

## The Sacrifice of the Mass: Catholic invention or Reformers' delusion?

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As response to Reformation the Catholic Church held the nineteenth ecumenical council. The council opened on 13 December 1545 and ended on 4 December 1563. Most sessions of the council were held in Trent (or Trento in Italy), hence the council is mostly known as Trent Council, with two sessions held in Bologna. The council reaffirmed and clarified all Catholic doctrines contested by the Reformers.

One of the Catholic doctrines contested by the Reformers is the Sacrifice of the Mass. Sacrifice of the Mass is the central act of worship in the Catholic Church. Protestant and present day evangelical churches, on the other hand, place sermon or preaching as the centre of their *fellowship* with other believers, which could originate from Luther himself<sup>1</sup>. Catholic Mass has Liturgy of the Word where passages from the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) are read, followed by a short sermon; but what comes after it, the Liturgy of the Eucharist is the core of the Catholic worship - and it is a sacrifice. It is a sacrifice because it makes present the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross and it also includes the Church's faithful offering<sup>2</sup>. In the Bible, giving offering and/or sacrifice to God are inseparable from worship (1 Samuel 1:3; 2 Kings 17:36; 2 Chronicles 32:12; Ezra 4:2, Romans 12:1), even for worship of false gods (Numbers 25:2; Deuteronomy 32:17; 2 Kings 10:19). Any sacrifice or offering requires priest (Hebrews Kohen; Greek ἱερεὺς) as mediator in offering it to God. This leads to another Catholic doctrine contested by the Reformers, i.e. their rejection of Ministerial priesthood through whom the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross is made present in every Mass. The Catholic Church has ministerial priesthood, priesthood of Christ (Hebrews 7:24; 9:11) and of all believers (1 Peter 2:5, Revelation 1:6)<sup>3</sup>. Protestants and evangelicals, on the other hand, recognize only the last two. Their rejection of ministerial priesthood and sacrifice of the Mass originated from what Luther wrote (underlined emphasis is mine):

*Every true Christian really ought to know that in the New Testament there is no outward, visible priest, except those whom the devil has exalted and set up through human lies. We have only one single priest, Christ, who has sacrificed himself for us and all of us with him. Peter speaks of this in 1 Pet. 3[:18]: "Christ died once for our sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us—dead in the flesh but alive in the spirit—to God." And Heb. 10[:14] says: "For by a single offering he has finished and perfected for all time those who are sanctified." This is a spiritual priesthood, held in common by all Christians, through which we are all priests with Christ. That is, we are children of Christ, the high priest; we need no priest or mediator other than Christ.*

Luther: *The Misuse of the Mass*  
Luther's works, Vol. 36, page 138

*Where is it written, that the mass is a sacrifice, or where has Christ taught that one should offer consecrated bread and wine to God? Do you not hear? Christ has sacrificed himself once [Heb. 7:27; 9:25–26]; henceforth he will not be sacrificed by anyone else. He wishes us to remember his sacrifice. Why are you then so bold as to make a sacrifice out of this remembrance? Is it possible that you are so foolish as to act upon your own devices, without any scriptural authority?*

Luther: *The Misuse of the Mass*  
Luther's works, Vol. 36, page 146-147

*I have consoled those whose consciences are weak and have instructed them so that they may know and recognize that there is no sacrifice in the New Testament other than the sacrifice of the cross [Heb. 10:10] and the sacrifice of praise [Heb. 13:15] which are mentioned in the Scriptures; so that no one any longer has cause to doubt that the mass is not a sacrifice.*

Luther: *The Misuse of the Mass*  
Luther's works, Vol. 36, page 162

Elsewhere Luther wrote that sacrifice of the Mass is blasphemous, ungodly, abominable, work of devil and ministerial priesthood is man-made and work of devil <sup>4</sup>. The other Reformer, John Calvin, made similar charge in rejecting sacrifice of the Mass and Ministerial Priesthood (underlined emphasis is mine):

*Christ, when dying, declares, that by his one sacrifice is perfected and fulfilled whatever was necessary to our salvation. To such a sacrifice, whose perfection he so clearly declared, shall we, as if it were imperfect, presume daily to append innumerable sacrifices? Since the sacred word of God not only affirms, but proclaims and protests, that this sacrifice was once accomplished, and remains eternally in force, do not those who demand another, charge it with imperfection and weakness? But to what tends the mass which has been established, that a hundred thousand sacrifices may be performed every day, but just to bury and suppress the passion of our Lord, in which he offered himself to his Father as the only victim? Who but a blind man does not see that it was Satanic audacity to oppose a truth so clear and transparent?*

Calvin: *Institutes of Christian Religion* 3.18.3

*If Christ is sacrificed at each mass, he must be cruelly slain every moment in a thousand places. This is not my argument, but the apostle's: "Nor yet that he should offer himself often;" "for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world" (Heb. 9:25, 26).*

Calvin: *Institutes of Christian Religion* 3.18.5

*They cannot produce one iota of Scripture in support of their priesthood. And must not the sacrifices be vain, since they cannot be offered without a priest?*

Calvin: *Institutes of Christian Religion* 3.18.9

*What remains but for the blind to see, the deaf to hear, children even to perceive this abomination of the mass, which, held forth in a golden cup has so intoxicated all the kings and nations of the earth, from the highest to the lowest; so struck them with stupor and giddiness, that, duller than the lower animals, they have placed the vessel of their salvation in this fatal vortex. Certainly, Satan never employed a more powerful engine to assail and storm the kingdom of Christ.*

Calvin: *Institutes of Christian Religion* 3.18.18

Luther and Calvin were certainly entitled to quote verses from the Bible to justify their belief. Even the devil quoted verse from the Bible when he tempted Christ (Matthew 4:6, Luke 4:9-11). Following Christ example when He dealt with the devil, we just need to look at other verses in the Bible, not just concentrating on just one or few verses. The Bible obviously nowhere says that the Mass is a sacrifice as Luther pointed-out, even the word Mass<sup>5</sup> is not there. But the word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible either and there is no single verse in the Bible precisely saying God is one God in three Persons – that definition first appeared in 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The Bible also nowhere tells us how many and which books belong to the Bible.

Catholics agree that Christ sacrifice on the cross completes and surpasses all sacrifices of the Old Covenant<sup>6</sup> and it is once for all (Hebrews 7:27; 9:25-26)<sup>7</sup>. Christ is not re-sacrificed again and again in every Mass, as Calvin wrote, which is common caricature of Catholic Mass among Protestants and evangelicals today. The Mass makes present the same sacrifice He made on the cross. How can this be? While Christ was sacrificed through crucifixion around two thousand years ago, the Bible also says in Revelation 13:8 that the Lamb, i.e. Christ, has been slain before the foundation (creation) of the world. In Greek, the language in which all New Testament books were written, the Greek verb "slain" in Revelation 13:8 is in *passive perfect tense* – though most Bibles translate it in passive past tense. Unlike that of English, Greek perfect tense implies a completed action with continuing result to the present (from writer/speaker point of view). For example, the phrase "it is written" (Matthew 2:5, 21:13; Mark 1:2, 14:21; Luke 24:46; John 6:31 etc.), that refers to Scripture, is also in passive perfect tense, though most Bible translate it as passive present tense. It implies that Scripture was written and remains written ever since. While the entire Scripture or just one or few verses can be re-printed or re-downloaded again and again from time to time, it does not mean they are re-written again and again. In the same way in Revelation 13:8 Christ as the Lamb was slain before God created the world and He remained slain ever since to the present. This is the reason why His sacrifice

can be made present at any time before and after His crucifixion. Christ is not re-sacrificed or re-slain in every Mass, just like Scripture is not re-written whenever it is re-printed or re-downloaded.

How do we relate “having been slain” in Revelation 13:8 with His once for all sacrifice on the cross (Hebrews 7:27; 9:25-26)? Does the phrase “before foundation of the world” in Revelation 13:8 refer to the written Book of Life, and not to the Lamb? The Old Testament has High Priest and only he can enter the Holy of Holies, the inner part of the Sanctuary (inside Jerusalem Temple) and only once a year, i.e. on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) to offer blood atonement for himself and for Israelites (Exodus 30:10; Hebrews 9:7). In New Testament Christ was the High Priest and He offered Himself as atonement for us in Sanctuary in heaven (Hebrews 9:24), not in man-made Sanctuary on earth, which is only a copy of the true one. Because of this He needs to do it once for all, at the end of age – otherwise, just like High priest of the Old Testament, He too must do it on yearly basis, interestingly, not from the year He was crucified but from the foundation of the world (Hebrews 9:26), a direct connection with Revelation 13:8. His Blood was shed for the forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22, prefigured in Leviticus 17:11), once for all, two thousand years ago on the cross. It was not shed before foundation of the world when He was slain, as the Incarnation (when Christ as the Second Person of Trinity took human form) did not even take place. The Sacrifice of the Mass, where His single sacrifice on the cross, is made present in un-bloody manner<sup>8</sup> has, therefore, solid scriptural basis. The verb translated as “appeared” in Hebrews 9:26 is in *active perfect tense*. This means His sacrifice on the cross appeared two thousand years ago and remains appeared ever since - this is the reason why Catholic churches display crucifixes, not empty crosses as in Protestant and evangelical churches.

Liturgy of the Eucharist of the Mass is re-enactment of what Christ did in the Last Supper with His disciples as recorded in the first three synoptic Gospels (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20). Protestants may also have what they called as Lord Supper or Communion service, where chunks of white bread and small cups of grape juice are distributed among the faithful. To them it is only a memory of Christ passion, following His statement: “do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). However, all three synoptic Gospels refer Last Supper to be Passover meal (Matthew 26:18; Mark 14:12-15; Luke 22:8-12). Passover meal is not mere memorial and communal meal like Thanksgiving meal of North Americans. It is both memorial and sacrificial meal that traces its origin in Exodus 12. On the tenth day of the first month (in Jewish calendar), a lamb is to be chosen (Exodus 12:3) for each household. It must be male and without blemish (Exodus 12:5). The lamb shall be killed/sacrificed between the evenings of the fourteenth day (Exodus 12:6) without breaking even single bone (Exodus 12:46) and is to be eaten (Exodus 12:9). In the beginning each household can perform this sacrifice with one of them acts as priest. Later this Passover lamb must be sacrificed by *Levitical priests* in Jerusalem Temple. While the whole Israelites are priests (Exodus 19:6), Levitical priests are male descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses (Exodus 28:1; 29:9) of the tribe of Levi. In Luke 2:41-42 Christ traveled to Jerusalem for Passover feast with His parents. This Passover sacrifice also prefigures that of Christ in the New Covenant as Scripture says: Christ is our Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). Old Covenant refers to the one God established with Moses as mediator. God promised New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:33-34 with Christ as mediator (Hebrews 8:6). Christ inaugurated the New Covenant in the Last Supper (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). He was not yet crucified when He had that Last Supper with His disciples but as described earlier He was slain before foundation of the world and remained perpetually slain. The Last Supper of the synoptic Gospels was the first Mass, where Christ made present His Perpetual Sacrifice in un-bloody manner. Christ was crucified on the next day or on 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first month.

The Gospel of John, on the other hand, makes crucifixion take place on the day before the Jews had their Passover meal (John 18:28, John 19:14) or on 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month. This is the reason why the Last Supper is not mentioned. It even makes His death happen on the hour when Passover Lamb is to be sacrificed (John 19:31). In other words, John Gospel points out that Christ is the Passover Lamb who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). John Gospel even placed the day of His entrance to Jerusalem to coincide with the day Passover Lamb was selected (John 12:1, 12 – cf. Exodus 12:3).

Catholics believe that Christ ordained His disciples as priests in the Last Supper. They were the first ministerial priests of the New Covenant and their main duty is to make present the same Sacrifice He made on the cross, following His commandment to do it in remembrance of Him. Following Luther and Calvin, Protestants and evangelicals reject this idea because New Testament does not apply the title priest (Greek ἱερεὺς) to any of his

disciples. New Testament applies that title to Christ (Hebrews 5:5, 10; 9:11), to all believers (1 Peter 2:5, Revelation 1:6, 5:10), to Levitical priests (Matthew 28:11, Luke 5:14, 10:31 etc.) and to priests of Zeus (Acts 14:13). Priesthood of all believers or common priesthood, which Catholics also believe, is prefigured in the Old Testament (Exodus 19:6) and so is that of Christ as High Priest of the New Covenant. Yet Old Testament or Covenant has another priesthood on top of common priesthood, that is the Levitical or Aaronic priesthood (Exodus 28:1; 29:9). Just like the other two, this Levitical priesthood must also prefigure that of the New Covenant, instead of being abolished as most Protestants and evangelicals would say, based on Hebrews 7:12. Examining Hebrews 7:12, it talks about *change* of priesthood, not abolishment of Levitical priesthood. The change here refers only to priesthood of Christ. According to Old Covenant only descendants of Aaron of the tribe of Levi can be priests and High Priests (Hebrews 7:13-14). Priesthood of Christ is, therefore, not Levitical, but changed and prefigured in the priesthood of Melchizedek<sup>9</sup> (Hebrews 7:15-17). Bread and wine brought by Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18), prefigures the offering of bread and wine of Last Supper and of all Catholic Masses<sup>10</sup>. It was rejected by both Luther and Calvin who insisted that they were meant for Abraham's refreshment<sup>11</sup>.

Those who insist that Levitical priesthood was abolished with the coming of Christ will have problem to reconcile their belief with the Bible. The Bible says that Levitical priesthood will continue offering sacrifices forever (Jeremiah 33:18, 21-22). This prophecy cannot be fulfilled by Levitical priesthood of Judaism. After the destruction of Jerusalem Temple in c. 70 AD., the sacrificial system of Judaism came to an end<sup>12</sup>. Their priests, i.e. males with surnames Cohen (or Cohn, Coen and other variants) can no longer offer sacrifice. But most of Catholic priests are not Jews and descendants of Aaron either, how can they be Levitical priesthood of the New Covenant? Well, the Bible has another prophecy saying God will take some from all nations to be priests and levites<sup>13</sup> (Isaiah 66:21). Priests are no longer have to be descendants of Aaron of the tribe Levi. This prophecy does not refer to common priesthood of all believers because it is already prefigured in Exodus 19:6. The term "priests and levites" in the Bible is always applied to Levitical priesthood (2 Chronicles 23:4, Ezra 3:12, Nehemiah 13:30, John 1:19). Both Luther and Calvin made grave blunder when stating that ministerial priesthood is not biblical. While it is not found in New Testament, it was prophesied in the Old Testament. The Bible nowhere says that all Old Testament prophecies must be fulfilled and recorded before the last book of the Bible was written.

The New Covenant Levitical priests, i.e. Catholic ministerial priests, comprising men of all nations (Isaiah 66:21), through their priestly ministry, make present the same and single sacrifice of Christ on the cross to this very day, thereby fulfilling prophecy of Jeremiah 33:18, 21-22. This is possible because Christ was slain before foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8) and remains slain ever since; and His sacrifice has appeared on the cross, once for all, two thousand years ago (Hebrews 9:26).

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *It would be well if we were able to accustom people to understand that when they say they are “going to sermon” this means “going to divine service,” and that preaching means serving God, and that all who are assembled together are assembled in real and high service of God. Just as in former times the beloved apostles and ancient fathers expressed it—and it is from them the expression came and remained to this day—we say “go to mass” and “hear mass,” as the pope himself strictly commanded in his decree that everyone should “hear” mass every Sunday. Nobody is accustomed to say “I am going to see a mass,” but rather “I am going to hear a mass,” and this really means the same as to go to divine service and hear preaching or God’s Word, which is the best and most necessary part of the mass, not as the pope does with his secret sacrificial masses in which there is no preaching nor hearing of God’s Word, especially in that part which they consider the greatest and is called the canon of the mass [Stillemesse]. For the little word “mass,” which appears to have been taken from the apostles, means in Hebrew the equivalent of a tribute or statute labor, as a peasant or tenant brings his lord his portion [Mess], that is, his due tribute or service, or serves his lord, thus acknowledging him to be his lord and rendering his obedience. So here too they said, “I am going to mass,” or “to hear mass,” as much as to say, “I am going to give or pay God his tribute and present and perform his service in the highest and most acceptable service.” Thus, to hear mass means nothing else but to hear God’s Word and thereby serve God.*

Luther: *Sermon on the Sum of the Christian Life*  
Luther’s works, Vol. 51, pages 261-262

<sup>2</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1330

<sup>3</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church # 784, # 1119, # 1546

<sup>4</sup> *Abraham builds an altar; that is, he himself is the bishop or priest, and he himself teaches the others and gives them instruction about the true worship of God. This must be the one purpose both of altars and of temples, that those who gather there hear the Word of God, pray, give thanks to God, praise God, and carry out those forms of worship which He has commanded. Where these activities are not present, there altars and temples are nothing but workshops of idolatry, of which the papacy is full; for the true forms of worship are disregarded, and meanwhile the entire worship is devoted to the blasphemous and ungodly sacrifice of the Mass.*

Luther: *Lectures on Genesis*, chapter 6-14  
Luther’s works, Vol. 2, page 284

*They likewise pervert and spoil the true sacrifices with their self-devised priestcraft and their abominable sacrifice of the Mass.*

Luther: *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapter 14 – 16*  
Luther’s works, Vol. 24, page 244

*I maintain that with these three arguments it has been demonstrated sufficiently to every real Christian that this popish priesthood and sacrifice of the mass is surely the devil’s work, with which he has led and betrayed the world into error. From this everyone can see that there is nothing Christian in what they do, and that they have invented and fabricated the mass merely for their own greed and honor, to the disgrace and dishonor of the holy testament of Christ.*

Luther: *The Misuse of the Mass*  
Luther’s works, Vol. 36, page 154

<sup>5</sup> The word Mass comes from Latin Missa. The phrase “ite, missa est” that means “go, you are sent forth”, concludes the Latin Mass.

<sup>6</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1330

<sup>7</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1366

<sup>8</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1367

<sup>9</sup> The name means “king of righteousness”

<sup>10</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1350

<sup>11</sup> *I believe that Melchizedek brought out bread and wine; that is, he arranged a festive meal, as is customary for guests and friends who are just arriving, and that thus he gave thanks to God for the victory given to Abraham.*

Luther: *Lectures on Genesis*, chapter 6-14  
Luther’s works, Vol. 2, page 385

*Yet such is their dishonesty, that to defend their impiety they arm themselves with the example of Melchizedek. As he is said to have “brought forth (obtulisse) bread and wine” (Gen. 14:18), they infer that it was a prelude to their mass, as if there was any resemblance between him and Christ in the offering of bread and wine. This is too silly and frivolous to need refutation. Melchizedek gave bread and wine to Abraham and his companions, that he might refresh them when worn out with the march and the battle. What has this to do with sacrifice?*

Calvin: *Institutes of Christian Religion* 4.18.2

<sup>12</sup> The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions, page 767, Encyclopedia Judaica Vol. 14 page 612

<sup>13</sup> Levites are descendants of Levi, third son of Jacob with Lea (Genesis 29:34). They were set part for their loyalty to the Lord (Exodus 32:26) to care the Tabernacle (Numbers 1:50-51; 18:23), to carry the ark of the covenant and to minister to the Lord (Deuteronomy 10:8).