

Malachi and the Mass

Some Catholic apologists claim that the prophecy in Malachi 1:11 is fulfilled in the Roman Catholic sacrifice of the Mass. A footnote in the New American Bible says that this verse is a reference to ‘the pure offering to be sacrificed in messianic times, the universal Sacrifice of the Mass, as we are told by the Council of Trent.’

The scripture reads:

My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD Almighty. (NIV)

A Catholic translation of the same verse reads:

For from the rising of the sun, even to its setting, my name is great among the nations; And everywhere they bring sacrifice to my name, and a pure offering; For great is my name among the nations, says the LORD of hosts. (NAB)

The Jews and their priests despised and profaned God’s name by offering blemished animals while keeping the best animals to themselves. God was dishonoured by their half-hearted service and their hypocrisy. God foretold a time when he would call the Gentiles to worship him. He will be glorified among the nations, ‘from the rising of the sun to its setting’, from the east to the west. His people will not be restricted to a single nation, but he will have worshippers ‘in every place’, implying the catholicity or universality of the church.

The incense offered to God is our prayers, as the Psalmist says, ‘May my prayer be set before you like incense’, and again, the Book of Revelation identifies the incense offered before God as ‘the prayers of all the saints.’ (Psalm 141:2, Rev 8:3).

Moreover, the New Testament explains how the church offers a ‘pure offering’ to God. ‘Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased’ (Hebrews 13:15, 16). Our prayers and good works are an offering to God.

The Eucharist is the prominent prayer of the church because during the Lord’s Supper we praise and thank God for the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Our English term ‘Eucharist’ is derived from the Greek word ‘eucharistia’ which means ‘gratitude, thanksgiving.’ Jesus gave thanks (‘eucharisteo’) when he took the bread and the wine (Matthew 26:27, Luke 22:19). In this sense the Eucharist is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

Thus, Malachi’s prophecy finds its fulfillment in our good works and prayers, especially the Lord’s Supper celebrated by God’s children from the four corners of the earth. The Didache and the early church fathers also rightly identified the Eucharist as the fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy.

What about the sacrifice of the Mass? Surely the Mass is offered in every country of the world, and it has been celebrated since the times of the apostles. Sadly that is not the case because the significance of the Eucharist has changed over the centuries from a sacrifice of praise to a propitiatory sacrifice, that is, a sacrifice to satisfy the justice of God for the sins committed against him. Malachi is not speaking about that kind of sacrifice.

Much has been written on the translation of the term ‘qatar’, rendered ‘incense’ in all the major Protestant Bibles, and ‘sacrifice’ in the Catholic versions. Both renderings could be correct, though the former is more likely. The basic meaning of the word ‘qatar’ is ‘to smoke, to burn’. A Catholic

commentator states that various forms of the word 'have to do with any kind of offering which gives off smoke, but in postexilic texts precise enough to let us see what is being offered they have to do with incense or other aromatic substances.' (The New Jerome Biblical Commentary - [link](#)).

Whether 'incense' or 'sacrifice' is preferred, the term does not mean a 'sin offering' and there is nothing in the context that compels us to understand it as a propitiatory sacrifice. That is the crux of the matter. In fact the same Catholic commentator concludes that the terms translated 'incense' and 'pure offering' do not have to do with animal sacrifices.

To prove the claim that Malachi is prophesying the Sacrifice of the Mass, it must be shown that he is speaking of a sin offering. To my knowledge that has never been done. On the contrary the study of the text leads us away from that conclusion.

During the Lord's Supper, God's people remember Christ and proclaim his death, giving thanks to God for providing a perfect redemption in the death of his Son. They praise God for Christ who 'entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.' (Heb 9:12). But according to Catholic teaching, during the Mass the sacrifice of Christ is carried on, perpetuated, renewed, re-presented and re-enacted. In this shift in the meaning of the Eucharist, God is neither pleased nor honoured. Christ is seated on the right hand of God, having obtained our redemption; he does not 'constantly enter' the sanctuary to carry on what he has already done once for all.