

# A Reformed Account of Eucharistic Sacrifice

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**Abstract:** Christian writers have always described the Eucharist as a ‘sacrifice’, but this was ill-defined before 1500. The Tridentine Fathers offered an account of the priest somehow offering the one sacrifice of Calvary anew at the altar, which depended on transubstantiation, but later theologians have found it difficult to narrate this. I propose a eucharistic theology that draws on Calvin’s account of the pneumatological ascent of the communicant, and on David Moffitt’s account of Jesus’ sacrifice in Hebrews, to suggest a way of understanding the Supper as sacrifice that is acceptable to Reformed sensibilities, and both more coherent, and more responsible to recent ecumenical convergence, than the various post-Trent theories.

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## Introduction

I begin by acknowledging the sheer unlikeliness of my theme: it is hard to think of an attitude more basic to sixteenth-century Reform than horror at the idea of the Mass as a sacrifice. If the Mass is a sacrifice, then it is, so the Reformation argument went, a way of gaining God’s favour that is disconnected from the work of Christ; on this basis alone the idea is unconscionable. Luther is a witness to this in his most central texts. Consider, for example, the beginning of the second part of the Smalcald Articles: Luther begins by asserting, in a catena of biblical citations, that sin can be forgiven only through the death of Christ – this is the ‘*primus et principalis articulus*’, the ‘*erste und Hauptartikel*’. Precisely because of this, the second, and lengthy, article on the Mass will describe the sacrifice of the Mass as the ‘*maxima et horrenda abominatio*’, because the suggestion that sins may be forgiven through the celebration of the Mass directly contradicts the first article.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Martin Luther, ‘*Articuli Smalcaldici*’, in F. Bente, ed., *Concordia Triglotta: Libri symbolici ecclesiae Lutheranae*, 2 vols. (St Louis: Concordia, 1921), vol. 2, pp. 460–2.

Further, a sacrificial account of the Mass invites, perhaps demands, a particular pattern of observance: if the Mass is sacrificial, then the celebration of a Mass can direct grace towards some intended recipient of the benefits of the sacrifice offered. McHugh makes the point that this idea goes, not only to the heart of the theological disputes of the Reformation, but to basic questions of religious practice: ‘the most burning question of all . . . was the status of the mass . . . Was the celebration of the mass a good work availing for the remission of sins for the living and the dead? . . . Here was a practical problem affecting every Christian’.<sup>2</sup> A relative has died; should I pay a priest to celebrate a mass, or many masses, for their soul? This was apparently what was at stake in terming the Mass a sacrifice, and it is not an exaggeration to suggest that on this question the Reformation turned.

In our present, less polemical, age, Lutheran accounts of sacramental presence (‘consubstantiation’) might allow some careful movement towards ecumenical rapprochement in this area,<sup>3</sup> as might some high Anglican accounts of the Eucharist,<sup>4</sup> although there are strong historical arguments that this rapprochement is not so easy to attain as some have wanted to claim.<sup>5</sup> For the

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- 2 J.F. McHugh, ‘The Sacrifice of the Mass at the Council of Trent’, in S.W. Sykes, ed., *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 157–8.
  - 3 See (in English) e.g. John R. Stephenson, *The Lord’s Supper (Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics XII)* (St Louis: Luther Academy, 2003), pp. 110–26, and references, particularly to Jenson’s optimistic essay, there. The move was made earlier in German Lutheranism; see (for a survey) Peter Brunner, ‘Zur Lehre vom Gottesdienst’, in K.F. Müller and W. Blankenberg, eds., *Leiturgia. Handbuch der evangelischen Gottesdienstes* (Kassel: Johannes Stauda-Verlag, 1952–70), vol. 3 (1954), pp. 223–38.
  - 4 John Cosin, bishop of Durham 1660–72, may be the earliest post-Reformation Anglican writer to be explicit about this:

But if we compare the Eucharist with Christ’s sacrifice made once upon the cross, as concerning the effect of it, we say that that was a sufficient sacrifice; but withal that this is a true, real, and efficient sacrifice, and both of them propitiatory for the sins of the whole world’. (John Cosin, *The Works of the Right Reverend Father in God John Cosin, Lord Bishop of Durham* (Oxford: John Henry & James Palmer, 1855), vol. V, p. 80)

- 5 Francis Clark, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation* (Chumleigh: Augustine, 1980) (originally Oxford: Blackwell, 1967) remains a monumental work of scholarship, reviewing significant Anglo-Catholic studies of the first half of the twentieth-century that had sought to demonstrate that Reformation, and particularly Anglican, objections to sacrificial language concerning the Eucharist were a response to medieval abuses and decadent popular piety, not to the notion of eucharistic sacrifice per se. Clark demolishes these claims comprehensively, offering a careful and informed reading of both the theology and the popular piety on the eve of the Reformation that simply leaves no room for such claims. Article XXI of the XXXIX Articles is a direct and demonstrable condemnation of the best pre-Reformation eucharistic theology and practice, not a swipe at some aberrant popular error.

Reformed,<sup>6</sup> confessionally committed to the claim that the body and blood of Christ cannot be present on the altar (which, therefore, is not an ‘altar’ but a table) to even begin to countenance the idea of the Eucharist as sacrifice might, however, seem impossible. Christ’s sacrifice was made once for all at Calvary; it is unrepeatable, and if the bread and wine remain merely bread and wine, there is no space for any attempt to speak of the re-presentation of Christ’s sacrifice in the Eucharist.<sup>7</sup> On the cross Christ, to quote the frankly polemical liturgy of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer,

made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world; and did institute, and in his holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory of that his precious death, until his coming again.<sup>8</sup>

There is only one sacrifice, once for all accomplished on the cross, and so there might be (as the BCP insists<sup>9</sup>) a spiritual feeding on Christ, represented or mediated<sup>10</sup> by the physical consumption of the sacramental elements, which is an appropriate way to receive the benefits of that one sacrifice; there is no acceptable sense, however, in which the Supper can be described as sacrifice in itself.

Further, the Reformed were very concerned to deny the possibility of the *manducatio indignorum*, the consumption of Christ’s body by unbelievers. This similarly precluded any account of the presence of the body and blood in the elements on the altar, which after all were made available – if not indiscriminately, then with imperfect discrimination at best, and so, inevitably, to unbelievers. For a series of reasons, then, the Reformed were implacably, confessionally, opposed

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6 For the purposes of this article, I am defining ‘Reformed’ as ‘being committed to upholding the doctrinal standards defined by the key Reformed confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries’. Obviously other definitions are available – probably preferable – but the challenge I have set myself is to imagine a doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice which could be affirmed by a faithful subscriber to the *Conf. Helv. Post.* or the Westminster Confession.

7 The point is easy to demonstrate, but for a clear and brief statement in a key confessional document consider Q. 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism, on the difference between the Lord’s Supper and the Mass; it begins: ‘Das Abendmahl bezeugt uns, dass wir vollkommene Vergebung aller unserer Sünden haben durch das einmalige Opfer Jesu Christi, so er selbst einmal am Kreuz vollbracht hat . . .’.

8 ‘Prayer of Consecration’ in the Book of Common Prayer from [www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/lords-supper-or-holy-communion](http://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/lords-supper-or-holy-communion) (accessed 26 December 2019).

9 ‘we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood; then we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us; we are one with Christ, and Christ with us’ from Book of Common Prayer, ‘Exhortation’.

10 On this distinction see later comments on Gerrish’s typology of Reformed doctrines of the Eucharist.

to any claim that the body and blood of Christ could be substantially present on the altar, and so to any account of the Eucharist as a sacrificial rite (beyond the offering of the ‘sacrifice of praise’).

### **Eucharist as sacrifice: the historical evidence for identification**

All that said, speaking of the Eucharist in clearly sacrificial terms is so basic and pervasive in Christian antiquity, and in the Western church before the Reformation debates, that it is simply embarrassing for the Reformed cause if it cannot give content to this language. There may not be carefully worked out theologies of eucharistic sacrifice prior to the Counter-Reformation, but the language appears to be simply instinctively Christian for the first fifteen centuries of the church. To speak of ‘sacrifice’ in speaking of the Eucharist cannot be dismissed as a late-medieval aberration that stood in need of correction; it is a part, rather, of the deposit of faith, a mode of speech sufficiently deeply and widely embedded in the tradition that any theological position that is unable to accept it is in grave danger of, for that reason alone, appearing sectarian and uncatholic. If Reformed theology wishes to claim to be what its name suggests, a reformation of an older tradition, it needs to be able to speak of eucharistic sacrifice. This was recognized by D.M. Baillie, who comments: ‘Certainly, from the early years of the second century, if not earlier, Christian writers did speak of the Eucharist as a sacrifice’.<sup>11</sup> Baillie also adds another imperative for finding a way to own this language, ecumenism, which, if eucharistic sacrifice is as pervasive a theme as he represents and as I have claimed, must be taken seriously. On these bases, he strives to offer an account of the Eucharist that retains space for sacrificial language, which I shall examine later in this article.

These claims for the antiquity and ubiquity of the language demand an evidential base. There is not space in an article like this for a review of every patristic and medieval reference to the Eucharist, but let me offer some indicative evidence. The biblical words of institution have, of course, been subject to endless polemical interpretations; I note here just that language of a body given (broken?), and even more of a ‘covenant in blood’, is hard to hear in non-sacrificial ways if our ears are attuned to the cadences of the Hebrew Scriptures. As a result, non-sacrificial readings of this text through history tend to accept that the primary reference of Jesus’ reported words is to sacrifice, referring to his coming self-offering on the cross, and then seek to find a way of distancing the celebration of the Lord’s Supper from that, admittedly sacrificial, event. Zwingli’s eager adoption of Hoen’s suggestion that ‘is’ means ‘signifies’ in the dominical announcement ‘this is my body’ is only the most famous attempt in history to find such a way.

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11 Donald M. Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments and Other Papers* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), p. 109.

Moving from biblical texts into the patristic era, where the interpretative battles are generally less fiercely fought, we might note first the *Didache*, where §§9–10 and 14 refer clearly to a eucharistic meal. The dominical words of institution are not referenced or alluded to, and there is no visible link with the passion of Christ, but the meal is nonetheless spoken of as a ‘sacrifice’ in 14.3, with a reference to Malachi 1:11.<sup>12</sup> Irenaeus referenced the same text, speaking of the ‘oblatio’ received by the church from the apostles, and offered across the world.<sup>13</sup> Justin Martyr repeatedly characterizes the Eucharist as sacrifice, particularly in debating with Trypho.<sup>14</sup> Tertullian will speak directly of eucharistic ‘participatio’ in the sacrifice of Christ,<sup>15</sup> and seems to represent the Eucharist as a repetition of Christ’s sacrifice.<sup>16</sup> By the time we get to Cyprian of Carthage, there is a fully developed account of the Eucharist as sacrifice, borrowing freely from Latin cultic terms to emphasize the point.<sup>17</sup>

It would be tedious to continue this list, but the point is already clear: to stand in continuity with the patristic churches requires confession of the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist in some form. There is little clarity beyond the bare terminology in some of the references above, and others pull in varying directions, but all are united in insisting that, somehow, the sacrament must be sacrificial. O’Conner, an admittedly partisan, but careful, writer on the history of the Eucharist, comments that the sacrificial character of the Eucharist ‘was a datum of belief practically unquestioned until [Luther’s]

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12 For a full analysis of the Eucharist in the *Didache*, which draws out the sacrificial theme, see Huub van de Sandt, ‘Why does the *Didache* Conceive of the Eucharist as a Holy Meal?’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 65 (2011), pp. 1–20. By contrast Koch argues that the ‘sacrifice’ spoken of is a sacrifice of praise: Dietrich-Alex Koch, ‘Eucharistievollzug und Eucharistieverständnis in der *Didache*’, in David Hellholm and Dieter Sänger, eds., *The Eucharist: Its Origins and Contexts*, 3 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), vol. 2, pp. 875–8.

13 *Ad. haer.* V.36. On Irenaeus more generally, see Andreas Lindemann, ‘Die Eucharistische Mahlfeier bei Justin und bei Irenäus’, in Hellholm and Sänger, *The Eucharist*, vol. 2, pp. 921–9.

14 *Dial.* 116–17, for example. Lathrop’s rather convoluted protestations that, in all his repeated uses of sacrificial language, Justin really did not mean to speak of sacrifice, serve mainly to demonstrate just how hard it is for even a brilliant liturgist to evade the obvious meaning of the texts. Gordon W. Lathrop, ‘Justin, Eucharist and “Sacrifice”: A Case of Metaphor’, *Worship* 64 (1990), pp. 30–48. *Dial.* 41, which Lathrop fails to mention, asserts that the Eucharist is the typological fulfilment, not some sort of annulment, of the levitical sacrifices. For a more convincing treatment, see Lindemann, ‘Die Eucharistische’, pp. 902–20.

15 *De orat.* xix.4. For a full account of Tertullian’s doctrine, see Øyvind Norderval, ‘The Eucharist in Tertullian and Cyprian’, in Hellholm and Sänger, *The Eucharist*, vol. 2, pp. 942–7.

16 So Norderval, ‘The Eucharist in Tertullian and Cyprian’, p. 943.

17 Norderval, ‘The Eucharist in Tertullian and Cyprian’, pp. 948–9.

writings on the matter'.<sup>18</sup> If he is even nearly right, then there is a significant pressure for a Reformed theology that does not want to be reduced to the status of an eccentric and sectarian position to find a way of confessing the point.

Baillie's ecumenical imperative for discovering ways of confessing eucharistic sacrifice grows out of this historical ubiquity, but also out of confessional commitments that demand the Eucharist be understood in these terms; speaking of his engagement with the World Council of Churches, he comments 'some [churches] regard the sacrament as a *sacrifice* and to them that is quite essential and central'.<sup>19</sup> Since he wrote, a key development in this area has been the 'Lima document', *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, produced by the WCC in 1982, and the process of response to, and reception of, it. *BEM* E.2–26 presents the meaning of the Eucharist under five heads: thanksgiving to the Father; anamnesis or memorial of Christ; invocation of the Spirit; communion of the faithful; and meal of the kingdom. The theme of sacrifice is dealt with under the second of these, with an attempt to leverage [then-]recent scholarship to construct a category of anamnesis as 'dynamic memorial'. With this conceptuality in place, the text stresses: the uniqueness and unrepeatability of Christ's saving work (E.8), Christ's active presence as Saviour in the Eucharist, and Christ's continuing work of intercession. There has been broad welcome from the churches that these emphases are moving in the right direction, and offer the possibility of overcoming old barriers, but there are also demands for further clarity, and some considerable hesitation that 'intercession' is not a strong enough term to encompass what has traditionally been referred to as the sacrificial element of the Eucharist.<sup>20</sup> A Reformed account of eucharistic sacrifice will want to test itself against this document, and against the issues raised in its reception.

### **Standard accounts of the Eucharist as sacrifice, and Reformed objections**

Claims concerning the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist were remarkably unspecific in the pre-Reformation tradition. As noted above, the language of sacrifice is pervasive in patristic texts, but there is no settled doctrinal proposal in view. Clark's careful examination of the medieval material demonstrates an insistence, based on a regularly cited text from Chrysostom (which, however,

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18 James T. O'Connor, *The Hidden Manna: A Theology of the Eucharist* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), p. 140.

19 Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments*, p. 108.

20 See Faith and Order Paper 149, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry 1982–1990* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990), pp. 60–7, for a summary of the responses received, and Max Thurien, ed., *Churches Respond to BEM*, 6 vols. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986–8) for the texts of the responses.

Lombard and many later writers erroneously ascribed to Ambrose),<sup>21</sup> that the mass was sacrificial, because each mass is a re-presentation of Christ's one unique sacrifice.<sup>22</sup> Chrysostom's argument is clearly based on the assumption that the Eucharist is sacrificial, and is equally clearly a response to a claim that the sacrificial character of the Eucharist implies some sort of repetition of the suffering of Christ. This is significant, because it shapes the medieval discussions: they become attempts to demonstrate how the sacrifice of the Mass does not denigrate from, how it most certainly does not displace, the one sacrifice of Christ, rather than an attempt to justify the sacrificial character of the Eucharist, which is merely assumed.<sup>23</sup> In these discussions, eucharistic sacrifice is assumed as a premise, not defended; and its nature, beyond the insistence that it is somehow not disconnected from the sacrifice of Calvary, is not asserted.

The *locus classicus* for a doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice is the Tridentine decree on the 'Doctrine of the Sacrifice of the Mass', which must be read in coordination with the earlier 'Decree concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist'.<sup>24</sup> Read together, these documents offer strictures and specifications, but, again, no theological account of how the Mass is sacrificial; as a result, a number of proposals have been offered, but it seems that none has gained general assent.

Of the Tridentine documents, the former focuses on the doctrine of real presence; the latter focuses on, as it suggests, the sacrificial character of the Mass. Real presence is almost immediately affirmed in the earlier text: 'Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum . . . vere, realiter, ac substantialiter sub specie illarum rerum sensibilium contineri' (XIII.1). The heavenly session of Christ is not denied of course, but there is another, 'sacramental' mode of Christ's presence asserted alongside it, which is demanded both by the words of Christ himself and by the long tradition of the church that there is a true and substantial presence of body and blood.

Because of this (XIII.3), the Eucharist surpasses the other sacraments in sanctity: Christ acts through the other sacraments, but is present in the Eucharist. The mode of presence is defined fairly briefly by transubstantiation (XIII.4), before the second half of the Decree turns to liturgical practice. Veneration is treated first (XIII.5): the real presence of Christ means the highest devotion ('latriae cultum'), properly reserved for God alone, may be offered to the reserved sacrament. Next,

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21 So Clark, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation*, p. 75.

22 Peter Lombard, *Sent.* lib. IV, dist. 12, cap. 5, quoting Chrysostom's Homily XVII on Hebrews, on Heb. 9:24–6 (Migne, *PG*, LXII, col. 131).

23 So Clark, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation*, pp. 77–96; see particularly the comment about 'the mysterious manner in which the divine victim is offered in the Mass' (p. 79), and the ten-point summary of medieval doctrine on pp. 93–5.

24 The earlier Decree filled the XIIIth Session (11 October 1551); the later Doctrine the XXIIInd (17 September 1562). Hubert Jedin, *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient*, 4 vols. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 1951–76) remains the standard account of the history.

viaticum – the ancient practice of reserving the consecrated sacrament to be taken to the sick – is recalled and commended (XIII.6). The seriousness of receiving the sacrament leads to the demand that sacramental confession precedes eucharistic communion (XIII.7), but the benefits of communion are such that none ought to absent themselves (XIII.8). The canons that follow reinforce these various points.

Monson has argued that, considered against the liturgical debates of the early sixteenth century, the central controversial point here is the permanence of the change in the elements.<sup>25</sup> This seems right: the focus on veneration and viaticum as the first-mentioned uses of the sacrament serves to emphasize this aspect of the doctrine, and he proposes convincingly that this reading also addresses what was at stake in the debate over real presence in the middle of the sixteenth century.

Turning to the second decree, on sacrifice, the Council attempted a full statement of what the church had always believed, albeit without formal definition. The pre-history is interesting<sup>26</sup>: two different sets of articles offering critiques of the Lutheran position were debated, one in 1547, and one in 1551. The debate on the latter led to the production of a draft decree dated 3 January 1552, which spoke of ‘two sacrifices’: of the cross and of the Eucharist. This was rapidly found unacceptable, but war intervened and no alternative formulation was offered for a decade. The interrupted session had, as far as we can tell, begun to coalesce around the idea that in the Upper Room Christ offered himself as a sacrifice, and that this self-offering was repeated in and through the ministry of the priest at the altar. A draft decree proposed in August 1562 affirmed that both Last Supper and Lord’s Supper were true sacrifices, but did not specify the nature of the offering. The Tridentine Fathers were divided as to whether they should specify the Eucharist to be an expiatory sacrifice of Christ’s body and blood, somehow linked to Calvary, or a merely eucharistic sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for the one unrepeatable expiatory sacrifice of Calvary. As discussion continued, the Fathers drew back even further: in the Mass a sacrifice is offered, but whether the Mass itself is a sacrifice, or whether it is merely a re-offering of the one unrepeatable sacrifice of the cross, is not specified.

In the final decree, the fact of real, substantial presence (derived from Session XIII) becomes the key to expounding this. According to Trent, the priest at the altar offers the body and blood of Christ to the Father under the species of bread and wine (XXII.1), and in doing so offers, unbloodily, a real sacrifice, which propitiates the Father, who on this account forgives the sins of the priest, the communicants and all Christians, living and dead (XXII.2). The sacrifice of the Mass is, here, the way in which Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross is made real and effective to individuals; Trent does not quite deny that one may benefit from Christ’s death without receiving

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25 Paul G. Monson, “‘Sub signis visibilibus’: Visual Theology in Trent’s Decrees on the Eucharist”, *Logos* 15 (2012), p. 148.

26 Here I follow McHugh, ‘The Sacrifice of the Mass at the Council of Trent’, pp. 161–75.



the Mass, but the implication that this is the normal and proper way to so benefit is clear. The remaining chapters spell out the liturgical implications of this.

What is not clear, however, is whether the Mass itself is a sacrifice, or whether it is merely the act of presentation of a sacrifice. The ambiguity in doctrine that Clark found in the medieval period remains in the Conciliar decisions. As we have seen, this is a deliberate ambiguity, arising from the controverted history of the Council. The Fathers could not agree, so allowed both positions. Similarly, Trent does not insist on any particular way of understanding the Eucharist as sacrifice, and this has proved difficult for the theologians who followed. The history rapidly becomes extraordinarily convoluted, but it seems fairly clear, and is generally agreed in the scholarship, that no proposal succeeded in achieving widespread assent.<sup>27</sup> There is, of course, general agreement that the eucharistic sacrifice is dependent on the events of Calvary. Beyond this agreement, Daly, following Lepin, outlines four general theories that can be found.<sup>28</sup>

For the first theory, somewhere in the ritual of the Mass there must be a representation of Christ's immolation. Cano put this in the fraction and mastication of the bread; de Soto emphasized the mastication only; some Jesuit theologians saw the implied humiliation of Christ as sacrificial victim in the act of consecration; all assumed that somehow, the true body must be broken. For the second, the key to sacrifice is a change in the material offered, which is accomplished in the Mass by transubstantiation – changing the elements. For the third, change is again key, but it is the victim who must be changed, and so somehow Christ must be affected by the consecration. Bellarmine, for example, argued that a sacrifice depends on the destruction of the victim, which happens in the Mass when the elements are ingested. A fourth group of theories attempted to combine the second and the third, generally resulting in a degree of incoherence.

To these we might add primitive realist theories, in which the Mass is a repetition of the events of Calvary – a breaking anew of Christ's body in the fraction of the bread, for example – and also theories that involve a prolonging of the once-for-all death of Christ.<sup>29</sup> Both these senses, of repetition and of prolonging, are rejected explicitly in *BEM*.<sup>30</sup>

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27 M. Lepin, *L'Idée du sacrifice de la Messe d'après les théologiens* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1926) remains the standard history, offering a classification of proposed understandings of how the Eucharist is sacrificial. Helpful recent summaries of Lepin's typology can be found in Robert J. Daly, 'Robert Bellarmine and Post-Tridentine Eucharistic Theology', *Theological Studies* 61 (2000), pp. 239–60; Robert Daly, 'The Council of Trent', in Lee Palmer Wandel, ed., *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 159–82.

28 Daly, 'Robert Bellarmine'; Daly, 'The Council of Trent'.

29 Leenhardt calls it 'an intuition of faith' that 'the redemptive action of God in Christ . . . is prolonged in order to reach every generation'. Oscar Cullmann and F.J. Leenhardt, trans. J.G. Davies, *Essays on the Lord's Supper* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1958), p. 58.

30 *BEM* E.II.B.8.

Finally, McHugh cites an account given by de la Taille which he clearly finds complete and satisfying. On this account, there are three necessary elements to any sacrifice: oblatio, or liturgical offering of the sacrificial element(s) to God; immolatio, the act whereby the element(s) are positively given over to God; and acceptatio, when God accepts the offering. De la Taille suggests that in the Upper Room Christ offers himself, an act of oblatio; on the cross Christ, who has already been offered, is immolated; and through the Mass the Father receives the immolated offering.<sup>31</sup>

With the exception of primitive repetition theories, all of these accounts are attempts to link the actions of the priest in the Mass with the one sacrifice of Christ in his self-offering on Calvary. As such, they are attempts to address the more obvious Reformation objection to accounts of eucharistic sacrifice, the one we have already seen in the Smalcald Articles, that somehow the doctrine of the Mass provides a route to the forgiveness of sins that bypasses the cross. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that one or another account worked; what other objections might a Reformed theologian make to schemes like these? Two seem obvious: that they bind God's application of salvation to the sacramental system of the institutional church, and that they demand an account of the real presence on the altar.

The first of these is probably evadable, should we wish to evade it: any account of the normality of the action of God through the sacramental life of the church can be glossed with exceptions, and also with an insistence of a certain degree of faithfulness and sanctity in the church and the celebrant that is necessary to make the eucharistic celebration valid.

The second is more difficult. No Reformed account of the Eucharist can accept that the body and blood of Christ are manipulated in the priest's hands on the altar. Ecumenical accounts of anamnesis cannot overcome this: either they make the Eucharist a mere memorial of a sacrifice accomplished elsewhere, or they somehow involve the priest handling and offering the body and blood, although disguising this somehow under the name of anamnesis. It would seem, on this basis, that there is still no possibility of a Reformed account of eucharistic sacrifice (that is more than a mere sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving); there may be space for ecumenical rapprochement amongst those who share some sort of a conviction that the body and blood are substantially present on the altar, but the Reformed are excluded from this.

### **Reformed doctrines of the Eucharist**

At this point in the discussion, we need to pause and identify the positive content of a Reformed doctrine of the Eucharist. So far, my commentary has all been negative – the things a Reformed theology cannot accept. In popular report, there

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31 See McHugh, 'The Sacrifice of the Mass at the Council of Trent', p. 179, summarising M. de la Taille, *Mysterium Fidei* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1931).

are two positive strands: a Zwinglian account that sees the Eucharist as merely a memorial, or perhaps an enacted sermon of some sort; and a Calvinist account that leverages pneumatology to assert a real, if spiritual, feeding on the body and blood whilst refusing, on christological grounds, any account of the substantial presence of the human nature of Christ on the altar.

Zwingli's own doctrine of the Eucharist seems to me, as a non-specialist, hard to reconstruct. The Marburg Colloquy, and his responses, prove beyond doubt that he finds Luther's account of the sacramental presence of the body and blood on the altar impossible to accept on christological grounds – the human nature of Christ is spatially located, as all human bodies are, and its location is 'at the right hand of the Father', not simultaneously scattered across thousands of altars. This is again merely negative, however. Zwingli seemed happy to speak of the power of the Eucharist, and, later in his career, of a genuine spiritual feeding on the body and blood, although it is not clear how he gave theological content to these stronger formulations.<sup>32</sup>

That said, and whether fairly or not, Zwingli's name has become attached to a recognizable recent account of the Eucharist which sees it merely as a reminder of the events of Calvary, a memorial, an enacted sermon, or similar, which has value only in recalling to the communicants' memories the narrative of what Jesus did in dying for our sins on the cross. Clearly, on such an account, there is no meaningful way of speaking of eucharistic sacrifice – the Eucharist is only a pointer towards, a reminder of, the one true sacrifice of Calvary. Such an account is not, however, authentically Reformed.

This may seem a bold statement, but a reading of the key symbolic literature supports it. The Reformed confessional heritage is, as far as I can discern, completely united in explicitly denying such an account. Let me offer just one detailed example, from my adopted country. The 1560 Scots Confession begins its chapter on the Sacraments, ch. 21, forcefully, announcing that 'we utterly dampne the vanity of thay that affirme sacramentis to be nathing ellis bot nakit and bair signis'. It goes on to deny transubstantiation also, but insists that 'in the supper rychtlie usit, Christ Jesus is sa jointit with us that he becumis the verray nurishment and fude of our saulis'. This happens by the action of the Holy Spirit,

quha by trew faith caryis us above all thingis that are visibil, carnall and eirdly, and makis us to feid upon the body and blude of Christ Jesus, quhilk was anis brokin and sched for us, quhilk is now in the hevin, and appeiris in the presence of his Father for us.<sup>33</sup>

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32 On Zwingli's doctrine of the Eucharist, see Carrie Euler, 'Huldrych Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger', in Wandel, ed., *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation*, pp. 57–65.

33 The best edition of the Confession is Ian Hazlett, 'Confessio Scotia 1560', in Andreas Mühling and Peter Opitz, eds., *Reformierte Bekenntnisschriften* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 2002–) vol. 2/1, pp. 240–99. The quotations in this paragraph are on pp. 282–3.

Because of this, and notwithstanding the distance,

the breid, quhilk we brek, is the communion of Christis body, and the coup, quhilk we blis, is the communion of his blude. Sa that we confes and undoutitlie beleif that the faithfull, in the rycht use of the Lords table, do sa eat the bodie and drink the blude of the Lord Jesus that he remanis in thame, and thay in him.<sup>34</sup>

It would be tedious to travel through the other Reformed confessions, and few are as bracing in expression as the six Johns were, but every one I have examined offers a similar doctrine.<sup>35</sup> The received confessional documents echo Calvin and Bullinger, who both accepted Zwingli's hesitations concerning the locatedness of the human nature of Christ, but then offered an account of the Holy Spirit's work in the eucharistic celebration, the work of somehow bridging the gap between the human body and blood of Christ in heaven and the communicants, so that a real, spiritual feeding may occur. Gerrish's typology of Reformed doctrines of the Eucharist offers three possible positions, which he calls: 'symbolic memorialism', in which the sacrament serves merely to recall to mind the gospel narrative; 'symbolic parallelism', in which the sacrament consists of two parallel but unconnected events: the external eating of the elements, and the internal pneumatological reception of the body and blood of Christ; and 'symbolic instrumentalism', in which the sacrament is an instrument through which the distance between worthy recipients and the heavenly sanctuary is somehow bridged, so that they are enabled to receive the body and blood there present. It seems clear enough that these align to the doctrines of Zwingli, Bullinger and Calvin, although Gerrish, probably helpfully, does not stress the personal identifications.<sup>36</sup>

There is a long and important story to be told of how symbolic memorialism became the default position of many churches of broadly Reformed heritage, particularly in the English-speaking world; it includes eighteenth-century anti-supernaturalism, and nineteenth-century anti-Catholicism, fueled by the rise of the Oxford Movement. The confessional inheritance, however, simply rules out memorialism, whilst not generally clearly distinguishing between parallelism

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34 Hazlett, 'Confessio Scotia 1560', p. 284.

35 Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments*, p. 9, made a similar point: 'There is no doubt that traditionally it [Reformed theology] has taught that not only the *signum*, the sign, is present, but also the *res* [by which he means the 'Real Presence' (his capitals)].' His confessional references are, unsurprisingly, to the Westminster Confession, but the point is the same.

36 Brian A. Gerrish, 'Sign and Reality: The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Confessions', in *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), pp. 118–30.

and instrumentalism.<sup>37</sup> Calvin, quoting Augustine, speaks of the sacraments as ‘a ladder [gradus]’ by which we are enabled to ascend to where Christ is, in the heavenly sanctuary<sup>38</sup>; Canlis has analysed this image and theme extensively, and argues that, whilst not without its weaknesses in Calvin’s presentation, he is clear that ‘spiritual feeding’ is real feeding that is enabled by the Spirit, and that what the Spirit does in the Eucharist is lift us up to the heavenly sanctuary, where the Jewish man Jesus of Nazareth is now spatially located, and so where his body and blood are actually available.<sup>39</sup>

Baillie’s own account is a little different to this, and although he essays a properly Reformed doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice,<sup>40</sup> the doctrine he offers is unfortunately finally unconvincing. Two themes drive his doctrine: eschatology and presence. In his introductory remarks he addresses the eschatological turn in early twentieth-century theology, and suggests that this has been particularly important in sacramentology.<sup>41</sup> A properly eschatological vision locates the church in an in-between time, where the kingdom is come (because Messiah has come), but has not yet come in fullness (because Messiah is yet to return); the proper theological stance of the church, then, is to be constantly looking both back to the work of Jesus, and forward to the return of Jesus. The (two dominical) sacraments do this.<sup>42</sup> Baillie invokes Dix to suggest that the concept of anamnesis carries this dual perspective in eucharistic theology, as we ‘remember’ both the work of Christ and his second coming.<sup>43</sup>

Baillie’s account of presence is more troubling. Simply put, he confuses the presence (in whatever way) of the human body and blood of the Jewish man Jesus in the eucharistic elements with the divine presence.<sup>44</sup> This leads directly to claims

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37 Nimmo suggests that, whilst the Scots Confession clearly rejects a ‘symbolic memorialist’ doctrine, it is capacious of both ‘symbolic parallelism’ and ‘symbolic instrumentalism’. Paul T. Nimmo, ‘The Eucharist in Post-Reformation Scotland: A Theological Tale of Harmony and Diversity’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 71 (2018) pp. 471–2.

38 Calvin, *Inst.* IV.19.15 quoting Augustine, *Div. Quaest.*, 43.

39 Julie Canlis, *Calvin’s Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), *passim*, but see particularly pp. 159–71.

40 Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments*, p. 118:

may we not say something like this: that in the sacrament, Christ Himself being truly present, He unites us by faith with His eternal sacrifice, that we may plead and receive its benefits and offer ourselves in prayer and praise to God? If we can say this, then surely we Protestants, we Presbyterians, have our doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice’.

41 Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments*, pp. 67–71.

42 Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments*, pp. 69–70.

43 Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments*, p. 105.

44 This is particularly obvious in his account of different ‘degrees or modes’ of presence, where three accounts of divine presence lead to a final account of human presence. Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments*, pp. 97–8.

such as “Present to the faith of the receiver” – that is the most real presence conceivable for a divine reality in this present world<sup>45</sup>; well, yes, but in speaking of the body and blood of Jesus we are speaking of a human reality, not a divine reality, and so this assertion is not germane to the discussion.

When he draws his threads together, this confusion of properly human and properly divine acts becomes decisive. He uses the eschatological turn to shift the problem of presence from a spatial issue to a temporal one, and then invokes divine eternity as the solution:

God inhabits eternity . . . God bore our sins incarnate in the passion and cross of Christ in one moment of history. But we cannot say that God’s bearing of sin was confined to that moment. In some sense it is an eternal activity or passion of God’s, and it has its direct ‘vertical’ relation to ever moment of our sinful human history, so that the sins which we commit this very day are being borne and expiated by the eternal love of God.<sup>46</sup>

The problem is obvious: the temporal human suffering of Jesus has become divine passion. Of course, this is a common move in contemporary dogmatics, but in this particular context we must resist it. As we have seen, Reformed doctrines of the Eucharist are predicated on the denial of the *genus maiestaticum*, and so, a fortiori, on the denial of the *genus tapeinoticum*; we cannot affirm divine suffering to make a doctrine work. Baillie’s confusion of human and divine acts has led him to deny absolutely central points of the Reformed confessional inheritance, and so his project, which shares my current aims, unfortunately necessarily fails. Can we do better?

### **The complexity of biblical sacrifice**

If there is any hope for my declared project in the discussion above, it is in McHugh’s invocation of de la Taille. It is not that the doctrine presented there, with its (to my mind difficult) account of the Father waiting for the church to celebrate the Mass before accepting the sacrifice of the cross, is in any way acceptable to Reformed theology; rather, it imagines a space that might prove helpful if construed differently. For de la Taille, sacrifice is a complex act, involving several discrete actions before it is completed. If this is right, then there might possibly be some sort of account of the complexity of the act of sacrifice that could be hospitable to Reformed accounts of the Eucharist. For it to be acceptable for Reformed theology, however, it will need to at least give serious attention to the biblical accounts of the nature of sacrifice, so we cannot just invent a doctrine of sacrifice, as de la Taille seemed to do.

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45 Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments*, p. 101.

46 Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments*, p. 117.

In an article already referenced, Daly is rather damning of, well, everyone (Orthodox perhaps excluded) who has written on the Eucharist as sacrifice since 1563. He writes:

it seems that all post-Tridentine theologians, whether Protestant or Catholic, looked first to the phenomenology of sacrifice, i.e. to the history-of-religions idea of sacrifice, in order to understand how the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist could be a sacrifice. They did not realize that the Christ-event had done away with sacrifice in the history-of-religions sense of the word.<sup>47</sup>

The suggestion that the methodology of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, which gathered first in Göttingen around 1890, was decisive for post-Reformation scholasticisms on all sides can be quickly discarded, of course. That said, we do not have to be quite so sweeping to acknowledge that there is a real issue concerning conceptualities of sacrifice. McHugh celebrated de la Taille for solving a centuries-old problem by redefining what ‘sacrifice’ must mean in ways that might have bases in anthropological study, but that were fundamentally justified by their utility in proposing a solution; as already noted, a Reformed account of the Supper as sacrifice must by contrast be not just useful, but profoundly responsible to biblical presentations of the theme.

There is not space here to offer a full-orbed biblical theology of sacrifice, of course; I turn instead to one recent presentation, offered to elucidate the Epistle to the Hebrews by my colleague David Moffitt.<sup>48</sup> Moffitt argues, simply convincingly in my view, that, whatever else might be going on, it is clear in the levitical instructions for sacrifice that sacrificial offerings are never killed on the altar. Rather, the killing happens elsewhere, and then the blood, and perhaps other body parts, are brought to the altar by the priest, there to be manipulated in divinely mandated ways to accomplish the intended benefits of the sacrifice.

Moffitt shows that this understanding of sacrifice illuminates the logic of Hebrews in very significant ways: readers, perhaps priestly, but certainly versed in Torah, are invited to see that the death of Jesus ‘outside the camp’ (Heb. 13:13) does not invalidate his self-offering as a sacrifice, because he, our great High Priest, resurrected and ascended, then takes his own blood into the true heavenly tabernacle, and completes the sacrificial rituals on the true heavenly altar. This self-offering in the true heavenly tabernacle is the completion of Jesus’ self-sacrificial ministry; no valid sacrifice has been offered until he takes his own blood and manipulates it in the required ways on the heavenly altar.

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47 Daly, ‘Robert Bellarmine’, p. 248.

48 David M. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); see also David A. Moffitt, ‘Jesus’ Heavenly Sacrifice in Early Christian Reception of Hebrews: A Survey’, *Journal of Theological Studies* 68 (2017), pp. 46–71.

Moffitt offers us an extended account of biblical sacrifice which is deeply located in Scripture, both Hebrew Bible and New Testament, and which locates the final act of Christ's self-sacrifice at the cross in the heavenly presentation by Christ, both priest and victim, of his own blood on the altar of the eternal sanctuary in heaven. Biblically, it seems sacrifice always has this complex character: slaughter happens in one place to obtain blood/life and flesh, which are then manipulated in other places, the blood generally on the altar, the flesh in more varied ways, to complete the sacrifice.

On Moffitt's telling, the final act of the single unrepeatable sacrifice of Calvary is the presentation of the 'blood of the eternal covenant' in the heavenly sanctuary by the risen and ascended Christ, our High Priest. If this is right, then Calvin's account of the pneumatological presence of communicants who are lifted by the Spirit to the heavenly realms where Christ is now physically present as they receive the Eucharist invites a new interpretation, one Calvin certainly never offered, but which his theology clearly allows: those who communicate are, by the Spirit, made present in the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ our High Priest offers his own blood on the eternal altar, and so makes atonement for sin.<sup>49</sup> Our act of communion, then, is, by the gracious work of God the Holy Spirit, our being made present in the heavenly tabernacle as Christ completes his self-offering to the Father, and so our receiving of the benefits of this self-offering.

In biblical presentation, the proper manipulation of the sacrifice after its death is both crucial and varied: parts must be presented on the altar; other parts must be consumed by the worshippers. On this basis, we might essay an account of the true feeding on the body and blood of Christ that occurs in the Eucharist: communicants are, by the Spirit, made present in the true tabernacle in heaven as Christ offers his own body and blood. By the normal biblical rules of sacrifice, his body and blood once offered are, by divine permission, offered to the worshippers to consume. Hebrews 13:10 speaks of an altar 'from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat', which, given everything we have already seen from Hebrews, could easily be an allusion to such a heavenly feeding.<sup>50</sup>

How might we construct this eating theologically? We would need to say something like this: truly, albeit in the Spirit, eating the body and drinking the blood as we communicate is therefore a proper part of our reception of the Eucharist, although the pneumatological mediation means we do not have to give any account of the substantial – or even real – presence of the body and blood on the altar/table in our account of the celebration of the Eucharist. The bread remains bread, but, by the Spirit, as we eat it we are elevated to the heavenly altar and offered the body of Christ to eat; the wine remains wine, but, by the Spirit, as we drink it we are elevated to the heavenly altar and offered the blood of Christ to drink.

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49 Moffitt reads Heb. 12:22–4 as describing precisely this (personal communication).

50 Again, I owe this point to Moffitt (personal communication).



There are two further questions of clarification necessary, one concerning the temporal location of Jesus' continuing intercession, and the other asking how believers can be said to eat and drink in the heavenly sanctuary.

Moffitt is clear that, as he reads Hebrews, Jesus' presentation of his blood at the heavenly altar continues, and will continue at least till the eschaton,<sup>51</sup> and my account of eucharistic sacrifice clearly depends on this, or something like it: when the communicants are made present by the Spirit in the sanctuary, the sacrifice must be being presented, or there is no flesh to eat and no blood to drink. There is an apparent sense, then, in which the sacrifice is ongoing, and will be till (at least) the Eschaton. We might ask whether this is a problem, and if so whether it can be evaded?

I noted above that *BEM* demands that there be no attempt to prolong the sacrifice of Christ, which the account I have given does do. In response, however, I might note that it is clear that *BEM* is concerned about accounts that prolong the suffering or slaughter of Christ beyond the hours on the cross; what I have outlined above does not do this, and so avoids the spirit, if not the letter, of the prohibition. *BEM*, whilst a weighty and significant document by virtue of the broad ecumenical consensus it attracted, does not have authoritative status, and so it is appropriate to respect what it is trying to do, without giving undue concern to infelicitous phraseology.

I also noted above that the test I have set myself in this article is conformity with the key confessional documents of the Reformed faith. These documents typically insist on the uniqueness and unrepeatability of Christ's sacrifice, not on it being finished and in the past.<sup>52</sup> There are places where the use of the past tense might be taken to imply completion in time,<sup>53</sup> but no direct insistence that the one unrepeatably sacrifice is complete and over, at least in the documents I have looked at for this article. Further, the symbols do generally insist on the ongoing heavenly intercession of Christ, so they certainly do not deny the ongoing salvific work of Christ. I am of course insisting that the suffering of Christ is over and past; the worst that might be said of my proposal is that, in describing Christ's continuing heavenly work as part of his 'sacrifice', I am using the word more expansively than has been common in the Reformed

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51 See in particular his (provocatively titled) essay, David M. Moffitt, 'It Is Not Finished: Jesus' Perpetual Atoning Work as the Heavenly High Priest in Hebrews', in J.C. Laansma, G.H. Guthrie and C.L. Westfall, eds., *So Great a Salvation: A Dialogue on the Atonement in Hebrews* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), pp. 157–75.

52 See, for example, *Heid. Cat.*, QQ. 31, 37, 80; *Conf. Scot.*, ch. 9.

53 For example, *WCF* 8:5:

The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.

tradition – but in a way that is, as I have argued in dependence on Moffitt, nonetheless biblical.

So I do not think that there is a problem here; if there is, however, there would be ways to evade it. Suppose we were to accept that the presentation of the sacrifice in the heavenly tabernacle was a brief act, perhaps taking place between the ascension and the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost; in that case, I would merely need to insist that the pneumatological relocation of the communicants was a relocation in time, to those ten days, not just in space, to the heavenly sanctuary; I do not want to argue this (the link between Jesus' self-offering and his ongoing intercession seems theologically attractive to me), but I see no basic problem with it; if it is important to insist that the sacrifice is finished, my proposal can be made capacious of that demand.

The second question was that eating and drinking are bodily actions, and, as such, require bodily presence to be performed.<sup>54</sup> To deny this point is to (in an inverted manner) to fall foul of the same confessional Reformed strictures about the integrity of human nature that gave rise to my whole argument. If the communicants are to eat and drink in the heavenly tabernacle, they must be made bodily present there, whilst still appearing to be gathering around the table in the local church – a kind of parody of transubstantiation that affects the communicants, not the elements. This seems sufficiently difficult as to be impossible to assert.

We have seen already Baillie's attempts to solve this conundrum by invoking eschatology and eternity – shifting the problem from spatial to temporal; we have also seen that this fails, for central christological reasons (it would require an assertion of the *genus tapeinoticum* to succeed). Is there a better way forward? I can see two candidates.

First, we might simply accept that spiritual presence is enough. Christ offers the sacrifice in the heavenly tabernacle; we are present with him in the Spirit as interested observers. It is in fact the case that sin offerings in Torah are not generally eaten by anybody<sup>55</sup>; the eight different types of sin and guilt offering in Leviticus 4:1–6:7 are all unconsumed, as are the various offerings made on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). In every one of these cases, the presentation of the sacrifice is in the bringing of the blood of the sacrifice to the altar. Perhaps our spiritual presence is enough?

The detractor might argue, however, that an account of being spiritually present as blood is presented, even if theologically justified, does not do justice to the central eucharistic command – 'eat, drink, in remembrance of me' (and nor does it respect the interpretation of Heb. 13:10 offered above). In response to this we might note another exegetical truth: the one sin offering in Leviticus that is eaten is eaten only by the priest, and only in the sanctuary (Lev. 6:26). If, that is, Hebrews is reading Christ's saving work through a Levitical lens, then

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54 My colleague Oliver Crisp first alerted me to this problem in email conversation; the solution offered here is mine, but I am grateful for his inspiration.

55 Once again, I owe this point to Moffitt (personal communication).

Christ, and Christ alone, should eat of the sacrifice, and should do so in the heavenly sanctuary.

Confessional Reformed theology depends on and demands a strong doctrine of incorporation into Christ (because its soteriology depends on seeing Christ and the saints as a single moral entity, such that the guilt of the saints may be ‘transferred’ to Christ<sup>56</sup>). If, in the Eucharist, the Spirit makes us present in the heavenly sanctuary with Christ, it is surely only, but precisely, as members of Christ.<sup>57</sup> As we communicate, we are present with Christ in the heavenly sanctuary as members of his Body. On this basis, his bodily acts of eating and drinking are acts that we are necessarily engaged in, and so we can speak without reserve of our eating the body and drinking the blood in the heavenly sanctuary.

### **Ecumenical reflections**

Early in this article I reflected on some ecumenical questions. This account, I propose, offers an authentically Reformed way of speaking of the Eucharist as sacrifice, and so answers some of the problems I raised. How does it fit with *BEM*? In a section of ‘Commentary’ on its discussion of anamnesis, the document states:

It is in the light of the significance of the eucharist as intercession that references to the eucharist in Catholic theology as ‘propitiatory sacrifice’ may be understood. The understanding is that there is only one expiation, that of the unique sacrifice of the cross, made actual in the eucharist and presented before the Father in the intercession of Christ and of the Church for all humanity. (E.8)

I noted above that one of the key problems with the reception of *BEM* on the Eucharist has been a discomfort that the ongoing heavenly intercession of Christ is too weak an account of what is meant by ‘sacrifice’. Moffitt’s reading of Hebrews allows us to understand Christ’s heavenly ministry of intercession as his heavenly self-presentation on the altar of his own blood, and so gives a robust and theologically satisfying response to this concern, which fits very well with the claims in this quotation.<sup>58</sup> In discussing the *epiclesis*, *BEM* insists that

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56 I have argued this in, for example, Stephen R. Holmes, ‘Penal Substitution’, in Adam Johnson, ed., *T&T Clark Companion to the Atonement* (London: T&T Clark, 2017).

57 Some recent Reformed theologians have expressed nervousness about the *totus Christus* ecclesiology of Augustine; for a survey, and an argument that their concerns are misplaced if the doctrine is adequately stated, see J. David Moser, ‘*Totus Christus*: A Proposal for Protestant Christology and Ecclesiology’, *Pro Ecclesia* 29 (2020), pp. 3–30.

58 See David. M. Moffitt, ‘Jesus as Interceding High Priest and Sacrifice in Hebrews: A Response to Nicholas Moore’, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 42 (2020), pp. 546–7.

Christ becomes present to us at the Eucharist through the Spirit (E13); again, my proposal develops this suggestion in ways that certainly go beyond *BEM*, but stand in continuity with its emphases and claims.

More broadly, I noted above the lack of any consensus on what it means to speak of the Eucharist as a sacrifice, and the profound difficulties with most proposals that have been offered; de la Taille's account might work, but every other proposal seems either to have been judged theologically incoherent or to have been found to demand unacceptable positions. I suggest that the account I have outlined above, although built on specifically Reformed concerns, and indeed on a specifically Reformed doctrine of the Eucharist, allows the ancient language of the Eucharist as sacrifice to be preserved more simply – and more biblically – than any alternative proposal and, as I have suggested, in a way that is also more in keeping with the real advances of recent ecumenical convergence. It may, therefore, be a gift to the wider church, not just a useful piece of Reformed theorizing.

### **By way of conclusion**

On this, Reformed, account of the Supper as sacrifice, the uniqueness and unrepeatability of Christ's sacrifice is central. Christ dies as a sacrifice on the cross for the sins of the world, is buried, is raised to life by the Father through the Spirit, and ascends to heaven as our great high priest, bearing his own sacrificial offering of his body and blood into the true tabernacle, there to present, by the eternal Spirit, his offerings to the Father on the true heavenly altar. By the same Spirit, we who communicate are made present with Christ in the heavenly tabernacle as he presents his sacrifice, and are invited, as members of his body, to eat his body and drink his blood, and so to participate in his sacrifice, and to receive the benefits thereof. The Eucharist on this understanding is not a memorial of, nor a repetition of, nor even any sort of representation of, but a direct participation in the one unrepeatable sacrifice of Christ.

Such an account respects Reformed convictions concerning the human nature of the incarnate Son, and borrows an account of the pneumatological relocation of the communicants gratefully from Calvin and the confessional tradition. It preserves Reformed concerns about the priestly role being properly restricted to Christ; it stresses, as good Reformed theology should, the pneumatological actions of God in the economy of salvation; and it uses biblical

narrative patterns, particularly the appropriation of the levitical sacrifices by Hebrews, to still speak, straightforwardly and without qualification, of the Eucharist as sacrifice, as the great tradition had always done.<sup>59</sup>

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59 This article grew out of some comments I made in responding to a paper by John R. Stephenson at a colloquium in St Andrews that was a part of the ongoing St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology project ([www.saet.ac.uk](http://www.saet.ac.uk)), funded generously by the John Templeton Foundation. It is a pleasure to record my thanks to Prof. Stephenson for the inspiration his paper provided, to Dr Brendan Wolfe, who organised and chaired the colloquium, to others who commented, and to JTF for their support of the project. A later version of the paper was presented to the St Andrews Systematic and Historical Theology seminar, then online due to pandemic restrictions. Dr Euan Grant offered a perceptive formal response, and I received many very helpful comments from members of the seminar, including Preston Hill, Oliver Crisp, Katrin Bosse, Christoph Schwöbel, and particularly David Moffitt. I am also grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this journal for a careful and detailed set of recommendations that improved the piece substantially.