

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH XXIX: 2
(Readings: Hebrews 9:11-28; Heidelberg Catechism Q. & A. 80)

How Man Misinterpreted The Lord's Supper

In many Protestant churches the worship area is known as 'the sanctuary'. I have heard Reformed people in America use that expression. And in some Protestant churches they call the front of the worship area 'the altar'. That's the place the Lord's Supper is administered.

There is a difficulty using these expressions, though, isn't there? They're not Protestant words – they are actually Roman Catholic. For they refer to certain rituals in the church which the Reformation strongly rejected.

It was the Reformers who in rediscovering the four solas - faith alone, grace alone, scripture alone, and Christ alone - realised that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper had fallen into error. In fact, the Lord's Supper had become called the Mass and was a ceremony constantly sacrificing Christ again each time it was done. The Council of Trent declared this view when in the mid 1500's it declared: "The sacrifice [in the Mass] is identical with the sacrifice of the Cross, inasmuch as Jesus Christ is a priest and victim both. The only difference lies in the manner of offering, which is bloody upon the cross and bloodless upon the altar."

So for some time already before the Reformation superstition had taken over the sacrament. You see, the Calvinist Reformers taught that this sacrament is a way of spiritual blessing and a memorial service, through bringing to mind the glorious person of Christ and the great service He did for us on Calvary.

But for the Roman Catholics it is a sacrifice, performed by a priest. Indeed, its sacrificial part is the most important of all. More important even than the preaching of God's Word. That's why you'll find many unordained lay people giving the message in a Roman Catholic service.

Those Who Put God In A Box

What Article 2 in the first place is telling us here is about THOSE WHO PUT GOD IN A BOX. And that's a terrible accusation to make, isn't it? But that's indeed what the Roman Catholic Church has done and is doing right up to this present day.

Now, this is not to say that the church before the Reformation taught this heresy for some thousand years or so. This teaching was unknown in the early church and was first proposed by a Benedictine monk in the ninth century. It didn't become an official part of doctrine until the Lateran Council of 1215.

The Reformers were protesting at what the church had degenerated into in the 16th century. So much had it degenerated that it had come to the point then that they had put God in a box. And that was literally. Because it was the element of the bread, proclaimed to be the actual body of Christ, which was kept in a little cupboard on the altar. They say God is in that box.

The words of a recent Roman Catholic Catechism state, "The body of Christ is "reserved" reverently even after the Eucharistic celebration is over. Thus it can be given to the sick at any time. It is usually kept on an altar in church, in the "tabernacle". Thus even when there is no Mass being celebrated, our Lord remains among us in this way. It is a visible sign that the Lord is as personally close to his Church as he was among his Apostles. We should try and to remain

reverently and thankfully aware of this presence whenever we enter church. It is an excellent custom to genuflect or kneel when we enter or leave.”

Can you see the stupidity of it all? They had to be so careful with those wafers. It is Christ’s body and as such conveys a special anointing to all who receive it. I mean, didn’t just touching Jesus while he was on earth heal you of your sickness?

There are a number of points we have to raise against the “popish sacrifice of the mass”. The first of these is that it is contradicted by our senses. The Anglican Archbishop Tillotson said: “Supposing the doctrine of transubstantiation had been delivered in Scripture in the very same words that it is decreed in the Council of Trent, by what clearer evidence could any man prove to me that such words were in the Bible, than I can prove to him that bread and wine after consecration are bread and wine still? He could but appeal to my eyes to prove such words in the Bible; and with the same reason and justice might I appeal to several of his senses, to prove to him that the bread and wine, after consecration, are bread and wine still.”

Then, secondly, the popish sacrifice of the mass is denying that the sacrament is metaphorical. You see, transubstantiation is the false teaching which takes the words of Christ literally when he instituted this sacrament. It means that the whole substance of the bread and the wine is changed into the physical body and blood of Christ. But it’s certainly not what they do with other teachings by Christ. Because elsewhere they have no difficulty seeing descriptions by the Lord of Himself as “the vine” in John 15:5, “the way” in John 14:6, and “the gate” in John 10:7 as not meaning He was literally a vine or a way or a gate.

Our Saviour plainly meant that the bread and the wine signify or represent His body and blood. Otherwise how else do you explain the Apostle Paul in 1st Corinthians 11 verses 26 and 28 giving the same names to the elements before and after the blessing?

For example, when you show someone a photo and you say, “This is my wife”; “This is my son”; “This is my daughter”; it’s clear what you mean. Nobody takes those words literally. In the same way, the Bible is written in the language of ordinary people. So it’s obvious that the Lord’s Supper is a simple memorial feast and not a literal reincarnation of Christ.

In the third point, the popish sacrifice of the mass is against reason. Because how can the physical body of Christ be in more than one place at a time? In fact, by their teaching, how can it be in thousands of places at the same time?

We know that Christ is spiritually present everywhere. But His physical body is now in heaven, where it will stay until His second coming again on the clouds of glory.

And then, fourthly, there’s a difference we must have with them over the nature of a sacrament. Because what two things are essential for a sacrament? Ah, the sign and seal. It points to something and it confirms something. But it is not the thing! And that’s exactly what transubstantiation does - it wipes out the sign and the thing signified is put in its place.

You can further prove the Lord’s Supper to be a sacrament and not a sacrifice by pointing to the Levitical law of Leviticus 6 verse 29 that a sin offering brought to make atonement in the Holy Place must not be eaten. Indeed, all eating of blood, even animal blood, and much more the eating of human blood, was strictly forbidden.

So how could so many people get it wrong? And how could they get it wrong for so long? Well, this is where we see the power of the evil one, for he works it so that it appeals to man’s ego. He draws millions into the lure of believing that it is actually through men that their salvation can come. Those men are the priests.

Of course that can never give a real assurance. You have to keep going back and back because you keep falling over and over. This is completely different to the gospel. But it does sound like something from the scriptures, doesn't it? Because it's almost like we're back in the Old Testament again, with the mediating priesthood in the temple. Then one needed to go through certain men in order to offer up the worship God delighted in. But to go back to that now? No wonder Article 2 says that "the popish sacrifice of the mass is most abominably injurious to Christ's one, only sacrifice, the alone propitiation for all the sins of His elect." The right anecdote to this is what the New Testament teaches. This is where the book of Hebrews is such a big help. It clearly details why the Old Testament priesthood has been abolished for all time in the doing and dying of Christ.

Those Who Only Look To The Cross

And this is where we come to the second aspect in Article 2. For the first aspect in touching upon THOSE WHO PUT GOD IN A BOX has raised the error of transubstantiation. This is what the second half of Article 2 brought out. Now we see, positively, what is in the first half. In the words of the second aspect to this Article, this is about THOSE WHO ONLY LOOK TO THE CROSS. You see, if it all depended on Christ being sacrificed all over again and again and again, we are left in a terrible state. Because once we have sinned we have to wait until that act takes place and we receive the benefits of that repeat action. And if we aren't able to take that grace we are not sure where we stand before God.

That is so terribly, terribly sad! Because you can be sure that God wouldn't want any of His children to feel that way. I mean, would you be happy your child being like that? Imagine if each time they came to you, after doing wrong, they had to start all over again. Then they could never take your love for granted! What kind of family is that?

Rather, Scripture is absolutely clear that because Christ Jesus has been offered upon the cross, once-for-all, we have every confidence we can come before our Heavenly Father at any time. It's because His sacrifice was perfectly acceptable that our Lord Jesus is where He is right now. In the words of Hebrews 4, the verses 14 till 16, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

That's why further on in Hebrews 9 verse 25 it can say that Christ didn't enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the high priest used to enter the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. In fact, in Hebrews 7:27 and 10:12 the same is said. The writer of this letter is inspired to tell especially the Jewish believers that there can be no turning back.

So the Lord's Supper, in the words of Article 2, is "a communion of that one offering up of Himself, by Himself upon the cross, once for all." It's not a matter of what we do at all! It can only be because of what God in Christ has done!

Oh, that the Roman Catholics would see that! But so many don't and there are more falling into the same error, because there are still Anglicans and Lutherans and Reformed and Presbyterians joining the Roman Catholic Church. They cannot simply accept the saving work of Jesus Christ. They cannot see that in the sacrament we can only praise God for His grace.

On ANZAC Day, or Remembrance Day, when we lay a wreath on the tomb of a soldier we speak of the sacrifice that he made to save his country. But his sacrifice cannot be renewed. He died once and his sacrifice was complete.

So it is with the sacrifice of Christ. He died once, as the Bible so definitively and repeatedly states. And since He was truly God and man He was a person of such infinite value and dignity that His work was completely sufficient. When Jesus in Matthew 26 verse 28 said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins," he was speaking of what He was about to fulfil in His death.

Now, do you want to put your trust in what He has done or in what a priest has to keep on doing? Do you want to live assured that Christ did it all perfectly or be insecure because if the priest is distracted in any way physically, mentally, or spiritually, it won't count? Do you want to know that it's God's grace in His Son or it's what you have to do in attending the mass?

Dear believer, this is all the difference in the world. One sacrament looks up, the other looks down.

Which way are you facing?