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SACRIFICIAL LANGUAGE AND THE LORD'S SUPPER IN THE PATRISTIC FATHERS
FROM THE DIDACHE TO JUSTIN MARTYR

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SACRIFICIAL LANGUAGE AND THE LORD'S SUPPER IN THE PATRISTIC FATHERS FROM THE DIDACHE TO CYPRIAN

At a very early date in the history of the church, the post-apostolic church fathers used sacrificial language and categories to understand and interpret what was occurring in the Lord's Supper. C. John Collins posits that the early church (immediately after the Apostles) began to see the Lord's Supper in terms of a Christian sacrifice.¹ Some may find this assertion problematic because many assume that Jesus's death on the cross fulfilled all the sacrifices found in the Old Testament. One must make two possible hypotheses in trying to reconcile why early Christian interpreters applied sacrificial language to understanding the Lord's Supper. The first assertion is that the patristic fathers of the church quickly departed from apostolic doctrine by applying sacrificial language to the Eucharist. The other hypothesis is that the New Testament provides evidence and lines of thought that are in congruence with the sacrificial understanding found in the fathers. Possibly, the method of interpretation the patristics used may be unique to the modern scholar but the unique exegetical practices should not obscure their insight into the Supper and its connection with sacrifice. In this paper, I will present a picture of early post-apostolic understandings of the Lord's Supper in terms of sacrifice, the biblical data that possibly led to that understanding, and methods of interpretation from the church fathers that can inform the modern scholar.

Sacrificial Language in the Early Church Fathers

¹ C. John Collins, "The Eucharist as Christian Sacrifice: How Patristic Authors Can Help Us Read the Bible," *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004): 1.

In examining the interpretive methods of the patristics, I would like to challenge us to consider what we can learn from their methodology. Collins proposes that reading the church fathers allows one “to see Scripture through another set of eyes.”² To accomplish the task of reading and interpreting the Supper through “another set of eyes,” I am focusing on church fathers in the early Second Century and their view of the Supper. I am specifically focusing on the documents from the first half of the Second Century to avoid the possibility for a long period of development of sacrificial thought. I also chose sources that specifically assign sacrificial categories to the Lord’s Supper. Through these early Second Century sources, I wanted to examine their use of sacrificial language and determine the locus of their thought. Three sources from the Second Century that I will examine in this paper are the Didache, Ignatius of Antioch, and Justin Martyr.

The Didache

One of the earliest Christian documents to describe the Lord’s Supper in sacrificial terms is the Didache. The Didache, also called “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,” gives ethical injunctions, instructions on baptism, teaching on how to celebrate the communal thanksgiving meal or Eucharist, and guidelines on how to deal with itinerant teachers, apostles, and prophets.³ The Didache gives an interesting take on the Lord’s Supper in sacrificial terms through an Old Testament prophetic passage and part of Jesus’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. One will notice that the writer of the Didache views the elements of the Supper as being holy. The Didache states, “Let no one eat or drink from your thanksgiving meal unless they have been baptized in the name of the Lord. For also the Lord said about this, *Do not give what is holy to*

² Ibid., 2.

³ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Volume 1* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 406.

the dogs.”⁴ The writer applies the words of Jesus in Matt 7:6 as an application of not giving the bread or wine from the Lord’s Supper to ones not sanctified through the waters of baptism. From this, one can deduce that the writer of the Didache does not see the food of the Eucharist as plain and ordinary food. To the writer of the Didache, there is something sacred about the elements of the Eucharist. Not only are they sacred elements, but there is also something sacrificial going on in the Eucharist.

The direct connection to sacrificial language comes later in the Didache in Didache 14:1-3 when it says,

“On the Lord’s day, when you gather together, break bread and give thanks [Or: celebrate the Eucharist] after you have confessed your unlawful deeds, that your sacrifice may be pure. Let no one quarreling with his neighbor join you until they are reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be defiled. For this is the sacrifice mentioned by the Lord: “In every place and time, bring me a pure sacrifice. For I am the great King, says the Lord, and my name is considered marvelous among the Gentiles.”⁵

There is one allusion and one direct quote in this passage that tie the Eucharist to sacrificial categories. First, the allusion in this passage is an echo of a teaching of Jesus found in Matt 5:23–24 in which Jesus states, “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (ESV).” It seems that the writer of the Didache has Matt 5 in mind when he encourages the worshipper to reconcile with someone that they are quarreling with so as not to defile the Eucharist. The only reason the application of this passage would make sense is if the writer of the Didache sees the Supper as a type of sacrifice.

⁴ Ibid., 431.

⁵ Ibid., 439.

The direct quote found in this passage that ties the thought of the Didache to sacrifice is the quotation of Malachi 1:11. Interestingly, the writer of the Didache picks the sacrifice mentioned in Malachi as his reference point because, in rabbinic literature, Malachi 1:11 was connected to the thank offering of Israel. Hartmut Gese quotes from *Pesiqta de Rab Kahana* and claims that in rabbinic thinking, Malachi 1:10–12 was interpreted as a *todah* offering.⁶ “In the coming Messianic age, all sacrifices will cease, but the thank offering [*todah*] will never cease.”⁷ The question arises, “why did rabbinic interpretation see Malachi 1:11 as a reference to the thank offering?” Why would the Didache draw this line of connection from Malachi 1:11 to the Lord’s Supper? All of these questions will be taken up later in this paper.

Ignatius of Antioch

Another early Christian source that applies sacrificial language to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is found in Ignatius of Antioch. Ignatius is intriguing due to the early nature of his testimony. According to Eusebius, Ignatius began his tenure as the bishop of Antioch around 69 AD.⁸ Ignatius supposedly penned the three letters we have from him on the way to martyrdom.⁹ Eusebius also claims that Ignatius was martyred midway through the reign of Emperor Trajan (98–117 AD), and Bart Ehrman concludes that the internal evidence of Ignatius’s letters match Eusebius’s dating.¹⁰ Eusebius’s dating and Ehrman’s testimony put Ignatius’s teaching on the Lord Supper in the early Second Century. In Ignatius’s Letter to the Philadelphians, he states,

⁶ Hartmut Gese, “The Origin of the Lord’s Supper,” *Essays in Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1981), 133.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁸ Jack N. Sparks, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Nashville: Nelson, 1978), 73.

⁹ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Volume 1* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 204.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

“And so be eager to celebrate just one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and one cup that brings the unity of his blood, *and one altar*, as there is one bishop together with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow slaves.”¹¹ Ignatius uses the word *thusiastērion* to describe the Eucharist. Ignatius’s intention in his letter to Philadelphians is to emphasize unity and to combat heresy, but in doing so he uses an overt reference to sacrifice when talking of the Lord’s Supper by employing the term altar. It seems that Ignatius is interpreting the celebration of the Lord’s Supper through a sacrificial understanding. The question for this current study is, “why does Ignatius use sacrificial language so early in the history of the church?”

Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr was a pioneer among the Greek apologists.¹² Justin is a pioneer because he believes that Christianity is the fullest expression of the truth of philosophy, and he wants to share his belief with his sophisticated pagan neighbors.¹³ Justin is of great interest for this paper because he uses sacrificial language to describe the Lord’s Supper. The year of birth of Justin Martyr is unknown, but scholars have set the date range for his martyrdom in Rome as between 162 and 167 AD.¹⁴ The quote from Justin that I find fascinating is found in his work the *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*. Justin probably wrote his correspondence with Trypho around

¹¹ Ibid., 287.

¹² Leslie William Barnard, *St. Justin Martyr The First and Second Apologies* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 3.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

160 AD, and in this work, he makes a defense of Christianity in light of Jewish objections.¹⁵ In Chapter XLI of his *Dialogue with Trypho* Justin stated,

“Likewise,” I continued, “*the offering of flour, gentlemen, which was ordered to be presented for those cleansed from leprosy, was a type of the bread of the Eucharist, which our Lord Jesus Christ commanded us to offer in remembrance of the Passion that he endured for all those souls who are cleansed from sin, and that at the same time we should thank God for having created the world, and everything in it, for the sake of mankind, and for having saved us from the sin in which we were born, and for the total destruction of the powers and principalities of evil through him who suffered in accordance with his will.*”

Thus, as I stated already, God speaks through Malachi, one of the twelve prophets, concerning the sacrifices you then offered up to him, I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord and will not receive your sacrifices from your hands. For from the rising of the sun even to its going down, my name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a clean oblation; for my name is great among the Gentiles, says the Lord, but you profane it.”

*By making reference to the sacrifices which we Gentiles offer to him in every place, namely, the bread of the Eucharist and the chalice of the Eucharist, he predicted that we should glorify his name, but that you should profane it.*¹⁶

Justin makes a direct reference to sacrifice and the Lord’s Supper when he connects the leper’s offering for healing to the Eucharist. In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin also quotes Mal 1:10–12 about a pure sacrifice that would continue into the Messianic age. The prophets pointed toward an age when the thank offering would continue. Justin uses sacrificial language and directly connects it to the Lord’s Supper in that same passage. In *Dialogue with Trypho 41*, Justin refers to the bread as ἄρτος τῆς εὐχαριστίας.¹⁷ The phrase “bread of the thanksgiving” hearkens one back to the concept of the thank offering. Justin’s quotation of Mal 1:10–12 is

¹⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶ Justin Martyr, *St. Justin Martyr Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. Thomas B. Falls (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 2003), 62–63.

¹⁷ Rev. W. Trollope, ed., *S. Justini Philosophi et Martyris cum Tryphone Judaeo Dialogus* (Cambridge: Pitt Press, 1846), 84.

important because Justin is quoting a passage that the rabbis had connected to the thank offering. Later, I will explore the implications of this connection.

Understanding the Eucharist in Sacrificial Terms from the Biblical Record

After examining the evidence from the patristics, I will now turn to the biblical passages that give rise to interpreting the Lord's Supper through a sacrificial lens. One may ask, "are there clues in the biblical record that reveal why the Second Century fathers connected the Lord's Supper with sacrifice?" Our forefathers possibly saw more sacrificial elements in the biblical passages about the Lord's Supper because they had a maximalist approach to interpretation, they were pre-modern in their exegesis, and they didn't carry the baggage of a Protestant polemic against Roman Catholic eucharistic theology. In the following section, I will examine the biblical evidence from the following sources: the institution narrative, 1 Corinthians 10:18 and its connection to the peace offering, and Malachi 1:10 -12 and its connection to the thank offering in rabbinic thought.¹⁸

Bertil E. Gartner rightly points out that Jesus uses sacrificial language in the institution account of the Lord's Supper.¹⁹ It would make sense to begin our analysis of the biblical data at the institution narratives found in the New Testament. None of the Second Century sources that I presented earlier make specific mention of the institution narratives in their connecting the Supper to sacrifice. I present the institution narrative data to prove that the 'ethos' of sacrifice in

¹⁸ Some may find it odd that I did not consider the Passover feast as a lens through which the early Second Century patristic fathers saw the sacrificial nature of the Supper. The reason for this omission is due to the Didache and Justin Martyr's connection of the Supper to the Mal 1:10 – 12. This prophecy is clearly connected to the thank offering of Israel and not the Passover. There was not enough evidence to see the sacrificial framework of these patristic sources as coming from the Passover. A future fruitful study may be to try to understand the Passover as a type of thank offering.

¹⁹ Bertil E. Gartner, *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue III: The Eucharist as Sacrifice* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference Publications Office, 1967), 28.

the church's interpretation of the Supper is found in the original accounts of the Last Supper. There are three references in the institution passages of the Lord's Supper that harken all readers, either Second Century or modern, back to sacrificial categories and concepts in the Old Testament and those three references are the following: the phrase the "new covenant in blood," the concept of blood being "poured out," and the call to "do this in remembrance of me."

Sacrifice and Covenant Formation

In Luke 22:20, Jesus says, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood (ESV)." Gartner is once again helpful in that he proposes that Luke 22:20 can be linked to Exodus 24:8.²⁰ One can see the striking similarities in the language used between Luke 22 and Exodus 24. Exodus 24:8 states, "And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words (ESV)." Gartner points out that there are four links between Luke 22 and Exodus 24, and they are the following: the blood, the covenant, the sacrifice, and the application of the blood to the people.²¹ An ancient reader of the institution narrative steeped in the Old Testament could easily pick up the echoes and connections with Exodus 24.

Similar language concerning the Supper and the forming of a covenant can be found in Matthew's account of the Lord's Supper. Matthew 26: 27–29 states,

"And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my *blood of the covenant*, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when *I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom* (ESV)."

²⁰ Ibid., 29.

²¹ Ibid.

Richard Hays directly connects the institution narrative in Matthew's Gospel with Exodus 24 when he states the following:

Just as Moses and the chief men of the people ate and drank in the presence of God, so also the twelve disciples (Matt 26:20) eat and drink in the presence of God in order to celebrate and solemnize the covenant of which Jesus speaks—a covenant that foreshadows an eschatological future (“that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom”) in which God's presence with Israel will be fully realized and celebrated.²²

With the echoes of Exodus 24 playing in the background of Matthew 26, one can see the close connection between the establishment of the old covenant with sacrifice and the establishment of the new covenant with sacrifice. God established his covenant with Israel at Sinai through animal sacrifice, and he forms his new covenant through the sacrifice of Jesus and his blood. The basic issue at play is the connection of Jesus' blood (*haima*) to the establishment of a covenant (*diathēkē*). As was mentioned prior, Exodus 24 gives us a full picture of God forming a covenant with His people through blood sacrifice and then celebrating that covenant through table fellowship. Many commentators point to Exodus 24 as a background to understanding Jesus' words concerning his blood and covenant.²³ Brant Pitre acknowledges that Exodus 24 is the most explicit connection to the words of Jesus in the institution narrative.²⁴ The following is the main passage that many believe is in the background of Jesus' words:

Then He said to Moses, “Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance. Moses alone, however, shall come near to the Lord, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him.” Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!” Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. Then he arose early in the

²² Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 134.

²³ Craig Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 300.

²⁴ Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Last Supper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 93.

morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. *Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar.* Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!” *So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.”* Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, *and they ate and drank* (Exodus 24:1–11 NASB).

The similarities in the account found in Exodus 24 and the Lord’s Supper institution passages are striking. In the Markan-Matthean account of the Supper, Jesus’s identification of the cup with “my blood of the covenant” (*to haima mou tēs diathēkē*) parallels the words of Moses “the blood of the covenant” (*haima tēs diathēkē*) found in the LXX of Exodus 24:8.²⁵ Would it be a stretch to think that the Second Century fathers connected the institution passage of Jesus to the covenant formation and sacrifices at Sinai? The parallels are not hard to see when one observes that the covenant was formed with blood, and there was eating and drinking in the presence of God.

Sacrifice and Pouring Out

Jesus says in Mark 14:24, “This is the blood of the covenant, which is *poured out for many* (ESV).” This image is similar to the blood of the peace offering being “thrown against” or “poured out” on the altar, as is reported in Exodus 24:6.²⁶ The image of Jesus’ blood being poured out and the blood being poured upon the altar at Sinai are pictures of sacrificial libations

²⁵ Ibid., 94.; Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 134.

²⁶ Pitre, *Jesus and the Last Supper*, 94.

of blood.²⁷ Luke’s Gospel also uses the phrase “poured out.” In Luke 22:20 Jesus states that his blood is being “poured out” (ἐκχυννόμενον, ekchynnomenon) similar to the language one sees in the LXX of the Levitical priests “pouring out” (ἐκχεεῖ, ekcheei) the blood of the animal being sacrificed for atonement (LXX Lev 4:7,18, 25, 30, 34).²⁸ One can see the connection between Jesus’s references to his blood being poured out to the libations of blood that were offered at the peace offerings on Mount Sinai. Patristic interpreters that read the Old Testament through Christocentric eyes could easily see this connection.

“Do this in Remembrance of Me”

When Jesus told his followers to “do this,” he specifically told them to do this in “remembrance of me.” Pitre proposes that the concept of “remembrance” is connected to the Jewish Scriptures and the idea of ritualized reenactment.²⁹ Pitre states, “the ritualized reenactment of the Passover sacrifice that set the exodus in motion is consistently associated with the remembrance of the original saving event.”³⁰ With Jesus’ command to repeat his actions “in remembrance of me” (*anamnēsin*) in mind, one might compare the following passages from the Jewish Bible with the words of Jesus:

Also in the day of your gladness and in your appointed feasts, and on the first days of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be as a *reminder* (italics mine) (LXX ἀνάμνησις) of you before your God. I am the Lord your God. (Numbers 10:10)

Now this day will be a memorial (LXX μνημόσυνον) to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance. (Exodus 12:14)

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ David E. Garland and Clinton E. Arnold, *Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), 857.

²⁹ Pitre, *Jesus and the Last Supper*, 419.

³⁰ Ibid.

There is a direct parallel between Num 10:10 and Jesus' words "in remembrance." In Num 10, there is a connection to sacrifice and the concept of remembrance. The sacrificial ritual was intended to help the worshipper remember the mighty saving acts of God in the past and appropriate those acts to the present. "Remembrance" in the Jewish Scriptures was not simply recalling a past event from Israel's history, but it often entailed extending the efficacy of that past event into the present.³¹ An example of this past-coming-to-the-present motif can be found in Exod 6:5–6. God "remembers" the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and because of his remembering, he delivers Israel from Egypt.

Connecting this concept of "remembrance" from the Jewish Scriptures to the context of the Lord's Supper can shed light on the words of Jesus and how the original readers of this text would have understood it. "Remembrance" would certainly be connected to sacrificial concepts in the Hebrew framework. David Garland aptly summarizes this realization for the Lord's Supper by stating:

The memorial requires Christians to reenact ritually what Christ did at his last meal to betoken his death and to explain its significance. The repeated imperative, 'do this unto my remembrance,' then, commands ritual remembrance of this foundational saving event (cf. Exod 12:14; Ps 77:12—12; 105:5). It is related to Jewish liturgical remembrance that praises and proclaims the mighty acts of God.³²

By looking at the words of Jesus at the institution of the Lord's Supper, a fuller picture starts to emerge. Jesus's declaration to "do this in remembrance of me" firmly connects the words of institution with the Jewish Scriptures' narrative concerning sacrifice and cultic ritual

³¹ Michael Barber, "The Historical Jesus and the Cultic Restoration Eschatology: The New Temple, the New Priesthood, and the New Cult." PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2010.

³² David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 548.

actions. One can conclude that the words of institution further buttress the hypothesis that the Lord's Supper could be connected to the concept of sacrifice by the early Christian community.

1 Corinthians 10:18

I believe that 1 Cor 10:18 may provide one of the best interpretive connections to the patristic fathers mentioned earlier and the connection between sacrifice and the Supper. I make that contention because of Justin Martyr and the Didache's use of Malachi 1:10 – 12 as a framework for understanding the Supper. If the Malachi passage is connected to the thank offering of Israel in rabbinic thought, it will help to find a direct link between the Lord's Supper and the thank offering in the New Testament. If there is a connection in the New Testament between the peace offering (thank offering) and the Lord's Supper, one could start to understand the use of Malachi in the Didache and Justin Martyr as a way to see the Lord's Supper.

The most compelling and complete case one could make in connecting the *todah* sacrifice to the Lord's Supper is the proverbial smoking gun of a direct scriptural reference linking the two. One possible direct scriptural link to the Lord's Supper and the peace offering is found in 1 Cor 10:18. Connecting the Lord's Supper to the peace offering is important because the *todah* offering was a subset of the peace offering. Johnathan Klawans points out that 1 Cor 10:18 underscores the seriousness and legitimacy of Israel's sacrificial service and connects the Eucharist as similarly serious, legitimate, and efficacious.³³ In 1 Cor 10:18 Paul states, "Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? (NASB)" This passage is interpreted by some as referring to the peace offering. The reason for this interpretation is that the people of Israel could only participate and eat the peace offering. All other sacrifices could

³³ Johnathan Klawans, "Interpreting the Last Supper: Sacrifice, Spiritualization, and Anti-Sacrifice," *New Testament Studies* 48 (2002): 11.

only be consumed by the priests. The peace offering is the only offering that could be consumed by the laity.

If 1 Cor 10:18 is referring to the peace offering, as Gordon Fee asserts, it would be very fruitful to this study because the context of this passage is Paul's teaching on the Lord's Supper.³⁴ In verses 16–17 of that same chapter, Paul says, "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." Paul is linking the taking of the Lord's Supper and the sharing (*koinonia*) in Christ with the sharing of the altar of Israel.

C. John Collins believes this passage forms the backbone of the basis of sacrificial language in the earliest Christian writers as they relate to the Lord's Supper.³⁵ Gordon Fee makes the point that 1 Cor 10:18 is specifically referring to a peace offering, such as found in Deuteronomy 14:22–27.³⁶ If Fee is correct in his interpretation, it provides a definite connection between the peace offering and the Lord's Supper. The evidence that 1 Cor 10:18 is referring to the peace offering could explain how sacrificial language arose very early in the history of the Church surrounding the Lord's Supper.

Malachi 1:10–12 and the Eucharist

From the quotes on the Eucharist by Justin Martyr and the Didache, it is obvious that Mal 1:10–12 played a major role in their interpretive understanding of the Lord's Supper.³⁷ Two

³⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 470–71.

³⁵ Collins, "The Eucharist as Christian Sacrifice: How Patristic Authors Can Help Us Read the Bible," 3.

³⁶ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 470–71.

³⁷ For a full discussion of Malachi 1:10–11 and its Hebrew context, LXX development, and allusions in the NT see Jon R. Jordan's Master's Thesis "For We offer Him His Own: Eucharist and Malachi in the New Testament and Early Church." <https://rts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/201403-Jordan-Jon.pdf>

interesting points can be drawn from the Malachi passage that brings light upon this investigation. Mal 1:10 states, “Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an *offering* from your hand (ESV).” First of all, the LXX of Mal 1:10 uses the Greek root *thusia* (*thusia*) concerning the offering that will not be accepted. The unaccepted offering is contrasted to the pure offering (*thusia*) that will be offered by the Gentiles in Mal 1:11. Andrew McGowan makes the point that the Septuagint uses the term *thusia* (*thusia*) to translate both the Hebrew terms *zabah* and *minhah* and in so doing collapses the idea of the bloody animal sacrifice with the grain or cereal offering.³⁸ McGowan proposes that the LXX’s combining of these two Hebrew terms in its understanding of sacrifice and in its method of translation opens the door for interpreters using the LXX to conceive of sacrifice as a communal meal.³⁹ The extension of the meaning of *thusia* in both these directions (*zabah* and *minhah*) is significant for this current study. By collapsing these two concepts of sacrifice into one overarching idea it makes it possible to see a sacrificial communal meal as one that is meatless. When one considers how prevalent sacrifice (*thusia*) brought about sustenance and communal meals in the ancient world it is not a stretch to see how this term in Malachi could take on the connotations of a communal meal with the LXX’s use of *thusia* it is also possible to see a meatless Eucharist as a type of sacrificial fellowship meal.

The connection between Mal 1:10–12 and the New Testament that I believe connects many of the dots for this current paper is found in 1 Cor 10:18–21. The phrase “table of the

³⁸ Andrew McGowan, “Eucharist and Sacrifice: Cultic Tradition and Transformation in Early Christian Ritual Meals” in *Meals and Religious Identity in Early Christianity* eds., Matthias Klinghardt and Hal Taussig, (Tübingen: Francke, 2012), 195–6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

Lord” (τραπέζης κυρίου) appears in the New Testament and early Christian literature, but it only appears twice in the LXX, and both of those occurrences are in Malachi 1 (Malachi 1:7,10). I believe there is a strong possibility that Paul is alluding to Malachi 1:11 in 1 Corinthians 10:21 when he states, “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord (τραπέζης κυρίου) and the table of demons.” The phrase *τραπέζης κυρίου* is an exact match of the phrase that one finds in Malachi 1:10. As steeped as Paul was in the Scripture of Israel, it would be hard to imagine that he did this by coincidence. Mal 1:10–12 provides the perfect interpretive backdrop for Paul in 1 Corinthians for his Jew and Gentile audience. Malachi 1 looks forward to an eschatological time when a pure sacrifice will be offered among the nations. Contrasting the “table of the Lord” to the “table of demons” demarcates out the Supper from its impure pagan parodies. Mal 1:10–12 provides Paul with the perfect context for his argument to the Corinthian church.

Towards a Synthesis: How did the Didache and Justin Martyr see the Lord’s Supper as a Sacrifice?

The “smoking gun” that helps put this puzzle together with the Didache and Justin Martyr is how 1 Cor 10:18 alludes to the peace offering of Israel and how 1 Cor 10:21 quotes from Mal 1:10.⁴⁰ The early church fathers had no problem seeing things typologically between Christ and images and themes in the Old Testament.⁴¹ As early interpreters read the institution narratives and saw it dripping with sacrificial overtones and as they examined Paul’s allusions to sacrifice in speaking of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 10, they would have to determine just how to

⁴⁰ The *todah* (thank offering) was just a subset of the peace offering found in Leviticus 3 and Leviticus 7.

⁴¹ For a good treatment of how the early church fathers read the Old Testament in a Christocentric manner see Alan J Watson and Duane F. Watson, *A History of Biblical Interpretation: Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 283–352.

understand the Lord's Supper in sacrificial categories. I believe the thank offering gives us the best answer to this mystery.

Earlier I connected the institution narrative with Exodus 24. In Exodus 24, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders ate in the presence of God. Jesus's words of institution are saturated with intertextual connections with Exodus 24 and the story of the formation of the Mosaic covenant and the subsequent peace offering. Consider that Moses and his group celebrated the forming of the covenant with peace offerings and a communal meal with God. Also, consider that in 1 Cor 10:18, Paul is speaking of the peace offering as he talks about the celebrants sharing in the altar. Furthermore, Paul in 1 Cor 10:21 refers to the Lord's Supper as the "table of the Lord." The earliest Christians would have viewed Jesus's death as the once and for all sacrifice for their sins (Hebrews 10). The death of Jesus on the cross would bring about peace with God. The "table of the Lord" would be the place that they celebrated their peace with God by eating and drinking in his presence. We share in the sacrificial benefits of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, and the table is the place that we celebrate, remember, and renew our covenant with God through Christ. Dennis R. Lindsay points out that the Christian worshipper brings the offering of bread and wine but, most importantly, gives himself as a living sacrifice.⁴²

Also, one can go through the Didache and find the remarkable number of times the word thanks or thanksgiving is used in reference to the Supper. I find it interesting that one of the earliest references to the Lord's Supper in the patristic material is εὐχαριστία. Using the term *eucharistia* is another indicator that the early interpreters of the Lord's Supper could have had the thanksgiving offering in mind. Jutta Leonhardt points out that in the writings of Philo one

⁴² Dennis R. Lindsay, "Todah and Eucharist: The Celebration of the Lord's Supper as a 'Thank Offering' in the Early Church" *Restoration Quarterly* 39,2 (1997): 90–91.

finds the concept of thanksgiving and the thank offering described as a time of εὐχαριστία.⁴³ Philo's translation of the term *todah* with the Greek term *eucharistia* demonstrates that the lingual connection between Eucharist and *todah* was already available to the Second Century fathers. Philo's testimony is important because the Septuagint does not use the term *eucharistia*. Philo does demonstrate that it was plausible to translate the thank offering of Israel into a term consistent with the Eucharist. Combine this with the understanding that contemporary rabbinic thought had already connected Malachi 1:10–12 to the thank offering, and a clearer picture starts to emerge as to how the Didache and Justin Martyr saw the Supper as a sacrifice. The rabbis said of Mal 1:10–12, "In the coming Messianic age, all sacrifices will cease, but the thank offering [*todah*] will never cease."⁴⁴

Ignatius of Antioch and the Altar

If the early Christians thought of the Eucharist as the "table of the Lord," how did Ignatius come to regard the Eucharist as an altar? Once again, 1 Corinthians 10 helps in understanding how this sacrificial concept came into Ignatius's thought world. It is helpful to turn back to 1 Cor 10:18–21 and see the analog that Paul is setting up in his exposition on the Lord's Supper. Paul says,

"Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons (1 Cor 10:18–21 ESV)."

Notice the line of thought of Paul. In verse 18, he draws a connection to the cultic altar of Israel and the Eucharist. In doing so, he is describing the peace offering in which the participant

⁴³ Jutta Leonhardt, *Jewish Worship in Philo of Alexandria* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 29.

⁴⁴ Hartmut Gese, "The Origin of the Lord's Supper," 133.

participated in the sacrifice by having a meal and eating the sacrifice. In verse 21, he switches his analog to the pagan communal meals that were tied to meat sacrificed to idols. Just as Israel in verse 18 had communion with the altar through the sacrifice and sharing a peace offering meal, the pagans have communion with their pagan gods through their pagan sacrificial meal. The point of Paul is that at the table of the Lord, we have communion with Jesus.

Ignatius connects the Eucharist to the idea of an ‘altar (θυσιαστήριον),’ and one can see how Ignatius could have developed this idea from the language of 1 Cor 10:18 and its use of the term ‘altar (θυσιαστηρίου).’ Paul’s point in 1 Cor 10:18 is not to build a case for the Lord’s Supper table to be considered an altar but to help the Corinthians understand the idea of sharing or communing with Christ. Ignatius’s point in his writing is the unity of the church and the importance of the bishop’s place to hold that unity. He uses the concept of the altar to buttress the idea that the valid and true eucharistic celebration is with those connected to orthodox bishops. I do not believe Ignatius is giving his readers a theology of the Lord’s Supper table as an altar but is making a point about the importance of unity and borrows from Paul’s use of the term. It is plausible that Ignatius would borrow from this particular section of 1 Corinthians because Paul is calling for unity, especially in regards to the Lord’s Supper and its proper celebration. For this paper, Ignatius does not give a strong point of reference to build my case, but he does provide a possible but tenuous connection of the Eucharist and the peace offering of Israel.

Analysis of the Data

When one takes all of these lines of thought into account, I propose that the thank offering is the lens through which sacrificial language develops early in church history. Ignatius does not give us enough data to use his testimony, but the Didache and Justin Martyr help make

the case for the thank offering as the early reference point for sacrifice in patristic thought. The reasons for believing this are the following:

- The Didache and Justin Martyr both apply sacrificial language to the Eucharist.
- Both the Didache and Justin Martyr use Mal 1:10-12 in connection to their sacrificial view of the Lord's Supper.
- In rabbinic thought, Mal 1:10-12 is viewed as the thank offering of Israel that will be the pure sacrifice that will be celebrated all over the world in the messianic age.
- In 1 Cor 10:18, Paul uses the peace offering or thank offering as his argument to the Corinthian church concerning proper eucharistic practice.
- The Didache's use of the term *eucharistia* and its connection with the thank offering found in Philo of Alexandria provides evidence that the term used to denote the Eucharist had an interpretive connection with the thank offering.
- Jesus's words in the institution narratives of the Gospels have echoes and intertextual connections to the peace offering (the thank offering is a subset of the peace offering) found in Exodus 24.
- Andrew McGowan's research has shown that the use of *thusia* in the LXX raises the possibility of early Christians understanding meatless communal meals in sacrificial terms.

Considering the data, I propose that the thank offering of Israel is the most plausible explanation as to where the Didache and Justin Martyr develop their sacrificial explanations of the Lord's Supper. The thank offering finds its ultimate *telos* in Jesus. The food we eat, the bread and wine, are in some way communion with the risen Jesus, and we eat in his presence, celebrating our peace with God. In coming to his table, we come bringing our lives as a living sacrifice before him and celebrate his ultimate sacrifice that happened once and for all on Calvary.

Conclusion

The early church fathers of the Second Century of church history provide an imaginative and fuller way to understand the Lord's Supper. The patristics can overturn our modern hermeneutical apparatus at times, but our discomfort for their methods and interpretations could be our limitations in exegetical imagination. Our theology of the Lord's Supper should give a listening ear to the exegesis and understanding of these Second Century sources. The Didache and Justin Martyr's connection of the Lord's Supper with Mal 1:10–12 and the concepts of sacrifice challenge and help us think through the implications for the Lord's Supper in our own time. By considering their view and reading "scripture through their eyes," our current view of the Eucharist can be enriched and imbued with new life from ancient wisdom and hermeneutical practices.

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