

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 *Corinthians* 10:3-6)

Number 351 © 2019 The Trinity Foundation Post Office Box 68, Unicoi, Tennessee 37692 January, February 2019
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Recovering Irenæus, Part 1

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Introduction

Irenæus, bishop of Lyons (early 2nd century – 202 AD), by his own hand commends himself as a disciple of Polycarp of Smyrna (69 – 155 AD)¹ who was himself “instructed by apostles and conversed with many who had seen Christ.”² The venerable bishop of Lyons held that the tradition of the apostles is the treasure of the Church, and their tradition is found in the written record of the Scriptures: “Since, therefore, the tradition from the apostles does thus exist in the Church...let us revert to the Scriptural proof furnished by those apostles...”³ Irenæus, just one generation removed from the voice of the apostles, is therefore held in high esteem by those who study the writings, beliefs, and practices of the early Church. The branch and leaf of Irenæus, many believe, is so close to the trunk and taproot of apostolicity that we can safely assume that what Irenæus taught is what Polycarp heard from the apostles themselves. What is more, his familiarity with and reliance upon the Scriptures not only show that he had immediate access to the instructions of the apostles, but also shed light on how the early Church interpreted those instructions.

An unwelcome surprise therefore appears to await the Protestant student of Irenæus. Upon a cursory reading he seems to advocate for the liturgical mixing of water with wine during the Lord’s Supper, the reality of Christ’s

presence in the bread and wine at the words of institution, and the continual offering of the flesh and blood of Christ as the oblation of the new covenant. In a word, he appears to be Romophilic in his liturgy. That, at least, is the legend that has arisen from the tattered remnants of his works, and many a Protestant has stumbled into error when confronted with Roman Catholic arguments ostensibly derived from him.

But the legend is pure fiction, the product of fertile imaginations, anachronistic readings, medieval traditions and, most unsettling, the wide acceptance of known, egregious, and even intentional translation errors from his original Greek into Latin and English. When understood within the context of his own works and his native Greek, Irenæus taught in the second century the same eucharistic⁴ liturgy practiced by Reformed Protestants today. What is more, he is shown to be utterly ignorant of the late antique and medieval Roman Catholic novelties of transubstantiation and the mass sacrifice. Truth be told, Irenæus was *Protestant*. He used simple wine in the celebration of the Supper without a liturgical mixing of water, knew nothing of transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the mass, and held that the change in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper occurred not in the substance of the elements themselves but in the mind of the believer. The fantastic Roman Catholic interpretations of Irenæus rely upon statements extracted from their original context, and

¹ Eusebius, *Church History*, V, 20.4-6.

² Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, III, 3.4. Unless otherwise indicated, citations from Irenæus’ *Against Heresies* (AH) and other church fathers in English come from Phillip Schaff’s *Ante-Nicene Fathers* series. Citations in Greek and Latin come from Jacques-Paul Migne’s *Patrologiæ Cursus Completus, Series Græca* (PG). Citations from the 1996 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) are indicated by paragraph, and citations from the Scriptures are from the *King James Version*.

³ Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, III, 5.1.

⁴ Eucharist comes from the Greek word, εὐχαριστέω (eucharisteō), used in the Gospel accounts when Christ multiplied loaves and fish and “gave thanks” for them (*Matthew* 15:36; *Mark* 8:6) and when He “took the cup, and gave thanks” (e.g., *Luke* 22:17) and “took the bread, and gave thanks” (e.g., *Luke* 22:19). The ancient church referred both to the tithe offering for the poor and to the Lord’s Supper as “the eucharist,” as both were expressions of gratitude to God.

both accidental and intentional mistranslations. Much of this may be blamed on the Roman Catholic apologist's desperation to find early evidence for his religion, but the problem is further compounded by the credulity of unsuspecting Protestants and the poor condition of the body of data, a situation that is leveraged to the full by the Roman apologist.

Irenæus' Works in Translation

The historiographical challenge facing us as we read Irenæus is threefold: first, his writing style can be tedious and difficult; second, his original Greek works survive only in fragments; and third, the complete manuscript of his most valuable treatise—the five-book compilation *Against Heresies*—survives only in Latin from an unidentified translator known to be unequal to his task. Dr. Alexander Roberts, who translated *Against Heresies* into English, observed,

Irenæus, even in the original Greek, is often a very obscure writer. At times he expresses himself with remarkable clearness and terseness; but, upon the whole, his style is very involved and prolix. And the Latin version adds to these difficulties of the original, by being itself of the most barbarous character. In fact, it is often necessary to make a conjectural re-translation of it into Greek, in order to obtain some inkling of what [Irenæus] wrote.... Its author is unknown, but he was certainly little qualified for his task.... [T]here are not a few passages in which a guess can only be made as to the probable meaning.⁵

It is to that “barbarous” Latin translation of Irenæus' missing or fragmented Greek originals that we must now turn our attention. The Roman Catholic arguments from Irenæus rely not only upon that barbaric Latin translation when the Greek is not available, but also upon “preferred” rewritings of what little Greek we possess. However, a careful analysis easily overcomes both the historiographical challenge and the fertile imagination of the Roman apologist.

Irenæus' Liturgy of the Eucharist

The bulk of Irenæus' writing on the liturgy of the eucharist is found in *Against Heresies*, Book IV, chapters 17-18 and Book V, chapters 1-2. Other incidental references to the liturgy are made throughout his works. We will begin with Irenæus' references to “the mingled cup and the manufactured bread” of the

⁵ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. I, Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 1885, Introductory Note to Irenæus *Against Heresies*, (Repr., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 312

Lord's Supper. From there we will examine why he believed that created food—stalk and vine, kernel and grape, ear and cluster, and especially the ingredients of mixed bread and mingled wine—militated so powerfully against the gnostic denial of the union of flesh and Spirit. That conviction bore heavily on his affirmation of the “new oblation of the new covenant.” Once Irenæus is understood in his own historical and historiographical context, and his approach to the Gnostics is understood, it is a matter of simple inspection to expose the widely accepted and egregious translation errors Roman Catholicism uses to advance an argument for transubstantiation and the mass sacrifice in Irenæus. Restoring Irenæus' original words corrects the Roman editorializing and reveals a much different eucharistic liturgy.

Irenæus' Reference to the Mingled Cup in the Lord's Supper

In Book I of *Against Heresies* (AH), Irenæus makes reference to the heretical imitations of the Lord's Supper using a cup “mixed with wine” (AH.I.13.2). In Book IV, he states that Christ “affirmed the mixed cup to be His blood” (AH.IV.33.2), and in Book V, he makes reference to “the commixture of the heavenly wine” (AH.V.1.3), the “mingled cup” used in the Lord's Supper (AH.V.2.3), and Christ's promise to drink “the mixed cup new with His disciples in the kingdom” (AH.V.36.3). Such references are very appealing to the Roman Catholic apologist because his own eucharistic liturgy includes the addition of water to the wine at the altar.⁶

A little history will serve us well. Prior to the rise of Roman Catholicism, Greeks, Jews, Romans, and early Christians all understood that wine for civilized consumption was made of *merum* mixed with water to cut flavor and alcohol to taste. *Merum*—pure wine or unmixed wine—was considered an unfinished agricultural product, too sweet and too inebriating on its own. The consumption of *merum* was considered the practice of barbarians. Jews found the drinking of straight *merum* to be “harmful.”⁷ The Greeks attributed the untimely death of Cleomenes to his habit of drinking pure wine “unmixed with water.”⁸ Roman poet Martial wrote in the first century that intentional inebriation could be achieved by reducing the water-to-*merum* ratio

⁶ See *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 2003), paragraphs 142, 178. At the altar, either the priest (paragraph 142) or the deacon (paragraph 178) “pours wine and a little water into the chalice.”

⁷ 2 *Maccabees* 15:39.

⁸ Herodotus, *History*, Book VI.

from the standard 2:1, to a much less diluted 1:1.⁹ Clement of Alexandria insisted that adolescents were obliged to water down *merum* in order to “allay the agitation of lust,” for the common proverb warned, “unmixed wine is far from compelling a man to be wise.”¹⁰

The ancient world—Greeks, Jews, Romans, Christians—thus understood the simple secular manufacturing process for making wine: *merum*, or unmixed wine, was mingled with water. The resulting mixture was called “wine with water,” “wine and water,” “mingled wine,” “mixed wine” or simply “wine.” Wine, as we know it today, was to the ancient world, “*merum* with water,” which is to say, “unmixed wine with water,” which of course is “wine.”

Early Christian references to mixed wine in the liturgy of the Lord’s table are not references to a *liturgical mixing* of wine with water, but rather to a *secular practice* of watering down the *merum* as the final step in a manufacturing process. Justin Martyr (100 – 165 AD) taught that “wine and water” used during the liturgy¹¹ was already mixed in the cup before it was brought to the table.¹² Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – c. 215 AD) described “baked bread” and “a mixture of wine and water” in his discussion on *John* 6, referring of course to the common manufacturing processes for both.¹³ Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200 – 258 AD) insisted that the wine used in the Lord’s Supper “is not indeed water alone, nor wine alone”¹⁴ in the same way that the bread “cannot be flour alone or water alone,” referring plainly to two secular manufacturing processes. Aphrahat of Persia (280 – 345 AD) had the “mixed” cup set at the table *prior to* the arrival of the bridegroom.¹⁵ None had the cup being mixed *at the table*. *Merum* was mixed with water to make wine, and wine was brought to the table already mixed.

Irenæus’ several references to the liturgical use of mingled wine reflect his knowledge of an ancient manufacturing process, not a liturgical rite of mixing water with wine. His description of “the mingled cup and the manufactured bread” in the Lord’s Supper plainly refers to those two manufacturing processes (AH.V.2.3). In Irenæus (as in Justin, Clement, Cyprian,

and Aphrahat, above), there was no more liturgical significance to the mixing of *merum* with water for the making of wine than there was to the mixing of flour and water or the baking of dough to make bread. Important to the present discussion, the wine and bread were mixed, mingled, kneaded and baked *prior to the meal*, not liturgically at the table. It is not until the late fourth century that Ambrose of Milan (c. 340 – 397 AD) proposed the novel mixing of water into the wine *liturgically* during the Lord’s Supper *at the table*.¹⁶ There is no credible evidence for liturgical mixing of water into wine any earlier than that, but Ambrose’s novelty has long since been used to reinterpret the earlier patristic references to suggest that even Christ Himself had mixed the water and wine at the table when He instituted the Supper.

We highlight this obscure history of the mingled cup not only to demonstrate how creatively Roman Catholicism strives to establish apostolic continuity for her novelties, but also, and more importantly, to showcase the early Church’s knowledge of, and fascination with, the secular manufacturing processes for the food Christ blessed and consumed at His last meal. It played no small part in their efforts to face down a growing gnostic heresy that denied that Christ had a body, or that the Holy Spirit was truly poured out on men. The mingling of *merum* with water to make wine and the mixing of flour with water to make bread was just a small piece of a larger construct employed by the early Church to show that God had mingled with His own creation. That knowledge will serve us well as we correct later Roman Catholic attempts to use the mixed cup to force the mass sacrifice upon an unwilling Irenæus.

Created Food as Figure and Evidence of the Unity of Flesh and Spirit

The early writers applied the figures of grain and vine, flour and grape, and bread and wine in their arguments on the incarnation, the pouring out of the Spirit, the body of Christ, and the resurrection from the dead. So with Cyprian: “when the water is mingled in the cup with wine, the people is made one with Christ,” and “as many grains, collected, and ground, and mixed together into one mass, make one bread; so in Christ, who is the

⁹ Martial, *Epigrams*, XI, 6.

¹⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Pædagogus*, II, 2, “On Drinking.”

¹¹ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 67.

¹² Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 65.

¹³ Clement of Alexandria, *The Pædagogus*, I, 6.

¹⁴ Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle* 62, 13. The error being corrected by Cyprian was that *merum* was not being used at all. His argument was not for a liturgical mixing but for the proper use of mixed wine during the meal.

¹⁵ Aphrahat of Persia, *Demonstrations*, Demonstration 6, 6.

¹⁶ Ambrose, *Concerning the Sacraments*, V.1.2-3. (*Translations of Christian Literature*. Series III, *Liturgical Texts*, C. L. Feltoe, D.D., ed., *St. Ambrose, “On the Mysteries” and the treatise “On the Sacraments”* by an unknown author, Thompson, T., B.D., trans., Srawley, J. H., D.D., ed. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919, 117-118) [*n.b.*: “unknown author” now known to be Ambrose].

heavenly bread...our number is joined and united.”¹⁷ Clement of Alexandria appealed to the bread and the mingled wine to signify the union of Christ with His people: just as bread, “crumbled into a mixture of wine and water” absorbs the wine and leaves the water behind, so Christ joins to Himself “those among men who are heavenly, nourishing them up to immortality...”¹⁸ And again, the Hebrews drank water in the wilderness, but harvested grapes in the promised land, which signified that “the blood of the grape—that is, the Word—desired to be mixed with water, as His blood is mingled with salvation.”¹⁹ Chrysostom likened the manufacturing processes of wine and bread to the incarnation: “He has mixed up Himself with us; He has kneaded up His body with ours.”²⁰

Irenæus joined in with alacrity, applying vigorously the allegories of bread and wine to the gnostic denial that Jesus was the Creator’s Son, that He possessed a body, that He had come to save both soul and body, that the Holy Spirit could be poured out on flesh, and that Jesus would raise our bodies to life. That Christ made wine at Cana (*John* 2:1-11) and bread on the mountaintop and thanked His Father for it (*John* 6:11), demonstrated that “the God who made the earth, and commanded it to bring forth fruit” was the same God who sent His Son and bestowed on flesh “the blessing of food and the favour of drink” (*AH.III.11.5*). Christ “availed Himself of those kinds of food which are derived from the earth” to show that He possessed a body of “flesh which had been derived from the earth...” (*AH.III.22.2*). The Lord’s promise to “give to men a new heart and a new spirit” (*Ezekiel* 36:26) was fulfilled in “the new wine which is put into new bottles” and in the giving of the Spirit “to give water to the elect people of God” (*AH.IV.33.14*). “For as a compacted lump of dough cannot be formed of dry wheat without fluid matter, nor can a loaf possess unity, so, in like manner, neither could we, being many, be made one in Christ Jesus without the water from heaven,” the Holy Spirit (*AH.III.17.2*). As “a grain of wheat, is sown in the earth and decays,” so our bodies “which are laid in the earth, into which seeds are also cast” arise from the dead and partake of incorruption (*AH.V.7.2*). Christ “hungered...in order that we may perceive that He was a real and substantial man—for it belongs to a man to suffer hunger when fasting” (*AH.V.21.2*). “God permitted these things to be

made, and...all such have been created for the benefit of that human nature which is saved, ripening for immortality” (*AH.V.29.1*). Christ’s promise “to drink of the fruit of the vine with His disciples” proved not only that they would inherit a material earth “in which the new fruit of the vine is drunk,” but also that they would be resurrected “in the flesh...for to drink of that which flows from the vine pertains to flesh, and not spirit” (*AH.V.33.1*). The Lord’s promise to reward Jacob with “plenty of grain and wine” (*Genesis* 27:28) would only be realized in “the times of the kingdom” when “the creation...shall fructify with an abundance of all kinds of food”—every vine will bring forth “ten thousand clusters” and “every ear should have ten thousand grains” (*AH.V.33.3*).

Irenæus was so focused on the significance of God’s *creation of food*, Christ’s and the disciples’ consumption of created food on Earth, and their future consumption of created food together in Heaven, because *created food* testified most clearly to him of the union of flesh and Spirit and stood in stark contrast with the heavenly powers of the Gnostics that “do not come in contact with any of those things which belong to creation” (*AH.II.15.1*). Irenæus had written *Against Heresies* to counter the error, applying repeatedly the construct of created food to expose their inconsistencies, as illustrated by the challenge, by no means unique: “Let them therefore no longer speak of the Pleroma as being spiritual, or of themselves as ‘spiritual,’ if indeed their Æons sit feasting with the Father, just as if they were men...” (*AH.II.17.3*). For this reason, Irenæus pressed the created food of the eucharist to its allegorical limit, and it is here that the Roman religion thinks to extract from him her most precious teaching: the sacrifice of the mass.

Irenæus’ Reference to the “New Oblation” Instituted at the Last Supper

It is in chapters 17 and 18 of Book IV that we find in Irenæus a new sacrifice to be offered by the Church during the Lord’s Supper. It is initially disturbing to read because the Protestant mind, after a fashion, has been schooled to deny all other sacrifices than that of Christ. Yet Irenæus was emphatic when he wrote that Jesus “taught the new oblation of the new covenant” at the Last Supper, an “oblation” the Church now regularly “offers to God throughout all the world.” Irenæus held that the “new oblation” was prophesied in *Malachi* 1:11, foreseeing that “in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering” by the Gentiles (17.5). And again: “the Lord gave instructions” that the “oblation of the Church” is “to be offered throughout all the world” (18.1). Such references are very appealing to

¹⁷ Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle* 62, 13.

¹⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *The Pædagogus*, I, 6. We can hardly accept Clement’s depiction of the selective absorbency of bread, but his comment is nonetheless relevant.

¹⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *The Pædagogus*, II, 2.

²⁰ Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily 46, 3.

the Roman Catholic and appear to confirm what his religion now teaches: “At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood,” (CCC, 1323) now called the “holy sacrifice of the Mass” offered regularly in fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy (CCC, 1330). Here, Roman Catholicism initially appears to have the support not only of Irenæus, but of Malachi as well.

Again, a little history will serve us well. Through Malachi, the Lord condemned the unacceptable burnt offerings of the Jews and foretold a day when “in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering...among the heathen” (*Malachi* 1:10-11). Indeed, the apostles left instructions that sacrifices must and would continue under the New Covenant, but these new sacrifices would take the forms of “praise...the fruit of our lips giving thanks” (*Hebrews* 13:15), doing good works and sharing with others (*Hebrews* 13:16), “spiritual sacrifices” (*1 Peter* 2:5), providing for those in need (*Philippians* 4:18), and “your bodies a living sacrifice” (*Romans* 12:1). Such sacrifices are “holy” and “acceptable” (*Romans* 12:1, *1 Peter* 2:5) and well-pleasing to the Lord (*Philippians* 4:18, *Hebrews* 13:16). The spiritual incense that accompanies these “spiritual sacrifices” is the “prayers of the saints,” offered on an altar in Heaven (*Revelation* 5:8, 8:3-4). “There is no more offering for sin,” it is true (*Hebrews* 10:18), but that does not mean there are *no more sacrifices at all*. A new temple of living stones had been constructed for the very purpose that these new sacrifices would continue (*1 Peter* 2:5). The early Church thus understanding Malachi’s prophecy and the apostolic instructions, implemented sacrificial offerings accordingly: thanks, praise, hymns, good works, sharing, caring for one another, and prayer. These were the holy, acceptable, well-pleasing oblations of a grateful Church.

The weekly gathering of Christians to partake of the Lord’s Supper became the venue where those sacrificial offerings were made. Tithes of the harvest were collected for distribution to the poor, thanks were offered to God for His provisions, and from the tithes, baked bread and mixed wine were taken for the celebration of the Supper. Justin Martyr explained that Christians brought the tithes of the harvest weekly, “the wealthy among us help the needy,” and “we...offer hearty prayers” of thanks “for all things wherewith we are supplied.” The tithes were collected and distributed to “orphans and widows and...all who are in need,” and all of this in the setting of the eucharistic liturgy “on the day called Sunday.”²¹ “[W]e have been taught that the only honour that is worthy of Him is not to consume by

fire what He has brought into being for our sustenance [*Malachi* 1:10], but to use it for ourselves and those who need [*Philippians* 4:18], and with gratitude to Him to offer thanks by invocations and hymns²² for our creation [*Hebrews* 13:15].... Our teacher of these things is Jesus Christ.”²³ “I admit,” Justin Martyr concluded, “that prayers and giving of thanks, when offered by worthy men, are the only perfect and well-pleasing sacrifices to God.”²⁴ The next century, Cyprian of Carthage held that the sacrifice foretold by *Malachi* 1:11 was not blood or burnt offerings, but rather “the sacrifice of praise.”²⁵ Tertullian had the sacrifices of *Malachi* 1:11 fulfilled in “the ascription of glory, and blessing, and praise, and hymns,”²⁶ and “simple prayer from a pure conscience.”²⁷ Origen saw the sacrifice of *Malachi* 1:11 offered “neither in a place nor in a land” but rather “in the heart.”²⁸ “[W]hat else can [Malachi] mean,” asked Eusebius, “but...the incense of prayer and...not a sacrifice of blood but of good works?”²⁹

Irenæus elaborated considerably on the sacrifices, insisting, “the class of oblations in general has not been set aside.... Sacrifices there were among the people [the Jews]; sacrifices there are, too, in the Church” (18.2). These sacrifices took the exact form prescribed by the prophets and apostles. “[T]he very oblations” of the Church consisted of the tithes of the Lord’s people, for “those who have received liberty set aside all their possessions for the Lord’s purposes” as the widow had in the *Gospels* (*Mark* 12:42, *Luke* 21:2) (18.2). “[A] pure sacrifice” is “to be found grateful to God, ...offering the

²² In the original Greek “invocations and hymns” is “προμῆς καὶ ὕμνων” (Migne, Jacques-Paul, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, PG, volume VI, Imprimerie Catholique, Paris, 1857, 345), which, correctly rendered, is “processions and hymns,” referring to the bringing forward of the tithe with praise. The uncaredful English mistranslation is of no small concern to us, as a following section will demonstrate. Justin did not see *invocations* as the fulfillment of the *Malachi* 1:11 prophecy.

²³ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 13.

²⁴ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 117.

²⁵ Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise XII*, I, 16.

²⁶ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, III, 22.

²⁷ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, IV, 1.

²⁸ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*, Homily XIII, 3, (*The Fathers of the Church, A New Translation*, volume 71, Hermigild Dressler, O.F.M., editor, *Origen, Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, Ronald E. Heine, translator, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982, 191).

²⁹ Eusebius of Cæsarea, *Proof of the Gospel*, I, 6, *Translations of Christian Literature, Series I: Greek Texts, The Proof of The Gospel Being The Demonstratio Evangelica of Eusebius of Cæsarea*, volume I, W. J. Ferrar, translator, London: Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1920, 36.

²¹ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 65; 67.

first-fruits of His own created things” to care for the needy in accordance with Epaphroditus’ example in *Philippians* 4:18 (18.4). “[W]e make offering to Him ...rendering thanks for His gift, and thus sanctifying what has been created,” setting aside our surplus for the needs of the hungry, thirsty and naked, in accordance with *Matthew* 25:34, caring for the poor, in accordance with *Proverbs* 19:17. The incense of *Malachi* 1:11 was fulfilled in the prayers of the saints (17.6). These offerings are placed not on an earthly altar, but on a heavenly one, “for towards that place are our prayers and oblations directed” (18.6).

As with Justin Martyr, Irenæus held that “the new oblation” took place in the setting of the weekly liturgy, in the form of thanksgiving (εὐχαριστέω, eucharisteō) for “the first-fruits of His own created things,” including the baked bread and mingled wine for which Christ had offered thanks, and from which He had selected the elements of the Supper. Irenæus’ most detailed exposition of “the new oblation” is found in *Against Heresies* Book IV, chapters 17 and 18, and it is notable that while he places the “new oblation” in the context of the Lord’s Supper, *at no point does he refer to Christ’s body and blood as the new oblation*. Each explicit reference to the substance of “the new oblation” (*italicized* below) indicates the tithe offering of first-fruits of the harvest for the poor, and by extension, our good works. Irenæus never actually refers to Christ’s body and blood as “the new oblation”:

Again, giving directions to His disciples *to offer to God the first-fruits of His own, created things*—not as if He stood in need of them, but that they might be themselves neither unfruitful nor ungrateful—He took that created thing, bread, and gave thanks, and said, “This is My body.” And the cup likewise, which is part of that creation to which we belong, He confessed to be His blood, and taught the new oblation of the new covenant; which the Church receiving from the apostles, offers to God throughout all the world, to Him who gives us as the means of subsistence *the first-fruits of His own gifts in the new testament*, concerning which Malachi, among the twelve prophets, thus spoke beforehand...indicating in the plainest manner, by these words, that the former people [the Jews] shall indeed cease to make offerings to God, but that in every place sacrifice shall be offered to Him, and that a pure one; and His name is glorified among the Gentiles. (17.5)

Inasmuch, then, as the Church offers with single-mindedness, *her gift* is justly reckoned a pure sacrifice with God. As Paul also says to the Philippians, “I am full, having received from Epaphroditus *the things that*

were sent from you, the odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, pleasing to God.” [*Philippians* 4:18] For it behooves us to make an oblation to God, and in all things to be found grateful to God our Maker, in a pure mind, and in faith without hypocrisy, in well-grounded hope, in fervent love, *offering the first-fruits of His own created things*. And the Church alone offers this pure oblation to the Creator, offering to Him, *with giving of thanks, [the things taken] from His creation*. (18.4)

For God, who stands in need of nothing, *takes our good works to Himself for this purpose*, that He may grant us a recompense of His own good things, as our Lord says: “...For I was an hungered, and *you gave Me to eat*: I was thirsty, and *you gave Me drink*...” [*Matthew* 25:34, etc.] As, therefore, *He does not stand in need of these*, yet does desire that we should render them for our own benefit, *lest we be unfruitful*; so did the Word give to the people that very precept as to the making of oblations, although He stood in no need of them, that they might learn to serve God: thus is it, therefore, also His will that we, too, should *offer a gift* at the altar, frequently and without intermission. The altar, then, is in heaven (for towards that place are our prayers and oblations directed). (18.6)

The reader will notice how frequently Irenæus refers to the grateful offering of created food as the substance of the oblation. We have only the “barbarous” Latin for these citations, but we can be assured that in the original Greek, Irenæus saw the eucharistic “oblation of the new covenant” instituted at the moment Christ “gave thanks” (εὐχαριστέω), rather than the moment He said “this is My body” and “blood,” because Irenæus would have cited the Scriptures in Greek. The Greek New Testament consistently has Christ “eucharisting” (εὐχαριστήσας) the bread and wine (*Matthew* 26:27; *Mark* 14:23; *Luke* 22:17,19; *I Corinthians* 11:24) *before* calling it His body and blood. That the early church offered eucharistic oblations in accordance with the written instructions of the apostles is clear. That Irenæus’ “new oblation” consisted of giving thanks to the Father for food (e.g., *Luke* 22:17,19), providing for the needs of the poor (*Proverbs* 19:17), the saints (*Philippians* 4:18), and the hungry and thirsty (*Matthew* 25:35) is also clear. That he had Christ *offering thanks* to His Father for the created bread and wine, and we, in imitation of Him, being “neither unfruitful nor ungrateful,” offering created things to Him as a tithe on a heavenly altar, is clear as well. When Irenæus thus writes that Christ gave “directions to His disciples to offer to God *the first-fruits of His own, created things*,” and then “took that *created thing, bread, and gave thanks*,” and “*the cup likewise, which is part of that creation to which we belong*,” and

“taught the *new oblation of the new covenant*” (17.5), the oblation to which he refers is the thank offering of the tithe of the harvest of “*created things*.” What Irenæus did not do, though the Roman religion wishes very much that he had, is say that Christ offered His body and blood as “the new oblation” and taught the apostles to do the same.

We highlight the *Malachi* 1:11 prophecy and this particular aspect of Irenæus’ eucharistic liturgy to demonstrate the yawning gap that exists in Roman arguments for the mass sacrifice in his works. In the place where Irenæus is alleged to teach the sacrifice of the mass as “the new oblation,” he never once states that “the new oblation” is an offering of Christ’s body and blood. What is actually offered is a tithe of the first fruits of the harvest for those in need, a point to which Irenæus returns repeatedly, emphatically and explicitly. It is what Christians today call “the offertory” or “the collection.” The Roman apologist leaps invalidly from the tithe offering in Irenæus to a sacrifice of Christ’s body and blood, of which Irenæus has said not a word. Such an approach to Irenæus not only ignores his explicit identification of “the new oblation” as the tithe offering, but also causes Rome’s apologists to miss why he was so focused on an offering of “*the first-fruits of His own, created things*” in the first place.

“He took it from that creation to which we belong...”

Our knowledge of Irenæus’ familiarity with the ingredients of the mixed bread and mingled wine, his conviction that created food served as a figure and evidence of the union of the flesh and Spirit, and his belief that “the new oblation of the new covenant” was both gratitude for, and an offering of, created things to the Creator, now serves us as we see him use the eucharistic liturgy to argue against the Gnostics. The gnostic liturgy was exactly the same as his, a matter of some consternation to him because they included mixed and mingled created food in their liturgy even as they rejected the mingling of God with His creation. He therefore appealed to the eucharist to highlight the gnostic inconsistency of offering created things to “their Father” who was not the Creator, calling created things the body and blood of “their Lord” while denying that He was the Creator’s Son, and nourishing their created bodies with it while denying that their created bodies could be saved.

The Valentinian Gnostics maintained that created things originated not from the Father of Christ, but rather “from apostasy, ignorance, and passion,” and yet offered in their oblations “what belongs to this creation of ours,” as if the Father was “desirous of what is not His own.” Like the Christians, the heretics, too, called the created

bread and wine His body and blood, but their inconsistency was intolerable: “[H]ow can they be consistent with themselves, that the bread over which thanks have been given is the body of their Lord, and the cup His blood, if they do not call Himself the Son of the Creator of the world...?” (AH.IV.18.4).

The Marcionite Gnostics held “that there are two gods, separated from each other by an infinite distance,” one god who created, and Jesus’ Father, Who did not. To Irenæus, this resulted in an impossible contradiction, for by saving created beings, Christ was taking “men that do not belong to him” away from the god “who made them.” It also made Christ inconsistent in His institution of the Supper: “[H]ow could the Lord, with any justice, if He belonged to another father, have acknowledged the bread to be His body, while He took it from that creation to which we belong, and affirmed the mixed cup to be His blood?” (AH.IV.33.2).

As for the Ebionite Gnostics, they “remain in the old leaven of [the natural] birth,” rejecting “the commixture of the heavenly wine” (AH.V.1.3). They “say that God came to those things which did not belong to Him...snatching away by stratagem the property of another” (AH.V.2.1). Irenæus observed that Jesus’ institution of the Supper contradicted them: “He has acknowledged the cup (which is a part of the creation) as His own blood, from which He bedews our blood; and the bread (also a part of the creation) He has established as His own body, from which He gives increase to our bodies” (AH.V.2.2; parentheses in original).

His consistent message as he countered the Gnostics was that it is only reasonable to offer created food to the Father *if the Father is the Creator*, only reasonable for the Son to thank Him for created food *if He is the Creator’s Son*, and only reasonable for Him to call created food “His body” and “blood” *if He actually possessed a created body*.³⁰ Thus, it is only reasonable to call Him Savior, *if He had come to save His creation*, body and soul together. By this means, *created food* (not *transubstantiated food*) had become for Irenæus a defense against the gnostic denial of the union of the flesh and Spirit.

Like the mixed bread and mingled wine, God had mingled with His Creation in two important ways: God the Son had commingled with the flesh *through the incarnation*, and God the Spirit had commingled with

³⁰ See also Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, IV, 40, “Then, having taken the bread and given it to His disciples, He made it His own body, by saying, ‘This is my body,’ that is, the figure of my body. A figure, however, there could not have been, *unless there were first a veritable body*.” Calling the bread His body and the wine His blood “*affirms the reality of His body*” (emphasis added).

the flesh *when He was poured out on men*. By his own hand, it is in those two comminglings that the sum of his arguments against the Gnostics was to be summarized:

Since the Lord thus has redeemed us through His own blood, giving His soul for our souls, and His flesh for our flesh, and has also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and, on the other hand, attaching man to God by His own incarnation, and bestowing upon us at His coming immortality durably and truly, by means of communion with God—all the doctrines of the heretics fall to ruin. (AH.V.1.1)

Because created food demonstrated so clearly to Irenæus that God had mingled with His own creation, it was the use of created food during the eucharist that so effectively overturned the gnostic error. Irenæus' own eight-chapter summary of his entire work against them focused on *created food* and most frequently on bread and wine at every stage of production, from kernel to loaf, from cluster to cup, so significant was the use of *created food* to him (AH.V.29-36).

“But our opinion is in accordance with the Eucharist...”

To Irenæus, therefore, it was the *whole spectrum* of created food that informed the eucharistic celebration: God's *creation of food*, the believers' harvest and eucharistic tithe of *created goods* on an altar in Heaven, the Lord's gratitude for the *created things* His Father provided, calling that *created food* His body and blood, feeding that *created food* to His disciples, and promising to eat that same *created food* again with them in Heaven. That continuum of eucharistic evidence testified of the permanent commingling of God and man, both in the incarnation and in the outpouring of the Spirit on men. The Gnostics, on the other hand, denied those comminglings, but nevertheless used *created food* in their liturgy, exposing their inconsistency in three ways:

1. In the oblation: “maintaining that the Father is different from the Creator, [while] they offer to Him what belongs to this creation of ours...rather subjecting Him to insult than giving Him thanks.” (AH.IV.18.4)

2. In the words of institution: “[saying] that the bread over which thanks have been given is the body of their Lord, and the cup His blood, [while] they do not call Himself the Son of the Creator.” (AH.IV.18.4)

3. In the memorial meal: “[saying] that the flesh...is nourished with the body of the Lord and with His blood, [but still] goes to corruption, and does not partake of life.” (AH.IV.18.5)

We note—it is of no small significance, and the reader must attend to it—that Irenæus believed the Gnostics had a *theological* problem, not a *liturgical* problem. He described their inconsistencies in the same liturgical order as that observed by Christians in the second century as well as by Protestants today: thanksgiving or tithe offering, followed by words of institution (“This is My body,” “This is My blood”), followed by the eucharistic memorial meal, the Lord's Supper. As we noted above in his own rendition of the Christian liturgy, and now here in his rendition of the gnostic liturgy, there is no mention of offering the Lord's body and blood. It is only in the oblation that anything is offered, and what is offered—by Gnostics and Christians alike—is “the fruits” of “this creation of ours” (AH.IV.18.4), the oblation occurring, quite noticeably, *prior to the words of institution*.

With that in mind, Irenæus believed the inconsistency of the Gnostics could be easily corrected in either of two ways:

Let them, therefore, either [1] alter their opinion, or [2] cease from offering the things just mentioned. But our opinion is in accordance with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn establishes our opinion. For we offer to Him His own, announcing consistently the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit. (AH.IV.18.5)

As we have shown, it is the *created food* of the eucharistic oblation that announces the “union of the flesh and Spirit.” What is being contrasted here is the gnostic oblation of *created food* to the non-creator to whom it *did not* belong, with the Christian oblation of “His own” *created food* to the Creator to Whom it *did* belong. The gnostic inconsistency could be easily resolved by repenting of the opinion that Christ was not the Creator's Son, and that created flesh could not be saved. Or, barring that, it could be resolved *by ceasing to offer created food to His Father* in the first place. It was really that simple. It was never about *offering Christ's body and blood to the Father*. Neither Irenæus nor the Gnostics knew of any such eucharistic sacrifice, and therefore the locus of his argument against them remained squarely on the inconsistency of their use of *created food*.

Part Two will continue in the next Trinity Review.