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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)

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Email: tjtrinityfound@aol.com Website: www.trinityfoundation.org Telephone: 423.743.0199 Fax: 423.743.2005

Something to Consider: A Response to Francis Chan and His Romish View of the Lord's Supper

By Timothy F. Kauffman

Every few years a prominent evangelical announces that he wants to go back to worshipping God the old-fashioned way, having discovered the ancient liturgy of the apostolic church. On January 5, 2020, as he was preparing to celebrate the Lord's Supper, pastor Francis Chan became the next to do so, confessing that until very recently, he had not known that the center of the ancient liturgy was the body and blood of Christ:

For 1500 years, it was never one guy and his pulpit being the center of the church. It was the body and blood of Christ. [And—this was the real surprise to him—*everyone* believed it was *literally* His body and blood.] I didn't know that for the first 1500 years of church history everyone saw it as the literal body and blood of Christ. And it wasn't 'til 500 years ago that someone popularized the thought that it's just a symbol, and nothing more.... That's something to consider.¹

Because there is so much countervailing evidence against his claim, it suggests to us not that Chan has discovered the ancient liturgy, but rather that he has credulously embraced the pedestrian talking points of a typical Roman Catholic apologist.

A gullible Protestant will often fall headlong into such a trap with neither knowledge of the facts nor even a healthy, investigative curiosity to find out for himself. Because Francis apparently lacks both, we provide this helpful primer to equip him not only to resist the claim, but also to correct the one making it. We will review the scholars who, though reluctantly, acknowledge the widespread and enthusiastic embrace of symbolic language in the early church; the testimony—explicit and implicit—of the ancient writers themselves; the reasons the scholars are constrained to downplay the evidence; and finally, three of the most common fallacious arguments used in support of the literal view, based on Ignatius of Antioch (107 AD), Cyprian of Carthage (253 AD), and Irenæus of Lyons (190 AD). Together, these data lead to the unavoidable conclusion that for the first three hundred years of Christianity, the nonliteral, symbolic view of the Lord's Supper prevailed.

The Tacit Confession of the Scholars

The early church's conviction that the consecrated bread and wine were figures, similitudes, icons, representations, symbols, images, examples, types—or, in some cases, antitypes—of the body and blood of Christ, may reasonably be inferred from the animated attempts of the scholars to deny it. We are assured, on their scholarly authority, that such language from the early writers ought to be construed opposite its known meaning:

¹ Chan, Francis, "The Body of Christ and Communion," January 6, 2020, May 26, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUUbXzb2atM>.

Adolph Harnack (1896): What we now-a-days understand by “symbol” is a thing which is not that which it represents; at that time “symbol” denoted a thing which, in some kind of way, really is what it signifies;²

Darwell Stone (1909): The question of the meaning of such words in connection with the Eucharist will recur again in a later period. It may be sufficient here to express the warning that to suppose that “symbol” in Clement of Alexandria or “figure” in Tertullian must mean the same as in modern speech would be to assent to a line of thought which is gravely misleading.³

Joseph Pohle (1917): For want of a more accurate terminology, they often refer to the sacramental species as “signs,” “types,” “symbols,” or “figures.”⁴

Burton Scott Easton (1934): None of this language, however, is “symbolic” in the modern sense; ... in the earlier Patristic period the deeper nature of this connection was left unexplored.⁵

J. N. D. Kelly (1977): Yet we should be cautious about interpreting such expressions in a modern fashion. According to ancient modes of thought a mysterious relationship existed between the thing symbolized and its symbol, figure or type; the symbol in some sense *was* the thing symbolized.⁶

These strident and dismissive cautions lead us to suspect that there is more to the early writers’ symbolic, figurative, metaphorical language than

these scholars would prefer to admit. The casual reader may therefore be forgiven for casting a skeptical eye on their warnings.

It is evident by inspection that the ancient writers were not in “want of a more accurate terminology,” and knew very well the meaning of their words and used them advisedly. Clement of Alexandria (198 AD) wrote that gold is “the symbol (σύμβολον) of royalty”⁷ and the crown “is the symbol (σύμβολον) of untroubled tranquility” (*Pædagogus*, 2, 8).⁸ With his expansive vocabulary, Clement analyzed the allegorical, metaphorical, symbolic, tropish and enigmatic sayings of the Barbarians and Greeks, comparing them against the “first principles” and “truth” they represented: “...both Barbarians and Greeks, have veiled the first principles of things, and delivered the truth in enigmas (αίνίγμασι), and symbols (συμβόλοις), and allegories (ἀλληγορίαις), and metaphors (μεταφοραῖς), and such like tropes (τρόποις),”⁹ (*Stromata*, 5, 4).¹⁰ Tertullian of Carthage (208 AD) explicitly contrasted *the figure* and *image* with *the truth* it was intended to represent, stating with a clear illustration that *the figure* is not *the reality*:

And, indeed, if all are figure (*figuræ*), where will be that of which they are the figures (*figuræ*)? How can you hold up a mirror for your face, if the face nowhere exists? But, in truth, all are not figures (*imagines*), but there are also literal statements (*veritates*)” (*De resurrectione carnis*, 20).¹¹

In a second century manuscript the term “antitype” is used the same way it is in *Hebrews* 9:24 in which the earthly temple is but a copy (ἀντίτυπον), a “pattern” (*Hebrews* 9:23), a

² Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Volume 2, translated from the 3rd German edition, Neil Buchanan, translator, 1896, 144.

³ Darwell Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, Volume 1, 1909, 31.

⁴ Joseph Pohle, *Dogmatic Theology*, Volume 9, “The Sacraments: A Dogmatic Treatment,” Volume 2, “The Holy Eucharist” 2nd edition, 1917, 75.

⁵ *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, Burton Scott Easton, translator, 1934, 94.

⁶ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th edition. 2000, 212. Emphasis in original

⁷ Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, (PG hereafter), 1856-1857, 85 volumes, Volume 8, Column 469.

⁸ Migne, PG, 8:484.

⁹ Migne, PG, 9:41.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise notes, English translations of the Early Church Fathers are cited from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325*, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 10 volumes, 1885–1887, and *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. 28 volumes in 2 series, 1886–1889.

¹¹ Jacques Paul Migne, *Patrologia Latina* (PL). 221 volumes, 1844-1855, Volume 2, Column 821.

“shadow” (*Hebrews* 8:5) of the true temple in heaven. The copy (*ἀντίτυπον*) is contrasted with the authentic (*αυθεντικον*) and is notably inferior to it: “No one then who corrupts the copy (*ἀντίτυπον*), shall partake of the original (*αυθεντικον*)”¹² (2 *Clement* 14)[§] An ancient writer, Adamantius (c. 300 AD) implores his listener to take heed as he explains the difference between the image (*εικόνοϛ*), the figure (*σχήματος*) and truth (*ἀληθείας*).¹³ These early writers freely contrasted the symbol with the reality, the figure with the truth, the antitype with the authentic, and the nonliteral trope with the literal meaning behind it.

In the face of this ancient evidence, are we to understand, as the scholars suggest, that Clement believed gold *is really* the royalty, and the crown *really* the tranquility? Are we to take Tertullian to mean that the figure is *literally* the thing it figures, ignoring his emphatic plea contrary? Are we to understand “antitype” to refer to *the reality*, rather than the copy, the pattern, the shadow, knowing full well how the term was used in antiquity—indeed, even in the Scriptures? Are symbols, figures, likenesses, images, metaphors, allegories, tropes, enigmas, images, and antitypes such mysteries to the layman that he cannot understand antiquity without liberal, anglo-Catholic and Roman apologists to redact and revise it for him? The scholarly warnings about the use of figurative language are more indicative of their own desperation than any deficiency in the vocabularies of these ancient writers.

The scholars’ desperation is on full display when Stone claims that Tertullian used *figura* to refer to the truth, the reality, the substance and essence of Christ’s spoken words, not just a *mere allegory*: “He says that our Lord made known to the Apostles ‘the form (*figura*) of his voice’.”¹⁴ The reference is to Tertullian’s *Scorpiace*, and we could scarcely ask for a more apt illustration of the poverty of Stone’s

hypothesis. Tertullian had used *figuram vocis* to describe Christ’s *parables* (*Mark* 4:11; compare *Matthew* 13:11, *Luke* 8:10), His “figure of speech.” Tertullian commends his reader to the writings of the Apostles where Christ’s parabolic lessons, His “veiled” language, His “*figuram vocis*”¹⁵ is unveiled to us (*Scorpiace*, 12). Christ’s “figures of speech” require unveiling precisely *because they are not literal statements*, and Tertullian had used “figure of speech” in exactly the same way we do today.

Strain though they might, the much-exercised scholars have tacitly revealed something important about the early Church, and the attentive reader is invited to take note of it: the early church writers so frequently, so liberally, so *enthusiastically* embraced symbolic, figurative, metaphorical, allegorical, typical, and antitypical language to describe the Supper, that the scholars have been forced into tortuous explanations to deny what they plainly meant by it.

The Explicit Evidence from Antiquity

Having heard from the scholars how frequently the early writers employed distinctively *nonliteral* terminology for the consecrated elements, we turn now to the words of the writers themselves. We limit our evidence to the first three centuries of Christianity in order to show at once that for 1,500 years “everyone” did not believe the bread and wine were the literal body and blood of Christ and, that the symbolic language for the consecrated bread and wine was not a 16th century novelty.

Irenæus of Lyons (190 AD)

Irenæus refers to “the bread the body of Christ, and the cup the blood of Christ” as “these antitypes (*ἀντίτυπον*)”¹⁶ (*Fragment* 37).

Clement of Alexandria (202 AD)

“Elsewhere the Lord, in the Gospel according to John, brought this out by symbols (*συμβόλων*), when He said: ‘Eat my flesh, and drink my blood;’ describing distinctly by metaphor (*lit. allegory, ἀλληγορῶν*) the drinkable properties of faith...”¹⁷ (*Pædagogus*, 1, 6)

¹² Of unknown authorship, once attributed to Clement of Rome.

[§] Remarkably, other translations intentionally suppress the distinction between that which is *antitypical* and that which is *authentic*: “no one, therefore, having corrupted the type, will receive afterwards the antitype.” (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325*, Volume 9, Allan Menzies, D.D., editor, 1896, 255.)

¹³ Adamantius, *Dialogue* 5, 6 (Migne *PG*, 9:1840).

¹⁴ Stone, 30-31.

¹⁵ Migne, *PL*, 2:146.

¹⁶ Migne, *PG*, 7:1253. N.B.: fragment 38 in Migne.

¹⁷ Migne, *PG*, 8:296.

Tertullian of Carthage (208 AD)

“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 (*figura*) of my body”¹⁸ (*Adversus Marcionem*, 4, 40).

Hippolytus of Rome (215 AD)

The Greek original of Hippolytus’ instructions on the thank offerings and the Supper is no longer extant, but the Verona Latin fragments helpfully preserve both the Latin translation and a Latin transliteration of the Greek. At the thank offering, prior to the blessing, the bread is called an example, “*exemplum*,” of the body of Christ, or in Greek “*antitypum*.” The wine is called an antitype, “*antitypum*,” of the blood of Christ, or in Greek, “*similitudinem*.”¹⁹ Yet, even after the consecration, the communicant is instructed to receive “the image (*antitypum*)”²⁰ of the blood of Christ” (*Anaphora* 32).²¹

Origen of Alexandria (248 AD)

“...it is not the material of the bread but the word which is said over it which is of advantage to him who eats it not unworthily of the Lord. And these things indeed are said of the typical (*τυπικοῦ*) and symbolic (*συμβολικοῦ*) body”²² (*Commentary on Matthew*, 11, 14).

Adamantius (c. 300 AD)

“If, as these say, He was fleshless and bloodless, of what flesh or of what blood was it that He gave the images (*εικόνας*)²³ in the bread and the cup, when He commanded the disciples to make the memorial of Him by means of these?” (*Dialogue* 5, 6)²⁴

Eusebius of Caesarea (325 AD)

“Yea, and perfect services were conducted by the prelates, the sacred rites being solemnized, ... and the mysterious symbols (*σύμβολα*) of the Saviour’s

passion were dispensed”²⁵ (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, 10.3.3).

“...we have received a memorial of this offering which we celebrate on a table by means of symbols (*σύμβολων*) of His Body and saving Blood”²⁶ (*Demonstratio Evangelica*, 1.10).²⁷

“...the wine which was indeed the symbol (*σύμβολον*)²⁸ of His blood...He gave Himself the symbols (*σύμβολα*) of His divine dispensation to His disciples, when He bade them make the likeness (*εικόνα*) of His own Body.... bread to use as the symbol (*σύμβολω*) of His Body”²⁹ (*Demonstratio Evangelica*, 8.1).³⁰

Cyril of Jerusalem (350 AD)

“Wherefore with full assurance let us partake as of the Body and Blood of Christ: for in the figure (*τύπω*) of bread is given to you His body, and in the figure (*τύπω*) of wine His blood.”³¹ (*Catechetical Lecture* 22, 3)

“Trust not the judgment to your bodily palate no, but to faith unflinching; for they who taste are bidden to taste, not bread and wine, but the *antitypical* (*ἀντίτυπον*) Body and Blood of Christ.”³² (*Catechetical Lecture* 23, 20)

Sarapion of Thmuis (353 AD)

“This bread is the likeness (*ομοίωμα*) of the holy Body, ... the cup, the likeness of the Blood, for the Lord Jesus Christ, taking a cup after supper, said to his own disciples, ‘Take, drink, this is the new covenant, which is my Blood,’ ...” (*Eucharistic Anaphora*).³³

¹⁸ Migne PL, 2:460.

¹⁹ *Didascaliae Apostolorum Fragmenta Veronensia Latina*, D. Hauler, translator, 1900, 112.

²⁰ Hauler, 117.

²¹ Easton, 60.

²² Migne PG, 13:952.

²³ Migne PG, 11:1840.

²⁴ English translation by Stone, 62.

²⁵ Migne PG, 20:848.

²⁶ Migne PG, 22:89.

²⁷ Translations of Christian Literature, Series I Greek Texts “*Demonstratio Evangelica* of Eusebius of Caesarea” W. J. Ferrar, translator, 1920.

²⁸ Migne PG, 22:593.

²⁹ Migne PG, 22:596.

³⁰ Ferrar, 114-115.

³¹ Migne PG, 33:1100.

³² Migne PG, 33:1124.

³³ *Bishop Sarapion’s Prayerbook: An Egyptian Pontifical Dated Probably about AD 350 – 356*, J. Wordsworth, D.D., editor, 1899, 62-63.

Gregory of Nazianzen (361-381 AD)

In his preparation for the Supper, Gregory refers to the unconsecrated elements using the language of symbolism, calling them “the antitype (*ἀντίτυπον*) of the great mysteries”³⁴ (*Oration* 2, paragraph 95), but also uses figurative language even after the consecration: “Now we will partake of a Passover which is still typical (*τυπικώς*); though it is plainer than the old one...”³⁵ (*Oration* 45, paragraph 23).

Macarius the Egyptian (390 AD)

The consecrated bread and wine are “the symbol (*ἀντίτυπον*) of His flesh and blood, ... those who partake of the visible bread eat spiritually the flesh of the Lord...”³⁶ (*Homily* 27, 17).³⁷

There are many other early writers who testify of the symbolic nature of the consecrated elements, but these are among the earliest and suffice to disprove any claim of a universal belief in the literal body and blood of Christ in the Supper since the Apostles. These same writers argued against the unbelief of the Jews on the one hand, and the idolatry of the pagans on the other, all while deconstructing the complex worldviews of the Gnostics and Philosophers. It is inconceivable to lay at their feet the charge of an insufficient vocabulary, or that they had left “unexplored” the mysterious connection between the symbol and what is symbolized. They knew very well what these words meant and knew exactly why they were using them. The bread and wine were symbolic of Jesus’ incarnation, remembrances of His sufferings for our sins, typical, figurative, sensory objects intended to stimulate our senses and bring to mind the reality of His incarnation. If these men had truly understood that the bread and wine were *literally, really, truly* changed into the body and blood of Christ, their sophisticated vocabularies were more than equal to the task of explaining and defending that belief to us in their own languages. Yet they used *figure, antitype, example, similitude* in Latin, and *antitype, symbol, allegory, icon, likeness* and *type* in Greek. None of them would have denied that the bread and

wine were *spiritually* the body and blood of Christ to us by faith. In fact, they insisted upon it. What is lacking in the ancient church is a confession from any of them that it was *literally, truly* His body and blood.

The Implicit Evidence from Antiquity

In addition to the explicit testimony of the early writers, we have implicit evidence, as well. They expressed themselves through teachings and practices that were wholly inconsistent with a deep, abiding conviction of the real, literal presence of Christ in the bread and wine.

Kneeling to receive the Supper was forbidden

A posture of kneeling would seem appropriate in the literal presence of Christ, as suggested by *Revelation* 1:17 and 5:8. The modern Roman Catholic liturgy incorporates a kneeling posture for the consecration of the bread and wine, and a genuflection—bending of the knee—to adore the “real presence” of Christ during the Lord’s Supper. Such a posture is used to reverence the consecrated bread in the tabernacle, as well. Yet that practice was forbidden in the early church. Irenæus wrote that Christians “do not bend the knee” on Pentecost “because it is of equal significance with the Lord’s day” (*Fragment* 7). Tertullian considered “kneeling in worship on the Lord’s day to be *unlawful*,” and similarly for every day from Easter to Pentecost (*De Corona*, 3). The Council of Nicæa established uniformity of worship by *prohibiting* kneeling on the Lord’s Day (Canon 20). The 20th canon of Nicæa was affirmed explicitly or incorporated by reference at every ecumenical council thereafter until kneeling was finally incorporated into the liturgy in the 11th century.³⁸ If the “real presence of Christ” was the universal conviction of the Church for 1,500 years, it seems that kneeling to receive communion ought to have been *required* rather than *forbidden* on the one day all Christians gathered together to consecrate the bread and wine. And yet,

³⁴ Migne, *PG*, 35:497.

³⁵ Migne, *PG*, 36:656.

³⁶ Migne, *PG*, 34:705.

³⁷ *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, A. J. Mason, translator, 1921, 209.

³⁸ The *Catholic Catechism* explains that “the Elevation” of the Eucharist for adoration during the Mass, and “kneeling during Consecration” are “of comparatively recent introduction” (“Elevation,” *The Catholica Encyclopedia*, Volume 5, Robert Appleton Company, 1909, 380, and “Genuflection,” in Volume 6, 424).

for a thousand years, kneeling on that day was prohibited.

Christ Was Not in the Cup the Night Before He Died

Cyprian of Carthage's figurative language is evident in his 62nd letter (253 AD). He writes that Christ is made one with His people "when the water is mingled* in the cup with wine," a mingling that occurred before the consecration (*Epistle 62*, 13). Obviously, Christ is not "really" in the cup before the consecration. Cyprian is speaking figuratively. He then insists that Jesus' "disciples ought also to observe and to do the same things which the Master both taught and did," having in their cup for the Supper exactly what Jesus had in His (*Epistle 62*, 10), so that what is consecrated is what Jesus Himself consecrated the night before He died. Jesus used wine. So ought we. Cyprian removes all doubt when he writes that Christ could not have had His own blood in the cup the night before He died, "because just as the drinking of wine cannot be attained to unless the bunch of grapes be first trodden and pressed, so neither could we drink the blood of Christ unless Christ had first been trampled upon and pressed" (*Epistle 62*, 7, emphasis added). To Cyprian, even after the wine is consecrated, Christ still is not "really" in the cup. If we must celebrate in the same way Christ did, and Christ's blood was not in the cup when the Supper was instituted, then Cyprian clearly did not believe in the "real presence" of Christ in the Supper.

The Invocation Does Not "Literally" Change the Thing

In Cyril of Jerusalem's explanations (350 AD) of the supper and of baptism, the change that occurs at the invocation was a trope (*τρόπον*), a figure of speech, a metaphorical turn of phrase not intended to be taken literally. The Scriptures use the term this way: Jesus says of Jerusalem that He would have "gathered thy children together, as (*τρόπον*) a hen doth gather her brood" (*Luke 13:34*), and Paul writes that lovers of self will "resist the truth" in the last days, just "as (*τρόπον*) Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses" (*2 Timothy 3:8*). The elements of

the supper were indeed "simple bread and wine" beforehand, Cyril taught, but "after the invocation the Bread becomes the Body of Christ, and the Wine the Blood of Christ." The same was true of meats sacrificed to idols: "so in like manner (*τρόπον*) such meats belonging to the pomp of Satan, though in their own nature simple, become profane by the invocation of the evil spirit"³⁹ (*Catechetical Lecture 23*, 7). There had been no change in the meats at the invocation of an evil spirit, except a change in their use, from simple to profane. The bread and wine of the Supper were changed "in like manner" at the invocation, from simple use to holy. There was no real change in the bread or the meat itself.

The same was true of the oil and water applied to the convert at baptism. The oil "was a symbol (*σύμβολον*)" of his participation with Christ, and the water of baptism was "hinting at a symbol (*συμβόλου*)"⁴⁰ of his burial with Christ, for baptism itself was the antitype (*ἀντίτυπον*) of the sufferings of Christ.⁴¹ Cyril insisted, on Paul's authority, that baptism was not *really* Christ's death, but only a likeness (*ὁμοίωματι*) of it (*Catechetical Lecture 20*, 2-7). Just like the bread after the invocation "is mere bread no longer," so the oil used in baptism, "after invocation" is no longer "simple" or "common," and "is symbolically (*συμβολικῶς*) applied to your forehead"⁴² (*Catechetical Lecture 21*, 3).

Cyril repeatedly emphasized that the "change" of the meat, the bread, the oil, and the water was not real, or literal, but only symbolic. A trope. A figure of speech not to be taken literally. And thus, water, oil, wine, and bread, though repurposed for holy uses, were still "antitypical" even after the invocation. If the bread of the Supper was changed in the same way as the meats offered to idols, or in the same way as the water and oil used in baptism, then the bread of the Supper was not really changed at all, except in the way it was used.

The Elements Were Handled with Care Because of Whom They Symbolized

³⁹ Migne, *PG*, 33:1072.

⁴⁰ Migne, *PG*, 33:1080.

⁴¹ Migne, *PG*, 33:1081.

⁴² Migne, *PG*, 33:1092.

* See our article *Recovering Irenaeus*, *The Trinity Review*, January-March 2019 for an explanation of the ancient practice of mixing *merum* with water to make wine.

Hippolytus of Rome (215 AD) warned the communicant not to drop the consecrated bread, “for the body of Christ...must not be despised,” and of the cup, “let none of it be spilled...as if thou didst despise it” (*Anaphora*, 32).⁴³ Yet, as he himself said, the consecrated bread and wine were *antitypical* of the body and blood of Christ.

Origen of Alexandria (248 AD) instructed catechumens to handle the consecrated elements reverently: “when you receive the body of the Lord...you protect it with all caution and veneration lest any part fall from it, lest anything of the consecrated gift be lost” (Origen, *13th Homily on Exodus*). Yet, as noted above, Origen believed the consecrated bread and wine were *typical* and *symbolic* of the body of Christ.

Cyril of Jerusalem (350 AD) instructed inexperienced communicants to handle the consecrated elements carefully, fingers together, hollowed palm, the left hand forming a throne for the right to receive, as it were, “a king” or precious “grains of gold,” taking the cup, not reaching out with arms extended, but worshipfully and respectfully (*Catechetical Lecture 23*, 21-22). He spoke as to children, to novices, to first-time communicants, about spilling the bread and wine, obviously concerned that they “[give] heed lest you lose any portion thereof” when handling the bread and wine on the day of their first communion. Yet, as noted above, Cyril thought the consecrated bread and wine were *figuratively* and *antitypically* the body and blood of Christ.

In these examples—from Hippolytus, Origen, and Cyril—the careful handling of the elements is understood in the context of their explicit words about the symbolic, typical, exemplary, and antitypical nature of the bread and wine. We may reasonably conclude that their concern was for Whom they *signified*, not for what they *were*. Such a conclusion is warranted in view of Cyril’s instruction to touch the bread to one’s eyelids before eating, and to moisten one’s eyes, ears, nose and forehead before drinking: “hallow your eyes by the touch of the Holy Body” (*Catechetical Lecture 23*, 21), and “while the moisture is still upon your lips, touch it with your hands, and hallow your eyes and brow and the other organs of sense”

(*Catechetical Lecture 23*, 22). Smearing the body and blood of Christ on your face as you eat and drink it is hardly indicative of a sincere belief in the “real presence.” Engaging one’s senses during communion, however, is evidence of a belief in the *symbolic* nature of the bread and wine—*sensible* reminders of the incarnation for which all of one’s faculties are brought to bear on the meaning of the symbol itself. This is confirmed for us by Tertullian, who also believed the consecrated elements to be *figurative*. Yet he displayed the same care for *unconsecrated* elements: “We feel pained should any wine or bread, even though our own, should be cast upon the ground” (Tertullian, *De Corona*, 3). If Tertullian feared to spill *unconsecrated* bread and wine merely because of Whom they *could signify*, we may reasonably understand Hippolytus, Origen, and Cyril to insist on the careful, reverent handling of consecrated elements because of Whom they *did signify*.

The Failure of the Scholars

In light of the abundance of explicit and implicit evidence from the early Church, one may justifiably wonder why the scholars were inclined to kick so strenuously against the goad. It not only hampered their own investigation into the early liturgy, but also obscured the terrain for those who would follow after them. Their self-inflicted wound was caused by a propensity for interpreting the early writers through a medieval lens. If the later paradigm of a literal or physical “presence” of Christ is definitive, then the early record becomes extremely challenging because its authors held no such belief, exasperating the medieval divines with a superabundance of symbolic, figurative language. As such, their works must be *reinterpreted*, *controverted*, or even *redacted* to force them to conform with the later novelties. The alternative is to view the early writers through the lens of their own time and writings, leading the objective historian to the obvious conclusion that the Roman Catholic doctrine of the “real presence” is itself the novelty, devoid of apostolic authority. The former requires an intentional misinterpretation of the early church, normalizing the medieval liturgy, and leading to the obviously misguided claim of Francis Chan and the apologists who persuaded him. The latter requires a wholesale re-evaluation of the

⁴³ Easton, 60.

medieval liturgy, and frankly calls into question the validity of some Protestant liturgies that were derived from it.

Of those two paths, the former is well-traveled and easy to find, and by and large the ecclesiastical scholars have preferred it. John of Damascus (726 AD) from his medieval perspective, could not accept that early writers had called the bread and wine *antitypes* even after the consecration, and gratuitously overturned the explicit testimony of the ancients: “if some persons called the bread and the wine antitypes of the body and blood of the Lord...they said so not after the consecration but before the consecration...” (*Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4:13). His claim is obviously false. W. Wigan Harvey (1857 AD) could not accept Justin Martyr’s 2nd century testimony that the *mere recitation of Christ’s words*—“*This is My body*”—effected the consecration (*First Apology*, 65), so he interpreted him instead through the lens of late-4th century Basil (364 AD) who “stated expressly” that the consecration had to be “something more than the simple words of Scripture.” On that basis Harvey overturned Irenæus’ own Greek description of the tithe offering and opted instead for an inferior Latin rendering more consistent with the consecration.⁴⁴ For the same reason Jacques Paul Migne (1857 AD) rejected Irenæus’ own account of the 2nd liturgy, substituting a “preferred” medieval wording more consistent with the later novelty.⁴⁵ Phillip Schaff (1894 AD) believed “the full explanation” of Irenæus’ Eucharist could only be found in the meanderings of late-4th century Gregory of Nyssa (382 AD), and reinterpreted Irenæus accordingly.⁴⁶ These examples illustrate a habitual, systematic redaction of the early liturgy to make it conform to the superstitious medieval liturgy that eventually replaced it. A principled approach would have prohibited such tampering, but the scholars were faced with an unpalatable choice between two unattractive options, and so took the path of least resistance.

Correcting Fallacious Arguments

The unbeaten path is less obvious to the naked eye, but much more satisfying to the intellect, and at the same time exposes the lie that the literal, actual, “real presence” of Christ in the Supper was held universally until the Reformation. The truth is, for the first three centuries, the nonliteral, symbolic understanding of the Supper prevailed. To that end, we now revisit three of the most common misinterpretations of the early writers, demonstrating how the scholars have corrupted the evidence through anachronism, misconstrual, and redaction.

The Anachronistic “Evidence” from Ignatius of Antioch (107 AD)

Of all the evidence supporting an ancient belief in the literal presence of Christ in the Supper, the most popular is Ignatius’ *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*. The heretics “abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins” (*Smyrnaeans*, 7). Ignatius appears to provide early 2nd century support for the central tenet of the Roman religion, and her apologists could scarcely ask for a more generous gift from antiquity. Ignatius’ words, however, can only support the “literal” presence of Christ if they are interpreted through a medieval lens by which “the Eucharist” is taken to refer to the elements *after the consecration*. But in Ignatius’ day, the Eucharist referred to the thank offering, the tithes and prayers offered *prior to the consecration*, a tithe that included bread from which a portion was taken for the celebration of the Supper. That subtle difference in the usage of “Eucharist” is determinative, as a little history will show.

Editor’s Note: The conclusion of this article will appear in the next Trinity Review.

⁴⁴ Harvey, W. Wigan, *Sancti Irenæi Episcopi Lugdunensis, Libros Quinque Contra Haereses*, Volume 2, 1857, 205n, 206n. Wigan refers to Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 66.

⁴⁵ Migne, *PG*, 7:1028n.

⁴⁶ *NPNF-02*, volume 7. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, editors, Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894, xxxix.