

The Act of Sacrifice



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Many a speaker in church and elsewhere admonish others to make sacrifices of time, energy, and even money for whatever cause they represent. In my experience, they often talk more about what’s being sacrificed and less about what’s to be gained from the sacrifice. Here are my thoughts on the topic of sacrifice as an action.

What is Sacrifice?

Sacrifice has religious roots. Eymologically, it means, “sacred performance” or later, “offering of something to a deity as an act of propitiation (appeasement).” Beginning in the 16th century English speaking world, it came to mean, “act of giving up one thing for another.” That is seemingly how it’s used most today.

What is Sacrifice, Really?

Some people sacrifice to appease their god; I suppose because they feel he is unhappy with them or requires sacrifice in order to keep them in his favor. What this and any other type of sacrifice amounts to is the trading of something valued today in order to receive something of value later, such as a happy god. I think that in every case, sacrifice, then, is indistinguishable from an investment on a base level.

Investment

It seems that most who admonish sacrifice do so with an air of contempt toward trade and investment. They pretend that sacrifice is somehow more noble, or righteous. I posit that because sacrifice is an investment, if one is noble than so is the other. In other words, we trade and invest something valued today in order to receive something of value later, whether it’s seconds in the case of trade or years in the case of investment. What makes sacrifice different is usually its religious nature, but as a means to an end, it’s really no different at all.

Trade

I've heard it said, and I think I agree, that all human interactions are trades. Not necessarily of a monetary nature, but because action is the purposeful utilization of means over a period of time in order to achieve a desired end, then what is traded in your typical human to human interaction are feelings and sentiments (means) in order to build or maintain a relationship (end). The lasting relationship is viewed as more valuable than abstaining from the sharing of sentiments. Or one could say, non-feelings and non-sentiments are sacrificed in order to keep a relationship. Sacrifice is then something we do when we interact with others, and whenever we give up something in the present in hopes of getting something in the future.

Final Thoughts

If you want others to sacrifice, to give up something now, then you must sell them something later. In commerce, trade or investment is made when people are convinced that the value of something they don't have is greater than what they do have. As sacrifice is akin to trade and investment, your cause will make more profits if, rather than hampering on the drudgery or difficulty of sacrifice, you instead promote the value your cause creates. If you can't, then you are asking people to behave irrationally and contrary to their own interests. If your cause is of a religious nature, then perhaps the idea of an irrational god should be rethought. In any event, sacrifice is no more noble or righteous than your typical everyday trade or investment, so please stop pretending like it is.

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