

The Augsburg Confession

Article 24

More on the Lord's Supper

The doctrine of the Lord's Supper is spoken of in the Augsburg Confession more often than any other doctrine. In Article X the Lutherans clarify their teaching on the bodily presence of Christ in the Sacrament, and demonstrate that they are not like the Zwinglians and others who teach otherwise. In Article XXII they clearly state their opposition to the Roman practice of withholding the cup from the laity, and describe the Scriptural command and historical support for giving both the bread and the wine to the common people. Now, in Article XXIV the Lutherans come to the heart of the issue surrounding the doctrine of the Lord's Supper: The sacrifice of the Mass.

The Sacrifice of the Mass (§ 21-35)

The Romans spoke of the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice, a term which Luther was quite uncomfortable with since ***“Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many” (Hebrews 9:28)*** through His death on the cross. For this reason they call the sacrifice of the mass an “unbloody sacrifice” since Christ is present but offered in an unbloody manner. While the Romans clearly stated that *“the mass does not abolish sins”* they also state that it *“abolishes the punishment due sin, supplies satisfactions, and confers increase of grace and salutary protection of the living” (Roman Confutation to Article 24)*.

This sacrifice was beneficial not only for those who were alive, but also those who were dead, by making satisfaction for sin. The problem with this is that it turns this sacrament into a work of man, instead of a work of God as the Lutherans state: *“Meanwhile faith in Christ and true service of God were forgotten.”*

Other areas of Disagreement

There were a number of important issues that divided the Lutherans and Catholics on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper at that time (and still today). We have already

discussed the doctrines of Transubstantiation, Concomitance and withholding the cup, and the sacrifice of the Mass as a satisfaction for sin. Here in this article the Lutherans also discuss a few other areas of disagreement. They include:

- **Preparation for the Lord's Supper;**
- **The Language used in the service;**
- **Private Masses for money;**
- **Close Communion; and**
- **How often Communion should be received.**

These points were very important in the time of Luther, and they are just as important in our time as well. As we consider these points we will see their value and emphasis in our teaching still today.

Preparation for the Lord's Supper (§ 9,7)

This article begins: *"Without boasting, it is manifest that the Mass is observed among us with greater devotion and more earnestness than among our opponents. Moreover, the people are instructed often and with great diligence concerning the holy sacrament, why it was instituted, and how it is to be used (namely, as a comfort for terrified consciences) in order that the people may be drawn to the Communion and the Mass. The people are also given instruction about other false teachings concerning the sacrament."* Luther and many others had seen the improper use of the Lord's Supper in the Roman Church. They understood the importance of instruction in preparation for receiving this sacrament and began educating the people accordingly.

Application: Many within Lutheranism (and without) now neglect the instruction of individuals concerning the meaning, purpose and misuse of the Lord's Supper. But according to Scripture, we see that preparing individuals for worthy reception of the Lord's Supper has, from the very beginning, been an important characteristic of the Lutheran Church.

The Language used in the Service (§ 2-3)

Another point made in this article was the change in the Lutheran service which incorporated German hymns for the congregation to sing. *“No conspicuous changes have been made in the public ceremonies of the Mass, except that in certain places German hymns are sung in addition to the Latin responses for the instruction and exercise of the people. After all, the chief purpose of all ceremonies is to teach the people what they need to know about Christ.”* (There is more on this subject in the Latin version which adds a few extra sentences.)

Application: The reason for the change in the service was to help teach the people. In order for them to learn about the Sacrament and the work of Christ, they had to understand what was being spoken. This is also a good reminder for us as we consider our own liturgy and worship practices.

Private Masses for money (§ 10-13)

One of the concerns the Lutherans had was that of corruption and greed within the Church. They address this in connection with the practice of offering special Masses for a price: *“Before our time, however, the Mass came to be misused in many ways, as is well known, by turning it into a sort of fair, by buying and selling it, and by observing it in almost all churches for a monetary consideration. ...such mercenary Masses and private Masses, which had hitherto been held under compulsion for the sake of revenues and stipends, were discontinued in our churches.”*

Close Communion (§ 35-36)

They also speak of the importance of withholding communion from some people: *“Thus the Mass is preserved among us in its proper use, the use which was formerly observed in the church and which can be proved by St. Paul’s statement in 1 Cor. 11:20ff. and by many statements of the Fathers. For Chrysostom reports how the priest stood every day, inviting some to Communion and forbidding others to approach.”*

Application: This is seen as judgmental by many in our society, but the practice of close communion is for the benefit of, and out of love for, that person. For that reason we commune only those who have publicly confessed their shared faith with us and show themselves to be worthy communicants.

How often Communion should be received (§ 34, 40-41)

Finally this article even discusses the topic of how often Communion should be offered and/or received. *“It is observed among us in the following manner: On holy days, and at other times when communicants are present, Mass is held and those who desire it are communicated.”* And, *“no conspicuous change has been made in the public ceremonies of the Mass except that other unnecessary masses which were held in addition to the parochial Mass, probably through abuse, have been discontinued.... In times past, even in large churches where there were many people, Mass was not held on every day that the people assembled, for according to the Tripartite History, Book 9, on Wednesday and Friday the Scriptures were read and expounded in Alexandria, and all these services were held without Mass.”*

Application: How often should the Lord’s Supper be offered in our worship services? How often should it be received? Some have the practice of celebrating Communion once a year; some once a quarter; others once a month or twice a month; some every week; and still others every day. Christ did not give us a specific command, He simply said: **“This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (1 Corinthians 11:25)**. While we do not want to take the blessings offered in this sacrament for granted, we should want to receive it frequently so that we may, through worthy reception, obtain those God-given blessings.

Summary

This sacrament was instituted *“to awaken faith and comfort our consciences when we perceive that through the sacrament grace and forgiveness of sin are promised us by Christ”* (§ 30).