



### Nicholas Ridley (c. 1500-1555): The Sufficiency of Christ's Sacrifice

*For such a high priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins and then for the people's, for this he did once for all when he offered up himself (Hebrews 7:26-27).*

Nicholas Ridley was born about the turn of the sixteenth century near the Scottish border. He became the vicar of Herne in Kent in 1538, learning almost all of Paul's epistles by heart. He came to read a treatise by the monk Ratramnus from the ninth century, which argued against understanding Christ's body and blood as being literally and physically present in the Lord's Supper. By 1546 Ridley was convinced of this, and had convinced Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury. In the following year, Cranmer convinced Hugh Latimer.

By 1547 Ridley was consecrated bishop of Rochester, and in 1550 transferred to the see of London. A man who opposed breaking the law in things indifferent – and who could not understand John Hooper when he refused for a time to be consecrated as Bishop of Gloucester because he was required to wear vestments – he nevertheless broke down the High Altar in St Paul's Cathedral in order to set an example for others in his diocese.

In Ridley's view, the Roman Catholic Mass, with its teaching on the Real Presence and its claim to sacrifice Christ again and again, was an offence to Christ's perfect work of atonement on the cross at Calvary. Ridley wrote: 'I fight in Christ's quarrel against the Mass, which doth utterly take away and overthrow the ordinance of Christ.'

The most influential contribution that Ridley made to the Reformation understanding of the Supper was his 46 page treatise, *A Brief Declaration of the Lord's Supper*. With the death of the sickly young Protestant king, Edward VI from

tuberculosis at the age of sixteen in 1553, Mary Tudor came to the English throne. She was a determined and increasingly embittered Roman Catholic. By January 1555 Reginald Pole, a cardinal who at times seems to have had some kind of grasp of justification by faith, had absolved the House of Commons from the sin of schism, and the old legislation on heresy was restored. Nicholas Ridley, Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, and the whole Protestant cause were now very vulnerable.

Ridley was arrested, and brought to trial where he made it clear that the Mass could not be a re-enactment of Calvary: 'Christ made one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, neither can any man reiterate that sacrifice of His; and yet is the Communion an acceptable sacrifice to God of praise and thanksgiving. But to say that thereby sins are taken away (which wholly and perfectly was done by Christ's Passion, of the which the Communion is only a memory), that is a great derogation of the merits of Christ's Passion: for the Sacrament was instituted that we, receiving it, and thereby recognising and remembering His Passion, should be partakers of the merits of the same.'

Latimer also told his accusers that 'Christ made one perfect sacrifice for all the whole world, neither can any man offer Him again.' The Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, who was to be burnt at the stake on 21 March 1556, explained: 'Figuratively He is in the bread and wine, and spiritually He is in them that worthily eat and drink the bread and wine; but really, carnally, and corporally, He is only in heaven, from whence He shall come to judge the quick [i.e. the living] and dead.'

For refusing to believe that the bread and wine became the literal body and blood of Christ in the Mass, Ridley and Latimer were condemned to die. On 16 October 1555 the two men prayed together for the last time, and were burnt together, back-to-back, at the stake. Latimer's last words to Ridley deserve to be long remembered: 'Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day, by God's grace, light such a candle in England as I trust shall never be put out.' The flames soon took Latimer, but Ridley suffered much before the flames reached the gunpowder around his neck, and he died. Trusting in the perfect sacrifice of Christ, he prayed that the Lord would receive his spirit.

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