

THE EUCHARIST AS SACRIFICE
IN ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY
(80 - 250 CE)

Didache, c. 80-140 CE

But every Lord's day [or, "according to the Lord's {instruction?}] gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one who is at odds with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is that which was spoken by the Lord: "In every place and time offer to me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, says the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the nations." (14)

Clement of Rome, c. 95 CE

For our sin will not be small, if we eject from the episcopate those who have blamelessly and holily fulfilled its duties [Note : literally, "presented its offerings"]. (First Epistle to the Corinthians 44:6)

Ignatius of Antioch, c. 105 CE

"Make certain, therefore, that you all observe one common Eucharist; for there is but one Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and but one cup of union with his Blood, and one single altar of sacrifice—even as there is also but one bishop, with his clergy and my own fellow servitors, the deacons. This will ensure that all your doings are in full accord with the will of God" (Epistle to the Philadelphians, 4)

Justin Martyr, 160 CE

"...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, in order that we may at the same time thank God for having created the world, with all things therein, for the sake of man, and for delivering us from the evil in which we were, and for utterly overthrowing principalities and powers by Him who suffered according to His will. Hence God speaks by the mouth

of Malachi, one of the twelve [minor prophets], as I said before, about the sacrifices at that time presented by you: 'I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord; and I will not accept your sacrifices at your hands: for, from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, My name has been glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to My name, and a pure offering: for My name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord: but ye profane it.' He then speaks of those Gentiles, namely us, who in every place offer sacrifices to Him, i.e., the bread of the Eucharist, and also the cup of the Eucharist, affirming both that we glorify His name, and that you profane. [So] He then speaks of those Gentiles, namely us, who in every place offer sacrifices to Him, i.e., the bread of the Eucharist, and also the cup of the Eucharist, affirming both that we glorify His name, and that you profane [it].... (Dialogue with Trypho XLI)

...

Yet even now, in your love of contention, you assert that God does not accept the sacrifices of those who dwelt then in Jerusalem, and were called Israelites; but says that He is pleased with the prayers of the individuals of that nation then dispersed, and calls their prayers sacrifices. Now, that prayers and giving of thanks, when offered by worthy men, are the only perfect and well-pleasing sacrifices to God, I also admit. For such alone Christians have undertaken to offer, and in the remembrance effected by their solid and liquid food, whereby the suffering of the Son of God which He endured is brought to mind, whose name the high priests of your nation and your teachers have caused to be profaned and blasphemed over all the earth... For there is not one single race of men, whether barbarians, or Greeks, or whatever they may be called, nomads, or vagrants, or herdsmen living in tents, among whom prayers and giving of thanks are not offered through the name of the crucified Jesus. And then, as the Scriptures show, at the time when Malachi wrote this, your dispersion over all the earth, which now exists, had not taken place. (Dialogue with Trypho, CXVII)

Irenaeus, 180 CE

Again, giving directions to His disciples to offer to God the first-fruits of His own, created things-not as if He stood in need of them, but that they might be themselves neither unfruitful nor ungrateful-He took that created thing, bread, and gave thanks, and said, "This is My body." And the cup likewise, which is part of that creation to which we belong, He confessed to be His blood, and taught the new oblation of the new covenant; which the Church receiving from the apostles, offers to God throughout all the world, to Him who gives us as the means of subsistence the first-fruits of His own gifts in the New Testament, concerning which Malachi, among the twelve prophets, thus spoke beforehand: "I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord Omnipotent, and I will not accept sacrifice at your hands. For from the rising of the sun, unto the going down [of the

same], My name is glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to My name, and a pure sacrifice; for great is My name among the Gentiles, saith the Lord Omnipotent; “ indicating in the plainest manner, by these words, that the former people [the Jews] shall indeed cease to make offerings to God, but that in every place sacrifice shall be offered to Him, and that a pure one; and His name is glorified among the Gentiles.

But what other name is there which is glorified among the Gentiles than that of our Lord, by whom the Father is glorified, and man also?... Since, therefore, the name of the Son belongs to the Father, and since in the omnipotent God the Church makes offerings through Jesus Christ, He says well on both these grounds, “And in every place incense is offered to My name, and a pure sacrifice.”

The oblation of the Church, therefore, which the Lord gave instructions to be offered throughout all the world, is accounted with God a pure sacrifice, and is acceptable to Him; not that He stands in need of a sacrifice from us, but that he who offers is himself glorified in what he does offer, if his gift be accepted. For by the gift both honor and affection are shown forth towards the King; and the Lord, wishing us to offer it in all simplicity and innocence... We are bound, therefore, to offer to God the first-fruits of His creation, as Moses also says, “Thou shalt not appear in the presence of the Lord thy God empty; “ so that man, being accounted as grateful, by those things in which he has shown his gratitude, may receive that honor which flows from Him.

...Sacrifices, therefore, do not sanctify a man, for God stands in no need of sacrifice; but it is the conscience of the offerer that sanctifies the sacrifice when it is pure, and thus moves God to accept [the offering] as from a friend.

...

Inasmuch, then, as the Church offers with single-mindedness, her gift is justly reckoned a pure sacrifice with God. As Paul also says to the Philippians, “I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things that were sent from you, the odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, pleasing to God.” For it behoves us to make an oblation to God, and in all things to be found grateful to God our Maker, in a pure mind, and in faith without hypocrisy, in well-grounded hope, in fervent love, offering the first-fruits of His own created things. And the Church alone offers this pure oblation to the Creator, offering to Him, with giving of thanks, [the things taken] from His creation. But the Jews do not offer thus: for their hands are full of blood; for they have not received the Word, through whom it is offered to God. Nor, again, do any of the conventicles (synagogue) of the heretics [offer this]. For some, by maintaining that the Father is different from the Creator, do, when they offer to Him what belongs to this creation of ours, set Him forth as being covetous of another’s property, and desirous of what is not His own... But how can they be consistent with themselves, [when they say] that the bread over which thanks have been given is the body of their Lord, and the cup His

blood, if they do not call Himself the Son of the Creator of the world, that is, His Word, through whom the wood fructifies, and the fountains gush forth, and the earth gives “first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.”

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 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.

Now we make offering to Him, not as though He stood in need of it, but rendering thanks for His gift, and thus sanctifying what has been created. ...that we, too, should offer a gift at the altar, frequently and without intermission. The altar, then, is in heaven (for towards that place are our prayers and oblations directed); the temple likewise [is there], as John says in the Apocalypse, “And the temple of God was opened: “ the tabernacle also: “For, behold,” He says, “the tabernacle of God, in which He will dwell with men.” (Against Heresies Book IV: Chapter XVII:5-6; XVIII:3-6)

...

Those who have become acquainted with the secondary (i.e., under Christ) constitutions of the apostles, are aware that the Lord instituted a new oblation in the new covenant, according to [the declaration of] Malachi the prophet. For, “from the rising of the sun even to the setting my name has been glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure sacrifice;” as John also declares in the Apocalypse: “The incense is the prayers of the saints.” Then again, Paul exhorts us “to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” And again, “Let us offer the sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of the lips.” Now those oblations are not according to the law, the handwriting of which the Lord took away from the midst by canceling it; but they are according to the Spirit, for we must worship God “in spirit and in truth.” 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 of blessing, giving Him thanks in that He has commanded the earth to bring forth these fruits for our nourishment. And then, when we have perfected the oblation, we invoke the Holy Spirit, that He may exhibit this sacrifice, both the bread the body of Christ, and the cup the blood of Christ, in order that the receivers of these antitypes may obtain remission of sins and

life eternal. Those persons, then, who perform these oblations in remembrance of the Lord, do not fall in with Jewish views, but, performing the service after a spiritual manner, they shall be called sons of wisdom. (Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus, 180 CE)

Tertullian, 198-200 CE

Likewise, in regard to days of fast, many do not think they should be present at the sacrificial prayers, because their fast would be broken if they were to receive the body of the Lord ... the body of the Lord having been received and reserved, each point is secured: both the participation in the sacrifice... (On Prayer, 19)

...

“As often as the anniversary comes round, we make offerings {or sacrifices} for the dead as birthday honors.” (The Chaplet or Corona [Crown], 3)

...

A woman, after the death of her husband, is bound not less firmly but even more so, not to marry another husband... Indeed, she prays for his soul and asks that he may, while waiting, find rest; and that he may share in the first resurrection. And each year, on the anniversary of his death, she offers the sacrifice.

“You, however, have no cause for appearing in public, except such as is serious, Either some brother who is sick is visited, or else the sacrifice is offered, or else the Word of God is dispensed.” (On Monogamy, 10)

Hippolytus, 215-17 CE

{Prayer of Ordination}

God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ... you who gave the rules of the Church through the word of your grace, who predestined from the beginning the race of the righteous through Abraham, who instituted princes and priests, and did not leave your sanctuary without a minister; who from the beginning of the world has been pleased to be glorified by those whom you have chosen, pour out upon him the power which is from you, the princely Spirit, which you gave to your beloved Son Jesus Christ, which he gave to your holy apostles, who founded the Church in every place as your sanctuary, for the glory and endless praise of your name.

Grant, Father who knows the heart, to your servant whom you chose for the episcopate, that he will feed your holy flock, that he will wear your high priesthood without reproach, serving night and day, incessantly

making your face favorable, and offering the gifts of your holy church; in the spirit of high priesthood having the power to forgive sins according to your command; to assign lots according to your command; to loose any bond according to the authority which you gave to the apostles; to please you in mildness and a pure heart, offering to you a sweet scent, through your son Jesus Christ, through whom to you be glory, power, and honor, Father and Son, with the Holy Spirit, in the Holy Church, now and throughout the ages of the ages.

Amen.

{Liturgy of the Eucharist}

When he has been made bishop, everyone shall give him the kiss of peace, and salute him respectfully, for he has been made worthy of this. Then the deacons shall present the oblation to him, and he shall lay his hand upon it, and give thanks, with the entire council of elders, saying:

...

[Addressing God] Therefore, remembering his death and resurrection, we offer to you the bread and the chalice, giving thanks to you, who has made us worthy to stand before you and to serve as your priests.

And we pray that you would send your Holy Spirit to the oblation of your Holy Church.

In their gathering together, give to all those who partake of your holy mysteries the fullness of the Holy Spirit, toward the strengthening of the faith in truth, (Apostolic Tradition 3:1-4:2,11-12)

...

“‘And she [Wisdom] has furnished her table’ [Prov. 9:2] . . . refers to his [Christ’s] honored and undefiled body and blood, which day by day are administered and offered sacrificially at the spiritual divine table, as a memorial of that first and ever-memorable table of the spiritual divine supper [i.e.,the Last Supper]” (Fragment from Commentary on Proverbs)

Cyprian, 250 CE

Whence it appears that the blood of Christ is not offered if there be no wine in the cup, nor the Lord’s sacrifice celebrated with a legitimate consecration unless our oblation and sacrifice respond to His passion. But how shall we drink the new wine of the fruit of the vine with Christ in the kingdom of His Father, if in the sacrifice of God the Father and of Christ we do not offer wine, nor mix the cup of the Lord by the Lord’s own tradition?...

Also in the priest Melchizedek we see prefigured the sacrament of the sacrifice of the Lord, according to what divine Scripture testifies, and says, "And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine." Now he was a priest of the most high God, and blessed Abraham. And that Melchizedek bore a type of Christ, the Holy Spirit declares in the Psalms... which order is assuredly this coming from that sacrifice and thence descending; that Melchizedek was a priest of the most high God; that he offered wine and bread; that he blessed Abraham. For who is more a priest of the most high God than our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered a sacrifice to God the Father, and offered that very same thing which Melchizedek had offered, that is, bread and wine, to wit, His body and blood? ... In Genesis, therefore, that the benediction, in respect of Abraham by Melchizedek the priest, might be duly celebrated, the figure of Christ's sacrifice precedes, namely, as ordained in bread and wine; which thing the Lord, completing and fulfilling, offered bread and the cup mixed with wine, and so He who is the fulness of truth fulfilled the truth of the image prefigured.

Moreover the Holy Spirit by Solomon shows before the type of the Lord's sacrifice, making mention of the immolated victim, and of the bread and wine, and, moreover, of the altar and of the apostles... But if we may not break even the least of the Lord's commandments, how much rather is it forbidden to infringe such important ones, so great, so pertaining to the very sacrament of our Lord's passion and our own redemption, or to change it by human tradition into anything else than what was divinely appointed! For if Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, is Himself the chief priest of God the Father, and has first offered Himself a sacrifice to the Father, and has commanded this to be done in commemoration of Himself, certainly that priest truly discharges the office of Christ, who imitates that which Christ did; and he then offers a true and full sacrifice in the Church to God the Father, when he proceeds to offer it according to what he sees Christ Himself to have offered.

And because we make mention of His passion in all sacrifices (for the Lord's passion is the sacrifice which we offer), we ought to do nothing else than what He did. For Scripture says, "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death till He come." As often, therefore, as we offer the cup in commemoration of the Lord and of His passion, let us do what it is known the Lord did. (Fragment LXII)

...

"Returning from the altars of the devil, they draw near to the holy place of the Lord... they intrude on the body of the Lord, although the sacred Scripture stands in their way, and cries, saying, "Every one that is clean shall eat of the flesh; and whatever soul eateth of the flesh of the saving sacrifice, which is the Lord's, having his uncleanness upon him, that soul shall be cut off from his people." Also, the apostle testifies, and says, "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of devils." He threatens,

moreover, the stubborn and froward, and denounces them, saying, “Whosoever eateth the bread or drinketh the cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

“All these warnings being scorned and contemned, before their sin is expiated, before confession has been made of their crime, before their conscience has been purged by sacrifice and by the hand of the priest, before the offence of an angry and threatening Lord has been appeased, violence is done to His body and blood; and they sin now against their Lord more with their hand and mouth than when they denied their Lord...

...

“When we were sacrificing, the mother brought the daughter in with her....

“...And when one, who himself was defiled, dared with the rest to receive secretly a part of the sacrifice celebrated by the priest; he could not eat nor handle the holy of the Lord, but found in his hands when opened that he had a cinder. (The Lapsed 15-16,25-26)

...

That the Eucharist is to be received with fear and honor, in Leviticus: “But whatever soul shall eat of the flesh of the sacrifice of salvation, which is the Lord’s, and his uncleanness is still upon him, that soul shall perish from his people.” Also in the first to the Corinthians: “Whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” (Treatise XII: Third Book of Testimonies Against the Jews, 94)