceptance of themselves, apparent humility, perception that a person does not deserve the other person. This can lead the person to assume the role of a victim which is devastating both for them and others close to them. Thus, many respondents reject the word *sacrifice* because they have experienced that such mindset dehumanizes many people, obstructs them from experiencing genuine gospel joy and the happiness of self-giving love in freedom and truth, towards which every person is called in Jesus Christ by the Father (cf. Jn 15:17).

Logotherapy also warns of the negative consequences of giving up by emphasizing that an unreasonable giving up may be pathological or pathogenic. An extreme form of pathological giving up may even be masochistic. Some mental patients want to be martyrs at all costs and they enjoy this role. A pathogenic giving up is typical of egoists who wish to please everybody. They either give up themselves to buy love, recognition, and gratitude, or they want to protect themselves from being rejected. In the long term, such an attitude always causes a disease, because it originates from an internal weakness (they do not want to disappoint others at any cost) and not from the power given by the true love to oneself and others. A formative giving up requires positive motivation oriented to the fulfilment of values. A reasonable giving up is free of any gratitude. A person practicing it does so because of his or her decision to do this out of love. Therefore, their motive lies in the value they try to achieve.¹²

Emphasizing giving up in sacrifice reveals the presence of an *ascetic attitude* or *spirituality* among the respondents. In the first place, asceticism denotes all efforts that help a person grow in their religious, moral, and spiritual lives; however, many consider it above all as giving up.¹³ As a matter of fact, many ascetic exercises include some sort of giving up that does not imply giving up sin and bad habits in the first place, but, above all, it indicates giving up values and things that are good in their nature and that a Christian could own. Yet, a person gives up such things for a higher cause, also for the benefit of the others and the community, in which they live.¹⁴

Because human nature has been hurt by original sin, asceticism may degenerate into a form of self-punishment. The masochism in Christianity, often disguised by various Christian illusions, is embodied in the need to identify

¹² Cf. Elisabeth LUKAS, *Pervenire le crisi. Un contributo della logoterapia*, Assisi, Cittadella, 1991, 102-108.

¹³ Cf. Alejandro Masoliver, *Ascesi*, In: Tullio Goffi in Achille Palazzini, Ed. *Dizionario Teologico della Vita Consacrata*, Milano, Ancora, 1994, 98.

¹⁴ Cf. Ivan PLATOVNJAK, *Askeza [Ascetic]*, in: Ivan J. Štuhec, Anton Mlinar, Ed. *Leksikon krščanske etike [Lexicon of Christian Ethics]*[Elektronski vir], Celje, Mohorjeva družba, 2009.

oneself with the suffering Christ.¹⁵ This was also observed in some survey responses. Moral masochism is a special form of masochism reflected in constant, more or less obvious punishment, emotional tensions, and dissatisfaction. By exhibiting this behavior, such a person shows a subconscious need to accept punishment, undervalue themselves, present themselves in a negative manner, and fail in everything they try. A masochist is unable to cooperate with God's mercy and accept atonement, even if it is provided by God Himself.¹⁶

Surely, the most delicate and difficult aspect of asceticism, especially with the ascetic form that emphasizes giving up, is to discover a proper balance. External penance may never become a goal, but it must always be in service of internal liberation.¹⁷ This must be the aim of every person who gives up something, because only in this way can the person realize that giving up, penance, mortification, and all ascetic exercises are only a means and that the values and things they gave up did not become bad, but they still retain their value.¹⁸ Such a viewpoint of sacrifice as giving up will help every person to observe giving up as positive and not to focus on its intermediary role in personal and collective spiritual growth.

Giving up as well as the entire asceticism does not make a person more like Christ, but it originates from Christ. It does not strive to form general virtues, but it strives to reinforce and deepen unity with the Lord. Rather than by its own power, it does this in the power of God's mercy arising from faith in the triune God. Therefore, ascetic Christian spirituality is above all following the Christ, following Him who, as Vladimir Truhlar says, »actively positioned himself into the historical-social context, lived his service to the brothers in this context – his giving up that was complemented by his death on the cross. It is exactly this dead and risen Jesus Christ that a Christian is experientially united with in his or her asceticism. In this unity, his human love (giving up) becomes Christian 'crucified love'«. ¹⁹

2.2 Sacrifice as Self-Giving in Eucharistic Spirituality

Nearing the end of the survey, self-giving meaning of sacrifice came to the fore: »To make a gift of yourself, to live for, to devote your (life, time, talents...)«

¹⁵ Cf. Tadej STEGU, Žrtev in pashalna skrivnost ter homilija na Slovenskem [Sacrifice and Mercy in Slovenian Catholic Religious Education], *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 76 (2016) 2, 393-403.

¹⁶ Cf. Mihály SZENTMÁRTONI, *In cammino verso Dio*, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano), San Paolo, 1998, 97-99.

¹⁷ Cf. Charles André BERNARD, *Teologia spirituale*, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano), ³1993, San Paolo, 310-311.

¹⁸ Cf. Mihály SZENTMÁRTONI, *Psihologija duhovnog života* [Psychology of Spiritual Life], Zagreb, Filozofsko-teološki institut družbe Isusove, 1990, 54-66.

¹⁹ Vladimir TRUHLAR, *Leksikon duhovnosti* [Lexicon of Spirituality], Celje, Mohorjeva družba, 1974, 26.

to others/the community« (Chart 4). This meaning even outweighed the aspect of giving up (Chart 5). This shows that the respondents have realized that their self-giving is actually a response of gratitude to what the triune God is, in His mercy and love, doing for them and every person. In the same way as God the Father is a gift for them through Jesus and Jesus Christ in gratitude gives himself for them to the Father and in joy that he is the Father's Son, they themselves would like to become a gift for the others and for Him so that He can give himself through them for the others, thus filling them with His joy. This is effectively illustrated by Jesus' words:

»As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete« (Jn 15:9–11).

Many respondents identify more with the word *self-giving* than with *sacrifice*. They also tend to use it more often.

On several occasions, many respondents explicitly stated that the word *sacrifice* does not ensure a proper understanding of Christianity and its spirituality. They clearly emphasized that Jesus Christ does not expect any person to be an offering for anybody. He desires that, just as He does, people would love each other (cf. Jn 13:34), serve each other (cf. Mt 20:28, Mr 10:45, Lk 12:37), and give their lives to the others in the same way as He does (cf. Mt 20:28; Jn 3:16), in all the freedom He gives them. Jesus very explicitly emphasized that He is giving his life completely willingly: »No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own« (Jn 10:18).²⁰

Supported by the opinion of M. J. Osredkar, the author also believes that »there is a difference in meaning between the words 'self-giving' and 'sacrifice'. The word 'offering' expresses violence, forceful giving, whereas the expression 'gift' has a broader meaning. It means a voluntary gift«. ²¹ The word *gift* implies the freedom that a giver has, and it implies that the person to whom this *gift* is given becomes the *gift recipient*. The *gift recipient* can either accept or reject the gift.²² At the same time, they themselves become givers who give themselves or something of theirs as a sign of gratitude for receiving the gift.

The more a person is aware that everything in this world and in his or her life is a gift – this was well-demonstrated by Robert E. Doult in his article entitled *The Global Experience of Gift, and Some Philosophy* – the more the

²⁰ Cf. Grzegorz SZAMOCKI, *Motyw bramy w Nowym Testamencie. Przyczynek do teologii biblijnej* [The Motif of Gate in the New Testament. A Contribution to Biblical Theology], Pelplin, Bernardinum, 2001, 183-184.

²¹ Osredkar, *op. cit.*, 266.

²² Cf. Erika PRIJATELJ, *Žrtvovanje, nasilje in grešni kozel* [Sacrifice, Violence and Scape Goat], *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 76 (2016) 2, 294.

person is clear that living a full life is only possible by gratefully accepting gifts and giving oneself to the other together with God who gives all these things.²³

Such a perspective of the world and humans is based on the Scripture theology emphasizing that everything that exists and lives is good. The Scripture (cf. Gen 1:1-2:3) highlights that God considers everything He created as good: »God saw that it was good« (Gen 1:10.18.21.25). When He created man »in his own image« (Gen 1:26) and when he saw all that he had made, he said that »it was very good« (Gen 1:31). The Book of Wisdom also strongly emphasizes that »everything« created is good and that the world has emerged from God's complete freedom and love. »For you love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made; for you would not fashion what you hate« (Wis 11:24).

The entire creation along with mankind and the mission with which God entrusted them, is very good because it all stems from God's kindness. Creation is a gift for mankind and a legacy which is intended for them and was put into their custody. The Church has regularly defended the »goodness of creation, including the material world«.²⁴

Every person is called to become a gift to themselves and to others in God and to become actively involved in this gift interchange:²⁵ To become the gift recipient and giver over and over again. The sign of human mental and spiritual maturity is precisely the grateful awareness of being endowed and the ability to live a self-giving love that a person himself always receive and because of which they can live and work at all. Therefore, it is of utmost importance, as St. Ignatius of Loyola emphasized in his Spiritual Exercises,²⁶ that persons strengthen their awareness of how much they are endowed with God's kindness and how this kindness is actively present in them and in everything that exists.²⁷ This way, a person is ever more able to find self-giving kindness in all things and starts to resemble it. Where there is kindness and self-giving love, there is God (cf. 1 Jn 4) and a person is becoming more and more like Him (cf. Lk 6:36).

Surely this awareness of being endowed with things and being grateful for everything is not automatic and self-evident. Every person must freely seek the path to gratitude and grateful self-giving. Among other things, Christians are given also the path to Eucharistic offering. The author believes that self-giving is especially present in the *Eucharistic spirituality* which is based on putting the Eucharistic way of life into daily practice. The word Eucharist de-

²³ Cf. Robert E. DOUD, The Global Experience of Gift and Some Philosophy, *The Way*, 52 (2013) 1, 99-100, 106-109.

²⁴ Cf. Heinrich DENZINGER in Adolf SCHÖNMETZGER, *Enchiridion symbolorum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, Barcelona, Herder, 1965, 286; 455-463; 800; 1333; 3002.

²⁵ Peter ROŽIČ, Self-sacrifice in politics and the corrective power of humility, *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 76 (2016) 2, 361-371.

²⁶ Cf. IGNACIJ LOYOLSKI, *Duhovne vaje* [Spiritual Exercises], Ljubljana, Župnijski urad Ljubljana-Dravljje, ³1991, 230-237.

²⁷ Cf. Donald ST. LOUIS, The Ignatian Examen: A Method of Theological Reflection, *Way Supplement*, 55 (1986) 68.

notes thanksgiving. »In Jesus, in his sacrifice, in his unconditional ‘yes’ to the will of the Father, is contained the ‘yes’, the ‘thank you’ and the ‘amen’ of all humanity«. ²⁸ Thus, every Eucharist encourages Christians to consciously unite with Jesus’ thanksgiving and self-giving offering. In this way, they become living witnesses of the redemptive thanksgiving offering of Jesus Christ to the Father in Holy Spirit for all mankind and witnesses of the triune God and His self-giving love in the world and their everyday lives.

In the Liturgies of the Word and Eucharist, a Christian identifies his or her life story as a history of redemption and realizes that every moment of their life has its meaning and value exactly through the grateful awareness of being continuously endowed with things by the self-giving love of the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. This encourages them to – in Christ’s spirit – gratefully start making a gift of themselves to everybody they meet on their path. In this manner, they start to live the thanksgiving and self-giving offering in their daily lives. ²⁹ And this is the essence of the completely triune Eucharistic spirituality. This is no spirituality reduced only to celebrating Eucharist or Holy Mass, but it is a spirituality that a Christian live based on the celebration of the thanksgiving Eucharistic offering. It inspires them in their daily relationships. Drawing from the strength of the Holy Spirit, it helps them renew and form the mysterious Body of Christ and his way of self-giving life and work. Simultaneously, Christians always finds strength in this spirituality as they unite with Christ and his Spirit upon listening to his word and receiving Christ’s body and blood. They realize that they can fully live their gift of themselves to God only by having a living and loving relationship with their brothers and sisters in Christ as well as with every person and all of creation. Because of the others, a Christian’s spirituality is not merely an idea or even an ideology, but an expression of genuine fraternity ³⁰ and a practical self-giving love which is encompassed in the new commandment and represents a fundamentally distinctive mark of Christ’s disciples.

Whoever lives self-giving in Christ’s Spirit (cf. Jn 15-17) is also safe from the danger of his self-giving love becoming self-seeking. Only by such a sacrificing human being can abandon the logic of individualism and opens to the logic of personalization and communion relationships. ³¹ The more Christians realize that they were endowed free of charge and that they live from the free self-giving love of the triune God, the more they can become a free and voluntary

²⁸ John Paul II, *Mane nobiscum Domine* (7.X.2004), 26, in: https://w2.vatican.va/.../ii/.../hf_jp-ii_apl_20041008_mane-nobiscum-domine.html (5.II.2017).

²⁹ Cf. Robert J. DALY, *New Developments in the Theology of Sacrifice*, *Liturgical Ministry*, 18 (2009) 49-58.

³⁰ Cf. Igor BAHOVEC, *Christianity in confrontation with individualism and crisis of Western culture: person, community, dialog, reflexivity, and relationship ethics*, *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 75 (2015) 2, 344.

³¹ Cf. *ibid*, 344-345.

gift in Christ's Spirit. Christians are aware that they are not called to give only a part of themselves, but that they are called to live and work in Christ's Spirit everywhere. Together with him and through his power, they become a living and self-giving love to every person (cf. Ef 5:1-20). Many have highlighted such a way of sacrifice demonstrating that only when sacrifice is lived in this manner can Christian spirituality be denoted as sacrificial.

Conclusion

The analysis of the *Sacrifice in Christian Spirituality* survey results confirmed the hypothesis claiming that Christian spirituality is sacrificial. Obviously, it can only be sacrificial when Christians live sacrifice in a form of giving up themselves or self-giving in Christ's Spirit. This occurs in the spirit and power of the self-giving love between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit as the source of everything that exists. By this love, every person can achieve the fulfilment of their life and mission.

By discerning in Christ's Spirit, a Christian is able to live ascetic and Eucharistic spirituality in a way not to become entrapped by a self-seeking, consumer, intimate, or individualistic spirituality where persons often seeks themselves, their perfection, liberation from all miseries and problems, fulfilment of their needs for peace, self-affirmation, integral health, and gathering special and remarkable experiences.³² Such a spirituality does not make a Christian ever more humane, sympathetic, open to every person, seeking the triune God in everything. It does not provide them with an opportunity to become God's dialog partner and co-worker in the process of building God's kingdom of peace, righteousness, love, and joy in the midst of their everyday lives, here and now.

At the same time, a Christian can live ascetic spirituality in a liberating and formative way only when they are in a deep personal relationship with Jesus Christ and when they accept the help and leadership of his Spirit and discern in this Spirit. This way, they can avoid falling into various giving up traps, such as various forms of self-punishment, masochism, self-seeking, atonement, penance etc. Charles Taylor termed such conceptualizations of spiritual fulfilment, growth, and freedom that do not open a transcendental dimension within a person as exarnation which is diametrically opposed to incarnation.³³

Most respondents regularly attend mass which is also reflected in their perception of sacrifice as self-giving. Surely, one must be careful not to celebrate

³² Cf. Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium* (24.XI.2013), 78, 89, in: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (8.I.2017).

³³ Cf. Tone SVETELJ, Human Agent's Search for Flourishing, Fulfillment, and Freedom within Modern Secularized Society – New Perspective for Christianity, *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 72 (2012) 3, 359-362.

the thanksgiving offering for the sake of the offering itself. The same applies to keeping the commandment of attending the Eucharist every Sunday and on compulsory feast day or even to attend the Eucharist to escape from the daily tensions or to magically expect that every problem will be solved through the Eucharist. The Christians are called to consider the Eucharistic celebration as a time and place to raise awareness on their endowment by the self-giving love of the triune God. This love enables them to exist, live, and function as brothers and sisters in Christ and to bear witness to this God's love between them and in relation to the others. The more they realize this and put it into practice in Christ's Spirit, the more the Eucharistic offering becomes a school of a self-giving way of life. This stems from gratitude, a deep awareness that they are endlessly loved and that a full life is lived by loving in the same way the Father loves them through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. However, all this is only possible by the mercy or merciful love of the triune God.

Ivan Platovnjak*

Kršćanska duhovnost kao žrtvovanje?

Sažetak

Žrtvovanje je u svim religijama prisutno s različitim naglascima i u različitim oblicima, pa i u kršćanstvu. Također postoji u svim duhovnostima, koje su zapravo živa religija u svim dimenzijama čovjekova života i djelovanja. Međutim, Isus Krist je svojom jedinstvenom žrtvom na križu eliminirao sve oblike žrtvovanja Staroga zavjeta i drugih religija. On je, naime, svojom žrtvom spasio kako čovjeka, tako i cijeli svijet. Uzimajući to u obzir, postavlja se posve legitimno pitanje: možemo li o kršćanstvu, odnosno u kršćanskoj religiji, o živoj vjeri u Kristovu Duhu, govoriti kao o žrtvovanju? Ako ne, zašto ne? Ako da, zašto da? Kakvo žrtvovanje postoji u njoj, ako se živi u Kristovu Duhu (Rim 8, 4.14)? U prvom poglavlju autor rasprave odgovara na pitanja analizirajući rezultate ankete (*Žrtvovanje u kršćanskoj duhovnosti*, 2016), dok u drugom poglavlju nudi odgovore na osnovi rezultata analize i nekih autora s prikazom dvaju temeljnih razumijevanja žrtvovanja kao odricanja i darovanja.

Ključne riječi: duhovnost, kršćanstvo, žrtvovanje, anketa, odricanje, darivanje, asketska duhovnost, euharistijska duhovnost.

(na hrv. prev. Barbara Jeran)

* Doc. dr. sc. Ivan Platovnjak, Duhovna teologija, Teološki fakultet Sveučilišta u Ljubljani, Poljanska 4, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija; E-mail: ivan.platovnjak@teof.uni-lj.si.