

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 of its sessions were held in Trent (or Trento in Italy), hence it is mostly known as Trent Council, with two sessions held in another Italian city, Bologna. This council reaffirmed and clarified all Catholic doctrines contested by the Reformers.

One of the Catholic doctrines contested by the Reformers is Sacrifice of the Mass. Sacrifice of the Mass is the central act of *worship* in the Catholic Church. Protestant and evangelical churches, on the other hand, place sermon or preaching as the centre of their *fellowship* with other believers, which could originate from Luther himself¹. 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 follows, the Liturgy of the Eucharist is the core of the Catholic worship - and *it is indeed a sacrifice*. It is sacrifice because it *makes present* the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross and includes the Church's faithful offering² as well. Protestants sometimes have what they called as Lord Supper or Communion service, where chunks of 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). Some still consider it to be a Sacrament (together with Baptism), but all of them do not consider it to be sacrifice.

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). Any sacrifice or offering requires service of priest³ as mediator in offering it to God. This leads to another Catholic doctrine contested by the Reformers, their rejection of Ministerial priesthood through whose ministry the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross is made present in every Mass. Protestants accept only (1) universal priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5, Revelation 1:6) and (2) High-priesthood of Christ (Hebrews 3:1). The Catholic Church⁴, Eastern Orthodox Church, Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Church of the East have those two *and* a separate group of ordained *men* as bishops, priests, and deacons. Luther expressed his rejection of both ministerial priesthood and Sacrifice of the Mass in his writings:

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* (underlined emphasis is mine)
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?

ibid, 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.

ibid, 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 ⁵. The other Reformer, John Calvin, made similar charge in rejecting sacrifice of the Mass and Ministerial Priesthood:

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 (underlined emphasis is mine):

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).

ibid, 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?

ibid, 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.

ibid, 3.18.18

Those who follow the two Reformers' views repeated the same charge to this day.

In accordance with this New Testament change in the priesthood, through which the old order of ritual and sacrifice which prefigured the atoning work of Christ has been fulfilled and Christ alone has become our true High Priest, the human priesthood as a distinct and separate order of men has fulfilled its function and has been abolished. Furthermore, all bom-again believers, having now been given the right of access to God through Christ their Savior, and being able to go directly to God in prayer and so to intercede for themselves and others, themselves become priests of God. For these are the functions of a priest. This we term the universal priesthood of believers. And this is the distinctive feature of Protestantism as regards the doctrine of the priesthood.

Boettner⁶: *Roman Catholicism*, page 44-45 (underlined emphasis is mine)

Since the New Testament gives no instructions at all about the continuation of the Old Testament sacrifices, it was necessary for the Roman priesthood to invent a new kind of sacrifice. This they did by making a frivolous distinction between the "bloody" sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and the "unbloody" sacrifice which they pretend to offer in the mass. A priest, of course, must have a sacrifice, for that is the distinguishing mark of his profession. A priest without a sacrifice is simply no priest at all.

Ibid, page 172

We can conclude that Protestants' rejection of both Sacrifice of the Mass and the Ministerial Priesthood is based on the following reasons:

1. With "once for all" sacrifice of Christ on the cross (Hebrews 9:12, 10:10), the existence and function of Levitical priesthood of Old Testament (or of Judaism) came to an end and was therefore abolished (Hebrews 8:13). We

no longer need any distinct and separate order of priesthood other than that of Christ and universal priesthood of all believers.

2. In the New Testament the title priests are applied only to Jesus (Hebrews 7:24; 9:11), to all believers or universal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, Revelation 1:6), to Levitical priests of Judaism (Matthew 8:4, Luke 10:31, Acts 4:1 etc.) and to priests of Roman god Zeus (Acts 14:13). There is not any mention of the office of ministerial priesthood in the New Testament.
3. The Eucharist is only memorial meal (Luke 22:19) and the New Testament nowhere says it is sacrifice. On the other hand, the Catholic Church makes Christ re-sacrificed again in every Mass, even though in unbloody manner, and therefore contradicting “once for all” sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

We examine and answer those three arguments one by one.

Is Levitical priesthood of the Old testament abolished in the New Testament?

Levitical or Aaronic priests of the Old Testament are male descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses, of the tribe Levi (Exodus 28:1). The rest of the tribe Levi are referred as levites, chosen for the service in the Tent of Meeting or Tabernacle (Numbers 18:23, 1 Chronicles 6:48). The Tent of Meeting is where God dwelt with Israelites during the Exodus and was later housed inside Jerusalem Temple built during Solomon time (1 Kings 6, 1 Chronicles 6:32). Priests are in charge in offering and sacrifice in the Tent of Meeting. The phrase “priests and levites” in Scripture (2 Chronicles 23:4, Ezra 3:12, Nehemiah 13:30, Luke 10:31-32, John 1:19 etc.) refer to these two tiers of Levitical priesthood. One of the priests is appointed to become the High Priest. Only High Priest can enter the Holy of Holies or the Sanctuary, the most sacred part of Tent of Meeting, and only once a year, on the day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) to offer blood atonement (Exodus 30:10). In addition to this levitical priesthood, the Old Testament has also *universal priesthood* belonging to all Israelites (Exodus 19:6).

According to Exodus 40:15 and Numbers 25:13 Aaronic priesthood is perpetual or forever. Numbers 18:19 applies “*covenant of salt*” to this priesthood, which means it will last forever as salt is used to preserve food. Covenant of salt is applied to kingship of David and his descendants through Solomon in 2 Chronicles 13:5, which is based on God’s promise to David (2 Samuel 7:12-13) – God will establish his throne through Solomon forever. The perpetuity of both Davidic kingship and Levitical priesthood were later reaffirmed by prophet Jeremiah:

For thus says the Lord: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn cereal offerings, and to make sacrifices forever.
Jeremiah 33:17-18 (underlined emphasis added)

When Jeremiah was given this prophecy, Nebuchadnezzar already defeated kingdom of Judah and took Jehoniah, then the ruling Davidic king, into exile (Jeremiah 24:1, 27:20). He also destroyed Jerusalem Temple built by Solomon (2 Kings 25:9). The Temple was later rebuilt, which enabled Levitical priests to perform their priestly duties but there were no Davidic kings. This second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in c. 70 AD, which ended sacrificial system of Judaism⁷ and is never rebuilt to this day. All Christians believe that Christ is the promised Davidic king that will reign forever (Luke 1:32-33). After He was raised to heaven, He was exalted at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33) and has been reigning from heaven (1 Corinthians 15:25). To be Davidic king, the second Person of the Holy Trinity took a human form and became descendant of David through Solomon and through Jehoniah (Matthew 1:6, 12). While Christ is not biological son of Joseph, he is Joseph legal son and hence a descendant of David through Solomon. By *not* being biological son of Joseph, Christ satisfies the prophecy of Jeremiah 22:30 that says none of Jehoniah’s descendants will be sitting on the throne of David (Jeremiah 22:30).

If the first part of Jeremiah 33:17-18 prophecy has been fulfilled in Christ, then the second part must find its fulfilment as well, instead of being abolished. Hebrews 7:12 talks about *change* of priesthood, not *abolishment* of Levitical priesthood. The change here refers only to priesthood of Christ who in human form belongs to tribe of Judah (to become Davidic king). A change is required as 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 belongs to more superior priesthood of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:15-17). To Catholics, bread and wine brought by Melchizedek (Genesis

14:18), prefigures the offering of bread and wine of the Last Supper and of all Catholic Masses⁸. It was rejected by both Luther and Calvin who insisted that they were meant for Abraham's refreshment⁹. Hebrews 10:1 says that the Law is a shadow of things to come and not the true form of realities. Thus, animal sacrifices of the Old Testament prefigure or are shadows of Christ's ultimate and once for all sacrifice on the cross. The High priests of the Old Testament prefigures that of Christ. The differences are: (1) Christ offered Himself as sacrifice in heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 9:24), while they offer blood atonement from animals in man-made sanctuary, which is only a copy or shadow of the heavenly one (Hebrews 8:5); and (2) because of this heavenly sanctuary Christ did not need to do it repeatedly (Hebrews 9:25-26) but once for all, while those of Old Testament must do it every year. The universal priesthood of Old Testament (Exodus 19:6) of Israelites prefigures or shadow of that of the New (1 Peter 2:5, Revelation 1:6) of all Christ's believers. Then the Old Testament Levitical priesthood must also prefigure or shadow of that of the New and this is where ministerial priesthood fits in and fulfill the second part of prophecy in Jeremiah 33:17-18. The levites of the New are the deacons while priests are *presbyters*, from which the English word "priest" originates, and *bishops*. While Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament is restricted only to those belonging to the tribe of Levi, that of the New is open to all nations as prophesied in Isaiah 66:21: "*An some of them also I will take for priests and levites, says the Lord*". The question is then: what sacrifice they offer if Christ's sacrifice on the cross is once for all? Priests without sacrifice are not priests, as pointed out, *correctly*, by Boettner. Before we answer this question, we go to the second argument.

Why does New Testament never mention the office of ministerial priesthood?

Scripture nowhere says all prophecies of the Old Testament must be fulfilled and written down in the New Testament. In New Testament times priests and levites always refer to those of the Old Testament (Matthew 8:4, Luke 10:31, Acts 4:1 etc.). Nevertheless, Paul did write in Romans 15:16 (underlined emphasis added): "*to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit*". The Greek word used and translated as priestly service is ἱερούργεω (hierourgeo). It appears only in this verse and is related to priest (Greek hierous). The verse does not mention sacrifice of the Mass, but it still states that Paul served as priest to make offering of the Gentiles acceptable to God. If those Gentiles were already believers of Christ, and hence were also having universal priesthood, then they could do it themselves.

Is the Eucharist just a memorial meal as taught by the Reformers or is it both memorial and sacrifice meal as according to the teaching of the Catholic Church?

Catholics agree that Christ sacrifice on the cross completes and surpasses all sacrifices of the Old Covenant¹⁰ and it is once for all¹¹. Christ is not re-sacrificed again and again in every Mass, which has been common caricature of Catholic Mass since Reformation and are still prevalent among Protestants and evangelicals today.

While Christ was sacrificed through crucifixion around two thousand years ago, the Bible also says in Revelation 13:8 that the Lamb or 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*. Unlike that of English, Greek perfect tense implies the action described by the verb was completed in the past 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.), referring to Scripture, is also in passive perfect tense, though most Bible translate it in passive present tense. It implies that Scripture was written in the past and it remains written ever since. Whenever we buy a new Bible, the *same* Scripture is *reprinted* but it is *not rewritten*. In the same way, according to Revelation 13:8 Christ as the Lamb was slain, obviously bloodlessly, 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* (in the Last Supper) *and after* (in Mass) His crucifixion. Christ is not re-sacrificed in every Mass, just like (the same) Scripture is not rewritten whenever it is reprinted.

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)? In New Testament Christ was the High Priest and He offered Himself as atonement for us in Sanctuary in heaven (Hebrews 9:24). Because of this He needs to do it once for all – 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 to 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 did not even take place. The Sacrifice of the Mass also makes present His single sacrifice on the cross in unbloody manner¹². The Greek 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. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:23: “*we preach Christ crucified*” - the verb crucified is also in *passive perfect tense*. Certainly, Paul was aware that Christ was taken down from the cross, buried, risen, and ascended into heaven but he did not write “we preach risen Christ”. This explains why Catholic churches always 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). All three synoptic Gospels refer the 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 Americans and Canadians. 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 sacrificed in the evening 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. Thus, Passover sacrifice of the Old is memorial (Exodus 12:14) and sacrificial and prefigures or shadow of that of Christ in the New as Scripture says: *Christ is our Passover Lamb* (1 Corinthians 5:7).

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 14th day of their first month (they count a day from sunset to sunset). It even makes His death happen on the hour when Passover Lamb is to be sacrificed (John 19:31). John Gospel simply points out that Christ is the Passover Lamb of the New, affirmed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:7. It also 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. He was not yet crucified but as described earlier He was slain before foundation of the world and remained perpetually slain. The Last Supper of the synoptic Gospels where Christ made present His Perpetual Sacrifice in unbloody manner, was the first Mass.

The New Testament neither mention *explicitly* about Mass nor the Last Supper as sacrifice, nor His disciples as priests. But neither does it explicitly mention Trinity nor God is one God in three Persons (Greek hypostasis), nor Original Sin, nor the number of books of Scripture.

Summary

According to Scripture Christ was slain (in Greek passive perfect tense), bloodless, before foundation or beginning of the world (Revelation 13:8). It appeared (in Greek active perfect tense) two thousand years ago, where His Blood was shed once for all on the cross (Hebrews 9:26). Greek perfect tense indicates that both verbs have continuing result to the present. The Last Supper, from which the Liturgy of the Eucharistic of the Mass is based, is both memorial and sacrificial meal (Exodus 12:6, 9, 14). According to Scripture Levitical priesthood, together with David kingship, are perpetuated (Jeremiah 33:17-18). Levitical priests (of the New), chosen from among nations (Isaiah 66:21) perform their sacrificial duty through making present the same sacrifice Christ made on the cross in every Mass. Like pieces of jigsaw puzzle fit together perfectly, the Catholic Church integrates those Scriptural verses together.

End Notes

¹ *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

² Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1330

³ Hebrews kohen while in Greek: ἱερεὺς (hiereus)

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1268, # 1545

⁵ *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

⁶ Lorraine Boettner (1901 – 1990) was American Reformed Theologian and graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary. His book “Roman Catholicism”, is considered to be anti Catholic handbook.

⁷ The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions, page 767, Encyclopedia Judaica Vol. 14 page 612

⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1350

⁹ *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

¹⁰ Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1330

¹¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1366

¹² Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1367