

**The Gospel of John (43); The Fourth Discourse:
Jesus, the Bread of Life (5)**

Introduction:

This is the fifth Lord's Day in which we will have considered this discourse of Jesus recorded in John 6. We are presently about half way through this passage in which the Lord Jesus is set forth as the Bread of life, whom God the Father sent in order to give life to the world. In our passage today, we read of our Lord Jesus becoming more direct and provocative with the Jews in the synagogue of Capernaum, who refused to believe on Him. As our Lord became more clear and direct, they became more hardened and belligerent in their unbelief.

Now the nature of the passage and the divergent claims of its interpretation by disparate groups over the centuries, whose beliefs are practiced today across the world, make it necessary that we address them. Not only are we to proclaim what is good and true, but we are to warn people against what is bad and false. And so in our notes today we give particular attention to the idolatrous and blasphemous practice of the Roman Catholic Mass with its teaching of transubstantiation. Rome's claim and practice that their "priests" repeatedly offer Christ in bloodless sacrifices on a consecrated altar made holy by a relic is unbiblical and is the committing of the sin of idolatry by all who participate. From the earliest days of the Protestant Reformation the belief and practice of Rome respecting the Mass has been refuted and discredited both biblically and historically. We will not have time to speak on all the information in your notes about this matter, but I thought that it would be good to put the information in your hands for your own study and review.

We left off last week with our study of John's Gospel in the sixth chapter with **verses 50 and 51**, in which we read Jesus' words,

⁵⁰This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

The Lord had been speaking of Himself as the true bread from heaven since the early portion of this discourse. But He did so in a more subtle manner in the earlier verses. As the dialogue unfolds, however, we read that our Lord became more direct and pronounced in His assertions.

Jesus first declared that although Moses had given Israel bread in the wilderness, Jesus said to them, "My Father gives you *the true bread from heaven*" (v. 32). And then in **verse 33** Jesus described this bread from heaven was not literal bread, but the true bread from heaven is a *person*. He said, "For the bread of God is *He* who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." But then Jesus became more direct in **verse 35**, in which He declared to them, "I am the bread of life." He told them that the life that He gives as the true bread is obtained by the one who "comes" to Him (v. 36).

But what does it mean to come unto Him and how does that take place? He conveyed the truth that to come to Him is to embrace Him in faith as the only source and means of eternal life that God the Father grants to those who know Him. But Jesus told them that they did not have the desire or the ability to come unto Him. Those who do come, therefore, do so because God the Father "draws" them, thereby enabling them to come unto Jesus Christ in faith. This speaks of God's effectual call of His elect onto their salvation. Let us read our Lord's words in **verses 35 through 40**.

³⁵And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. ³⁷All

that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

The Jews understood His claim when He declared that He had come down from God in heaven. They understood Him, but they did not believe Him. He was asserted His incarnation when He said that He was “sent by the Father” to give “life” to them. They reacted and rejected His claims, as we read in **verses 41** through **42**, which read:

The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.” ⁴²And they said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, ‘I have come down from heaven?’”

But with **verse 43** our Lord stepped up the intensity of His language, by becoming more direct toward His hearers and more abrupt in the description of Himself. And so, we may read **verses 43 through 51**:

⁴³Jesus therefore answered and said to them, “Do not murmur among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. ⁴⁶Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. ⁵⁰This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

It is at verse 51 that we left off last Lord’s Day, and it is here we pick up our Lord’s Words, which speak to the theme of this fourth division of the discourse of the outline that we have been employing in our study. Here the Lord Jesus declared that...

IV. No one has eternal life except through “feeding” upon Jesus Christ (6:52-59)

Let us read John 6:52 through 59.

⁵²The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?”

⁵³Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. ⁵⁸This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

⁵⁹These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

What we read is that the Lord Jesus taught these people with an increasingly boldness and intensity, speaking in terms and conveying images that confronted these people. As they expressed their refusal to believe on Him, He expressed to them their sad and damned condition as unbelievers. They had revealed their resistance to Him, even their intractable hostility of Him, of their incorrigible unbelief in His claims to

be God incarnate sent by God the Father. He was asserting that He was eternal God, sent by God His Father, and now was manifest in this man standing before them, who alone gives eternal life to them who believe on Him.

We know, of course, that our Lord's emphasis of eating His flesh and drinking His blood was to illustrate and emphasize to these people that true saving faith in Him is a whole-hearted dependence and confidence in Him. He was pressing on them the truth of the gospel, that God gives eternal life to those who believe on Him with their entire heart, mind, soul, and strength. This should not be understood carnally, that in some miraculous manner He was pulling flesh from His body and blood from His veins, telling them that they must literally eat His flesh and drink His blood; that is a pagan and antichristian understanding and practice. He was, rather, impressing upon His hearers that He alone was the source of eternal life. Just as the people of Israel in the wilderness long before had to depend on eating the manna that God had given them in order to sustain their physical lives, so all people everywhere must depend on believing wholly and unreservedly Jesus Christ, the true bread from heaven, in order to receive and enjoy eternal life.

But we may see in these verses we just read that our Lord increasingly sharpened His speech and intensified His imagery as this discourse unfolded in this passage. Although Jesus had spoken about the need to come unto Him, to believe on Him, in the earlier portions of His discussion, He introduced the idea of *eating* Him in verse 50 and 51. And then beginning with verse 53 He spoke of "eating", or "eating and drinking" in every verse through the remainder of His teaching which concluded with verse 58.

Now the teaching of Jesus to this gathering of Jews regarding eating His flesh and drinking His blood caused a significant and lasting impression on His listeners. Those who had not believed on Him were affirmed in their unbelief. They thought that this man was either a flaming heretic or greatly beside Himself, out of His mind. Those who did believe on Him in a measure had their faith tried severely by His words. Those who had "faith" which was not wrought of God, which was but a temporary faith in which they had been enamored at what He was doing among them, would shortly walk away from Him, abandoning what little and faulty faith they had. But those few who truly believed on Him as Lord and Savior had their faith tried also. But at the end of the day, though troubled and confused by what Jesus had taught them, they continued to follow Him. They had completely resigned themselves to follow through with their commitment to be His disciples. At this point they were resolved to do so regardless of what they saw or heard, for in actuality they had been ones that the Father had called to come unto Him in true heaven-wrought, heaven-kept faith in Jesus Christ.

A. Some general matters of interpreting this passage

1. The difference of opinion on how to interpret John 6

This theme of Jesus of eating His flesh and drinking His blood is one of the major points of difference and sources of contention across the spectrum of commentators of the Gospel of John. It is not so much a difference between more conservative commentators and more liberal commentators, as it is a difference between those who favor a more liturgical form of worship from those who are less liturgical. In other words, a major point of difference and contention in interpreting this discourse of John 6 is whether or not our Lord's words should or should not be understood as applying to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. One can understand (though vehemently disagree) why some would argue for their belief that they are actually eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus when they observe the Lord's Supper (i.e. Roman Catholic Mass).

Usually the arguments of these commentators center on what the writer of the Gospel intended to convey in his record of John 6. Was John writing to show how Jesus was comparing and contrasting Himself to Moses and the manna that he gave to ancient Israel? Or rather, was John actually recording this event in order to teach the Christian community, John's Christian readers at the end of the first century? Those who take this latter view argue, therefore, that the Christian observation in the churches of the Lord's Supper,

commonly called the Eucharist¹ by many, should be understood to be the major theme expounded in Jesus' recorded words, not just the comparison and contrast between Moses and Jesus.

Here is a theological note in one of the commentaries that we have used in our study of this Fourth Gospel that speaks to the different claims:

In Depth: Eucharistic Imagery in the Fourth Gospel
(by Edward W. Klink III)

Unlike the Synoptics, John does not give an account of the Lord's Supper. For this reason, alongside what is often taken as strong Eucharistic imagery of the pericope (especially vs. 52-59), numerous interpreters have debated the manner in which this pericope incorporates sacramental theology. How one interprets (or even recognizes) the Eucharistic imagery is almost entirely dependent upon the author assumed by the interpreter. For example, those who see the sacramental meaning directly in the text consider the author to be writing to a late first-century Johannine "church" audience where such practices are already developed. In contrast, others consider any sacramental meaning to be blatantly anachronistic.² One might try to hold them both in tension, like Carson, who has in view primarily the ostensible historical context but would secondarily be willing to say that "it is hard to imagine the Evangelist, writing several decades after the institution of the Lord's Supper, could produce these words without noticing that many readers, even if they understood the passage aright, would in all likelihood detect some parallels with the Eucharist."³

Rather than choosing between Jesus and the evangelist or trying to mediate between them on historical grounds, this commentary intends to incorporate them both within the confines of the ontology of Scripture, which interprets the words of the divine agent (author) in cooperation with the human agent (author). This allows—no, demands—that one not choose between Jesus and His "Jewish" context or the evangelist and his "Christian" context. That is, we should not be forced to choose between whether the imagery is alluding to the motif of manna in the Old Testament (Jewish) or to the rite of the Eucharist in the early Christian movement (Christian). Rather, in light of the purview of the divine author, the images make "impressions" upon the reader that reverberate across the entire canon, with the manna in Exodus and the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians serving the appropriate interpretive background from which Jesus comes and is made known. As Augustine (AD 354-430) explains in regard to manna and the Lord's Supper, "In the signs they were diverse; in the thing which is signified they were alike." As Jesus explained regarding Moses, "He wrote about Me" (5:46).⁴

And so, the arguments continue. There are those that recount verses from this discourse, especially verses 53ff, when speaking of the Lord's Supper. And then there are those who would never quote these verses in application to the Lord's Supper.

2. Arguments against the sacramental interpretation of John 6

The common arguments against applying these words to the Lord's Supper are as follows:

- (1) The setting of the discourse mitigates applying it to the Lord's Supper.

"Jesus is speaking in the synagogue at Capernaum to a crowd which includes opponents and lukewarm disciples. It is difficult to hold that John intends us to think that to such an audience Jesus

¹ The word, *Eucharist*, is taken from the Latin and Greek words meaning "gratitude", or "grateful", or "favor" or "grace." It is similar to a Greek word meaning "to rejoice." The Eucharist is another name for "Holy Communion" or for "the Lord's Supper." The term is used commonly by the more liturgical churches and denominations.

² Anachronistic means belonging to a period other than that being portrayed.

³ Here he quotes Donald Carson's commentary, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 279-280.

⁴ Edward W. Klink, III, *John*. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 324f.

gave teaching about a sacrament whose institution lay well in the future. References to such a sacrament could not possibly have been discerned by this audience. The only result could have been profound mystification.”⁵

(2) There is the nature of the language itself. We could hardly understand verse 53 sacramentally, which reads, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.’”

“This language is absolute. No qualification is inserted. No loophole is left. But it is impossible to think that Jesus (or for that matter the Evangelist) should have taught that the one thing necessary for eternal life is to receive the sacrament.”⁶

(3) The consequences to failing to eat and drink here, are the same as failing to receive and believe in Jesus in other verses (Cf. vs. 35, 40, 47).

(4) The words of Jesus would never have had a sacramental meaning to His Jewish audience. Although His listeners took Him literally, and therefore utterly rejected Him and His teaching, clearly He was teaching that feeding on Him was to receive Him wholly and completely into one’s inner most being.

And so, those commentators who would give weight to these arguments would say that

“The chapter refers to purely spiritual realities. Eating Christ’s flesh and drinking His blood point to that central saving act described otherwise in, say, John 3:16. Christ’s death opens the way to life. Men enter that way by faith. So in this chapter Christ speaks of giving His flesh (v. 51), which points to the same act as God’s giving His Son. But men must appropriate this gift by faith (v. 47). Eating the flesh and drinking the blood represent a striking way of saying this... Men must take Christ into their innermost being if they would have the life He died to bring them.”⁷

B. More specific matters of interpretation of this passage

Let us now consider some of the verses more specifically.

1. The reaction of the Jewish crowd to Jesus’ words (6:52)

We read in **verse 52**, “The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” This “quarrel” was intense. They were fighting with one another. The plain sense of His words caused them to cringe and recoil with shock and disgust. I imagine a few were trying to be patient, perhaps wanting to hear more, giving Him the benefit of the doubt. Others, however, were totally disgusted with what He was teaching. They wanted to throw Him out of their synagogue. This was the affect that Jesus had on many gatherings during His earthly ministry. He was not coming to bring peace, but a sword, as He indicated in another place (Cf. Matt. 10:34).

2. Jesus further pressed His claims to them in language that accentuates their rejection of Him (vs. 53-58)

⁵ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 352.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, 353f. However, after Leon Morris cited these reasons for not taking the sacramental view, he went on to say that he does see both the historical and sacramental views as legitimate. He wrote: “The third line of interpretation (which seems to me preferable) is a mediating one. It sees in the words primarily a teaching about spiritual realities (as outlined in the preceding paragraph), but does not deny that there may be a secondary reference to the sacrament.”

It was in the midst of this conflict, however, that our Lord spoke in a manner to aggravate the mayhem. Here He did not retreat from conflict. Neither did He attempt to calm the crowd so that they not quarrel among themselves. He spoke in a manner to stir up the controversy all the more. Again, we read in verses 53 through 58, but highlighting His emphasis on eating His body and drinking His blood:

⁵³Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, *unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood*, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoever *eats My flesh and drinks My blood* has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵For *My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed*. ⁵⁶He who *eats My flesh and drinks My blood* abides in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so *he who feeds on Me will live* because of Me. ⁵⁸This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. *He who eats this bread will live forever.*”

In verse 53 Jesus used the Greek word, *φάγητε* (*fagayte*) which is translated eat.” But in verse 54 He used a different Greek word translated as “eat”; it is the Greek word, *τρώγων* (*trogon*), which is a coarser word, which is sometimes translated as “to crunch, or munch.” It was a word used in classical Greek of animals gnawing on their food. Our Lord was throwing oil on the fire, so to speak. “Unless you chew on Me, you have not eternal life.” One can well imagine the rising vehement hostility of this crowd toward Him and any who would align themselves with Him.

All present would remember this day and this interchange and the accentuated reaction of those present. Through this interchange, the Lord Jesus caused His speech to be heard and listened to very carefully, and it was given in such language that His teaching would be retained in the minds of these people, which would then, but in the future also, press upon them the need for sole reliance upon Him and total commitment to Him alone for salvation from sin and the gift of everlasting life.

How has Jesus’ words been interpreted in more ancient Christian history? Here is a description of two notable Christian leaders in earlier Christian history

Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430) explains our Lord’s language here as ‘a figure, bidding us communicate in our Lord’s passion, and secretly and profitably treasure in our memories the fact that for our sakes He was crucified and pierced’. Elsewhere he sums up the truth in the immortal epigram: ‘Believe, and thou hast eaten’. Later Bernard of Clairvaux (AD 1090-1153) expounds the words ‘He who eats My flesh...’ as meaning: ‘He who reflects upon my death, and after My example mortifies his members which are upon the earth, has eternal life—in other words, “If you suffer with Me, you will also reign with Me”’. Bernard’s exposition is quoted simply to show that a twelfth-century mystic and (like Augustine) a doctor of the church saw no need to take the words in a literal or ‘corporeal’ sense; it is Augustine who penetrates more surely to their true meaning. Appropriating Christ by faith not only assures His people of life in the age to come when He raises them up at the last day; it makes that life of the age to come their heritage to be enjoyed by anticipation here and now. Moreover, this life is secured to them by the death of Christ, for the terms in which He describes their appropriation of Him by faith imply that the one whom they so appropriate has yielded up his life in sacrifice.⁸

In other words, some of the most prominent men in the history of Christendom, did not interpret our Lord’s words to be speaking of the Eucharist, but of having full faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, the first recorded claim that bread and wine are changed into the actual body and blood of Jesus is not found until the ninth century AD, but even then, it was not a widely held and promoted teaching for several centuries.

C. The historical belief and observance of the Lord’s Supper in Christendom

We may assert at the outset that the Lord intended to say that when the Lord’s Supper is observed, the bread *represented* His body.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 159-160.

²⁶Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." (Mat. 26:26)

We would also assert that the Lord intended to say that when the Lord's Supper is observed, the wine in the cup **represented** His blood.

And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." (Luke 22:20)

It would have been patently obvious when the Lord Jesus instituted this ordinance to His disciples on the night He was betrayed that this was His meaning. Nevertheless, different teaching respecting these matters have been promoted in Christendom down through the centuries respecting the meaning of our Lord's words to eat this bread and drink this wine.

This is very important, for not only is a promise of God's blessing upon all who observe the Lord's Supper rightly, there is a curse of God promised to those who observe the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner.

²⁷Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ³⁰For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. ³¹For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. (1 Cor. 11:27-30)

Let us consider the various teachings in Christendom.

1. Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and high church Anglicanism/Episcopalian belief and practice

The position of **Roman Catholicism** has been that when Jesus said, "Take, eat; this is my body", that our Lord was declaring the bread was actually His physical body and the wine was actually His literal blood. In the observance of the Lord's Supper, Rome teaches that the priest who supervises the Mass turns the bread into the literal body of the Lord. And then with respect to the cup, Rome teaches that the priest changes the wine into the literal blood of Jesus. This is how the **Catechism of the Catholic Church** states their position:

At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine, that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ's Body and Blood. Faithful to the Lord's command the Church continues to do, in his memory and until his glorious return, what he did on the eve of his Passion: 'He took bread...' 'He took the cup filled with wine...' The signs of bread and wine become, in a way surpassing understanding, the Body and Blood of Christ...⁹

Rome also describes their understanding of the Eucharist to be a "bloodless sacrifice." Here is how it is described in their **Catechism**:

The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice: 'The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of the priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different.' 'In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner.'¹⁰

⁹ **Catechism of the Catholic Church** (Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), p. 299f.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 307.

In a Catholic encyclopedia, the following is said of the Mass:

Question: What is the Catholic Doctrine of the Mass?

Answer: That in the Mass is offered to God a true, proper, and propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead.

Question: What do you mean by the Mass?

Answer: The consecration and oblation of the body and blood of Christ under the sacramental veils or appearances of bread and wine: so that the Mass was instituted by Christ himself at his Last Supper: Christ Himself said the first Mass, and ordained that His apostles and their successors should do the like. Do this in remembrance of Me.” – Luke 22.

Question: What do you mean by a propitiatory sacrifice?

Answer: A sacrifice for obtaining mercy, or by which God is moved to mercy.

Question: How do you prove that the Mass is such a sacrifice?

Answer: Because in the Mass, Christ Himself, as we have seen, Chapter iv, is really present, and by virtue of the consecration is there exhibited and presented to the eternal Father under the sacramental veils, which by their separate consecration represent His death.

Now, what can more move God to mercy than the oblation of His only Son, there really present, and under this figure of death representing to His Father that death which He suffered for us.¹¹

Here is a quote from **James O’Brien**, a Roman Catholic priest wrote these words in his book, *The Faith of Millions*:

“When the priest pronounces the tremendous words of consecration, he reaches up into the heavens, brings Christ down from His throne, and places Him upon our altar to be offered up again as the Victim for the sins of man. It is a power greater than that of monarchs and emperors: it is greater than that of saints and angels, greater than that of Seraphim and Cherubim. Indeed it is greater even than the power of the Virgin Mary. While the Blessed Virgin was the human agency by which Christ became incarnate a single time, the priest brings Christ down from heaven, and renders Him present on our altar as the eternal Victim for the sins of man—not once but a thousand times! The priest speaks and lo! Christ, the eternal and omnipotent God, bows His head in humble obedience to the priest’s command.”

Over the centuries Rome developed many unbiblical beliefs and practices in order to perpetrate this doctrine and practice. They invented a priesthood separate from the laity, complete with an unbiblical sacrament of “holy orders”, so that they could have a special class of men to offer what they claim to be the sacrifice of the Mass. They invented an altar in a church building on which they could offer this sacrifice. They invented a ritual and prescribed words that were to fashion an acceptable sacrifice to God. They invented clerical robes and vestments to make their priests appear to be uniquely qualified and called to their “service.” None of these beliefs and practices are biblical. They are the result of centuries of defection and departure from biblical truth, even as they invented traditions and liturgy whereby they deceive people that they are doing something that God accepts and honors. All of these trappings help deceive and damn souls by leading them to falsely believe that God’s wrath is appeased regarding them and that He is pleased with them. We strongly advocate the Bible alone is our infallible source of truth for what we believe and what we practice. The Mass is not taught or promoted in Holy Scripture.

2. The Roman Catholic response to Protestant teaching—the Council of Trent

Rome has gone on record that they pronounce accursed of God anyone who refuses to embrace the teaching of the Mass that it espouses. At the **Council of Trent**, which was convened from **1545-1563**, Rome made the effort to counter the Protestant Reformation that had begun earlier in the century. The conclusions

¹¹ *The Catholic Educator* (Thomas Kelly, Catholic Publisher, 1889), p. 252.

and canons declared at Trent are declared by Rome to be as binding and authoritative today as it was then. Here are the declarations of Trent on them who objected or refuted what Rome said regarding the Mass:

ON THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

CANON I.--If any one saith, that in the mass a true and proper sacrifice is not offered to God; or, that to be offered is nothing else but that Christ is given us to eat; let him be anathema.

CANON II.--If any one saith, that by those words, Do this for the commemoration of me (Luke xxii. 19), Christ did not institute the apostles priests; or, did not ordain that they, and other priests should offer His own body and blood; let him be anathema.

CANON III.--If any one saith, that the sacrifice of the mass is only a sacrifice of praise and of thanksgiving; or, that it is a bare commemoration of the sacrifice consummated on the cross, but not a propitiatory sacrifice; or, that it profits him only who receives; and that it ought not to be offered for the living and the dead for sins, pains, satisfactions, and other necessities; let him be anathema.

CANON IV.--If any one saith, that, by the sacrifice of the mass, a blasphemy is cast upon the most holy sacrifice of Christ consummated on the cross; or, that it is thereby derogated from; let him be anathema.

CANON V.--If any one saith, that it is an imposture to celebrate masses in honour of the saints, and for obtaining their intercession with God, as the Church intends; let him be anathema.

CANON VI.--If any one saith, that the canon of the mass contains errors, and is therefore to be abrogated; let him be anathema.

CANON VII.--If any one saith, that the ceremonies, vestments, and outward signs, which the Catholic Church makes use of in the celebration of masses, are incentives to impiety, rather than offices of piety; let him be anathema.

CANON VIII.--If any one saith, that masses, wherein the priest alone communicates sacramentally, are unlawful, and are, therefore, to be abrogated; let him be anathema.

CANON IX.--If any one saith, that the rite of the Roman Church, according to which a part of the canon and the words of consecration are pronounced in a low tone, is to be condemned; or, that the mass ought to be celebrated in the vulgar tongue only; or, that water ought not to be mixed with the wine that is to be offered in the chalice, for that it is contrary to the institution of Christ; let him be anathema.

3. The views of Protestants on the Lord's Supper

There is not total agreement among Protestants on how to understand and practice the Lord's Supper. This lack of a unified agreement, I believe, is due to the fact that all Protestants came out of Roman Catholicism, and were attempting to correct their former belief and practice to conform to the Scriptures. They simply were successful to varying degrees in achieving their aims.

The various positions about the Lord's Supper have terms to distinguish them from one another. The doctrine of Rome respecting the Lord's Supper is commonly referred to as *transubstantiation*. It refers to their claim that in the Mass the bread and wine are literally changed into the body and blood of Jesus. Another view is that of *consubstantiation*. It holds that the bread and wine remain bread and wine, nevertheless, the real presence Christ is believed to be in these elements when they are consecrated. Some say that this is the historical view of Lutheranism, but others argue that Luther actually taught a view known as *sacramental union*. The view espoused by Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich Switzerland is the view that the Lord's Supper is simply a *memorial* to the death of Christ. *Memorialism* is a view common to many Baptist

churches. Reformed churches, which hold to the view espoused by John Calvin, hold to a *spiritual presence* of our Lord in the observance of the Lord's Supper. Sometimes it is called *real spiritual presence*, or *pneumatic presence*.

This is the position set forth in our **Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689**, which reads as follows:

Chapter 30: Of the Lord's Supper

1. The supper of the Lord Jesus was instituted by him the same night wherein he was betrayed, to be observed in his churches, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance, and shewing forth the sacrifice of himself in his death, confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits thereof, their spiritual nourishment, and growth in him, their further engagement in, and to all duties which they owe to him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other. (1 Cor. 11:23-26; 10:16, 17, 21)
2. In this ordinance Christ is not offered up to his Father, nor any real sacrifice made at all for remission of sin of the quick or dead, but only a memorial of that one offering up of himself by himself upon the cross, once for all; and a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God for the same. So that the popish sacrifice of the mass, as they call it, is most abominable, injurious to Christ's own sacrifice the alone propitiation for all the sins of the elect. (Heb. 9:25, 26, 28; 1 Cor. 11:24; Matt. 26:26, 27)
3. The Lord Jesus hath, in this ordinance, appointed his ministers to pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine, and thereby to set them apart from a common to a holy use, and to take and break the bread; to take the cup, and, they communicating also themselves, to give both to the communicants. (1 Cor. 11:23-26)
4. The denial of the cup to the people, worshipping the elements, the lifting them up, or carrying them about for adoration, and reserving them for any pretended religious use, are all contrary to the nature of this ordinance, and to the institution of Christ. (Matt. 26:26-28; 15:9; Exod. 20:4, 5)
5. The outward elements in this ordinance, duly set apart to the use ordained by Christ, have such relation to him crucified, as that truly, although in terms used figuratively, they are sometimes called by the names of the things they represent, to wit, the body and blood of Christ, albeit, in substance and nature, they still remain truly and only bread and wine, as they were before. (1 Cor. 11:27; 11:26-28).
6. That doctrine which maintains a change of the substance of bread and wine, into the substance of Christ's body and blood, commonly called transubstantiation, by consecration of a priest, or by any other way, is repugnant not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense and reason, overthroweth the nature of the ordinance, and hath been, and is, the cause of manifold superstitions, yea, of gross idolatries. (Acts 3:21; Luke 14:6, 39; 1 Cor. 11:24, 25).
7. Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this ordinance, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually receive, and feed upon Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death; the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally, but spiritually present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses. (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:23-26)
8. All ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with Christ, so are they unworthy of the Lord's table, and cannot, without great sin against him, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto; yea, whosoever shall receive unworthily, are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, eating and drinking judgment to themselves. (2 Cor. 6:14, 15; 11:29; Matt. 7:6)

4. Protestants vs. Roman Catholicism on the Lord's Supper

Many Christians believe that the Protestant observance of the Lord's Supper and the Roman Catholic Church practice of the Mass are simply two variations of the same thing, offering the sacrament of communion to their people. But this is a very wrong understanding. The observance of the Lord's Supper by Protestants and the Roman Catholic performance of Mass have no common ground. The teaching of Rome was greatly objected to by the Protestant Reformers. They rejected Rome's claim to have an order of "priests" who were above the laity, who claimed to have the power to take Christ out of heaven and convert Him into the elements in the Eucharist. The Protestants viewed and proclaimed openly that this was a terrible, sinful act of idolatry.

The Mass was one of the greatest points of difference and debate in the early days of the Protestant Reformation. Here are a few quotes of the Protestant Reformers of their opinion of the Catholic Mass.

1) Martin Luther's stand against the Mass

Martin Luther was very adamant against the Catholic Mass. Here is a statement of some of Luther's views¹²:

Luther's most strenuous objection was to the concept of mass as sacrifice. The Roman teaching that in the mass the priest offers a sacrifice and thus appeases God's anger denies the efficacy of Christ's atoning work. The papal mass is therefore a persistent, daily attack on the article of justification. It is an unremitting assault on the gospel and on the sufficiency of Christ's atonement. It completely distorts the nature of Christianity changing it from a religion of grace to one of works. In his *Admonition Concerning the Sacrament* (1530), Luther summarized his objections:

They made the sacrament which they should accept from God, namely, the body and blood of Christ, into a sacrifice and have offered it to the selfsame God... Furthermore, they do not regard Christ's body and blood as a sacrifice of thanksgiving, but as a sacrifice of works in which they do not thank God for His grace, but obtain merits for themselves and others and first and foremost, secure grace. Thus Christ has not won grace for us, but we want to win grace ourselves through our works by offering to God His Son's body and blood. This is the true and chief abomination and the basis of all blasphemy in the papacy.¹³

2) John Calvin gave Eight Charges Against the Mass

Calvin wrote: "If in Paul's times an ordinary abuse of the Supper could kindle the wrath of God against the Corinthians, so that he punished them thus severely, what ought we to think as to the state of matters at the present day? We see, throughout the whole extent of Popery, not merely horrid profanations of the Supper, but even a sacrilegious abomination set up in its room."

In the first place, it is prostituted to filthy lucre (1 Tim. 3:8) and merchandise.

Secondly, it is maimed, by taking away the use of the cup.

Thirdly, it is changed into another aspect, by its having become customary for one to partake of his own feast separately, participation being done away.

¹² Rev. Daniel Preus wrote this summary of Luther's views on the Mass. Preus is the first full-time Executive Director of the Luther Academy. He also has served on the pastoral staff at Hope Lutheran Church in St. Louis, MO. In July 2010 he was elected as Fourth Vice President of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

¹³ AE 38:117-118.

Fourthly, there is no explanation of the meaning of the sacrament, but a mumbling that would accord better with a magical incantation, or the detestable sacrifices of the Gentiles, than with our Lord's institution. (Prior to 1963 the Mass was in Latin, which no layman understood.)

Fifthly, there is an endless number of ceremonies, abounding partly with trifles, partly with superstition, and consequently manifest pollutions.

Sixthly, there is the diabolical invention of sacrifice, which contains an impious blasphemy against the death of Christ.

Seventhly, it is fitted to intoxicate miserable men with carnal confidence, while they present it to God as if it were an expiation, and think that by this charm they drive off everything hurtful, and that without faith and repentance. Nay more, while they trust that they are armed against the devil and death, and are fortified against God by a sure defense, they venture to sin with much more freedom, and become more obstinate.

Eighthly, an idol is there adored in the room of Christ.

In short, it is filled with all kinds of abomination

D. Our understanding of the Biblical teaching regarding the Lord's Supper

1. The elements of the Lord's Supper are simply bread and wine, and remain so.

We cannot discuss the Lord's Supper without addressing this matter. We understand the Bible to teach that the bread and wine represent Christ's body and blood; they do not become Christ's body and blood physically or spiritually, but rather they are simply representative symbols that the Lord has chosen to show forth the nature and benefits of His death to His people. Christ is "present" in the Supper because the elements stir up faith in us toward Him and of the spiritual reality that He is with us.

1) We reject the teaching of transubstantiation. I am not being unkind in making these statements. They would say plainly that they reject our understanding. We believe the Bible alone must be the resolve of the question. Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and some Anglicans (Episcopalian) espouse the view of transubstantiation. This position holds that the bread and wine are miraculously and literally turned into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. The elements cease to be bread and wine, they only appear to be so; they are in actuality, the flesh and blood of the Savior. The Bible does not teach this; therefore we reject this teaching and practice.

2) We reject the teaching of consubstantiation. This is the Lutheran position. Martin Luther came out of Rome part way on this matter. This position holds that the elements remain bread and wine, but spiritually they become the flesh and blood of the Savior. The precise teaching is that Christ's body and blood are present "in, with, and under" the form of the bread and wine.

3) Calvin taught that the bread and wine remained unchanged.

We affirm this position. Calvin wrote,

"The Holy Spirit raises the believer through faith to enjoy the presence of Christ in a way that is glorious and real, though indescribable" (Note in The New Geneva Study Bible, p. 1814).

We can again quote **The Baptist statement of Faith of 1689** that describes what we understand to be the Bible's teaching:

Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this ordinance, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually receive, and feed upon Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death; the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or

carnally, but spiritually present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses. (Art. 30, par. 7).

2. The Lord's Supper affirms truth to us.

1) The Lord's Supper affirms a *past* event.

The Lord's Supper is a Commemorative Meal; it emphasizes a past event. Earlier in the service we read **Matthew 26:17-30**. There we read of our Lord instituting the Lord's Supper which He commanded His disciples to do. The Lord Jesus said, "*This do...in remembrance of Me.*" When we in faith observe the Lord's Supper, we remember His death, and we through faith do have His death for us signified in the bread and cup; through faith we are feeding on the fact and deriving spiritual nourishment and strength from His death, which was on our behalf. One once described it this way:

The rite is commemorative. The Passover served for a memorial of deliverance from Egypt; and, year after year, as the pious Israelites partook of it, they were reminded of that marvelous deliverance, and were required to tell of it to their children. The Passover was instituted the night of that deliverance (from Egypt). The Lord's Supper was instituted the night when Jesus was betrayed to be crucified; and serves as a memorial of His sufferings and death. When we remember Him, we are to remember His agonies, his body broken, and His blood shed. In preaching the gospel, Paul determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. So in the Eucharist, Christ is presented to view; not as transfigured on Mount Tabor, or as glorified at His Father's right hand, but as suffering and dying. We delight to keep in memory the honors which they whom we love have received; but Jesus calls us to remember the humiliation which He endured. To the lowest point of His humiliation, the Supper directs our thoughts. (J. L. Dagg, **Manual of Church Order**, pp.209ff)

The Supper is commemorative. It looks back to the one perfect, complete, once for all time sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for the sins of His people. When we partake of the Lord's Supper we commemorate that He accomplished redemption for us through His death. When we eat and drink, we are showing our individual and collectively derive from His death. We affirm in faith that we stand in covenant relationship with God through the sacrifice of His Son.

We reject the idea, therefore, that the Lord's Supper is in any way to be viewed as a *repetitive sacrifice* which is offered by a priest. This denies the one-time, final, and effectual offering of Himself when Jesus died on the cross. Christ said on the cross, "It is finished." To say that the Eucharist is the sacrifice of the cross repeated, is to say that "it is not finished"; it denies the sufficiency and finality and the security that Christ obtained for His people when He died in their place.

2) The Lord's Supper affirms a *future* event -- The Lord's Supper proclaims the coming Lord.

Our observance is not only a memorial of His death, but it is a proclamation of His death; our observance of the meal preaches the certainty of Christ's future return. When our Lord instituted the Supper, He promised that He would return. When we observe the Supper, we affirm our faith in His Coming.

3) The Lord's Supper affirms a *present participation* -- of which we have already discussed.

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God,
be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:17)
