

## **Responding to articles (mostly pro Roman Catholic) sent anonymously to me and received 14<sup>th</sup> June 2011: Response (1) to: ‘Does Christ’s sacrifice continue?’**

Not for the first time, on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2011, I received anonymously a large package of assorted articles. There was a brief unsigned note that read '**Dear Cecil, A few theological articles for your interest**'. Where the anonymous sender personally stands 'theologically' I cannot be absolutely sure as some of the articles would be arguing in favour of the Roman Catholic understanding of certain issues, others would be from an Arminian standpoint and several would purport to be from a Reformed standpoint. Overall I would suspect that the anonymous sender clearly views Roman Catholicism as being 'Christian' and it wouldn't surprise me if the person were to be someone who is actively engaged in the practice and promotion of that religion.

Previous packages have not elicited any response from me, but interestingly enough, when this package arrived, I already had on my desk a piece of paper on which I had jotted down, some days previously, the heading for a possible article. That heading read as follows –

### **‘The Sacrifice of the Mass’: Still deceiving and damning millions.**

As a result I have decided to work my way through each of the 10 articles that were sent to me. With each (pro Roman Catholic) article I will focus on some key assertions made in the articles and which I believe my anonymous sender obviously believes show the Roman Catholic understanding on the issues to be correct. His intention I believe is to show to me that in his opinion the Roman Catholic view of the issues is correct and that either I am wrong in what I personally believe or else or perhaps in addition that I have misunderstood what Roman Catholicism teaches as 'truth' on the issues. As I complete each article I will post it to the 'Take Heed' web site so that readers can slowly digest each article individually rather than having to work through one single huge article containing all 10 article responses.

### **Responding to Article 1**

This first article was a copy of an '**Ascension Talk**' given by Graham Redding who had been the Pastor of St John's in the City Presbyterian Church, Wellington, New Zealand. It was published in a 'Reformed Worship' magazine and is located on

<http://www.reformedworship.org/article/march-2007/ascension-talk>

I will shortly copy the article and highlight in red the portions that I believe my anonymous sender wanted me to consider as he, I think, believes they give some basis to the Roman Catholic belief that the Sacrifice of the Mass does perpetuate/continue the Sacrifice made by Christ at the place called Calvary. For example, these are some words from Paragraphs 1364, 1365, 1366 & 1367 of the 1994 Catechism of the Catholic Church –

**'When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover and it is made present: the sacrifice of Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present... the Eucharist is also a sacrifice... In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross... The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice...'**

As a further example these are some words from Canon 897 of The Code of Canon Law –

**"The eucharistic Sacrifice, the memorial of the death and resurrection of the Lord, in which the Sacrifice of the cross is for ever perpetuated, is the summit and the source of all worship and Christian life".**

This now was the '**Ascension Talk**' article that was sent to me –

## Ascension Talk

Pondering the Significance of the Ascension

By [Graham Redding](#)

[March 2007](#)

*Sing! A New Creation* includes a delightful little sung meditation by John Bell of the Iona Community that has as its opening line, "Take, O take me as I am; summon out what I shall be" (SNC 215).

I have used this many times in worship, often as a sung refrain in a prayer of adoration and confession. I especially like what it suggests about our humanity: We are accepted by God not on the basis of who we are (the "God-accepts-me-just-as-I-am" mentality), but because of who we are *in Jesus Christ* and what we might yet become, or are summoned to be *in him*. Being in Christ, the truly Human One, is the basis of both our acceptance and our transformation.

There is a strong echo here of Paul's exhortation to the church in Colossae to set our minds on things that are above, for we have died and our lives are "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:2-3). This is ascension talk.

## HUMANITY INFUSED WITH HOPE

The Christian life is not merely a matter of following the example of a person who lived two thousand years ago,. Rather, it's about being drawn by the Spirit to share personally and corporately in Christ's ascended life and humanity, and in so doing finding ourselves clothed with "a new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator" (Col. 3:10).

"In that renewal," Paul goes on to declare, "there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian and Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3:11). In other words, being in Christ involves being part of a new reconciled and reconciling humanity, in which the divisions and inequalities that characterize the old humanity have been superseded. When we are in Christ, our humanity is infused with hope, and we are able to declare with Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

Whenever I ponder this uniquely Christ-centered and Spirit-shaped perspective on human personhood, my mind turns to Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). Drawn toward Jesus out of curiosity, this despised tax collector finds himself ushered into a new reality that is utterly liberating and transformative, with remarkable results—he pledges half his money to the poor and promises to repay fourfold those he has defrauded.

It seems to me vitally important that Christian worship give robust liturgical expression to this theologically derived anthropology. In so doing it will inevitably presume the doctrine of the ascension, for it is the ascension that provides the basis for affirming the continuing significance of the Incarnation and the vicarious humanity of Christ.

In light of this affirmation, the Incarnation should not be understood merely as a necessary prelude to the events of Easter. Rather, it has atoning significance in and of itself and finds its completion in the ascension. The ascended Christ is the One in whom, with whom, and through whom our reconstituted humanity has been lifted before the throne of grace. Through the activity of the Holy Spirit, we are joined to Christ and lifted with him into the presence of the Father and brought to share in the life of this triune God.

Every time we recite the *sursum corda* ("Lift up your hearts"; see *RW* 82) in the liturgy of the eucharist we give voice to this reality. The lifting of the congregation's hearts is to be conceived as our being brought by the Spirit to participate in the perfect praise and adoration that Christ the High Priest offers on our behalf. This is how Calvin conceived of the real presence of Christ in the sacrament. Not, as the Romans taught, in the transubstantiation of the elements, but in the act of being lifted by the Spirit, through the Son, into the presence of the Father.

## OUR ASCENDED INTERCESSOR

Thus understood, the doctrine of the ascension provides the basis for talking about the ongoing work of Christ in worship and prayer. In the book of Hebrews, Christ is portrayed as the great High Priest, the mediator of a new covenant, the leader of worship, the true intercessor, the pioneer and perfector of our faith.

What this cluster of titles and roles suggests is that the work of Christ did not end at Calvary. It is ongoing. The ascended Christ continually offers worship to the Father in our place and on our behalf; he continues to pray for the world he has redeemed in suffering love.

This last point is most important for helping us understand the basis for intercessory prayer. It is interesting to note that Diebold Schwarz, one of the forerunners to the Genevan Reformation, located the prayer of intercession within the eucharistic prayers of consecration and thanksgiving, thereby acknowledging that intercessory prayers are inextricably linked to the intercessory work of Christ in his role as High Priest. Calvin maintained this practice.

Of particular significance here is the idea that in prayer the Church does not merely participate in the *benefits* of Christ's work—it participates in the *work* itself.

This was a point emphatically reinforced by the nineteenth-century South African pastor and evangelist Andrew Murray. In his book *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, Murray described Christ's ascended life in terms of an ever-praying life which, when it descends and takes possession of us, constitutes in us too an ever-praying life. Our faith in the intercessory work of Christ, therefore, must not only be that he prays in our stead when we do not or cannot pray, but that, as author of our life and faith, he draws us on to pray in union with himself. In prayer, and through the work of the Spirit, we seek nothing less than the mind of Christ and commit ourselves to the way of Christ.

## CHRIST, THE ETERNAL SACRIFICE

If the doctrine of the ascension provides a basis for talking about the intercessory work of Christ, it also provides a basis for talking about **his eternal self-offering**. In the Church of Scotland's 1940 edition of *Book of Common Order*, the liturgy of the eucharist included a reference to "pleading Christ's eternal sacrifice."

The authorship of this phrase has been traced to the internationally renowned liturgist of the time, William Maxwell, who appeared to be drawing on the insights of the nineteenth-century champion of liturgical reform, William Milligan, and his son, George. Along with John McLeod Campbell, **these pivotal figures in liturgical reform argued that Christ's offering to the Father was not confined to the offering of his life at Calvary two thousand years ago. Rather, in light of the ascension, it is deemed to continue.**

The ascended Christ is the one true worshiper in whom, with whom, and through whom, and by the Spirit, the Church's own meager offerings of praise and thanksgiving are joined, perfected, and offered to the Father.

A worship service that portrays the offering, duly collected and dedicated, as a means of supporting the life and mission of the Church is a worship service with a vastly reduced understanding of the Church's participation in the eternal self-offering of its Lord. Even when the eucharist is not celebrated, the offering should be understood eucharistically in terms of being united by faith with our great High Priest's eternal sacrifice, that we may plead and receive its benefits and offer ourselves in prayer and praise to the Father.

In summary, the doctrine of the ascension is essential to understanding the nature of worship and prayer, the ongoing work of Christ, and the nature of human personhood. Belief in the ascension flows from a trinitarian doctrine of God, and it commits one to belief in the vicarious humanity of Christ and his role as High Priest. That Luke closes his gospel and opens his book of Acts with accounts of the ascension shows its importance in linking the person and work of Christ (as narrated in the gospel) with the activity of the Spirit (as narrated in Acts).

Falling as it does between the more prominent festivals of Easter and Pentecost, the Day of Ascension is easily overlooked. It does not have a church season named after it, but that should not render it any less significant.

In the risen and ascended Christ our humanity—assumed, sanctified, and redeemed through the cross—has been lifted into the innermost presence of the triune God. For now, the full extent of this reality is hidden from us, but it is nevertheless something into which we can grow.

First of all – who is Graham Redding? On this link <http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/staff> we read the following –

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Before taking up the position of Principal in February 2007, Graham had fifteen years of ministry experience in two churches – Somervell Memorial Presbyterian Church in Auckland and St John's in the City Presbyterian Church in Wellington. He has held the position of Moderator of the General

Assembly, and has served the Church in a variety of capacities, including as Co-convenor of the Equipping the Leadership Policy Group and Convenor of the Doctrine Core Group. His research interests have lain mainly in the fields of theology, liturgics, ethics and the arts. His book, Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ in the Reformed Tradition, was published by T&T Clark in 2003. He is married to Jenni and they have three children.

I also came across another article on [http://209.200.121.40/magazine/article.cfm?article\\_id=1642](http://209.200.121.40/magazine/article.cfm?article_id=1642) written by Mr Redding and no doubt the following portion from it would also have ‘gladdened’ the heart of my anonymous pro Roman Catholic article sender when Mr Redding wrote –

**This new humanity’s life is inherently eucharistic, and the Eucharist, thus understood, is not merely a meal of remembrance—it is an eschatological banquet in which, through the power of the Spirit, the risen and ascended Lord is profoundly present, and the church is brought to share in Christ’s life and mission.**

‘Christ’s life and mission’ that Mr Redding referred to was, according to the Scriptures, to ‘**save His people from their sins**’ (Matthew 1:21) and He did that when He ‘**redeemed**’ them on the cross of Calvary or as Peter put it “**ye were not redeemed with corruptible things** (like bread and wine) ... **but with the precious blood of Christ**” (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:18-19).

When that truth is understood and grasped, enlightened believers recognise that ‘**Christ’s life and mission**’ were uniquely and exclusively His and we (the church) do not, and cannot ‘share’ in it. During the ‘life’ of the church her ‘mission’ is to PREACH ‘**Jesus Christ and Him crucified**’ (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2:2; Mark 16:15 ;) and that is an entirely different ‘mission’ from that unique and exclusive redemptive mission that was Christ’s.

What Mr Redding wrote in this short excerpt about ‘**sharing in Christ’s life and mission**’ would also have been ‘music’ (well this is after all on a web site dedicated to ‘Resources for Planning and Leading Worship’) to my anonymous correspondent’s ears, in addition to the article that was actually sent to me, for Rome believes that through the rituals of her Mass, performed by her priests, that people are being ‘redeemed’ as we read in **Vatican Council II: Volume 1** (p 1) ‘**it is the liturgy through which, especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist the work of our redemption is accomplished**’.

Returning now to the article sent to me, I want to comment upon the portions that I highlighted in red. These portions would appear to endorse the false teaching of Rome, namely that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is a ‘continuing’ sacrifice rather than a ‘finished’ sacrifice. Rome believes that as Christ’s sacrifice is to be perpetuated then a whole class/army of sacrificing priests is always going to be needed until the return of Christ. Listen to these words from Canons 899 and 900 of The Code of Canon Law –

**‘The celebration of the Eucharist is an action of Christ himself and of the Church. In it Christ the Lord, through the ministry of the priest, offers himself... to God the Father... In the Eucharistic assembly the people of God are called together under the Presidency of the Bishop or of a priest under his authority, who acts in the person of Christ... The only minister who, in the person of Christ, can bring into being the sacrament of the Eucharist is a validly ordained priest’**

In the light of these teachings by Rome it’s no wonder that the later ‘Mother’ Teresa had such a very high regard for Roman Catholic priests. In his book ‘Evangelicals & Rome: The Ecumenical End Times “Church”’ David Cloud wrote (pp 325 - 327) –

**'Mother Teresa was a thoroughgoing Catholic, a faithful daughter of Vatican II... she believed the wafer of the Mass is Jesus Christ...consider some quotes from her speech at the Worldwide Retreat for Priests, October 1984... "At the word of a priest, that little piece of bread becomes the body of Christ, the Bread of Life. The you give this living Bread to us so that we too might live and become holy...I was so struck by the thought that ONLY when the priest is there can we have our altar and our tabernacle and our Jesus. ONLY the priest can put Jesus there for us"**

Let me now address the relevant portion of the heading to my article namely '**Does Christ's sacrifice continue?**' (As Rome claims according to Canon Law 897 quoted earlier with these words '**the Sacrifice of the cross is for ever perpetuated**'; and, as it would appear, Mr Redding also claims by referring in his article to Calvary as being '**deemed to continue**').

I believe God's Word teaches quite clearly that the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross was finished there, at Golgotha, at that moment in time/history, and that under no circumstances is it, the Sacrifice, perpetuated or continued.

In Matthew 16, following Peter's great confession in verse 16 of who Christ was/is, we then read this in verse 21 "**From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be raised again the third day**".

The Lord is here setting out a time-scale, a chronology of events that detailed how much of the remainder of his earthly life would unfold. The journey to Jerusalem would take a specific time; the suffering at the hands of the religious authorities would take a specific time; his death (on the Cross) would take a specific time; his burial would last a certain time; his resurrection would take place after a specific time.

Twice during His time on earth the Lord used the expression "**finished**". Firstly in John 17:4 the Lord said in prayer to His Father "**I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do**". Then secondly in John 19:30, as He hung on the cross, He declared triumphantly "**It is finished**". How can these two statements by Christ of "**finished**" be explained?

In John 17 the Lord is declaring I believe that He has just completed His role as God's promised Prophet (See Deuteronomy 18:15 – I deal with this in more detail in my article on <http://www.takeheed.info/the-promised-prophet-of-deuteronomy-18-jesus-christ-or-mohammed/>).

During His earthly life thus far, He had spoken to people on behalf of God in His role as the ultimate Prophet. But more than that, He had done so during a life lived by Him that had been blameless and totally without sin, thus qualifying Himself for the next phase of His earthly life, that of being a self-sacrificing Priest for sin.

John referred to Christ as "**the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world**" (John 1:29) – this was the language of sacrifice and of course "**the lamb**" had to be "**without blemish and without spot**" (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:19). By His life, Christ had established a perfect righteousness and so had demonstrated Himself to be an acceptable sacrifice for sin and therefore He could with authority declare at this point in His life "**I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do**".

Having said these words, the Lord then embarked upon a further work that He had to do, namely the work of offering Himself sacrificially on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for sin. This involved the shedding of His precious blood and also Him suffering and finally dying as a substitute for His chosen people. Having read how on the cross He declared "**It is finished**",

we then read further in the same verse, John 19:20, that “**he bowed his head and gave up the spirit**”.

The first “**finished**” refers I believe to His having lived sinlessly; the second “**finished**” refers I believe to His having died sacrificially. These were two time-limited events that were seen and witnessed and we read in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:18 “**the things which are seen are temporal**”. Shortly I will address the rest of that verse in Corinthians that speaks of “**things eternal**” but for now I want to continue to address the testimony of Scripture to the fact that the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross was finished at Golgotha and is in no way ‘**perpetuated**’ or ‘**continued**’.

From Hebrews 9:26-28 we read “**But now ONCE in the end of the ages hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men ONCE to die, but after this the judgment, So Christ was ONCE offered to bear the sins of many**”. The Greek for ‘**once**’ is **hapax** and in Vine’s Expository Dictionary we read that its use in “**ONCE offered**” means that the offering is ‘**of perpetual validity, NOT requiring repetition**’.

This means that the merits and benefits flowing from the Sacrifice of Christ are ‘**of perpetual validity**’ but that the actual Sacrifice itself is ‘**not requiring repetition**’. The ‘unseen’ merits and benefits of Christ’s sacrifice are ‘eternally valid’ – when a sinner is genuinely converted to Christ all the glorious merits and benefits of that sacrifice offered 2000 years ago are credited to him (forgiveness of sins and acceptance by God – see Ephesians 1:6-7).

I mentioned earlier how Calvary was a seen and witnessed, time-limited event, and how in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:18 we read that “**the things which are seen are temporal**”. What was not seen or witnessed at Calvary were of course the unseen merits and benefits that would flow from that Sacrifice by Christ (forgiveness of sins and acceptance by God) but the glorious good news of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:18 is this, that “**the things which are not seen are eternal**”.

The actual visible sacrifice of Christ on the Cross was a ‘**temporal**’ matter but the unseen merits and benefits flowing from it were and are ‘**eternal**’, so the actual sacrifice itself does not need to be ‘**perpetuated**’ or ‘**continued**’ in ‘The Sacrifice of the Mass’.

One final portion of Scripture to confirm the absolute ‘**finished**’ state of Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross – Hebrews 10:12 “**But this man (Christ) AFTER he had offered ONE sacrifice for sins FOR EVER, sat down on the right hand of God**”.

This verse clearly breaks Christ’s life down into ‘time capsules’. There was the ‘time capsule’ of Calvary – now ‘finished’. And then, following other ‘time capsules’ not mentioned here such as Christ’s burial – now ‘finished’, Christ’s resurrection – now ‘finished’, Christ’s post resurrection appearances – now ‘finished’ and Christ’s ascension – now ‘finished’, we then have the ‘time capsule’ of His exalted position now in Heaven (see Philippians 2:9) and even that will one day be ‘finished’ when He returns to rule and reign over His people in the new heavens and new earth (see Revelation 21:1-3).

Somewhat quaintly but very accurately Matthew Henry wrote in his commentary on verses 11-18 of Hebrews 10 –

‘Under the new covenant, or gospel dispensation, full and final pardon is to be had. This makes a vast difference between the new covenant and the old one. Under the old, sacrifices must be often repeated, and after all, only pardon as to this world was to be obtained by them. Under the new, one Sacrifice is enough to procure for all nations and ages, spiritual pardon, or being freed from punishment in the world to come. Well might this be called a new covenant. Let none

**suppose that human inventions** (Cecil – I have no doubt that Mr Henry had ‘The Sacrifice of the Mass’ in mind here) **can avail those who put them in the place of the sacrifice of the Son of God’.**

Tim Kauffmann, a brother in Christ and former Roman Catholic, in his article entitled ‘**Mass Deception**’ located on <http://www.cwrc-rz.org/zins/theological/99-mass-deception.html> wrote

**‘The news that Christ's sacrifice has put away sins once and for all is marvellous news to the believer, but Rome's priesthood cannot stand the hearing of it. This Good News of Christ's High Priestly ministry puts an end to everything that Rome's sacrificial priesthood wants to carry on. No worse news can fall on the ears of a Roman priest than this: Christ's sacrifice *has put away sins once and for all*. But the Christian Hebrews to whom the epistle was written, among whom were no doubt some of the Levitical tribe of priests, understood the significance of it. We have proof from the Scriptures that the converted Levites, upon hearing the gospel, did not rush to construct duplicates of their Levitical altars in order to continue their ministrations... were they to see *EWTN*'s (an American Roman Catholic TV station) daily Mass, they would stare aghast in wonder that what had been so close to disappearing in their time had been revived illegitimately’**

In closing let me quote from the second section of a little booklet that contains portions of the book ‘Roman Catholicism Tested by the Scriptures’ by the Rev John Coleman. The second section is titled ‘**The Tragedy of the Mass**’ and Mr Coleman wrote –

**‘Hebrews chapters 7, 9 and 10 constitute an overpowering refutation of all Roman claims regarding the Mass. Seven times this passage thunders forth its truth, “ONCE”, and those sounds come rolling down the centuries to us today, announcing the finality of an accomplished redemption. This finality of Christ's sacrifice and the perfection of HIS priesthood sweep away for ever the claims of a sacrificing priesthood within the framework of a New Testament Christian Church’... The Mass points men to that which can never take away sins...The Church of Rome bids men look to a wafer and on the false doctrine of Transubstantiation leads them away from the true God’.**

Christ’s sacrifice does NOT, as Rome claims and as Mr Redding suggests, CONTINUE, but gloriously, the merits and benefits of His FINISHED sacrifice at the place called Calvary, are graciously applied eternally to all those truly ‘born again’ of His Spirit.

My simple prayer is that Mr Redding and my anonymous, pro Roman Catholic correspondent may come to personally know, understand and experience this glorious scriptural truth in their own lives.

Cecil Andrews – ‘Take Heed’ Ministries – 18<sup>th</sup> June 2011