

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 351b © 2019 The Trinity Foundation Post Office Box 68, Unicoi, Tennessee 37692 March, April 2019
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Recovering Irenæus, Part 2

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Irenæus' Alleged Reference to Transubstantiation and the Mass Sacrifice

It is here that we must now take aim at the overt historical revisionism employed by the Roman Catholic to have his way with Irenæus. Lacking support from his actual words, Rome takes matters into her own hands and commits some of the most egregious offenses in all of eucharistic historiography, unable to prove from the evidence either how Irenæus affirmed the mass sacrifice, or why he would want to do so. Irenæus indeed wrote that Christ instituted “the new oblation of the new covenant” at the Last Supper, and also that Christ called the bread and wine His body and blood, but he stubbornly refuses to testify that “the new oblation” is the offering of Christ’s body and blood.

The only option available to Rome is to change what Irenæus wrote, forcing him to affirm what he would have denied. The mass sacrifice is therefore extracted from Irenæus through an extraordinary deception that is made even more remarkable by the Protestants who have been complicit in advancing it. Rome intentionally mistranslates his original Greek in order to conflate “the new oblation” with the words of institution, making it appear that “the new oblation” occurs at the moment the bread and wine are called the body and blood of Christ. By that sleight of pen Irenæus is made to affirm the offering of the body and blood of Christ by the Church, and the Roman Catholic mass sacrifice thereby becomes the antidote to the second century gnostic heresy. The linchpin of Rome’s deception is the moment when Christ’s words—“this is My body,” “this is My blood”—are spoken over the bread and wine. That moment is alternately called “the words of institution,” “the consecration,” “the invocation,” or in Irenæus’

words, “the epiclesis,” when the elements “receive the word of God.”

The Epiclesis

In several of his references to the Lord’s Supper, Irenæus highlights the point in the liturgy when the words of institution are spoken over the bread and wine. As he describes it, “When...the mingled cup and the manufactured bread receives the Word of God,” the bread and the wine become “the Eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ” (AH.V.2.3). Irenæus acknowledges the liturgical epiclesis, consistently placing it *after* the eucharistic oblation, as the Scriptures would indicate as well, for all of the accounts of the Last Supper have Christ eucharistening the bread and wine before calling it His body and blood. Irenæus affirmed this same order when criticizing the heretic Marcus for “pretending to eucharist (εὐχαριστεῖν) cups of mixed wine” and *afterward* uttering a lengthy epiclesis (ἐπικλήσεως) causing the wine, for dramatic effect, to change color (AH.I.13.2).¹ Irenæus’ ordering of the eucharistic oblation *prior to the epiclesis* is confirmed by two other early Greek witnesses—Irenæus’ disciple, Hippolytus of Rome (170 - 235 AD)² and Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 310 – 403 AD)³—both of whom recited this specific criticism of Marcus by Irenæus.

¹ Migne, *PG*, VII, 580.

² Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, VI.34. “...taking the Cup, as if offering up the Eucharistic prayer (εὐχαριστῶν), and prolonging to a greater length than usual the word of invocation (ἐπικλήσεως)...” (Migne, *PG*, XVI, 3258).

³ Epiphanius, *Heresies*, 34.2: “pretending to eucharist (εὐχαριστεῖν) the mixed wine” and then uttering a lengthy epiclesis (ἐπικλήσεως) (Migne, *PG*, XLI, 584).

The early church's ordering of the eucharistic oblation *prior to the epiclesis*, before it is called Christ's body and blood, is problematic to Roman Catholicism for obvious reasons. The epiclesis is the key to the Roman Catholic sacrifice of the mass that requires the eucharistic oblation to occur *after the epiclesis*, that is, *after* the bread and wine are called His body and blood:

The Epiclesis ("invocation upon") is the intercession in which the priest begs the Father to send the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, so that the offerings may become the body and blood of Christ.... (CCC, 1105)

The epiclesis, which Rome also calls the "consecration" (CCC, 1376), is the hinge upon which the Roman religion's ministry of reconciliation is alleged to turn, for "the epiclesis is at the heart...of the Eucharist" (CCC, 1106), and "[t]he Eucharist is 'the source and summit of the Christian life'" (CCC, 1324). To prove that the early Church offered the mass sacrifice, Roman Catholicism requires Irenæus to place "the new oblation" at the "epiclesis," and for this reason, Irenæus' eucharistic liturgy has suffered great abuse at the hands of Rome.

It is relevant here, so we will repeat what we noted at the beginning: early Christians mixed their wine with water *prior to the weekly gathering, not during the memorial meal*. It was not until the late fourth century that Ambrose proposed the liturgical mixing of water with wine at the table. Roman Catholic Jacques-Paul Migne (1800-1875), stumbling into Ambrose's novelty, mistook Irenæus' second century reference to "cups of mixed wine" as a late fourth century reference to cups that had been mixed liturgically *during the service*. Because the cups were mixed, Migne assumed that Irenæus could not have been referring to a mere eucharistic oblation of gratitude for wine. He thus assumed Irenæus must have used εὐχαριστεῖν (eucharistein) to refer to the epiclesis rather than to the thank offering, and so preferred to render it "*to consecrate*" rather than "*to give thanks*." This has the effect of collapsing Marcus' liturgical oblation followed by the epiclesis, into a single, lengthy epiclesis, and has him offering a "consecrated" cup of Christ's blood, rather than making a simple thank offering of mixed wine.⁴ It is by such deliberate mistranslation that Migne subtly shifted Irenæus' focus away from the

contemporary eucharistic oblation of gratitude for created food *prior to the epiclesis*. Migne repeated the error in Epiphanius' verbatim account of the same event, insisting in a footnote that Irenæus' reference to the mixing must imply that he had been using εὐχαριστεῖν to mean "consecrate."⁵ Remarkably, that evidence tampering has been largely accepted by Protestants.⁶

Migne returned to his folly in Book IV of *Against Heresies*, committing what is arguably one of the most offensive translation errors in all of patristic eucharistic literature. Still unable to find the "source and summit" of his religion in Irenæus, Migne attempted again to show that Irenæus' "new oblation of the new covenant" occurs *at the epiclesis*. In Book IV, that is exactly where Irenæus appears to place it as he describes the offering of bread *after it has received the invocation*:

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. For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, *when it receives the invocation of God*, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity. (AH.IV.18.5, emphasis added)

Irenæus' expression that the bread offering consists of "two realities, earthly and heavenly" after "the invocation" is thus taken to refer to a change of the bread at the epiclesis, at which point it becomes a heavenly offering of Christ's flesh to the Father. Migne, it seems, had finally found his mass sacrifice.

The problem, as Migne well knew, is that Irenæus wrote nothing of "the invocation" here. Aided by the "barbarous" Latin version, Migne discreetly inserted the epiclesis into the Greek text to force Irenæus to have the bread changed into Christ's body in time to be offered as the "new oblation." What Irenæus' original Greek actually says is that the bread becomes both "earthly" and "heavenly," not at the *epiclesis*, but rather at the moment it is set aside *as a tithe*. The bread is "earthly" in that it is the product of our toil, and "heavenly" in that it is set

⁵ Epiphanius, *Heresies*, 34.2, (Migne, *PG*, XLI, 583n): "Quoniam ille ipsis interpres parum commode: *Pro calice enim vino misto fingens se gratia agere*. Nostro autem sensu post κεκραμένα [mixed] apponenda distinctio est" (Italics in original). Migne makes no such correction to Hippolytus' account since Hippolytus' later Latin translator had already rendered "εὐχαριστῶν" as "consecrans" (Migne, *PG*, XVI, 3257, 3258).

⁶ See Dr. Alexander Roberts rendering at AH.I.13.2 in Schaff's *Ante-Nicene Fathers*: "Pretending to consecrate [εὐχαριστεῖν] cups mixed with wine...."

⁴ Migne, *PG*, VII, 579n: "*Consecrare, inquam, non gratias agere...hic enim non de gratiarum actione simpliciter, sed de ipso Eucharistiae sacrificio...*" (emphasis in original), and 580n: "Nam hic εὐχαριστεῖν significat *consecrare*,...non *gratias agere*." (emphasis in original).

aside for the heavenly purpose of feeding the poor, and therefore offered as a tithe on an altar in Heaven.

Migne's fraudulent reading of the passage is based on the "barbarous" Latin translation, "*terra panis, percipiens invocationem Dei (earthly bread, when it receives the invocation of God).*"⁷ But there is no need to rely on the "barbarous" Latin when the Greek is in our possession. In his native tongue Irenæus wrote that the earthly bread takes on a heavenly reality not at the "ἐπικλυσιν (epiclisin) of God," but rather at the "ἐκκλησιν (ecclisin) of God": "Ὡς γὰρ ἀπὸ γῆς ἄρτος προσλαμβάνόμενος τὴν ἐκκλησιν τοῦ Θεοῦ...."⁸ That underlined word, ἐκκλησιν (ecclisin), means to "call forth" or "appeal,"⁹ and thus Irenæus' statement is properly rendered,

For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the summons of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly....¹⁰

A simple analysis of this chapter of Irenæus brings the true meaning out of the medieval shadows in which Migne attempted to hide it. The early Church saw the thank offering of the first-fruits not only prophesied in *Malachi* 1:11, but also foreshadowed in the bread offerings under the Levitical rite. That bread offering was "a sweet savour unto the LORD" (*Leviticus* 2:2, 6:21) and an offering of "the firstfruits" (*Leviticus* 23:17). Irenæus saw these linked together in the Philippians' gift to Paul, "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God" (*Philippians* 4:18), and in Christ's gratitude for the bread and wine at the Supper. It is that offering to which Irenæus referred when He said the bread "receives the summons of God" Who in the Old Testament summoned that bread unto Himself as a tithe: "thou shalt bring it in" (*Leviticus* 6:21; compare, *Leviticus* 2:8, 23:17; *Deuteronomy* 12:6, 11; 14:28, *Nehemiah* 10:37; *Amos* 4:4). The Lord summoned the tithe for the use of "the Levite" as well as for the poor, "the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow" (*Deuteronomy* 26:12). In *Malachi*, the very locus of Irenæus' thinking on the "new oblation," the Lord summons the tithe again: "Bring ye all the tithes..."

(*Malachi* 3:10). In Irenæus' original Greek, therefore, it is not the *invocation* of God (ἐπικλυσιν τοῦ Θεοῦ), but rather the *summons* of God (ἐκκλησιν τοῦ Θεοῦ), that brings about the "heavenly" reality in the bread.

This, in fact, is Irenæus' sole point in Book IV, chapter 18: "the class of oblations in general has not been set aside; for...those who have received liberty set aside all their possessions for the Lord's purposes" (18.2). The change of reality does not occur by Christ's heavenly flesh descending into the bread of Earth for a eucharistic offering, but rather by the earthly bread being raised up to Heaven to be offered there, having been set aside after the examples of the widow (*Mark* 12:42, *Luke* 21:2), the sheep (*Matthew* 25:35) and Epaphroditus (*Philippians* 4:18). Irenæus insists in this very chapter that our tithes are placed on a heavenly altar for His use (AH.IV.18.6). That is how the bread consists "of two realities, earthly and heavenly" when it "receives the summons of God."

As with Irenæus' representation of the liturgy in Book I, this rendering, too, is problematic for the Roman Catholic because it has the offering occurring *prior to the epiclesis*, before it is said to be the body and blood of Christ. Because Irenæus' words here refute Rome's claims of early origins for the mass sacrifice, Migne insisted in his footnotes that by "ἐκκλησιν" Irenæus really must have meant "ἐπικλυσιν" which he calls the "preferred" reading.¹¹ Every Roman Catholic apologist—and many a Protestant¹²—accepts that editorial modification without objection, assuming that Irenæus simply must have been referring to the epiclesis as the cause of the change in the reality of the bread. In this stunning display of editorial license, Irenæus' second century work is modified—with the blessing of Protestants!—to collapse his eucharistic oblation into the epiclesis to make it conform to Roman Catholicism's late fourth century liturgical novelties.

"...The Things Just Mentioned"

Migne's editorial modifications cause Irenæus, quite against his will, to point to the mass sacrifice as the solution to the inconsistency of the Gnostics. Returning

¹¹ Migne, PG, VII, 1028n.

¹² See, for example, Harvey, W. Wigan, *Sancti Irenæi Episcopi Lugdunensis, Libros Quinque Contra Haereses*, volume ii, Typis Academicis, 1857, 205n-206. "ἐπικλυσιν is evidently the reading followed by the [Latin] translator and is that which the sense requires." See also, John H. McKenna as he wonders credulously what Irenæus must have meant when he wrote "προσλαμβάνόμενος τὴν ἐπικλυσιν τοῦ Θεοῦ," something that Irenæus did not write! See *The Eucharistic Epiclesis: A Detailed History from the Patristic to the Modern Era*, Second edition, Hillenbrand Books, 2009, 46.

⁷ Migne, PG, VII, 1028.

⁸ Migne, PG, VII, 1028.

⁹ *A New Greek and English Lexicon*, 1st American Edition, Hilliard, Gray & Co., 1840, 452; *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 8th edition, American Book Company, 1882, 435.

¹⁰ See *A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, Anterior to the Division of the East and West*, volume 42, *Five Books of S. Irenæus Bishop of Lyons Against Heresies*, Rev. John Keble, M.A., translator, James Parker & Col, 1872, 361.

now to Irenæus' argument against them, we remind the reader that his explicit concern was that they were inconsistent to offer to God "what belongs to this creation of ours," and only afterward to call "the bread...the body of their Lord, and the cup His blood" (AH.IV.18.4). What is offered is not called the body and blood of "their Lord," and what is called the body and blood of "their Lord" is not offered. When Irenæus then immediately continues, insisting, "Let them, therefore... cease from offering the things just mentioned," *the things just mentioned are the things just offered*, which are "what belongs to this creation of ours." It is a very subtle point that is obscured by Migne.

It is here that Migne reaps a harvest of the deceit he has sown by changing "summons" to "invocation." Irenæus continues (according to Migne) saying that Christians, by way of contrast, are not inconsistent in their offerings, because "we offer to Him His own [bread]" that has received "the invocation of God," showing that we announce "consistently the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit" (AH.IV.18.5). By Migne's wordcraft, "fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit" is thus made to refer to the Holy Spirit changing the bread into Christ's flesh at the epiclesis, and, *Voilà!*, Irenæus has put forward as a counter-example the consistency of the Christians who "offer to Him His own [Son]," the transubstantiated bread, at the epiclesis. Irenæus thus appears to counter the inconsistent gnostic offering of the body and blood of Christ with the Christian offering of the same, and the fraudulent parallel is complete: just as the bread turns into the body and blood of Christ at the epiclesis, "so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity" (AH.IV.18.5). This is how the ancient "barbarous" Latin translator, and Migne after him, turned Irenæus' simple tithe offering into the sacrifice of the mass, and caused Irenæus to affirm the resurrection of the body by consumption of transubstantiated bread. There is hardly a Roman Catholic apologist who does not cite Irenæus here as if he actually meant that "our opinion is in accordance with the Roman Catholic mass, and the Roman Catholic mass in turn establishes our opinion." It is a parallel forged in the imagination of the Roman mind, from an argument based on a barbaric Latin translation and an unconscionable redaction of the original Greek.

"...and the Eucharist in turn establishes our opinion."

But we know better, so now it is our turn to reap a bountiful harvest from our Irenæic toil. We know from Irenæus' own words that it is *created food*, not *transubstantiated food*, that announces "consistently the

fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit." We correct Rome's illicit redaction of Irenæus' original Greek to allow him to speak plainly *in his own words* of the tithe offering of *created food* before the epiclesis; we see clearly that he has both the Gnostics and Christians offering (but not eating) a tithe of created food *prior to the epiclesis*, and has both the Gnostics and Christians eating (but not offering) the body and blood of "their Lord" *after the epiclesis*; we see that it was the gnostic offering of *created food* that so aptly illustrated their inconsistency; and we perceive that the union of flesh and Spirit, as signified by Irenæus in the mixed bread and mingled wine, really manifested in the two cominglings of God and man: Christ in His incarnation, and the Spirit in the outpouring on men, unto rebirth, and ultimately, unto resurrection.

The antidote to the poisonous fruit of Rome's intentional mistranslation thus presents itself to the patient reader. Irenæus' argument against the Gnostics had never been about transubstantiation or the mass sacrifice at all. It was about *created food*. Whether it was in the ground, in the ear, on the vine, at a wedding (*John* 2:1-11), on a mountaintop (*John* 6:11), offered as a tithe, consumed at the memorial meal or again in eternity with Christ, *created food*—and particularly mixed bread and mingled wine, consistently announced "the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit." The Gnostics were inconsistent to offer *created food* to the Father while denying that He was *the Creator*, to call it the body and blood of "their Lord" while denying that "their Lord" was the Creator's Son, and to nourish their bodies with that *created food* while denying that their *created bodies* could be raised up by the working of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Faith, not Transubstantiation, as the Nexus of Eucharist and Resurrection

With this in mind we may now grasp Irenæus' hope of the resurrection through the consumption of Christ's body and blood at the Supper. The Roman Catholic, misled by his illicit translations, would have our bodies suited for resurrection by consuming the literal body and blood of Christ under the appearance of bread and wine. But having corrected the Roman redaction, we see Irenæus' conviction that our bodies are prepared for Heaven *during the meal* in the same way the bread was prepared for Heaven *when it was set aside as a tithe*:

For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, *when it receives the summons of God*, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, *when they receive the Eucharist*, are no longer corruptible,

having the hope of the resurrection to eternity.
(AH.IV.18.5, emphasis added)

This is the parallel Irenæus has drawn, and it is simple and clear: our bodies become suited for their heavenly destiny “when they receive the Eucharist,” in the same way the bread becomes suited for heavenly purposes “when it receives the summons of God.” Both occur by faith. As Irenæus has already stated, the tithe becomes acceptable to God when we “offer it in all simplicity and innocence” (AH.IV.18.1), for “it is the conscience of the offerer that sanctifies the sacrifice when it is pure” (18.3), offering it “in a pure mind, and in faith without hypocrisy, in well-grounded hope, in fervent love” (18.4). As with the earthly bread of the tithe, so with our earthly bodies in the meal. The parallel is inescapable. It is the disposition of the recipient, not the substance of the bread, that makes the eucharist effectual to those who receive it.

To that end, we return to Irenæus’ passionate insistence that the Triune God interacts with His creation, while the heavenly powers of the Gnostics do not. Irenæus has thus far identified two moments when God interacts with the created bread and wine: when the Father summons the bread and wine as a tithe (18.5), and when the Son calls it His body and blood for a meal (V.2.3). In the same context Irenæus has the Holy Spirit operating on the wine and bread when they are yet grapes on the vine and wheat in the ear, long before they are even summoned for the tithe, and longer still before the epiclesis. The preparation of our created bodies for eternity by the operation of the Spirit and the Word is thus likened to the way the Spirit and the Word operate on the created bread and wine:

And just as a cutting from the vine planted in the ground fructifies in its season, or as a grain of wheat falling into the earth and becoming decomposed, rises with manifold increase by the Spirit of God, who contains all things, and then, through the wisdom of God, serves for the use of men, and having received the Word of God, becomes the Eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ; so also our bodies, being nourished by it, and deposited in the earth, and suffering decomposition there, shall rise at their appointed time, the Word of God granting them resurrection to the glory of God, even the Father, who freely gives to this mortal immortality, and to this corruptible incorruption. (V.2.3)

Here when Rome most needs Irenæus to invoke the Holy Spirit to bring about a change in the wine and bread *during the liturgy*, he instead has the Spirit operating on vine and kernel *while they are yet in the Earth*, so far removed is his thinking from any notion of

Roman transubstantiation at the invocation of the Holy Spirit.¹³ Significantly, Irenæus has all three Persons of the Trinity interacting with the created food, demonstrating the way the Triune God mingles with created flesh to save it, the centerpiece of his argument against the Gnostics.

Allowing Irenæus to draw out his own point, the problem with the Gnostics was not that they did not offer created things to the Father (they did, AH.IV.18.4), or that they did not call the bread and wine the body and blood of “their Lord” (they did, 18.4), or that they did not consume the memorial meal (they did, 18.5). The problem was that they “do not receive by faith into their soul the union of God and man” by which “the Word of the Father and the Spirit of God...become united with the ancient substance of Adam’s formation” (V.1.3), just as They had at creation: “Now man is a mixed organization of soul and flesh, who was formed after the likeness of God, and moulded by His hands, that is, by the Son and Holy Spirit, to whom also He said, ‘Let Us make man’” [*Genesis* 1:26] (IV.Preface.4).

The *created food* of the eucharist abundantly illustrated the raising up of Adam’s fallen progeny by the threefold interaction of the Triune God with His creation, and it was by faith, not by transubstantiation, that it occurred. This, to Irenæus, is how Christians announce “consistently the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit,” both in the oblation and in the meal, consuming Christ’s flesh and blood by faith unto resurrection and eternal life (*John* 6:31-54). Irenæus thereby illustrated his arguments against the Gnostics by having *the Spirit* operating on the grapes in fructification while they are still “in the ground” and on the kernel in germination while it is yet in “the Earth,” *the Father*

¹³ We have studiously avoided any references to the much controverted *Fragment 37*, dismissed by some because the bread and wine are called “eucharist” before the epiclesis, and the “eucharistic oblation of the new covenant” is complete before the Holy Spirit is invoked—and even then the author still refers to the bread and wine as “antetypes” of the sacrifice of Christ after the invocation. Quite notably in *Fr. 37*, the Holy Spirit is not said to change the bread and wine into Christ’s body and blood, but rather to operate on the mind of the believer to bring about the mental perception of Christ’s sacrifice through the created elements of bread and wine. *Fr. 37* was dismissed by Adolf von Harnack, among other reasons, because it was *too consistent with the beliefs of the Lutheran who discovered it*. (*Die Pfaffschen Irenäus-Fragmente als fälschungen Pfaffs Nachgewiesen*, J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1900). It is our opinion that Harnack dismissed it too quickly, for in light of our analysis here, the substance of Harnack’s objection, though he did not know it, is that *Fr. 37*, ostensibly by the hand of Irenæus, is *too consistent with Irenæus!*

summoning the earthly bread to bring about its “heavenly reality” while it is still but a tithe offering, and *the Son* speaking over the *created bread* during the meal to make it His body and blood to us. There can be no doubt that his language is figurative throughout. Such an illustration of the Triune God’s interaction with *created food* aptly demonstrated to Irenæus the triune God’s interaction with *created flesh*, standing in stark contrast to 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). That powerful signification is lost in Migne’s misguided editorial diversions.

We might then ask whether Irenæus believed the *Spirit’s* operation on kernel and cluster during germination and fructification effected a literal, substantial change to make it other than wheat and grape that “serves for the use of men”? Or whether Irenæus believed the *Father’s* summons of the earthly bread effected a literal, substantial change to make it other than bread for the heavenly purpose of feeding widow and orphan? Of course not. If Irenæus thus has the *Spirit* and the *Father* operating on bread and wine *without bringing about a literal, substantial change*, there is no basis for the Roman insistence that the Son’s words spoken over the bread and wine effected a literal, substantial change in it, either. Irenæus’ focus rather is on the interaction of the Trinity with the things of creation, and Jesus’ words simply set aside the created bread and wine for consumption by the believer who, as a condition of partaking must “*receive by faith into [his] soul the union of God and man.*” To Irenæus, there was nothing that figured the union better than the Lord’s *creation of food*, His appetite for *created food*, His use of *created food*, and His promise to eat *created food* with us in eternity. It is only Rome’s ambitious imagination and illicit redaction of the Greek text that could have suggested otherwise. With the Greek text restored, the Roman argument evaporates.

The Quintessentially Protestant Irenæus

Upon careful analysis, Irenæus sends the Roman apologist away empty-handed. Only upon a cursory reading does Irenæus appear to advocate for the liturgical mixing of water with wine, for the reality of Christ’s presence in the bread and wine, and for the sacrifice of the mass as the “new oblation of the new covenant.” But Irenæus requires more than a cursory reading, and the Christian must not accept one.

Not only do the historical data contradict Rome’s claims, but the Roman arguments from Irenæus are also shown to be void of substance and integrity. Rome’s attempt to find a liturgical mixing of water with wine in

Irenæus is based not on any explicit affirmation from him, but rather upon his description of a secular manufacturing process for wine, a nearly universal practice with no liturgical origin. Rome’s attempt to find in Irenæus a sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ is based on his detailed and exhaustive exposition of *Malachi* 1:11 as a grateful offering of the tithe, in which exposition he never once identifies the body and blood of Christ as “the new oblation.” Rome’s attempt to collapse Irenæus’ eucharistic offering into the *epiclesis* requires that one adopt Ambrose’ late fourth century novelty of mixing the water and wine liturgically and then mistranslate “eucharist” as “consecrate” in order to accommodate the anachronism. Rome’s attempt to find a substantive change in the bread at the *epiclesis* requires that we defer to a “barbarous” Latin translation, while discreetly changing the original Greek from “summons” to “epiclesis” so that later Roman novelties may be discovered in the second century. What is more, Roman attempts to elicit the mass sacrifice from Irenæus require a willful ignorance of his own affirmation that it is *created food* that testifies of the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit at every phase—in its planting, growth, harvest, manufacture, tithe, and consumption on Earth and again in Heaven. Far from supporting Rome’s claims, the evidence rather demonstrates to us the dim light in which one must study Irenæus to find the Roman Catholic liturgy in his works. What we find in the light of day is a second century eucharistic liturgy that is essentially the same as that celebrated by most Reformed Protestants today: a tithe of gratitude that is offered (but not eaten) in the liturgy, from which tithe created food is procured with no further liturgical mixing, and then consecrated for the memorial meal that is eaten (but not offered), the elements of the meal becoming figures to us of the body and blood of Christ by faith, not by transubstantiation.

In sum, Rome cannot support the origins of her mass sacrifice without attempting to extract it from Irenæus by anachronism, by subtle wordcraft, and by deceit. Even under such an assault, Irenæus refuses to help her. The real surprise in Irenæus therefore awaits not the Protestant but the Roman Catholic. And while Protestants do not need Irenæus to support their eucharistic liturgy—the Scriptures testify of it abundantly—it is nevertheless delightful to find in Irenæus, despite centuries of Roman attempts to obscure it, an essentially Protestant liturgy precisely where Rome cannot stand to discover it: in the early Church.

Episode 7 of Trinity Foundation Radio is available at our website. Host Steve Matthews interviews Dr. Paul Elliott.