21. The Mass as sacrifice vs "once for all"

Often heard: "Hebrews says Christ was offered once for all. Why do priests re-sacrifice Him at every Mass?"
Also heard: "Hebrews says Christ is still a priest in heaven who must 'have somewhat also to offer' (Heb 8:3)."

Christ's one sacrifice is not offered again

HELD BY Lutheran Mass kept, not propitiatory · Reformed · Anglican Articles; Anglo-Catholics differ · Methodist Article XX · Baptist

Christ's sacrifice on the cross was complete and unrepeatable, so there is no more offering for sin and no need for sacrificing priests.

VERSES CITED

Heb 7:27; 9:12, 25–28; 10:10–14, 18; John 19:30; Rom 6:10.

WHERE THE IDEA COMES FROM

Wycliffe; Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), attacked the Mass as a sacrifice; Zwingli and Calvin followed.

The Eucharist makes present Christ's one sacrifice

HELD BY Catholic · Orthodox bloodless sacrifice

The Mass does not re-crucify Christ or add a new sacrifice. It makes present the one sacrifice of Calvary in an unbloody way, with the same victim and the same High Priest. Hebrews shows Christ still exercising His priesthood in heaven ("it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer," Heb 8:3), and Malachi foretold a pure offering among the nations. "We have an altar" (Heb 13:10).

VERSES CITED

Mal 1:11; Gen 14:18 and Ps 110:4 (Melchizedek's bread and wine); Heb 7:24–25; 8:3; 9:23–24; 13:10; 1 Cor 10:16–21; Luke 22:19; Rev 5:6 (the Lamb standing as though slain).

EARLY CHURCH AND HISTORY

Didache 14 (the Sunday "sacrifice," quoting Malachi); 1 Clement 44.4 (bishops who "offered the gifts"); Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 41, 117 (Malachi fulfilled in the Eucharist); Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.17.5; Cyprian, Letter 63.14 (ANF Epistle 62.14: the priest imitates what Christ did).

CATECHISM AND COUNCILS

CCC 1362–1372 (esp. 1366–1367); Trent, Session 22 (1562).

Across the traditions

How each major tradition answers this question, in its own words and from its own documents.

Catholic

The Mass does not repeat or add to Calvary: it makes present the one sacrifice of the cross in an unbloody manner, with the same victim and High Priest, only the manner of offering being different. The full case is set out above.

Sources: Council of Trent, Session 22 (1562), ch. 1-2, canons 1, 3-4; CCC 1366-1367.

Orthodox

The Orthodox call the Eucharist a sacrifice. At the anaphora the priest lifts the gifts saying, "Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee on behalf of all and for all," and Philaret's Catechism speaks of "the bloodless sacrifice" offered for the departed. The Confession of Dositheus calls it "a true and propitiatory Sacrifice" offered for all Orthodox, living and dead. Orthodox theology states this in liturgical terms and does not adopt Trent's definitions.

Sources: Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, anaphora (Holy Trinity Orthodox Mission translation); Longer Catechism of St Philaret, Q 376; Confession of Dositheus (1672), decree 17.

Lutheran

Lutherans retain the Mass, celebrated "with the highest reverence" (Augsburg Confession XXIV), but deny that it is a propitiatory sacrifice. The Apology teaches that "there has been only one propitiatory sacrifice in the world, namely, the death of Christ," and that the Church's offerings are eucharistic sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving by those already reconciled. The Smalcald Articles call the Mass in the papacy "the greatest and most horrible abomination."

Sources: Augsburg Confession XXIV; Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV.18-25, 56; Smalcald Articles II.2.1.

Reformed

Reformed confessions deny that Christ is offered in the Supper: it is a commemoration of His one offering on the cross and a spiritual offering of praise, and the Westminster Confession calls the "popish sacrifice of the mass" "most abominably injurious" to Christ's one sacrifice. Heidelberg Q 80 calls the Mass "a condemnable idolatry." In 2006 the Christian Reformed Church kept that text but bracketed it as not adequately reflecting today's Catholic teaching and no longer confessionally binding on its members.

Sources: Westminster Confession 29.2; Heidelberg Catechism Q 80 (RCA/CRC 2011 translation); Synod 2006 of the Christian Reformed Church, as reported in The Banner.

Anglican

Article XXXI teaches that Christ's one offering on the cross is the perfect redemption for all sin and calls the sacrifices of Masses "blasphemous fables, and dangerous deceits." The 1662 Prayer Book calls the cross "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice," while the people offer their "sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving" and themselves. Anglo-Catholics speak more freely of eucharistic sacrifice; ARCIC (1971), not binding, affirms "no repetition of or addition to" Calvary.

Sources: Thirty-Nine Articles, XXXI; Book of Common Prayer 1662, Holy Communion (prayer of consecration; prayer of oblation); ARCIC I, Eucharistic Doctrine (Windsor, 1971), para. 5.

Methodist

Methodist Article XX, taken from Anglican Article XXXI, holds Christ's offering on the cross to be the perfect redemption for all sin and calls the sacrifice of masses "a blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit." Yet This Holy Mystery (2004) calls Holy Communion "a type of sacrifice," "a re-presentation, not a repetition," of Christ's sacrifice, in which the church offers itself in praise and thanksgiving in union with Christ's offering.

Sources: United Methodist Articles of Religion, XX; This Holy Mystery (UMC General Conference 2004), pp. 8-9.

Baptist

Christ's sacrifice on the cross was complete and unrepeatable, so the Supper offers no sacrifice for sin; the Second London Confession calls it "only a memorial" of His one offering and a spiritual offering of praise. The full case is set out above.

Sources: Second London Baptist Confession (1677/1689), 30.2; Baptist Faith and Message (2000), art. VII.

Where it gets contested: Those who deny a sacrifice of the Mass (Lutherans, Reformed, Anglicans, Methodists and Baptists) read "offer" in the early writers as an offering of praise and thanks; Catholics and Orthodox point to the consistent altar and priest language and to Malachi.

See also: Classic argument 64

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