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## EUCCHARIST AS SACRIFICE: A STUDY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUCCHARIST AS A SACRIFICE OF THE BELIEVER IN THE FIRST AND SECOND CENTURIES

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**EUCHARIST AS SACRIFICE: A STUDY INTO THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUCHARIST AS  
A SACRIFICE OF THE BELIEVER  
IN THE FIRST AND SECOND  
CENTURIES**

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*Abstract*

The sacrifice of the believer at the Eucharist can nowhere be found in the Adventist understanding of the Lord’s Supper. However, Adventists may find value in reexamining the early church’s teachings on sacrifice. While the early church deviated from Scripture in its primary teachings on the Eucharist, they maintained the scriptural notion of the spiritual sacrifice of the worshiper—something Adventists would do well to practice. This article examines the liturgical orders and teachings of the apostolic fathers, apologists, and early liturgical orders of the first and second centuries. The author considers four major issues relating to the Eucharist as sacrifice: first, martyrdom as sacrifice in the first century; second, the transition from the Old Testament concept of sacrifice to the spiritual sacrifice of the believer; third, the Eucharist as a business transaction; and fourth, the priesthood at the Eucharist.

Keywords: Eucharist, sacrifice, martyrdom, Lord’s Supper, worship, offering, priesthood, spiritual, do ut des, quid pro quo.

*Introduction*

The sacrifice of the believer at the Eucharist can nowhere be found in the Adventist understanding of the Lord’s Supper. In the Adventist exposition of fundamental beliefs, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, on the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, the Communion Service is described as a Eucharist, “a reference to the thanksgiving and blessing aspect of the service.”<sup>1</sup> The only mention of sacrifice

<sup>1</sup>*Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), 198. Nowhere in Scripture is the term “Eucharist” used in conjunction with the Lord’s Supper though the verb “to give thanks” is utilized in the institution narratives (Matt 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17, 19; 1 Cor 11:24). Jerome Kodell, *The Eucharist in the New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 11; Robert Cabié, *The Church*

appears as a memorial of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, early Christians spoke of the Eucharist as a sacrifice of the believer though this has often been the subject of controversy.<sup>3</sup> Maxwell Johnson,<sup>4</sup> an Evangelical Lutheran pastor and professor of liturgical studies at the University of Notre Dame, adamantly defends the concept of the Eucharist as a sacrifice:

It is important to underscore that the eucharist in the first three centuries was certainly widely understood theologically as the church's "sacrifice"; thus, the burden of proof to the contrary has always been (and remains) on those who wish somehow to deny this interpretation and who seek to avoid using sacrificial terminology altogether in their eucharistic practice and theology.<sup>5</sup>

If Johnson is correct, then Adventism must answer for a missing doctrine of the Eucharist as sacrifice.

Adventists have been swift to dismiss the views of the apostolic fathers, apologists, and early liturgical orders of worship, given their abandonment of fundamental truths, such as the Sabbath.<sup>6</sup> As C. Mervyn Maxwell famously said, "The speed with which the early Christians tobogganed into apostasy takes one's

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*at Prayer*, vol. 2, *The Eucharist* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986), 10; Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 33.

<sup>2</sup>*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 200. See also Herbert Kiesler, "The Ordinances: Baptism, Footwashing, and Lord's Supper," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 595–604.

<sup>3</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 146; Christopher A. Hall, *Worshiping with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 51. Central to the controversy has been that "Roman Catholics and Protestants have divided over the question of whether the eucharist is primarily a sacrifice or a meal" (Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997], 17). Royden Yerkes argued that the Christian sacred meal was "sacred" because of the adjoining notion of sacrifice, which means "to make a thing sacred" or "to do a sacred act" (*Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952], 25–26).

<sup>4</sup>I had the privilege of studying with Max during my Master of Sacred Music degree at Notre Dame from 2008–2010. He was a wonderful instructor, and I credit my interest in liturgical studies to him.

<sup>5</sup>Maxwell E. Johnson, "The Apostolic Tradition," in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 59.

<sup>6</sup>Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977).

breath away.”<sup>7</sup> While this may be so, Adventist scholarship may find value in reexamining the early church’s teachings on sacrifice. I posit the thesis that the early church deviated from Scripture primarily in its teachings on the Eucharist. However, they maintained the scriptural notion of the spiritual sacrifice of the worshiper, something Adventists would do well to practice. This study invites Adventists and other Christians to examine to what extent the conception of sacrifice should be believed and practiced in worship, specifically at the remembrance of the Lord’s Supper.

In this article, I examine the liturgical orders and teachings of the apostolic fathers, apologists, and early liturgical orders of the first and second centuries in order to trace the development of the doctrine of sacrifice at the Eucharist.<sup>8</sup> As early as the second century, the early church began to embrace a complex view of the Eucharist. In this paper, I will consider four major issues as it relates to the Eucharist as sacrifice: first, the rise of martyrdom as a type of sacrifice in the first century; second, the transition from the Jewish Old Testament concept of sacrifices to the spiritual sacrifice of the believer, culminating in sacrifice at the Eucharist; third, the Eucharist as a business transaction; and fourth, the priesthood at the Eucharist.

### *Martyrdom as Sacrifice*

Christian martyrdom influenced the early church’s understanding of sacrifice. The Greek word *μαρτυρέω* (*martyréō*) shifted in meaning from “to be a witness” or “to bear witness” to that of “dying for the faith.”<sup>9</sup> By the second century, particularly in Asia Minor, the concept of *martyréō* became more closely attributed with the latter understanding. Within the wider context of “witness,” accounts of dying for the faith first appeared in 2 Maccabees 7, with stories of Jewish martyrs. The earliest Christian martyr is Stephen, whose stoning is reported in Acts 7. Johannine writings, particularly Revelation, with its expressions such as “martyred” saints, contributed to the notion of “dying for the faith.” Beginning with the blame against Christians for the burning of Rome by Nero in AD 64, the persecution of Christians would be commonplace for the next two and a half

<sup>7</sup>“Change of the Sabbath,” in *History of Sabbath and Sunday* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1973), 3.

<sup>8</sup>Most scholars include in their studies the teachings of the church fathers in the third and fourth centuries. In addition, this study will focus on the English translation texts of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (ANF), without addressing issues of authorship, unity, transmission, or redaction, except for Ignatius of Antioch. Only the short forms of Ignatius’s epistles will be considered.

<sup>9</sup>Hermann Strathmann, “*Martyréō*,” TDNT, 4:474–514.

centuries.<sup>10</sup> While the persecution suffered by Christians has been greatly exaggerated, it must have reached a point in which all Christians believed their own personal suffering could be imminent.<sup>11</sup>

The primary point of contention between Christians and Rome was the Christians' steadfast opposition to the mandates of worship to the pagan gods.<sup>12</sup> Tradition's record of the martyrdom of Justin (AD 165) combines the witness at death with sacrifice:

Rusticus the prefect said, "Unless ye obey, ye shall be mercilessly punished."

Justin said, "Through prayer we can be saved on account of our Lord Jesus Christ, even when we have been punished, because this shall become to us salvation and confidence at the more fearful and universal judgment-seat of our Lord and Savior."

Thus also said the other martyrs: "Do what you will, for we are Christians, and do not sacrifice to idols."

Rusticus the prefect pronounced sentence, saying, "Let those who have refused to sacrifice to the gods and to yield to the command of the emperor be scourged, and led away to suffer the punishment of decapitation, according to the laws."

The holy martyrs having glorified God, and having gone forth to the accustomed place, were beheaded, and perfected their testimony in the confession of the Saviour.<sup>13</sup>

The Christians refused to sacrifice to the pagan gods, yet later Christians would interpret their impending death as a sacrifice to the living God.

Possibly the earliest development of martyr theology may be seen in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch (ca. AD 35–117). In his *Epistle to the Ephesians*, he pleaded with the Ephesian Christians to pray that he would live to be devoured by the beasts of the arena, "so by martyrdom I may indeed become the disciple of

<sup>10</sup>Roland H. Bainton gives a broad perspective on the factors that not only led to the blame cast upon Christians but also to the growth of Christian persecution in *Christianity*, 1st Mariner Books ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 54–58. Richard P. McBrien gives a valuable timeline on the history of saints and martyrs in *Lives of the Saints: From Mary and St. Francis of Assisi to John XXIII and Mother Teresa* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2001), xiii–xiv. Finally, Richard M. Price connects the persecution of the early Christians to the development of the martyr cult in "Martyrdom and the Cult of the Saints," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 808–825.

<sup>11</sup>Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100–400)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 29–30, and 134n13.

<sup>12</sup>Price, "Martyrdom and the Cult of the Saints," 809.

<sup>13</sup>*Mart. Just.* 4–5 (*ANF* 1:306).

Him ‘who gave Himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God.’”<sup>14</sup> From this passage it may be seen that Ignatius considered martyrdom to be a high spiritual calling. His prayer is reminiscent of Paul in Ephesians 5:1–2. Ignatius considered martyrdom to be true discipleship, following in the likeness of Christ. He similarly wrote in his *Epistle to the Romans*, “Pray, then, do not seek to confer any greater favour upon me than that I be sacrificed to God, while the altar is still prepared.”<sup>15</sup> In another *Epistle*, he declared, “I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of God . . . [that] I may be found a sacrifice,”<sup>16</sup> again reminiscent of Paul in 2 Timothy 4:6. Given Ignatius’s use of eucharistic language elsewhere (cf. *Phil.* 4), it would be remiss not to perceive the connection he made between martyrdom, sacrifice, and the Eucharist.

The later account regarding the martyrdom of Polycarp (ca. AD 155) has similar theological attributes. In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Polycarp’s prayer is recorded: “May I be accepted this day before Thee as a fat and acceptable sacrifice, according as Thou, the ever-truthful God, hast fore-ordained, hast revealed beforehand to me, and now hast fulfilled.”<sup>17</sup>

As Christians bore witness of their faith in death, the semantic range of “martyr” narrowed toward “dying for the faith.” Early Christian martyrdom increasingly came to be understood as a sacrifice, one which might possibly effect salvation. Clear allusions to the Eucharist were also made. These accounts reveal a significant shift from the scriptural meaning of “bearing witness” to the death of the Christian at the hand of persecution as sacrifice. It is this theological and political milieu, in which is couched the transition from the Old Testament sacrificial system to the early Christian concept of spiritual sacrifice, to which we will now turn.

#### *From Spiritual Sacrifice to Eucharist*

The development of the theology of spiritual sacrifice came as the result of many factors. “Major conflicts—with the Jews, with gnostic brands of Christian faith, and with secular authorities—forced the [Christian] movement to define itself, especially in the latter half of the second century.”<sup>18</sup> Part of this self-identification is revealed in the doctrines of sacrifice and the Eucharist. In this section, we will

<sup>14</sup>Ign. *Eph.* 1 (*ANF* 1:49).

<sup>15</sup>Ign. *Rom.* 2 (*ANF* 1:74).

<sup>16</sup>Ign. *Rom.* 4 (*ANF* 1:75).

<sup>17</sup>Mart. Pol. 14 (*ANF* 1:42).

<sup>18</sup>John Baldwin, “Christian Worship to the Eve of the Reformation,” in *The Making of Jewish and Christian Worship*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 157.



consider three areas in which the concept of sacrifice developed: (1) spiritual sacrifice, (2) polemical writings, and (3) the sacrifice of the Eucharist.

### Spiritual Sacrifice

The use of sacrificial language as a spiritual act of worship by the believer has well-founded roots in both the Old Testament and New Testament. Such texts are David's prayer of repentance, stating "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit"<sup>19</sup> in Psalm 51:17; Paul on the "living sacrifice" in Romans 12:1 (ESV); the "sacrifice of praise" in Hebrews 13:15; and "the living stones/holy priesthood/spiritual sacrifices" mentioned in 1 Peter 2:5. It was upon these and similar texts that the early church fathers based their understanding of Christian sacrifice, and ultimately their understanding of worship.

Among the writings of the first and second centuries, very little exists on the subject of sacrifice that is not in response to Judaism. It is valuable to recognize that the early Christians understood sacrifice apart from Judaism, but this may only be observed in the writings of Clement of Rome (d. AD 99). It is not insignificant that he was chronologically the earliest of all the fathers considered in this study. In his *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (ca. AD 96), Clement rooted his concept of sacrifice in Old Testament imagery: Cain and Abel (chap. 4),<sup>20</sup> Abraham and Isaac (chaps. 10, 31),<sup>21</sup> and David's confession (chap. 18).<sup>22</sup> The first two may be understood as physical sacrifices, but all reveal an interwoven spiritual thread. When compared with chapter 52, Clement considered confession as a sacrifice of praise, saying, "The Lord, brethren, stands in need of nothing; and He desires nothing of any one, except that confession be made to Him."<sup>23</sup> He then cites several psalms, including "offer unto God the sacrifice of praise" (Ps 50:14 [49:14 LXX]) and "the sacrifice of God is a broken spirit" (Ps 51:17).

### Polemical Writings

As already seen in Clement's writing, early Christians believed in a spiritual sacrifice above and beyond the physical sacrifices of the Old Testament sacrificial system. What began as an evangelistic message of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of Old Testament sacrifices in the sermon of Peter in Acts 2 swelled into an anti-Judaic polemic by the early Christians in the second century.

<sup>19</sup>Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from biblical sources in this article are from the NASB.

<sup>20</sup>1 Clem. 4 (*ANF* 1:6).

<sup>21</sup>1 Clem. 10, 31 (*ANF* 1:7–8, 13).

<sup>22</sup>1 Clem. 18 (*ANF* 1:10).

<sup>23</sup>1 Clem. 52 (*ANF* 1:19).

In his *Epistle*, Barnabas (ca. AD 70–131) wrote with an eschatological motivation toward Jewish sacrifice. Because the antichrist was at hand, it was imperative to not fall into error as the Jews had done.<sup>24</sup> Such statements have been labeled as “anti-Jewish.”<sup>25</sup> Barnabas viewed the Old Testament liturgical system (i.e., sacrifices, Sabbaths, etc.) as abolished so that “the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is without the yoke of necessity, might have a human oblation.”<sup>26</sup> In the same chapter, he argued further that God had not wanted sacrifices but for the Israelites to love their neighbors. Barnabas concluded that Christians, since they possess true understanding, should approach God with true sacrifice: “A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; a smell of sweet savour to the Lord is a heart that glorifieth Him that made it.”<sup>27</sup>

The primary corpus of polemical writing on Christian sacrifice in contrast with Jewish sacrifice may be found in the writings of the martyr Justin (ca. AD 110–165). Robert Daly argued that Justin was not necessarily anti-Judaic but rather anti-Judaic-sacrifice.<sup>28</sup> Justin took issue with the material sacrifices of the Jews, saying, “God does not need the material offerings which men can give,”<sup>29</sup> and “He has no need of streams of blood and libations and incense.”<sup>30</sup> Justin argued that God had been “gracious towards the Gentiles also; and our sacrifices He esteems more grateful than yours.”<sup>31</sup>

Writing late in the second century (ca. AD 177), Athenagoras of Athens not only criticized the countless bloody sacrifices of Judaism as Justin had but went further, seeing greater virtue in the “bloodless” Christian sacrifice:

And first, as to our not sacrificing: the Framer and Father of this universe does not need blood, nor the odour of burnt-offerings, nor the fragrance of flowers and incense, forasmuch as He is Himself perfect fragrance, needing nothing either within or without; but the noblest sacrifice to Him is for us to know who stretched out and vaulted the heavens. . . . And what have I to do with holocausts, which God does not stand in need of?—though indeed it does behave us to offer a bloodless sacrifice and “the service of our reason” [Rom 12:1].<sup>32</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Barn. 4 (*ANF* 1:138–139).

<sup>25</sup>Robert J. Daly, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1978), 110.

<sup>26</sup>Barn. 2 (*ANF* 1:138).

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.* While the first phrase is a quote from Ps 51:17, the second line is not.

<sup>28</sup>Daly, *Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, 87.

<sup>29</sup>Justin, *1 Apol.* 10 (*ANF* 1:165).

<sup>30</sup>Justin, *1 Apol.* 13 (*ANF* 1:166).

<sup>31</sup>Justin, *Dial.* 29 (*ANF* 1:208).

<sup>32</sup>Athenagoras, *Plea* 13 (*ANF* 2:134–135).



Whereas Paul had implied a Christian corollary to the slaughtered Old Testament sacrifice—a living sacrifice—Athenagoras heightened the contrast with his terminology “bloodless.” Thus, Athenagoras put forth a bloodless Christian sacrifice over and against the bloody Judaic sacrifice. His citation of Romans 12:1 suggests that he viewed this bloodless sacrifice as a spiritual sacrifice. Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe, editors and translators of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, defined a “pure *minbah*” (Mal. 1:11) as the “unbloody sacrifice of the Jews.”<sup>33</sup> *Minbah* may be translated as “offering” or “grain offering.” One may logically connect this with the Eucharist.

Irenaeus (AD 120–202) presented the most comprehensive understanding of the Christian spiritual sacrifice in contrast with the sacrifice of the Old Testament:

God stood in no need of their slavish obedience . . . [for] “God does not desire whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices, but He will have His voice to be hearkened to. Behold, a ready obedience is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” [1 Sam 15:22]. . . rejecting, indeed, those things by which sinners imagined they could propitiate God, and showing that He does Himself stand in need of nothing. . . . He continues, exhorting them to what pertained to salvation: “Wash you, make you clean, take away wickedness from your hearts from before mine eyes: cease from your evil ways, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow; and come, let us reason together, saith the Lord.”<sup>34</sup>

For Irenaeus, God had instituted the sacrifices as the means by which to draw his people toward himself. He desired their obedience; he desired what mattered most, their salvation. Living in salvation meant living a life that was a sacrifice, in praise to God and in service to the world.

### Sacrifice of the Eucharist

Justin Martyr’s most significant statement on sacrifice can be found in his *Dialogue with Trypho a Jew*, in which he tied together elements of anti-Judaic-sacrifice, spiritual sacrifice, and the Eucharist, in which God calls their prayers sacrifices:

God, anticipating all the sacrifices which we offer through this name, and which Jesus the Christ enjoined us to offer, i.e., in the Eucharist of the bread and the cup, and which are presented by Christians in all places throughout the world, bears witness that they are well-pleasing to Him. But He utterly rejects those presented by you and by those priests of yours. . . . For such alone Christians have undertaken to offer, and in the remembrance effected by their solid and liquid

<sup>33</sup>Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1885) 135n4).

<sup>34</sup>Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.17.1 (*ANF* 1:482–483).

food, whereby the suffering of the Son of God which He endured is brought to mind.<sup>35</sup>

The “sacrifices which we offer” were not an abstract but a concrete action. Justin not only claimed that Jesus Christ commanded these sacrifices but also that the sacrifice itself was the giving of the Eucharist.<sup>36</sup> Earlier in the *Dialogue with Trypho*, while commenting on Malachi 1:10–12, Justin articulated that the Judaic sacrifices were antitypical of the Eucharist:

And the offering of fine flour . . . was a type of the bread of the Eucharist, the celebration of which our Lord Jesus Christ prescribed, in remembrance of the suffering which He endured on behalf of those who are purified in soul from all iniquity.<sup>37</sup>

From these sources, Daly has concluded that for Justin, “Christian sacrifice is the Eucharist.”<sup>38</sup> But what precisely is this sacrifice of the Eucharist? Justin said that Christian sacrifices at the Eucharist are the “prayers and giving of thanks,” for when they are “offered by worthy men, [they] are the only perfect and well-pleasing sacrifices to God.”<sup>39</sup> This led Daly to interpret the entire ritual itself as a spiritual sacrifice.<sup>40</sup> With this theological context in mind, the liturgy of the Eucharist helped to reinforce the notion of the entire ritual as sacrifice:

When the Jewish liturgical context of this sacrificial language could no longer be taken for granted among Christian hearers and readers, the Christian liturgies were already using similar language about the offering of the prayers, the gifts, and the lives of the worshipers, and probably also about the offering of the sacrifice of the Mass, so that the sacrificial interpretation of the death of Christ never lacked a liturgical frame of reference.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, Paul Bradshaw asserts, “The fact that the worshippers themselves brought the bread and wine with them from their homes to be used in the Eucharist (just as they had earlier contributed the food and drink for the full eucharistic meal) would have further encouraged the idea that these elements formed the substance of the sacrifice.” Over time, the spiritualization of the sacrifice of the Eucharist came to mean a physical offering, as signified by the ritual actions of those gathered in worship.

<sup>35</sup>Justin, *Dial.* 117 (*ANF* 1:257).

<sup>36</sup>Daly, *Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, 89–90. The “whole transaction” was the sacrifice (Everett Ferguson, *The Early Church at Work and Worship*, vol. 3, *Worship, Eucharist, Music, and Gregory of Nyssa* [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017], 19).

<sup>37</sup>Justin, *Dial.* 41 (*ANF* 1:215).

<sup>38</sup>Daly, *Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, 90.

<sup>39</sup>Justin, *Dial.* 117 (*ANF* 1:257).

<sup>40</sup>Daly, *Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, 90.

<sup>41</sup>Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 146–147.

Maxwell Johnson sees Daly's interpretation of a spiritual sacrifice at the Eucharist as pushing too far. Rather, Johnson supports the findings of Kenneth Stevenson. In *Eucharist and Offering*, Stevenson suggested eucharistic sacrifice could include not only the "self-offering of the community" and "the gifts" of bread and cup, but even "the entire eucharistic rite itself as that which is offered in thanksgiving for God's gift of salvation."<sup>42</sup> However, Everett Ferguson disagrees, saying, "It is not clear that the bringing of the gifts (by the people?) was understood as a sacrificial act."<sup>43</sup> From the context of Justin's writing, both may be correct. Justin anticipated "all the sacrifices" to be included in the offering of "the Eucharist of the bread and the cup." Justin may have understood the action of the bread and cup to represent a spiritual thanksgiving within a physical ritual action.

The earliest church order from the early second century, *The Lord's Teaching through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations* (ca. AD 115–130), commonly referred to by its Greek transliteration, Didache, taught several key nuances for understanding the Eucharist:

But every Lord's [Day?]<sup>44</sup> do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned.<sup>45</sup>

Both the breaking of bread and thanksgiving constitute the sacrifice. Confession precedes *sacrifice* (Matt 5:23–24), making the sacrifice pure (Mal 1:11).

Irenaeus's writings on the Eucharist are some of the most controversial, for he presented ideas leading to "real presence." Daly suggested this physical realism was due to Irenaeus's strong concern against Gnosticism.<sup>46</sup> A fundamental dualism articulates his view of the supper:

Then, again, how can they say that the flesh, which is nourished with the body of the Lord and with His blood, goes to corruption, and does not partake of life? Let them, therefore, either alter their opinion, or 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

<sup>42</sup>Johnson, "The Apostolic Tradition," 59; Kenneth Stevenson, *Eucharist and Offering* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986), 3–4.

<sup>43</sup>Ferguson, *The Early Church at Work and Worship*, 27.

<sup>44</sup>See the following articles for discussion of the Lord's Day. Traditional readings of the text have inserted "day" though the original Greek does not include the term. Ranko Stefanovic, "'The Lord's Day' of Revelation 1:10 in the Current Debate," *AUSS* 49, no. 2 (2011): 261–284; Fritz Guy, "The Lord's Day in the Letter of Ignatius to the Magnesians," *AUSS* 2, no. 1 (1964): 1–17.

<sup>45</sup>Did. 14 (*ANF* 7:381).

<sup>46</sup>Daly, *Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, 94.

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.<sup>47</sup>

Liturgical practice influenced belief. “The Eucharist in turn establishes our opinion.”<sup>48</sup> As we have seen in the writings of Justin, the act of bringing bread and wine to the gathering constituted physical sacrifice. For Irenaeus, the experience of the eucharistic liturgy’s prayers and offerings affirmed for him a solemn mystery of heavenly realities.

He spoke of a change that occurs in the bread during the prayer, probably a prayer of thanksgiving. “When it receives the invocation of God,”<sup>49</sup> the bread is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist. His two realities seem to indicate not a physical change but a metaphysical change. He saw the earthly bread as heavenly food. He believed that our earthly bodies encountered heavenly realities.

Pelikan believed the apostolic fathers understood the Eucharist as the “real presence,” as indicated by Irenaeus’s phrase, “no common bread.” Pelikan thought that these early thinkers did not have “adequate concepts” to “formulate a doctrine of real presence” even though this view was “already believed by the church.”<sup>50</sup> I disagree with Pelikan. I do not think we can fully say Irenaeus taught transubstantiation. We can say that his teachings moved in that direction and would become the basis of thought for later theologians.

Was “real presence” the concept Justin understood when he stated that the offering of the Eucharist as sacrifice was a “remembrance effected by their solid and liquid food”?<sup>51</sup> Justin argued for some type of change to take place at the Eucharist:

For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood

<sup>47</sup>Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.18.5 (*ANF* 1:486).

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup>The invoking (or Gk. *Epiklēsis*) developed into a core component of the eucharistic prayers of the early church. Paul F. Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship: A Basic Introduction to Ideas and Practice*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 49–55; Hall, *Worshiping with the Church Fathers*, 67; Daniel Sheerin, “Eucharistic Liturgy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, 716.

<sup>50</sup>Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 168.

<sup>51</sup>Justin, *Dial.* 117 (*ANF* 1:257); cf. Justin, *Dial.* 41 (*ANF* 1:215).

and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.<sup>52</sup>

Christopher Hall reads Justin as teaching a sacramental realism, employing graphic language.<sup>53</sup> At the “prayer of His word,” the food *is* or *becomes* the flesh and blood of Jesus. Justin likens the change to Christ’s change at the incarnation, brought about by the Word of God. The believer’s flesh and blood are transmuted, or changed, by that same Word of God. Is this transformation of flesh and blood a type of theosis—a divinization? Or should the reading of the text be more figurative or spiritual? If the latter, should not the type of change in the gathered community not influence the type of change taking place in the Eucharist itself? That is, if the change in the worshiping community is spiritual, why must a literal, physical change be applied to the eucharistic elements? Does change take place in the mind or in a dualistic heavenly reality? Justin and Irenaeus did not have the nuanced theological language of later scholars, but I am not sure that they would have agreed with them either. I see in both apologists a move toward the later views. However, it is important to treat these texts as having a bit more openness in meaning than has been claimed in the past. Caution is given to those who bring an anachronistic reading to the writings of Justin and even Irenaeus. We should “see things their way.”<sup>54</sup>

#### *A Business Transaction*

Protestants have historically viewed the Eucharist as sacrifice as a type of *do ut des*, a business transaction whereby something is given by one party so that something may be received in return. The dominant view of pagan religion was “I give in order that you may give to me.”<sup>55</sup> This type of transaction inspired the Lutheran critique of the Mass as a sacrifice of human hands.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup>Justin, *1 Apol.* 66 (ANF 1:185).

<sup>53</sup>Hall, *Worshiping with the Church Fathers*, 57.

<sup>54</sup>Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1, *Regarding Method* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3; Alister Chapman, John Coffey, and Brad S. Gregory, eds., *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>55</sup>Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 180. However, some classical Greek playwrights rejected *do ut des*, saying that God has need of nothing. Ferguson, *The Early Church at Work and Worship*, 1.

<sup>56</sup>In 1520, Martin Luther published his treatise, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. Even still, Luther never abolished the term “sacrifice” from his theology but nuanced it as a spiritual sacrifice of the believer. James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 36–39.



This kind of exchange also appears manipulative toward God, though Frank Senn sees this as missing the point.<sup>57</sup> In the ancient world, communal meals, such as the Passover, were “communion-sacrifices.” “Part of what was offered was returned to those who had offered it to be eaten by them, so that in effect they shared a sacred meal with God as a sign of his acceptance of them through the sacrificial act.”<sup>58</sup> Senn views the Eucharist as phenomenologically both a sacred meal and a sacrifice because the “bread and wine are offered, consecrated, and eaten and drunk with the understanding that the communicants enter into fellowship with the One who is both priest and victim. Put another way, sacrifice has served as a metaphor describing communion with Christ, who is our Passover sacrifice.”<sup>59</sup> The early Christians’ offering was a “reminder” of “Christ’s offering on the cross,” a celebration “when his followers gather[ed] round that table.”<sup>60</sup>

Among early Christians, the communal meal typified unity between the participants and with God: “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf” (1 Cor 10:16–17 NIV). The liturgical significance of offering a sacrifice at the Eucharist became heightened when the worshipers ceased receiving communion.<sup>61</sup> Not receiving the bread and wine but only offering it stressed the *do ut des* relationship. Bradshaw views this as a fading away from the biblical model.<sup>62</sup>

Irenaeus’s teaching on nourishment points to a business transaction. Speaking of Christ’s words at the supper, he says, “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.”<sup>63</sup> His vocabulary is reminiscent of Christ’s language in John 6, equating the cup with Christ’s blood. This teaching is clarified in the *Fragments of the Lost Writings of Irenaeus*, in which he wrote,

And therefore the oblation of the Eucharist is not a carnal one, but a spiritual; and in this respect it is pure. For we make an oblation to God of the bread and the cup

<sup>57</sup>Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 17.

<sup>58</sup>Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*, 62.

<sup>59</sup>Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 17.

<sup>60</sup>Kenneth Stevenson, *The First Rites: Worship in the Early Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989), 56.

<sup>61</sup>Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*, 62.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup>Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.2.2 (*ANF* 1:528).



of blessing, giving Him thanks in that He has commanded the earth to bring forth these fruits for our nourishment.”<sup>64</sup>

The nourishment provided by the Eucharist comes from God—it is the fruit of “His own gifts in the New Testament.”<sup>65</sup> As a meal, the Eucharist provides physical nourishment. As a sacred meal, it provides spiritual nourishment.<sup>66</sup> Could Irenaeus possibly mean what Ignatius more explicitly said much earlier, that the breaking of bread is “the medicine of immortality.”<sup>67</sup> If the Eucharist’s nourishment provides salvation, is this sacrifice not a type of *do ut des*?

Early Christians viewed their worship, particularly the eucharistic sacrifice, as “superior” to the surrounding pagan and Jewish cultural practices. They “could reject sacrificial imagery and ideas in relation to gentile religion and idolatry but still see their meal as fulfillment of the offerings once made at the Jerusalem temple.”<sup>68</sup> Ironically, the anti-Jewish polemic led the Christians to practice their spirituality in a way that led to the same pitfall. As the Jewish liturgical system of sacrifice pointed forward to Christ’s sacrifice by faith, the Christian liturgy of the Eucharist pointed backward to Christ’s sacrifice. Both religious systems ultimately ended up viewing the sacrifices as their own in order to gain salvation, resulting in a business transaction.

### *Sacrifice of the Priesthood*

At last, let us consider the early Christian teachings connecting the Eucharist as a sacrifice with the priesthood. The development of the doctrine of the Eucharist as sacrifice and the doctrine of ordination mutually influenced each other.<sup>69</sup> Where there is sacrifice, there necessitates a priesthood.

Ignatius linked the believers’ communion with Christ and the Father to the bishop. In his *Epistle to the Magnesians*, he urged the believers to do nothing “without the bishop and presbyters.”<sup>70</sup> He affixed this solidarity with the Eucharist in his *Epistle to the Philadelphians*, saying, “Take ye heed, then, to have but one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to the unity of His blood; one altar; as there is one bishop, along with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants: that so, whatsoever ye do, ye may do it according to

<sup>64</sup>Irenaeus, Frag. 37 (ANF 1:574).

<sup>65</sup>Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.17.5 (ANF 1:484)

<sup>66</sup>Hall, *Worshiping with the Church Fathers*, 58.

<sup>67</sup>Ign. *Eph.* 20 (ANF 1:57).

<sup>68</sup>McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 54.

<sup>69</sup>Kiesler, “The Ordinances,” 601.

<sup>70</sup>Ign. *Magn.* 7 (ANF 1:62).

God.”<sup>71</sup> The liturgical primacy of the bishop is evident. He also possessed spiritual authority: “Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it.”<sup>72</sup> Justin required a “president” or presider for the Eucharist:

There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen.<sup>73</sup>

Who was the president?<sup>74</sup> Justin calls not for a bishop or priest but a president—one who presides. This could simply be a pragmatic rubric.

However, if the Eucharist is the believer’s sacrifice, why could not the priesthood of all believers accomplish this action? Justin was indeed favorable to the idea of the universal priesthood. “We are the true high priestly race of God, as even God Himself bears witness, saying that in every place among the Gentiles sacrifices are presented to Him well-pleasing and pure. Now God receives sacrifices from no one, except through His priests.”<sup>75</sup> Could this be what Justin meant when he spoke of God not needing “streams of blood and libations and incense”? “We offer thanks by invocations and hymns. . . . We reasonably worship him.”<sup>76</sup> Sacrifice belonged to the priesthood of the church, “not to the ordained ministry of the church.”<sup>77</sup> Irenaeus likewise supported the theology of the priesthood of all believers. “For all the righteous possess the sacerdotal rank. And all the apostles of the Lord are priests, who do inherit here neither lands nor houses, but serve God and the altar continually.”<sup>78</sup>

The ecclesiology of the first and second centuries was not set. A high ecclesiology was made manifest in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch, while Justin and Irenaeus exhibited a low ecclesiology. Ignatius placed more authority in bishops than is observed in Scripture. Importantly, the significant New Testament ecclesiology of the priesthood of all believers survived at least until the third century.

<sup>71</sup>Ign. *Phil.* 4 (*ANF* 1:81).

<sup>72</sup>Ign. *Smyrn.* 8 (*ANF* 1:89–90).

<sup>73</sup>Justin, *1 Apol.* 65 (*ANF* 1:185).

<sup>74</sup>Daly, *Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, 90.

<sup>75</sup>Justin, *Dial.* 116 (*ANF* 1:257).

<sup>76</sup>Justin, *1 Apol.* 13 (*ANF* 1:166).

<sup>77</sup>Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 25.

<sup>78</sup>Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.8.3 (*ANF* 1:471).

### *Conclusion*

A variety of beliefs existed in the late first and second centuries regarding Christian sacrifice. Persecution led to a theology of martyrdom, which was divergent and evolved from Scripture. In an attempt to push against Judaism, pagan persecution, and Gnosticism, the early church fathers' theology and praxis consequently developed toward an extreme position. These factors led early Christians to transfer their developing beliefs of spiritual sacrifice to the Eucharist. This led some early Christians to treat the Eucharist as a type of business transaction. Some, such as Ignatius, required the Eucharist to be celebrated under the authority of a bishop, but others continued to embrace the biblical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

Christians need to take seriously the terminology of sacrifice. And yet, "Christian worship is not sacrifice."<sup>79</sup> Not in the literal cultic sense. There are no animal killings. Even Christ's death on the cross was a public execution. Gordon Lathrop argues that precisely because sacrifice is the "wrong word" for Christian worship, we should more heartily embrace the metaphor. Only when we lean into the wrongness of the word sacrifice can Christian worship present the necessary challenge to die to self, a living sacrifice.

When Protestants call a collection of money that is now mostly used for church maintenance—and not for the poor—and offering, when they make of this collection a ceremony, replete with processions and elevations, they inevitably mangle Christian liturgical meaning. When Roman parishes call their presider a priest, praying for him with the prescribed words, "may the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands," they easily miss the critical wrongness of these words. Indeed, the words of that particular text seem intended to avoid any metaphorical character that lingers in the offering terminology of the Roman canon and to say directly that Christians do give offerings to God. In both Roman and Protestant cases, the unbroken cultic language serves to reinforce the cultural status quo. The essential message is a familiar one: you get what you pay for.<sup>80</sup>

Seventh-day Adventists need to carefully critique their liturgical practices. Why are we so cautious about calling the Eucharist a sacrifice while our traditional churches continue to bring a physical sacrifice in the weekly offerings of money for church building maintenance? We have not as a church adequately reflected on the liturgical theology manifest in our services.

I adamantly disagree with the theologies and practices that point toward a *quid pro quo* business transaction. Calling the Lord's Supper a sacrifice can easily prompt a *quid pro quo* mentality. As Martin Pröbstle states, "If we lose sight of the fact that sacrifices express a spiritual relationship between God and us and that they all

<sup>79</sup>Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 140.

<sup>80</sup>Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 155.

point to a much greater sacrifice, Jesus Christ, we could easily mistake the sacrificial ritual for an automatic apparatus for making atonement.”<sup>81</sup> Adventist communion practices, however, often lack a strong sense of eucharist, or thanksgiving. Moreover, the sacrifice of Christian worship is imperative for continued renewal and revival in the churches.

The Bible presents a holistic worldview of worship and liturgy essential to understanding the sacrifice of the church. Earthly corporate worship corresponds to the liturgy of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary.<sup>82</sup> “Acceptable worship in all its dimensions can only be offered through Christ, by God’s enabling.”<sup>83</sup> Christ, our High Priest, leads the worship of the royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9). The priesthood of all believers has cultic activity in liturgy,<sup>84</sup> not for salvation but as worship. God wants one’s whole being, not liturgy or worship separately. God saves his people so that they may “offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” as worship (1 Pet 2:5). The sacrifice God wants is “a broken spirit and a contrite heart” (Ps 51:17). In worship, we offer God our attitude, our lives, our all.

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup>Martin Pröbstle, *The Sanctuary*, Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide (Silver Spring, MD: Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013), 26.

<sup>82</sup>“Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister [*leitourgos*] in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. . . . But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry [*leitourgias*], by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises” (Heb 8:1–2, 6).

<sup>83</sup>David G. Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1992), 246. “An engagement with God through Christ is now the only way to offer the worship that is due to him” (Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 187).

<sup>84</sup>Hermann Strathmann insisted that the term *leitourgeo* must not be understood in the cultic liturgical sense, for never in the New Testament is the cultic liturgy used in connection with early Christian leaders, such as apostles, teachers, prophets, presbyters, bishops, etc. Hermann Strathmann, “Leitourgeō,” *TDNT*, 4:228. He is incorrect in this, for it is also used in Acts 13:2, a worship service of church leaders. Strathmann missed the point. We do have liturgy in the performance of ritual action in worship. Strathmann did not utilize the systematic theology that allowed him to conceptualize Christ’s liturgy corresponding to the liturgy of the royal priesthood.

<sup>85</sup>Rom 12:1–2; cf. Rom 14:17–18.

This is sacrifice. God wants the human will. He wants one's life as a sacrifice, as an attitude of praise, doing good, and sharing with others: "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb 13:15–16).<sup>86</sup>

<sup>86</sup>The church's "mission is to render highest honor to God by exercising the priesthood of continual praise. It is in this high sense that we must hear the word *liturgy* and not in the narrow concept of an order of service" (Richard Paquier, *Dynamics of Worship: Foundations and Uses of Liturgy* [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1967], 56). "For the New Testament believers the priestly cultus had reached its end with the sacrifice and ascension of Christ, and they proclaimed in the gospel the *leitourgia* which took place on Calvary's cross and continues in Christ's heavenly ministry. The new community, the church, consists of priests who have access to God by faith in Christ, and a High Priest who is performing the *leitourgia* (ministry of service) before God on behalf of His people" (C. Raymond Holmes, *Sing a New Song: Worship Renewal for Adventists Today* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1984], 13; Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, trans. M. H. Bertram [Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1968], 14–15).