

LOGIA

A JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

REFORMATION 2001

VOLUME X, NUMBER 4

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Luther and the Mass

Justification and the Joint Declaration

DANIEL PREUS



BY THE TIME THIS ARTICLE APPEARS, about two years will have passed since the signing by Rome and various Lutherans of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. Few ecumenical events in recent church history have received the attention that the adoption of this document has produced. Supporters continue to laud the *Joint Declaration* as a major ecumenical break-through. Detractors remain no less adamant that the *Joint Declaration* represents no progress at all, indeed, that it is a compromise or even a concession of the worst kind. Perhaps one of the most compelling arguments supporting the latter view is that made by the Department of Systematic Theology of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana in the April 1998 issue of the *Concordia Theological Quarterly*. In response to a preliminary form of the *Joint Declaration*, it quotes from the Evangelical-Roman Catholic *Gift of Salvation* paper, another document produced through the dialogue process, that

spells out “diverse understandings of merit, reward, purgatory, and indulgences, Marian devotion and the assistance of the saints in the life of salvation, and the possibility of salvation for those who have not been evangelized.” For Lutherans it is nonsense to speak of consensus on justification if these issues remain unsettled.¹

One more “diverse understanding” needs to be added to the above list: that concerning the mass. In fact, nowhere else is a “diverse understanding” more clearly evident than in the positions of Lutherans and Roman Catholics on the Lord’s Supper. Nowhere is the central article of the Christian faith more powerfully impacted than in this difference. And nowhere is this difference more thoroughly described than in the writings of Martin Luther.

When Luther began to assail the mass as sacrifice, he attacked the same false soteriology that he had first condemned in the indulgence controversy a few years earlier. For Luther, the same principle was involved in both battles. “What he objects to is the claim that Christ is at our disposal to be made into an object that can be presented to God in order to gain his favors. It is that which damages both the sovereignty of Christ and the complete character of his work on the cross.”² As Luther saw it, the message proclaimed to the sinner in the sacrament of the altar is the same message announced

to him by the gospel and declared to him by the keys. It is the message of forgiveness, freely offered and given by God and received by faith. Against the heavenly prophets Luther wrote, “I will find in the sacrament or Gospel the word which distributes, presents, offers, and gives to me that forgiveness which was won on the cross.”³ The sacrament offers to the sinner the body and blood of Christ and thereby acts as absolution. The body and blood of the Savior, given for the sins of the world, are received by the sinner together with the forgiveness that Christ purchased by his death. The sacrament of the altar, therefore, is not merely a divine mandate given by Jesus as a memorial. It is not simply a token of his love. It is the gospel itself. The Lord’s Supper offers and bestows precisely that which the gospel gives: the forgiveness of sins. Luther writes:

What is the whole Gospel, but an explanation of this testament? Christ has gathered up the whole Gospel in a short summary with the words of this testament or sacrament. For the Gospel is nothing but a proclamation of God’s grace and of the forgiveness of all sins, granted us through the sufferings of Christ. . . . And this same thing, as we have seen, is contained in the words of this testament.⁴

Thus Henry Hamann indicates that the Smalcald Articles view the sacraments “not only to be compatible with the central teaching of justification by faith, but to be that central teaching itself in another form.”⁵

There is nothing in the sacrament of the altar that is not gospel. According to Luther, it is the nature of the antichrist to rage against the gospel, and his raging is more than evident in his perversion of the sacrament. Even those moderately acquainted with Luther’s views know that he considered the pope to be the antichrist. To no small extent, this identification is due to the Roman doctrine of the mass. The pope altered the very nature of the Lord’s Supper. Under antichrist, it is no longer as a sacrament that bestows forgiveness; it is rather a sacrifice and a good work by means of which the antichrist and his followers deceive everybody. To turn the sacrament into a sacrifice is to pervert it utterly; it is to change grace to works and Gospel to law. “Just as you cannot make out of the Gospel a sacrifice or a work, so you cannot make a sacrifice or a work out of this sacrament; for this sacrament is the Gospel.”⁶

The doctrine of justification was at the heart of Luther’s conflict with the papacy, and eventually the mass had to become central to this conflict. As Wissløff points out, Luther did not attack the mass until his reforming efforts had been under way for

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some time. At one time, he confessed, he would have carried wood to burn someone heretical enough to attack the mass. Eventually, however, he came to view the mass as the very worst of all papal heresies, as he discovered that “nothing less than the very essence of the Gospel was at stake.”⁷

The doctrine of justification was at the heart of Luther’s conflict with the papacy, and eventually the mass had to become central to this conflict.

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.⁸

How has Satan achieved this perversion of the sacrament within the papal church? He has done it by hiding the word that is the bearer of Christ and salvation. For Luther, it is the word of Christ that causes the sacrament to be what it is. There is no sacrament apart from the word.

Because it is not contrary to Scripture or faith that Christ’s words, as we understand them, give Christ’s body at the first celebration of the Lord’s Supper, we see no reason why this should be contrary to Scripture and faith at other celebrations of the Lord’s Supper.⁹

In his *Small Catechism* Luther stressed that God’s word is the effective cause of all that the sacrament does. In answer to the question, “How can bodily eating and drinking produce such great effects?” the *Catechism* responds,

The eating and drinking do not in themselves produce them, but the words “for you” and “for the forgiveness of sin.” These

words, when accompanied by the bodily eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the sacrament, and he who believes these words has what they say and declare: the forgiveness of sins (SC vi, 8; Tappert, 352).

But that which is the chief thing in the sacrament has been obscured by the mass. Luther exclaims,

But see what they have made of the mass! In the first place, they have hidden these words of the testament and have taught that they are not to be spoken to the laity, that these are secret words to be spoken only by the priest. Has not the devil here in a masterly way stolen from us the chief thing in the mass and put it to silence?¹⁰

The silencing of the words of institution and the concept of the mass as sacrifice go hand in hand. As Wissløff points out, when the words are neglected, that which the word promises is forgotten, and

When the promise of the Word is forgotten, faith which lives solely by the promise dies. And when faith dies, all sorts of works enter in instead. If the Word is not given the role of sole authority, human ideas will promptly come in to occupy its place. And since faith is the only thing that can correspond to the Word, these human ideas will automatically lead to “work.”¹¹

Thus the theft of the word from the sacrament necessarily results in the introduction of works-righteousness and paves the way for an understanding of the sacrament as sacrifice. But the pope and his bishops have stolen not only the words of the sacrament. They have also kept for themselves the bread and the wine. The wine was withheld in the context of the worship service, and both elements in the case of private masses. For this reason, they are the “greatest thieves of God and robbers of the church.”¹² For since the sacrament of the altar is itself the gospel, the robbery is much more serious than simply depriving the laity of one or even both elements in the Lord’s Supper. If they are deprived of the body and blood of Christ, they are deprived of salvation itself.

What kind of peddling is this, yes, what thievery and robbery when I am robbed of the body and blood of Christ which by right ought to be given to me freely, and when in exchange for my money and goods, I am offered the sacrifice and work of a godless, miserable man? I would call that robbing me of my nourishment and, moreover, selling refuse for money. Yes, it means robbing me of the kingdom of heaven, and in exchange for my money, selling me the fire of hell, which unfortunately I had previously earned without money and possessed because of my sin.¹³

The plundering of God’s church by the priests who through their celebration of the mass deprive the sheep of nourishment and life is so contrary to the nature of the sacrament and the calling of a true pastor that Luther questioned the authenticity of both the mass and the mass priests. If it is the duty of the priest to sacrifice, then his office is not pastor, but an office that rejects the gospel, denies

Christ, and angers God. It must be so if his office is one that intends to sacrifice and preach works instead of offering and preaching forgiveness in the sacrament.

Thus Luther did not equate the office of priest with that of pastor. Luther perceived that the pope possesses his own priesthood. He spoke of a "holy popish priesthood," a "papal priesthood," and "the pope's pseudo-priesthood. In his assessment of the papal mass, Luther did speak about priests, but he viewed them as "mass priests."¹⁴ They are "godless priests" and the "devil's priesthood."¹⁵ Never did Luther refer to them as priests of Christ, much less as pastors. For pastors feed the flock of Christ; the mass priests starve the sheep.

Luther often denied that the popish priests hold any Christian office, but his challenge to their possession of a Christian priestly office is most often found in his writings that deal with the mass. The sacrifice of the mass is an attack on the only priestly sacrifice that can ever have any merit before God, that of the great High Priest himself. The very term "priest" replaced that of "minister" in order that the concept of sacrifice might be reinforced in the papal mass.¹⁶ The title "priest" is not an appropriate one to describe him who holds the pastoral office and should be used only in reference to a Christian.

Luther saw the pope's priesthood as completely inimical to the Christian priesthood of believers.

So you see that Christ's priesthood has less chance of existing with the pope's pseudo-priesthood than death has with life or heaven with hell. Verily, verily, the pope is a regent of Christ: he has driven out Christ and expelled him and put himself in Christ's place as a ruler, and instead of the priesthood of the Spirit, he has set up a childish and grotesque priesthood.¹⁷

Since the pope's priesthood has nothing to do with Christ, much less with the office of a Christian minister, Luther denied that the consecration or ordination of such priests has any validity in the church of Christ. The pastoral office offers and bestows the gospel through preaching. Ordination should "consist of, and be understood as, calling to and entrusting with the office of the ministry."¹⁸ Those priests, however, who are consecrated only to offer the sacrifice of the mass perform none of the duties of the office of the ministry.

They do not preach. They do not baptize. They do not administer the sacrament. They do not absolve. They do not pray (except to intone badly and hiss the words of the Psalter). They do not exercise the office of the care of souls, nor do they do anything with the dying; rather, they are a useless, lazy, idle crowd who alone, as they suppose, handle the sacrament and sell it as a sacrifice and good work.¹⁹

Luther wondered what kind of priesthood it is that performs none of the duties of a pastor and even "forbids public preaching in the church and parish ministry . . . without a special new order and call." As far as Luther was concerned, consecration to such a priesthood has nothing in common with "ordination or a call to the public Christian office of preaching and the parish ministry."²⁰ Such a priesthood has no authorization from the

Scriptures and is therefore a perverted priesthood, instituted not by Christ, but by antichrist. Wissløff summarizes Luther's view of this papal "ministry,"

The sacrifice of the mass is viewed from the standpoint of preaching. It does not speak of grace and faith, but of works and merit. The only priestly ministry the New Testament knows anything about is the ministry of the Spirit. But the ministry of the priest in the mass has to be characterized as one of the letter, of the law, of works. Therefore it is a "ministerium perditionis." "Therefore as the priesthood is, so is the sacrifice, so is the ministering. The priest, the law, the work—all are nothing but the laws of Satan."²¹

"As the priesthood is, so is the sacrifice." Just as the pope's priests are in no sense the priests of Christ, so the pope's mass should not be identified with that sacrament instituted by Jesus. Luther attacked with vehemence especially the private mass. The sacraments are the possession of the church, not the possession of the priests. Therefore "no sacrament can be performed by an individual alone." "[A]ll masses without communicants should be completely abolished,"²² for "every private mass is an abomination."²³ So foreign is the concept of a private mass to Christ's institution of the Lord's Supper that Luther questioned more than once in *The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests* (1533) whether Christ's body and blood are even present in such a mass. Reflecting upon the private masses that he himself celebrated, he confessed, "I, who was an arch papist and a more zealous reader of masses than they all are now, said mass for over fifteen years and do not know yet whether I received the sacrament in the mass or not." Since in private masses "they remove the essential ordinance and institution of Christ' and produce their own ordinance," and it is therefore uncertain whether the body and blood of Christ are even present in such masses, Christians should never believe that "Christ's body and blood are present; for faith should be sure of its affairs and have a sure basis concerning which one must not and should not be in doubt."²⁴ Since faith cannot possibly be nourished by such an uncertain act, and since these doubtful masses have no basis in Scripture, it would be far better for the church if they would all be abolished.

Luther did not equate the office of priest with that of pastor.

But Luther's condemnation of the mass was not limited to the private mass. He viewed the mass itself as a "papist idol." When he wrote, "This is the true and chief abomination and the basis of all blasphemy in the papacy,"²⁵ he spoke not of the private mass alone. It is the mass itself that is the greatest of all abominations, whether it take place privately or publicly.

How then did Luther distinguish between the mass and the sacrament of the altar? In his first attacks on the papist abuses of

the Lord's Supper, Luther used the terms "mass" and "sacrament of the altar" interchangeably. In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), for example, he wrote, "Let this stand, therefore, as our first and infallible proposition—the mass or Sacrament of the Altar is Christ's testament, which he left behind him at his death to be distributed among his believers."²⁶ In 1530, when the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession were written, Melancthon used the word "mass" as a synonym for the Lord's Supper,²⁷ and Luther subscribed to both confessions. In the same year, in his *Admonition Concerning the Sacrament*, Luther himself used the term "mass" as a synonym for "sacrament."²⁸ By

would very much like to see and hear that the two words 'mass' and 'sacrament' would be understood as being as different as darkness and light, yes, as different as devil and God."³¹ Again Luther prayed,

May God grant to all devout Christians such hearts that when they hear the word "mass," they might be frightened and make the sign of the cross as though it were the devil's abomination; on the other hand, when they hear the word "sacrament" or "Lord's Supper," they might dance for pure joy. . . .³²

Lutherans tempted to use "mass" as a synonym for the Lord's Supper should take seriously Luther's observations on the difference between "mass" and "sacrament." The same confusion may very well result today when a term frequently used in reference to a sacrificial act performed by a priest is used carelessly by Lutherans in reference to the Lord's Supper. It is not without justification that a charge of "Roman Catholic" is brought against those who refer to the Lord's Supper as "the mass." Luther's own example after 1533 and that of the orthodox theologians such as Chemnitz who followed him ought to be instructive in this regard. They do not use the term "mass" to speak of the Lord's Supper. It is ill advised for Lutherans to do so today. Confusion will almost necessarily result unless Rome reforms its doctrine on the mass, which is hardly likely. Luther conceded that if the papists adhere to the ordinance of Christ in their celebration of the sacrament, the body and blood of Christ are truly present and received.³³ On the other hand, the mass, which is celebrated by the priest at the same time that the sacrament is administered, is a misuse of the sacrament and an abomination. Luther declared,

I am not contending against the sacrament, but against the mass, and would like to separate the sacrament from the mass so that the mass might perish and the sacrament alone, without the mass, might be preserved in its honor and according to the ordinance of our dear Lord Jesus Christ.³⁴

In 1537, when Luther's Smalcald Articles appeared, he continued to view sacrament and mass as inimical to each other. Mass and sacrament are so opposed to each other that Luther dealt with them under two different headings. Furthermore, when speaking of the Lord's Supper in the article on the mass, he used the word "sacrament"; the word "mass," on the other hand, means sacrifice (SA II 11). Nor was Luther referring alone to the private masses in his condemnation of the mass, although it is clear that because of their proliferation, they come in for a great deal of criticism. His remarks introducing the article on the mass indicate that his major concern was with the mass as sacrifice. The mass is considered the "greatest and most horrible abomination" not because it is done in private, but because it runs "into direct and violent conflict with this fundamental article [of justification]." The mass is a papal idolatry because it is considered a sacrifice that delivers from sin, whereas only the Lamb of God can do this. Therefore it is an abomination whenever a mass takes place, be it public or private. It is little wonder then that Luther concluded, "The Mass is unnecessary, and so it can be omitted without danger" (SA II 11, 3). In fact, he wrote, "Let the people be told openly that the Mass, as trumpery, can be omitted without sin, that no one will be damned for not observing it,

By 1533, however, Luther came to the conclusion that "mass" should no longer be used in reference to the sacrament of the altar.

1533, however, Luther came to the conclusion that "mass" should no longer be used in reference to the sacrament of the altar. Luther's *Letter Concerning His Book on the Private Mass* is very illuminating in regard to his distinction between the two. In this letter Luther provided a definition of the term "mass" that clearly drives a wedge between mass and sacrament. According to Luther, "mass" refers

to what the priest does alone at the altar, to which no ordinary Christian or layman adds anything. For they indeed know that no layman or ordinary Christian can celebrate mass and they will not allow it. Nor do they allow it to be or to be called a mass when a layman receives the sacrament; but they . . . alone celebrate mass; all other Christians simply receive the sacrament and do not celebrate mass.²⁹

The word "mass," Luther believed, should be defined as the sacrifice that the priest offers for sin. It should never be used to speak of that sacrament which grants to believers the body and blood of Christ and the forgiveness of sins. He spoke of the time when he himself could not differentiate between the two:

For me mass and sacrament at the altar were one and the same thing, as they were at that time for all of us. Yet they are not one and the same thing. It is the mass when I sacrifice the sacrament to God for my sins and the sins of others as a work performed by human beings (whether they be evil or godly). . . . It is the sacrament when I receive from the priest the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine.³⁰

Luther was convinced that the use of the terms "mass" and "sacrament" interchangeably has resulted in great confusion, and that the only way to provide a clear understanding of the nature of the Lord's Supper is to stop calling it the mass. "Indeed, I wish and

and that one can be saved in a better way without the Mass" (SA II 11, 5; Tappert, 293). The better way to which Luther refers is that sacrament which has been instituted by Christ: the Lord's Supper.

It is clear also in Luther's *Letter Concerning His Book on the Private Mass* that he included both private and public masses in his condemnation of the mass. He confessed his anger at the papists for the way in which they have woven together so inseparably the sacrament and the mass that when the Christians receive it at Easter time "the common man is unable to distinguish between the mass and the sacrament."³⁵

As Luther viewed it, the one responsible for this weaving together of the mass and the sacrament is none other than Satan himself.

Such sacrificing and reception of the sacrament the devil has mingled together so inseparably in the mass, even as dishonest innkeepers mix water and wine with one another and as deceitful minters mix silver and brass. There is need here of an acute tester and of a hot fire (which is the word of God, Psalm 17 [3 ff.]) so that they might again be separated from one another.³⁶

Through his antichrist, the devil has substituted a sacrifice for Christ's sacrament and introduced an idol into God's temple, as Daniel prophesied (Daniel 11 [37 ff]). Just as the devil has constructed his own chapel next to the church of God, so he has imitated also God's sacrament and established the mass as its substitute. And just as the church of antichrist is a hypocritical and false church, so his mass is an idol and an abomination. For since the false church of antichrist attacks the church of Christ by robbing it of the gospel, the false "sacrament" of antichrist must also deprive the church of her inheritance, robbing her of Christ's body and blood and the forgiveness of her sins, offering a human work and sacrifice in its place. The mass may indeed feed the pope's "army and men of war,"³⁷ but it is no meal for the church of Christ, which lives and is nourished by the gospel.

The doctrine of the Lord's Supper was not simply an ancillary issue when considering Luther's understanding of the nature of Antichrist and the eschatological struggle of the church. When the mass poses as a legitimate observance of the sacrament of the altar, Christ, the only Savior, is replaced with an idol, and it is always the removal of Christ's cross that antichrist seeks. He has accomplished this goal in the sacrifice of the mass, substituting works for grace. When mass and sacrament meet, two completely different soteriologies confront each other. When mass and sacrament actually take place concurrently, as they do when mass is offered during the celebration of the Lord's Supper itself, the struggle between the true and the false church becomes a particularly grievous one. At one and the same time, at one and the same place, Christ with his body and blood offers grace and salvation, and antichrist with his sacrifice of works proffers death and perdition. Every mass is an assault on the atonement of Christ, proclaiming it insufficient, indeed irrelevant. Thus the battle between Christ and antichrist rages nowhere more intensely than in the struggle between sacrament and mass when two conflicting soteriologies confront each other, one of grace and one of works.

It is because Luther saw the contention between the mass and the sacrament as a struggle between two mutually exclusive soteriolo-

gies, and therefore, the site of battle between the true church and the false church, that he viewed the mass as crucial to the survival of the papal office. Since the mass is a denial of the atonement, its loss would have a profoundly significant impact upon the office of the antichrist, whose chief objective is to suppress the gospel and destroy faith in Christ. Just as Luther believed that the entire gospel is encompassed within the sacrament of the altar, so he viewed the sacrifice of the mass as, "the basis of all blasphemy in the papacy."³⁸ Every celebration of the mass is a proclamation of the central doctrine of the antichrist, that is, salvation by works. To remove the mass would be to topple antichrist from his throne. Therefore, said Luther, it is not possible for the papists to yield on the article of the mass. "The papists are well aware that if the mass falls, the papacy will fall with it" (SA II 11, 10; Tappert, 294).

The mass is a papal idolatry because it is considered a sacrifice that delivers from sin.

Already in 1522, foreshadowing his later distinction between the words "mass" and "sacrament," Luther recognized how essential the mass is to papal soteriology. He declared in a treatise against Henry VIII: "After the mass has fallen, I believe that we will have triumphed over the entire papacy. For upon the mass, as upon a rock, the entire papacy is founded."³⁹ In 1524, Luther confessed that he had even been tempted to interpret the words of institution symbolically in order to deal a greater blow to the papacy.⁴⁰

Luther's view that the mass is critical to the survival of the office of the Antichrist never changed. In 1534, he said of the papists,

However, they indeed perceive that the Reformation is about to become too powerful now that the chief article and the true cornerstone of the papal church, the holy mass, is also being attacked. This is going to be too much for them. At this point—and it is time—they really have to shout, lie, murder and resort to all kinds of insults and abuses in order that their one rock of consolation and chief fortress might not fall.⁴¹

Since the mass is essential to the soteriology and survival of the papacy, it would be absolutely ruinous to retain it in the Christian church. The sacrifice of the mass contains precisely those elements that bind consciences to a false worship of God and hinder them from attaining to faith's only true worship of God.⁴² As far as Luther was concerned, there can be no compromise between those who wish to celebrate the Lord's Supper and those who desire the sacrifice of the mass.

It is as Campeggio said in Augsburg: he would suffer himself to be torn to pieces before he would give up the mass. So by God's help, I would suffer myself to be burned to ashes before I would allow a celebrant of the mass and what he does to be considered equal or superior to my Savior, Jesus Christ.

Accordingly, we are and remain eternally divided and opposed the one to the other (SA II II, 10; Tappert, 294).

A true pastor feeds the sheep; he offers to the congregation Christ's body and blood and the forgiveness of sins, their true inheritance, in the sacrament of the altar. The pope and his priests, on the other hand, either rob the people outright of their inheritance, as in the private mass and by withholding the host, or they so intermingle mass with sacrament that the common people cannot perceive that their inheritance is there. The pope is therefore no pastor, nor are his bishops and mass-priests pastors. Pastors "pasture"; they feed and guide and protect the flock. The pope and his papists, in Luther's view, are wolves and arsonists who ravage the flock and burn down the church.

At the heart of Luther's assessment of the papacy as the antichrist lies the sacrifice of the mass.

Thus, Luther's view that the pope was to be identified as antichrist was formed not only by those passages of Scripture that deal with the coming antichrist and with a description of his kingdom. It was also shaped substantially by the teaching of justification that permeates Scripture. Certainly it is the specific passages that predict the coming "man of sin" and describe his activity that bring to attention the existence of this eschatological figure. But for Luther it was the Scripture's message of justification and his recognition that the pope lives to destroy this doctrine, and thus to destroy Christianity, that was instrumental in causing Luther to see that the pope is indeed this antichrist. And at the heart of Luther's assessment of the papacy as the antichrist lies the sacrifice of the mass.

If, as indicated earlier, the sacraments *are* the central teaching of justification by faith, and if the Lord's Supper *is* the gospel, it is surely disingenuous for Lutherans to declare convergence with Roman Catholics on the article of justification without even mentioning the Lord's Supper. Yet this is precisely what the *Joint Declaration* does. Though the document contains a number of references to baptism, it makes no mention of the Lord's Supper whatsoever, except obliquely when it concedes the need for further clarification on a number of topics such as "the relationship between the Word of God and church doctrine, as well as ecclesiology, ecclesial authority, church unity, ministry, the sacraments, and the relationship between justification and social ethics."⁴³

To avoid completely discussion of a *locus* that is absolutely central to the theology of both Lutherans and Roman Catholics, and particularly to their understanding of the article of justification, can hardly create confidence in the integrity of the participants. Or is it possible that Lutherans and Roman Catholics have come closer together during recent years in their understanding of the sacrament of the altar?

Mass as sacrifice is certainly evident in the canons of the Council of Trent (1545–1563). "If anyone says that in the Mass there is not offered to God a true and proper sacrifice, or that to be offered is nothing but that Christ is given to us to eat, let him be anathema." "If anyone says that the Mass is merely a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, or a bare commemoration of the sacrifice performed on the cross, not however a propitiatory sacrifice, or that it benefits him only who eats and that it ought not to be offered for the living and the dead for sins, punishments, satisfactions, and other necessities, let him be anathema."⁴⁴ Rome has not recanted the canons of the Council of Trent. What Rome affirmed shortly after Luther's death is her official doctrine still today.

But can one really say that Rome's position has not changed in light of the fact that today in Roman Catholic churches the sacrament can be received in both kinds and Christ's words of institution will be heard in the native tongue of the communicant? Yes! On the nature of the mass as sacrifice Rome's position has not changed. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is replete with affirmations of the mass as sacrifice. According to this book of instruction, commissioned and approved by Pope John Paul II, in the eucharist the church "presents to the Father the offering of his Son which reconciles us with him." "As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed' is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out." "The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it *represents* (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross." "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." Particularly forceful in view of Luther's condemnation of the "mass priests" is the following citation:

Through the ministry of priests the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is completed in union with the sacrifice of Christ, the only Mediator, which in the Eucharist is offered through the priests' hands in the name of the whole Church in an unbloody and sacramental manner until the Lord himself comes.

The connection between the mass and purgatory is also made clear in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, as well as an implicit denial of the full sufficiency of Jesus' atonement. "The Eucharistic sacrifice is also offered for *the faithful departed* who 'have died in Christ but are not yet wholly purified' so that they may be able to enter into the light and peace of Christ."⁴⁵

Luther abhorred the mass as sacrifice precisely because it denied the sufficiency of Christ's atonement and thus robbed sinners of comfort. That mass and sacrament would be observed together he saw as tragic because sinners were confused and left in doubt as to the inheritance that was theirs in the sacrament. Such confusion is truly a tragedy because the Christian's inheritance in the Lord's Supper is the forgiveness of sins—and where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. But as in Luther's day this inheritance was denied by the teaching on the mass, so today also the teaching on the mass deprives Christians of the true comfort the Lord's Supper is meant to give.

Is the Lord's Supper sacrifice or sacrament? According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "The Mass is at the same time,

and inseparably, the sacrificial memorial in which the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated and the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood." The eschatological battle that Luther saw when sacrament and sacrifice contended with each other, when grace and works faced off against each other, continues today in the Roman mass. "The altar, around which the Church is gathered in the celebration of the Eucharist, represents the two aspects of the same mystery: the altar of the sacrifice and the table of the Lord."⁴⁶

Luther abhorred the mass as sacrifice precisely because it denied the sufficiency of Christ's atonement.

It is difficult to look seriously at the official teachings of the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church and come to the conclusion that the formulators of the *Joint Declaration* have attempted to be honest with their respective churches. To declare convergence on the article of justification when there are "diverse understandings of merit, reward, purgatory, and indulgences, Marian devotion and the assistance of the saints in the life of salvation, and the possibility of salvation for those who have not been evangelized"⁴⁷ is indeed nonsense. To speak of consensus on the doctrine of justification and ignore the soteriological conflict between the Roman mass and the Lord's Supper is to make a mockery of the meaning of consensus.

One can hardly escape the conclusion that the signers of the *Joint Declaration* are more interested in the illusion of peace and harmony than they are in the truth. In his Preface to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Philip Melancthon stated that he wrote it

to testify to all nations that we hold to the Gospel of Christ correctly and faithfully. We take no pleasure in discord, nor are we indifferent to our danger; its extent is evident from the bitter hatred inflaming our opponents. But we cannot surrender truth that is so clear and necessary for the church (AC Pref. 15-16; Tappert, 99).

True Lutherans will never take pleasure in discord. But neither will they surrender truth that is so clear and necessary for the church. If the Lutheran Church today wishes to hold to the gospel of Christ correctly and faithfully, she cannot afford to ignore actual differences in doctrine, especially when those differences impinge so directly on the gospel itself. The Roman and Lutheran teachings on the Lord's Supper not only divide us in our understanding of the sacrament of the altar. They represent two differing soteriologies, and no less in our day than in Luther's. It is difficult to know what long-term effect the *Joint Declaration* will have on Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches. One thing is sure: we have no consensus now on the doctrine of justification, nor will there ever be consensus as long as the Roman mass remains a sacrifice. **LOGIA**

NOTES

1. Department of Systematic Theology, "Joint Lutheran/Roman Catholic Declaration of Justification: A Response." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 62 (April 1998): 94.
2. Marc Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ: Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), 128.
3. AE 40: 214.
4. AE 35: 106.
5. H. P. Hamann, "The Smalcald Articles as a Systematic Theology: A Comparison with the Augsburg Confession," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 52 (January 1988): 40.
6. AE 36: 288, 289.
7. Carl Wissløff, *The Gift of Communion: Luther's Controversy with Rome on Eucharistic Sacrifice* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 5, 10; H. G. Haile, *Luther: An Experiment in Biography*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1980), 250.
8. AE 38: 117-118.
9. Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), 304.
10. AE 35: 90.
11. Wissløff, 42.
12. AE 38: 159.
13. Ibid, 160.
14. AE, 36: 203, 178. Luther frequently uses the term "mass priests" in his treatise *The Misuses of the Mass*.
15. Ibid, 183, 161.
16. Ibid, 173.
17. Ibid, 203.
18. AE 38: 197.
19. Ibid, 179.
20. Ibid, 176-177.
21. Wissløff, 87-88.
22. AE 49: 206.
23. AE 50: 131.
24. AE 38: 156, 158, 163, 227, 194, 163.
25. AE 49: 263; 38: 188.
26. AE 36: 37.
27. *Triglotta*, 65-69, 383-419.
28. AE 38: 226.
29. Ibid, 226.
30. Ibid, 227.
31. Ibid, 226.
32. Ibid, 227.
33. Ibid, 225.
34. Ibid, 226-227.
35. AE 38: 227. See also Luther's *Admonition Concerning the Sacrament*, p. 120 of this volume, where Luther spoke of both the sacrifice of the priest and the sacrament of the ordinary Christian as "both one and the same sacrament."
36. Ibid, 227.
37. Ibid, 132.
38. Ibid, 118.
39. St. Louis ed., 19: 346. The translation is the author's.
40. Hermann Sasse, *This is my Body* (Adelaide, South Australia: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), 64.
41. AE 38: 232.
42. Wissløff, 18.
43. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 5.43. Subsequent references will be abbreviated "Joint Declaration."
44. Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 2: 440.
45. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Image, Doubleday, 1995), 378 (1354); 380 (1364, 1366); 381 (1367); 382 (1369, 1371).
46. Ibid, 386 (1382); 387 (1383).
47. *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 62 (April 1998): 94.