

How is the Mass a Sacrifice?

Early Christian Liturgies, Wesley, and Contemporary United Methodist Practice

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Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the Cross for our redemption; who made there, by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; and did institute and in his holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory of that his most precious death, until his coming again: Hear us, O merciful Father. . .

O Lord and heavenly Father, we thy humble servants entirely desire thy fatherly goodness mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; most humbly beseeching thee to grant, by the merits and death of thy Son Jesus Christ, and through faith in his blood, we and all thy whole church may obtain remission of our sins, and all other benefits of his passion. And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee; humbly beseeching thee, that all we, who are partakers of this holy Communion, may be fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly benediction. And although we be unworthy, through our manifold sins, to offer unto thee any sacrifice, yet we beseech thee to accept this our bounden duty and service; not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offenses, through Jesus Christ our Lord.¹

With these words, John Wesley, priest in the Anglican Church, with all his fellow priests in apostolic succession, led English congregations in Holy Communion. With these words, only slightly amended (in fact but very slightly: the only change is to eliminate the word "one" in "one oblation of himself once offered"), John Wesley intended for the ordained elders and bishops who served the people called Methodists in North America to lead their congregations in Holy Communion, carrying on the tradition of the "sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving" he, and many Christians in his day, believed to have been instituted by Christ himself.

In our day, with the recovery of a number of early Christian liturgical documents during the past century, there has been a renewed interest in examining what eucharistic practice looked like in the earliest centuries of Christian life, and a vigorous reworking of eucharistic texts to bring them closer into line with these ancient precursors. The work in this field is too vast to survey-- it would comprise at least a roomful of books and PhD theses and a thorough knowledge of dozens of languages living and dead. The work that has been done so far has primarily used the

"archaeological" tools of form and source criticism which have been the groundwork for biblical studies for much of the past century, "unearthing" various "strata" within these texts and attempting to account for these strata linguistically, historically, literarily and, occasionally, theologically. I have neither the skills nor the inclination to engage in much of this kind of work in this paper.

Instead, I want to look at whether, or how, "sacrifice" is an appropriate metaphor for what is happening in the early eucharistic texts we now can access, and how it plays out in Wesley's Sunday Service and in the "official" United Methodist liturgies of the Book of Worship (1992). My approach is unapologetically "canonical;" that is, rather than trying to establish with great certainty what the texts in question are in all their parts, I am trying to read those texts as we now have them. I will first address the meaning of sacrifice in the eucharist as it is described in Didache, Justin Martyr, the Apostolic Tradition, and the Prayer Book of Bishop Sarapion of Thmuis.² Having surveyed these earlier liturgical traditions,³ I will explore the understanding of sacrifice in the Anglican-Wesleyan eucharist and in the "restored" liturgies of the Book of Worship, showing points of continuity and discontinuity. I conclude with some normative reflections (if historical tradition is capable of producing norms) on whether and how Christian eucharistic liturgies "ought" to be handling the idea of sacrifice.

Eucharistic Sacrifice in the Didache

Each Lord's Day of the Lord, having been gathered together, break bread and do the eucharist, having priorly confessed your faults, so that your sacrifice might be pure. And any having a quarrel with a neighbor, let them not gather with you until they are reconciled, so that your sacrifice may not be defiled. For this is the word 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 shall be astounding among the nations"⁴ (Didache, ch. 14).

The Didache's eucharistic instruction is remarkable in a number of ways. It contains no remembrance (anamnesis) of the death or resurrection of Jesus, no connection of the "elements" of bread and wine to the body and blood of Jesus, and no discussion of forgiveness of sins. As Arthur Vööbus has pointed out, "the act of the ritual is not understood as having an effect which normally is characteristic of the sacrifice, namely, the propitiation for sins."⁵ And yet, the word sacrifice shows up a startling three times (that word's only appearances in the entire document!). So clearly, there is some connection the Didache community was making between sacrifice and eucharist, and in fact a

connection this document is making about as emphatically as possible. But what is that connection?

Vööbus argues that the word "sacrifice" (*thusia*) is here a stand-in for "liturgy" (*leitourgia*).⁶ The worship itself is the sacrifice, or, perhaps better, the community at worship is the sacrifice. For the sacrifice, the worship, to be pure, as the Malachi text quoted insists it must, the community must be pure. The community achieves its "ritual purity" through acts of ethical purification-- by being reconciled to each other. The acts of reconciliation between members of the community must happen before they "do the eucharist." They become reconciled (literally, make amends-- the word in Greek is *diallagosin*) through confessing their faults (*paraptoma*--failings, not *amartia*-- the usual word for sins in the moral sense) to one another (perhaps at the beginning of the service, or separately somewhere else) and, perhaps, working out restitution for wrongs done. Persons who have serious conflicts cannot gather at table to do eucharist until they have first worked out their conflicts with others in this way.

What then is eucharistic sacrifice, and what does it accomplish, or what does it seek from God? In the Didache, the eucharistic sacrifice is thanksgiving to God ("our Father") for revealing God's kingdom in the world through the life and ministry of Jesus and for allowing those who follow the way of Jesus to participate in that kingdom.

*We give you thanks, our Father,
over the holy vine of David your servant,
which you have made known to us through Jesus your servant.
To you be the glory for ever.*

*We give you thanks, our Father,
over the life and knowledge
which you have made known to us through Jesus your servant.
To you be the glory for ever.*

*Just as this broken bread, scattered over the mountains
and gathered together, has become one,
so also may your church be gathered together
from the corners of the earth
into your kingdom.
For yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever.*

(Ch. 9:2,3; p. 324. Translation mine).

These pre-communion prayers and the post-communion prayers which follow them (chapter 10) focus much more on the bread and cup as food provided by God (eschatological banquet) than as sacrifices or oblations we offer to God. The second post-communion petition, borrowing heavily from the Qiddush, makes this point most clearly:

You, almighty master, have made all things

*on behalf of your name
and have given food and drink to people for enjoyment
so they might give you thanks;
but you have gifted us with spiritual food and drink and eternal life
through your servant. (10:3, p. 324).*

If there is any classical ritual sacrificial understanding of the eucharist in Didache, it may be the notion of sharing the virtue or life force of the object of the sacrifice.⁷ The "name" alluded to in this verse is spelled out more clearly in its relationship to the eucharist in the previous one:

*We give you thanks, holy Father, over your holy Name
which you have made to dwell in our hearts,
and over the knowledge and faith and immortality
which you have made known to us through Jesus your servant.*

Taking these two verses together as a description of the "benefits" of the eucharistic sacrifice, one might conclude that eating this heavenly banquet imparts the "holy Name" into the hearts of the people, so that the people in some sense become participants not only in the church and the kingdom (the earthly manifestations of the life of God) but into the very life or being ("name") of God. "Knowledge and faith and immortality" could be adjectival to "name" (i.e., spelling out what the benefits of the impartation of the Name are) or supplementary to it. In either case, both knowledge (gnosis) and immortality (athanasia) could be seen directly as connections with or participations in the inner life of God, and faith at least indirectly so. If one wants to read a *mysterium fascinans* into this rite, the material appears to be there.

Of course, one could just as plausibly argue for a less mystical (and correspondingly a less or even almost completely non-sacrificial) reading as well. The thanksgiving over the name could reflect thanks for a gift *already* imparted to all Christians (or at least all those who are qualified to communicate) before the eucharist and communion proper ever take place, and thus be seen as a continuation of or supplement to the thanks begun before the communion. Carrying this further, the communion thanksgivings, both pre and post communion, might be understood as thanksgivings for the gifts God has already given to the church, so that participation in the eucharist itself does not add to those gifts, but simply offers hearty thanks for them. Such a reading is not inconsistent with the idea of not admitting the unbaptized (who do not yet have any of these gifts) and persons in conflict (who are denying the unity of the church and thus God's gifts by their ongoing fighting), since these persons could not, de facto, offer these kinds of thanksgivings with any sincerity. In this reading, the sacrifice described in chapter 14 is only and completely a sacrifice of thanksgiving by people who seek to do no more than give thanks, and who pray that what they are enacting with the cup and bread will come true in the world-- that God's kingdom will grow and unite people from all over the world into one

body giving thanks to God.

Eucharist and Sacrifice in Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr's description of the eucharist portrays a mixture of anti-sacrificial rhetoric with overtones of sacrificial practice. In chapter 13 of the *First Apology*, Justin is arguing that Christians are neither atheistic nor illogical in their worship, but are, on the other hand, quite pious and sensible. He describes the God Christians worship as the artisan (demiourgon) of all things, "not being in need of bleeding things, and of libations and of incense," all of which form a direct reference to the Roman pagan sacrificial rites (and the former Jewish rites as well!).⁸ Then he adds in a rather tongue in cheek manner that Christians have been taught that

*by the word of prayer and thanksgiving over all the things which have been offered to us, we ought to praise [God] with as much might as we have, having received [through our] tradition that this honor alone is worthy of him: [namely] that the things which come from his hand for food [we ought] not to consume with fire, but instead offer it before ourselves and those who are needy.*⁹

In other words, Justin says to his pagan interlocutors, we don't burn up food like you do in your so-called logical sacrifices: we thank God for it and eat it, and we give whatever we have beyond this (other offerings) to the poor. There is no need of performing anything to propitiate a god, but rather to praise the living God for taking care of them and to show forth their praise not only in words over the eucharistic bread and wine, but also in deeds by giving other offerings to the poor. If there is any sacrifice here, it is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, perhaps along similar lines as the Didache.

While Justin's rhetoric ridicules sacrifice and replaces the term "sacrifice" (*thusia*) with "offering" (*prosphora*, and its cognate verb *prosphero*), his description of the eucharistic practice of Christians does appear to describe the sacrificial motif of participation in the "life" of the victim.

*For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these things. But the way our Savior Christ, having been made flesh by the word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, thus also we have been taught that the food which is eucharistized by the word of prayer, from which also our flesh and blood are fed according to a change, is itself the flesh and blood of Jesus who was made flesh.*¹⁰

What is not said here may be as important as what is said. Neither here nor in the recollection of the words of institution which

follows does Justin make any reference to "covenant." The sole focus is on the elements of bread and wine (mixed with water) being themselves changed into the body and blood of Christ during or because of someone giving thanks over them. I want to argue that this is significant in that a) covenantal language was part of some of the institution narratives available to Justin, and indeed a central part of both the Pauline and Markan/Matthaeian understandings of it, and b) that covenantal language does presuppose a sacrifice for sins (or for peace) whose blood seals the covenant.

The lack of covenantal language could be explained in a number of ways. It could be that it would just not be understood by the pagan audience he addresses, and so Justin leaves it out. Or it could be that the audience (or Justin himself) does understand it at such a deep level that there is no need to mention it. Both of these are plausible alternatives for what I am proposing, namely, that Justin either leaves out references to covenant or chooses texts, such as a number of older manuscripts in the Lukan tradition, which do not include them because he finds the covenantal approach to be too closely allied to the pagan sacrificial approaches he has already rejected.¹¹

So here is participation (having our bodies and blood fed by the body and blood of Christ) of a sort without sacrifice. The metaphor here is not sacrifice or covenant, but feeding. It is not clear in Justin exactly what the benefits of this feeding are. It seems to be enough that God has provided food for the faithful community in Jesus, that God does feed them in this meal, to give God thanks for doing this, and having been fed by God to turn their attentions to feeding others by collecting for the poor. It is not a participation which brings entrance into the divine life or the realm of heaven per se (as one reading of the Didache and the explicit readings of later Orthodox texts could have it), but participation in which something of the divine life feeds us in this life.

Eucharist then is like nursing on God. The bread and wine which have been blessed are God's full breasts. The milk, the body and blood of Jesus, comes through the elements by "a change," perhaps wrought by the Spirit. And we "latch on" through opening our mouths to praise God (saying the Amen to the president's prayer of thanksgiving) and to receive the blessed food and drink.¹²

Eucharist and Sacrifice in the Apostolic Tradition

The Apostolic Tradition, ascribed to Hippolytus, comes down to us in two major textual traditions: a Latin text and a Latin translation of an Ethiopic (Coptic) text. A few Greek fragments from other versions also remain. Generally it is thought that the Latin text is older, but that the Ethiopic text preserves some of the linguistic structures of the "original" Greek text that is lost.

There are both agreements and significant variations between these two texts on the question of how or whether the eucharist is

understood as a sacrifice. In the ordination prayer for the bishop preserved in a Greek text called *The Epitome*, both Latin and Greek versions ask that the bishop might be a blameless high priest before God, "serving you (*leitourgeo*) night and day, and unceasingly to appease your face ("will" in Greek)."¹³

The word "appease" here (*ilaskomai*) is specifically sacrificial language, and seems to be almost propitiatory. The references to the high priestly office of the bishop are consistent with this reading. However, it is not clear that the bishop is using the eucharist per se as this propitiation. It would seem that one valid reading of this is that the act of carrying out perpetual liturgy before God (serving God night and day) may be what is meant by "appeasing your face." The literary structure of the prayer would seem to support this. In this prayer, the main verbs are infinitives, and participial phrases are used to modify the infinitival ones. The carrying out of the daily liturgy and the acts of appeasing God are structured as participial phrases modifying the infinitival request that precedes this-- namely, "to exercise chief priesthood before you without reproach." The language about offerings which follows the participial instruction about appeasing God begins a new infinitival phrase: "to offer before you the [holy] gifts of your [holy] church." The Greek word for "offer" here is *prosphero*, a word that can refer to sacrificial, propitiatory offerings or to offerings of praise and thanksgiving. My argument from the literary structure of this prayer is that appeasing God and offering the gifts of the church (both eucharistic-- i.e. bread, wine, milk and honey-- and other gifts, such as cheese, olives, etc.) are understood as two different things, not necessarily continuous with each other in this text.

Where the waters get a little murkier is in the description of the effect of the sign of the cross, which comes as an excursus of sorts during the description of the eucharist after baptism (chapter 22, p. 137). Both the Latin and the Sahidic (an earlier version in the Coptic tradition) say the sign of the cross has its antitype in what Moses commanded to be done with the the paschal sheep, namely, anointing the posts and lintels of the houses with its blood, which is read here as a sign both of the cross and of faith in Jesus, the perfect sheep. The Latin text has it that this lamb is simply killed; the Latin translation of the Sahidic version has "immolabatur," sacrificed, probably as a burnt offering. This distinction corresponds to the two different passover traditions recorded in Exodus 12, the first of which is not properly sacrificial (a ceremonial meal where the killing of the lamb is performed by heads of households, not by priests, Exodus 12:1-18) the second of which is at least proto-sacrificial ("elders" are assigned the role of ritual killers, and the ceremony is called a sacrifice, Exodus 12:21-27).

Now to the eucharist proper. The Apostolic Tradition describes the eucharist in two different connections (at the ordination of a bishop and at the regular Sunday worship after baptism), reflecting, I think, also at least two different traditions (the one using bread and wine, the other using bread, wine, water, milk and honey in three chalices). While the actions of the bishop and presbyters at the ordination eucharist

are clearly actions of presenting an offering (*oblatio*, or *prosphora*), there is no hint here that these actions are understood as propiatory sacrifice. The anamnesis in the anaphora recalls creation, incarnation and the *suffering* (not the death per se) of Jesus as God's initiatives in the salvation of all creation. This salvation is pictured not as a moral victory nor as a forgiveness of sin, but as a decisive cosmic victory over the powers of death and hell. In the Ethiopic text the words are:

In order that he might fulfill your will and make for you a people, he extended his hands when he suffered, so that he might liberate the suffering ones who hoped in him: who was handed over by his own will to suffering, that he might destroy death, and break the chains of the devil, and trample hell, and direct the saints, and fix the boundary, and manifest resurrection.

Therefore, taking the bread, he gave thanks and said, Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you. [And over the chalice] This is my blood which is poured out for you. Whenever you do this, you are making my anamnesis (Ch. 4, pp. 48-50).

The epiclesis reinforces the non-sacrificial character of this feast. Again, from the Ethiopic text:¹⁴

We pray that you might send your Holy Spirit upon the offering of the holy church. Joining with us, give to all who receive this holiness a refilling of the Holy Spirit toward a confirmation of faith in truth so that they might glorify and praise you through your son, Jesus Christ, through whom to you be glory and honor in the holy church now and always and for ever. Amen (p. 52).

Participation in this feast is not participation in the life or benefits of a sacrificial victim, but participation in the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit which results in even greater thanksgiving. The first petition of the epiclesis is that the yoking of the Holy Spirit with the people in the eucharist would confirm their faith. Their faith is in the power of the suffering (not particularly the death) of Jesus to overcome the powers of death and hell on behalf of, with, and through them as "suffering ones" (*patientes*). Participation is the receiving of this power and the giving of thanks that this power has been set loose in the world by God's initiative and granted to their lives to set them free as well.

The other eucharistic rite in the Apostolic Tradition has a somewhat different feeling to it, perhaps owing to its baptismal context. The newly baptized drink from three chalices: a chalice of water, a chalice of milk and honey, and a chalice of wine. The order of the presentation of and the precise contents of these chalices differs in the different textual traditions. The Sahidic (older Coptic) tradition has wine (perhaps mixed

with water?) first, then milk, then honey. The Latin tradition has water first, then milk and honey, then wine. There are also different traditions about what the contents of these chalices signify. The Latin textual tradition reads "truly the water in oblation is an indicator of the bath that the inner person, which is animal¹⁵, might follow [in being washed?] just as the body." The Ethiopic says the water of oblation is "an indicator of the bread," perhaps a reference to the bread of life, although presumably the newly baptized would be getting bread in this feast as well (Ch. 21, p. 92). In both cases, however, the cleansing and life-giving function of baptism is here joined with the eucharist in this first chalice. This is the earliest liturgical text to make such a connection.

The chalice of milk and honey in both textual traditions points both to the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey for those who were delivered from the realm of Egypt, and to the flesh of Jesus, "through which, those who believe are nursed (*nutriuntur*) just like little children by the smoothness of his word, making sweet [all] bitterness of heart" (p. 92, Latin text). The nursing metaphor I suggested might be implicit in Justin is made explicit here. The purpose of the nursing is not cleansing, but feeding, calming, pacifying.

The administration of the chalice of wine is not given separate treatment in the Latin tradition. The same words are said over all three chalices: "In God the Father Almighty" (p. 92). The Sahidic version preserves a separate set of words over the chalice of wine: "This is the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." Trying to draw any real conclusions from these differences would be speculation at best.

There is no way to determine which if either of the two major eucharistic traditions recorded here would have been normally used in Sunday worship. Both of these traditions are relatively free of explicit connection between the eucharist and the forgiveness of sins, and in the one place in the baptismal tradition where there is some connection (the chalice of water in the Latin version) it seems to be overwhelmed by other images in the eucharist-- nursing, deliverance, and fullness of life ("the promised land"). Neither of these eucharistic traditions appears to be framing the eucharist as a sacrifice (*thusia*), certainly not as a propitiation (*ilasmos*), but more as an offering (*prophora*) of gifts, lives, and thanksgiving to God which is answered by God giving the Spirit and power in more abundance to the people who share in God's feast.

Sarapion: The Eucharist as Sacrifice

Lover of humanity and lover of the poor, you who are reconciled to all and draw all to yourself through the coming of your beloved Son. . .

Fill also this sacrifice with your power and your participation, for to you we have offered this living sacrifice, the unbloody offering. . . .

*To you we have offered this bread, the likeness (*omoïoma*) of the body of the only-begotten. This bread is the likeness of the holy body.*

For the Lord Jesus Christ. . . took bread, broke it, and gave it to his

disciples, saying: Take and eat, this is my body which is broken for you for the forgiveness of sins. . .

We implore you, through this sacrifice, God of truth: be reconciled to us all and be propitiated.

*God of truth, let your holy Word dwell upon this bread in order that the bread might become the body of the Word, and upon this cup in order that the cup may become the blood of Truth. . . .*¹⁶

What a difference a century and a half makes! The best current scholarship on the prayer book of Sarapion, bishop at Thmuis in Lower Egypt (Bp. 339-360), dates this compilation of prayers for the liturgy in Thmuis between 350 and 356.¹⁷ There is no question here that the eucharist is understood precisely (though not only) as a propitiatory sacrifice to God in order to have God become reconciled to the people and forgive their sins. Maxwell Johnson has done an excellent job of discerning the various strata of this eucharistic prayer on linguistic and theological grounds and has convincingly argued that this eucharistic prayer contains a composite of several different traditions that are somewhat in tension with each other. There is one tradition which sees the thanksgiving at eucharist as the sacrifice, another which sees the elements as likenesses of a sacrifice (the sacrifice made by Jesus), and a third in which the elements are concretely a propitiatory sacrifice.¹⁸ The greatest tension in this prayer is whether God is reconciled to the people or not. The opening of this prayer indicates God is by nature and the one who is reconciled and who has demonstrated this by having come to dwell among us in Jesus. By the end of the prayer, the bishop is begging God to be reconciled and propitiated through the offering of material sacrifices. What is going on here?

I have talked about both the inconsistencies in the prayer and the "sudden" appearance of a material, propitiatory sacrifice in the eucharist at some length with Paul Bradshaw, who supervised Maxwell Johnson's thesis, and together we've reached several conclusions. First, it's quite possible that the inconsistency we see in this text from our Western perspective would not have been experienced as inconsistency in an oriental setting. Second, Sarapion may not have been trying to be systematic nor even consistent-- perhaps he was just laying out traditions he either knew about or composed himself. Third, Sarapion may be a good compiler and pastor but not a very good theologian; his eucharistic theology could well be self-contradictory.

As for the matter of eucharist as propitiatory sacrifice, Maxwell Johnson believes this is the earliest liturgical tradition we have that makes the elements of the eucharist a propitiatory sacrifice, though it is not the first in which the elements are identified as the eucharistic sacrifice.¹⁹ Paul Bradshaw noted two possibilities for this phenomenon. The first possibility is the extra-ecclesial missionary concerns. The

fourth century, with the legalization of Christianity, had brought a flood of pagans to the doors of the churches. Pagan religions often understood sacrifice as propitiation, and the eucharist here might have been shifted in its meaning to meet the missional needs of its large new pagan audience.

The second possibility is the increasing value the church by and throughout the fourth century was placing on the Old Testament. Since the Old Testament was full of propitiatory sacrifice as a major model of atonement/salvation, it was likely to become a serious part of Christian reflection and liturgical practice in a time when the Old Testament was gaining in interest and authority, and, in fact, did. Every liturgical tradition I know of after Sarapion understands the eucharist as a propitiatory sacrifice, or at least as a participation in the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

That this is a specifically fourth century phenomenon, and not a clear reflection of earlier tradition, may be somewhat demonstrated at least in North Syria, home of both the Didascalia of the late third century (around 280) and the Apostolic Constitutions of the late fourth century (around 380), the first six books of which represent an expanded Greek recension of the Syriac Didascalia. Both texts are terribly concerned about drawing a clear distinction between the law that all Christians are expected to follow and the "second legislation" that applied only to the Jews and from which Christ's coming, life, death and resurrection has freed those who believe in him. Roughly speaking, the law all Christians are to follow is contained in the ten commandments. The rest of the legislation in the Old Testament, for the most part, is understood as "additions" placed there by God to curse Israel for its idolatry with the golden calf and murmurings against Moses.

In both the Didascalia and the Apostolic Constitutions, sacrifices for propitiation are specifically designated as belonging to the Second Legislation. But the editor/compiler of the Constitutions had a decidedly different view about the role of sacrifices in the Second Legislation than the Didascalists. In Didascalia, we read, in specific relation to sacrifices, "he destroyed the second legislation."²⁰ In the same place in the Apostolic Constitutions we read "He stopped them through first fulfilling them."²¹ Didascalia goes on to say that Jesus "did not offer sacrifices or burnt offerings or anything written in the second legislation."²² Apostolic Constitutions in the same place reads "for he was also circumcised, he was sprinkled for purification, he offered both sacrifices and whole burnt offerings, and of other customs he made use; and the law-giver became the fulfiller of the law, not destroying the physical law, but having stopped the additions which come through the second legislation, even if not all of those."²³ The editor of the Apostolic Constitutions has a fuller appreciation for the Old Testament and while rejecting animal sacrifices for propitiation (the final sacrifice was Jesus), does see Jesus as a propitiatory sacrifice, and the eucharist, by extension, as a participation in that propitiatory sacrifice. "Instead of sacrifices with blood, the reasonable and unbloody and mystical [sacrifice] which is carried

out for the death of the Lord by the grace of the symbols of the body and blood.²⁴ The Euclesis of the Clementine Liturgy (Book 8) in the

Apostolic Constitutions makes the propitiatory character of the eucharistic sacrifice clearest:

... and send down your Holy Spirit upon this sacrifice, the witness
of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, that he may show this bread to be
the body of your Christ and this cup to be the blood of your Christ; so
that the ones partaking of this might be confirmed toward piety,
might find remission of sins. . . .²⁵

It would be difficult to generalize from the evidence of these North Syrian documents of the third and fourth centuries to conclude that the process of the shift in eucharistic theology toward propitiatory sacrifice occurred in similar ways or for similar reasons throughout the fourth century Christian world. What this does show, I think, was that in this instance the shift was dramatic and that it was fairly rapid (within one century)-- more by revolution than by evolution²⁶.

It should not be all that surprising, then, that Sarapion, writing as a near contemporary of the Constitutionals, already has material propitiatory sacrifice as the model for his eucharistic theology.

What is important to note for my purposes, however, is not simply that the eucharist in Sarapion is pictured as a propitiatory material sacrifice, but that its benefits are more than the simple forgiveness of sins, though this is certainly primary.

*And make all who partake to receive a medicine of life for the healing
of every illness, and for empowerment of every advancement and virtue,
not for condemnation, God of truth, nor for testing nor for
reproach. . . Let angels be with them for overcoming the evil one and
for the establishing of the church. . . Give to this entire people
health, and wholeness, and cheerfulness and every advancement of soul
and body.*²⁷

In Sarapion, as in several other liturgical traditions that go back to the late fourth or fifth centuries²⁸, healing, empowerment, and victory over the devil are almost equally crucial motifs in eucharistic worship. He is not alone in ascribing healing powers to the eucharist; there appears to be some similar connection in the Apostolic Tradition as well, though almost none in the Apostolic Constitutions. Empowerment comes not simply from consuming this strengthening medicine, but also from the Holy Spirit who has earlier been asked to "fill this sacrifice." Victory over the devil is an old theme in eucharistic worship, though the petition for angels to help achieve this is not found in earlier texts.

What we see in Sarapion, then, is a whole range of eucharistic images set loose at once. Some of them, such as propitiation, are clearly connected with sacrifice. It is not clear how he understands healing to be connected to the propitiation, though there would certainly be plenty of biblical texts which would make this connection. Pneumatic empowerment and victory over the devil come straight from the older

epicleses and anamneses, such as in the Apostolic Tradition, where they are not connected with any sacrifice but a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

The effect of this piling up of images from all over the place is something like liturgical surround sound, or the polyphonic structure of early Renaissance choral music. Each melody line is in fact totally independent with a rhythm and color all its own. While the singers have to focus intently on their own lines, those who hear will enjoy the music best if they allow themselves not to pay more attention to one line than to any other. The beauty and harmony of the whole comes not from one part dominating and setting the patterns for the others, but from the experience of the independent melodies winding in, out, with, against, and around each other in delightful and surprising ways.

Eucharistic Sacrifice in the Anglican-Wesleyan Tradition

W. Jardine Grisbrooke has offered a very succinct classical Anglican understanding of eucharistic sacrifice, one which, I think, would be very consonant with Wesley's own views. *The sacrifice which we offer is the sacrifice of Christ-- his sacrificed and sacrificial Body and Blood. . . [If we try to offer ourselves or our gifts as a sacrifice] we are in danger of erecting another sacrifice than that of Christ, of denying the uniqueness and perfectness of his sacrifice, of transgressing that fundamental principle of the New Covenant that all other sacrifice is done away.*²⁹

Wesley and the Anglican tradition were adamant about insisting on "one oblation of himself, once offered. . . for the sins of the whole world." Wesley, more than the Anglican tradition, was concerned to make it clear that Jesus was the sacrifice, not our offerings and not the eucharistic elements themselves.³⁰ He also took pains to show, with the words if not the actual liturgical practice of the Book of Common Prayer, that the normative channel for receiving "the remission of sins and all other benefits of his passion" (which go unnamed in the prayerbook) was through regular (preferably at least weekly) participation in the eucharistic sacrifice.³¹

If Wesley's liturgy proper focuses almost solely on the remission of sins as the result of the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus, the hymns by the Wesleys are better at filling out the "other benefits of his passion." The life of God ("Jesus at whose supreme command"), mercy, strength, peace ("Author of our salvation"), presence, joy unspeakable, glory not to be expressed ("Jesus, we thus obey"), living faith, the Spirit's inward groaning, grace ("Come, thou everlasting Spirit"), removal of the power of sin, perfect love, the divine stamp ("Jesus, all-redeeming Lord"), removal of sins, end of griefs and troubles ("Lamb of God, whose dying love"), heaven begun below ("O what a taste is this")-- these are just a few of the images from hymns by Charles Wesley.³² Thus, while the eucharistic liturgy of the Prayer Book played an ostinato bass on propitiatory sacrifice, the hymns in Wesley's movement (as well as the Calvinist revivals generally) could sing an endless variety of descants

and melody lines above it.

This is an important insight. For while the eucharistic theology and philosophy of the Anglican liturgy really can be summed up in one paragraph (as Grisbrooke's quote above), in part because it takes a typically Western single focus and combines this with the Anglican ideal of the *via media* (or as a priest friend of mine in the Episcopal Church like to call it, the very least common denominator), the actual eucharistic worship cannot. It would be an internal mistake for the Anglican-Wesleyan tradition to argue that its "official" view in the Prayer Book or the Sunday Service was *the* Christian understanding of sacrifice. The most Wesley can say in honesty about the Anglican tradition is that it is sufficient. "I believe there is no LITURGY in the World, either in ancient or modern language, which breathes more of a solid, scriptural, rational Piety, than the COMMON PRAYER of the CHURCH of ENGLAND."³³ This is not to say that Wesley believed the Anglican liturgy said all there is to say, or that Wesley believed the eucharist was only about propitiatory sacrifice, but that what it says, it says well according to experience ("I believe," "breathes," "Piety"), tradition ("solid"), scripture ("scriptural") and reason ("rational").

What can we say then about the Anglican-Wesleyan tradition on eucharistic sacrifice? This tradition believes in it, but not only in it. In its purest form, it agrees with Grisbrooke and the Book of Common Prayer that the only sacrifice that counts is the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the whole world, and that only by commemorating and receiving the benefits of that sacrifice first are we enabled to "offer ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto" God. It believes in this image of propitiation preceding a sacrifice of thanksgiving from the people because it believes in God's prevenient grace, a grace that is able to be described in more images than propitiatory sacrifice, and some that even work against the idea of propitiatory sacrifice at a logical level but remain consistent with what really matters, God's sovereign, prevenient grace.

Sacrifice in the Eucharist in the "Restored" United Methodist

Liturgy, 1989

The first three services of Word and Table in the 1989 United Methodist Hymnal represent a serious departure from the older, Anglican tradition preserved for the most part (with the exception that the congregational prayer, "O Lord, our heavenly Father," is moved from after the communion to before it) in Word and Table IV. Word and Table III is closest in some ways to Justin Martyr's service in which the pastor would lead the prayers *ex tempore* and the people would respond with *Amens*. Structurally the eucharists in Word and Table I and II are identical; II is a bit briefer. Word and Table I represents the "fullest" restoration in line with earlier liturgical models, so my main focus will be

here. (See *United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 9).

Unlike the Anglican-Wesleyan service, with its preoccupation with remission of sins, and its perfunctory summing up of the rest of the eucharistic blessings as "all other benefits of his passion," this text focuses heavily on the older traditional themes, as found in the Apostolic Tradition and Sarapion, of deliverance from death and bondage. At the same time, it does not eliminate or leave out references to sin itself as something Christ has freed us from, as do the earliest traditions (Didache, Justin Martyr, Apostolic Tradition). Unlike those earliest traditions, as well, it follows the synoptic and Pauline tradition of connecting the words of institution over the cup to covenantal language and the forgiveness of sins (p. 10), so that the last supper is understood here as an integral part of the eucharist (as in most post-fourth century traditions I am aware of).

Despite the proddings of liturgical scholars like Grisbrooke, the offering of "ourselves in praise and thanksgiving, as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ's offering for us" precedes, or at least coincides with rather than follows, the actual reception of communion. This order has strong liturgical precedent in pre-fourth century texts, as we have seen. The wording here is curious, though. Are we really to understand that our praise and thanksgiving is a sacrifice (*thusia*), while Christ's death on the cross is (merely?) an offering (*prosphora*)? Are these two words being used in their technical sense here, or is this simply a case of elegant variation? If we are to assume the former, the picture of sacrifice is in line with the earliest Christian texts (Didache, Justin), and the picture of self-offering might be a reference to Jesus extending his arms on the cross in the Apostolic Tradition.

The effect of participation in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving in union with Christ's self-offering is asked for in the epiclesis, which, in line with both material and personal understandings of the eucharistic sacrifice, calls for the Spirit to fall both on the people and on "these gifts of bread and wine." The Spirit is further requested to be the agency of unity between individuals and Christ, within the church, and between churches in common mission. Perhaps we hear a distant echo of the Didache here with its focus on the unity of the church internally as a prerequisite for a holy sacrifice of praise to be presented, and externally as the result of the benefits of that sacrifice. The Spirit's work of creating unity is somehow connected to the unity between the elements, the body and blood of Christ, the people who receive them, and their incorporation as body of Christ for the world.

Overall, this "restored" liturgy has done a marvelous job of picking up on cues from many early and later liturgical traditions, and of presenting a balanced³⁴ understanding of sacrifice as praise, as people, as Christ, and as propitiation and of the eucharist as channel for forgiveness, liberation, and power from the Spirit to the church in the world. With this text, the United Methodist Church breaks free of its

liturgical hang-up with forgiveness of sins and propitiatory sacrifice as the necessary prerequisite to achieve this. Since the hymnal maintains the older Anglican text, with a few rubrics rearranged, the hymnal as a whole offers the option of providing a more complete picture of God's saving grace in the eucharist either through the addition of suggestive hymns (to the Anglican text) or through the liturgy itself (in the "restored" text).

Normative Suggestions for the Understanding of Sacrifice in the Eucharist

We have surveyed a lot of ground: Syria in the second, third and fourth centuries, Egypt in the fourth century, Rome in the third, England in the seventeenth and America in the eighteenth and twentieth. What kinds of norms for the understanding of sacrifice in the eucharist can I draw from this assortment of people, places, and churches? Let me suggest four.

1) *We need to listen to the early church's hesitancy about using sacrificial language in the eucharist and its silence, if not rejection of seeing Jesus primarily or at all as a sacrifice for sins.* It is a profound mistake, I think, to act as if we can take our cues in the church today only or primarily from either contemporary or earlier models that date back only to the fourth century. The earliest church worked hard to tell us something about their opinions on the matter, and though the font or the screen colors may be different, the central message is the same: a sacrificial understanding of either the death of Jesus or of the eucharist does not adequately convey the fulness of God's salvation nor the purposes of God's kingdom.

2) *If we are going to use sacrificial language, we ought to be clear about exactly what we mean by it.* Is sacrifice a sacrifice of praise (*leitourgia*), or an offering of money or elements in thanks to God for God's provision (*prospora*), or is it something we owe or otherwise have to hand over to God in order for God to be reconciled to us or bless us (*ilasmos*)? What sort of image of God are we endorsing depending on which of these images, or which combination of images, we choose? Personally, with the earlier traditions, I see little value in any notion of eucharistic sacrifice as propitiatory, even if it is, as in Sarapion, the Apostolic Constitutions, and Anglicanism, simply a participation in the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus. This still means that God had to be bought off-- that God was unable to reconcile Godself to us without someone getting killed in the process. That's not the picture of God I see Jesus presenting in the New Testament, nor does it fit with pre fourth century liturgical practice from what we can see.

3) *Sacrifice in the eucharist is to be understood primarily as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for God's deliverance and the building of God's kingdom and an offering of oneself in service to Christ, the church, and the world as a faithful citizen of God's kingdom.* I emphasize the

word primarily because, despite my problems with propitiatory models, they are in the tradition from at least the fourth century, and they are well-grounded in biblical precedent. I would argue that the better framework for understanding propitiatory sacrificial models would be a non-sacrificial reading of them.

4. The act of sacrifice (giving praise or offering a material offering or oneself) is not the only important part of the eucharistic celebration. It is just as important, and maybe more so, to be prepared to receive from God the gifts that God will lavish upon us through this means of grace.

One gets the idea from the Anglican tradition and the other sin-obsessed traditions before and after it that "this our bounden duty" is pretty burdensome, maybe even a real chore, and that when the day is done, we should not expect to enjoy it or God very much. The earlier traditions, even the propitiatory, material sacrificial Sarapion, are loaded with a sense of joy, and a picture of a God "flowing with milk and honey." I'm tired of bounden duties; pass me the sweetness of God. I don't think God is into begrudging me that. Neither did the earliest liturgical traditions.

ENDNOTES

1

The Book of Common Prayer (1662) (London: Boots Limited, (undated)), 141

143.

2

I have been reading in these sources for my current thesis work, as much as possible in the original languages, and the question here is collateral to the broader question I am exploring in my thesis-- what these liturgies (along with Didascalia and the Apostolic Constitutions) teach, in word and deed, about peace. My readings of these texts are mine, with the sage guidance of the Rev. Dr. Canon Paul Bradshaw at Notre Dame.

3

Admittedly, I could have chosen to include many more texts than just these four. One has to stop somewhere, though. I have chosen to stop with texts that can be clearly dated no later than the late fourth century. Within that frame, I could have also included a more thorough coverage of Didascalia and the Apostolic Constitutions that I do here (as an excursus on changes in sacrificial and propitiatory understandings between the third and fourth centuries in my section on Sarapion), but that would also have added immensely to the length of this paper. One might argue the Strasbourg Fragment (perhaps an early version of the Liturgy of St. Mark), Basil, Chrysostom, Addis and Mari, and Mark and James ought to be included here, but I have not found scholarly consensus on what fourth century versions of these texts would look like. Liturgical texts after this point multiply in both number and diversity. Let the graduate students have at it!

4

Willy Rordorf and André Tuilier, La Doctrine des Douze Apôtres: Didaché (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1978), 330. Translation mine from the Greek text. Hereafter this edition will be cited with chapter, verse, and page number in the text.

5

Arthur Vööbus, Liturgical Traditions in the Didache (Stockholm:ETSE, 1968), 108.

6

Ibid., 107.

7

This would appear to be at least a bit of a stretch in the technical sense. First, this notion of sharing of life force is not well-liked in the OT; usually it's identified with pagan belief and practice, what God's people are NOT supposed to follow but which apparently was followed in the sacrificial rites on the "high places." Not everything pagan is bad or wrong, however. Second, though, and more importantly, it would be hard to say just what the object of a sacrifice (from which one would draw life) would be in the Didache. It really appears NOT to be the body and blood of Christ, or even a representation of it. If it is God's kingdom in some way (which is the main object of thanksgiving), the only way I can see they are drawing additional life from it (since they are NOT killing it!) is by being thankful for it. Overall, then, I'm arguing that if there are sacrificial overtones here, they are overtones and no more. Sacrifice as propitiation which enables participation has been replaced by sacrifice as thanksgiving which may enhance participation.

8

André Wartelle, Saint Justin Apologies (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1987), 112. Translation mine here and throughout.

9

Ibid.

10

Ibid., 188. This is from chapter 66 of the Apology. Translation mine.

11

There are striking problems with an argument that Justin is relying here on biblical texts per se. First, he is not actually quoting any of them. Justin's text reads "Do this for my anamnesis. This is my body" and over the cup "This is my blood." The wording of the "This is" statements is closer to the variant reading the old RSV preserves for Luke's gospel, but that variant a) places the cup before the bread and b) does not include the words "Do this for my anamnesis." Further, where "Do this for my anamnesis" appears in the biblical texts (the other Lukan reading and I Corinthians 11) it always FOLLOWS, rather than precedes, the "this is" statements. Perhaps Justin is not trying to be precise relative to scripture, but trying to give a picture of actual eucharists he has seen which have anamnesis and identification with body and blood but lack covenantal references.

I think the latter may well be the case. And if so, what are those traditions, rather than the biblical ones, teaching? In short what is the "this" is "Do this" referring to? It appears from context to refer to the act of giving thanks to God over bread and breaking it.

Further, the description of the institution narrative here is a midrash on the supper as described in chapters 65 and 67, not a description of the supper proper (i.e. what the president actually says or does over the bread or wine), but a commentary on what it means and on its history. What the president actually says and does is described in chapters 65 and 67 as giving *ex tempore* thanksgiving over the all the elements in the name of the Trinity and "thanksgiving is made at length for having been counted worthy of these things from His hand" (p. 188, chapter 65). Anamnesis of the last supper does not appear to happen at the eucharist proper, but to be a matter of discussion over the table after communion and before the collection for the poor (ch. 67). (I've gone over this reading with Paul Bradshaw, and though he'd never seen it before, he thought it quite plausible and is checking to see if others in the field have given it much consideration).

Thanksgiving, then, or a "sacrifice of praise," is understood as the key to participation in God's act of feeding our flesh and blood with the flesh and blood of Christ.

¹² I'm pretty certain Justin would not have put it this way, but the imagery does seem to fit.

¹³ Bernard Botte, translator and editor, *La Tradition Apostolique: D'apres les Anciennes Versions* (Paris:Éditions du Cerf, 1984), chapter 3, p. 44. Hereafter chapter and page numbers will be given in the text of the paper.

¹⁴ There are no significant differences between these two texts either here or in the anaphora. I am using the Ethiopic here simply because its syntax is more Greek than the Latin text.

¹⁵ "Animal" here does not seem to refer to some lower nature, as would be commonly understood today, but to the soul or some living (animated) property within the person. The Ethiopic text has "in order that the interior man, who is made alive (animatus)."

¹⁶ Maxwell E. Johnson, "The Prayers of Sarapion of Thmuis" (University of Notre Dame: Ph.D. Thesis, 1992), 42-47. Translation mine from the Greek text Johnson provides.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 310-311. Johnson notes, correctly, that the notion of material sacrifice (in the form of offering, not in the form of propitiation) had already appeared in the late third century in the Didascalia (Book 6, chapter 22).

²⁰ Franciscus Xavier Funk, ed., *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* (Paderborn: In Libraria Ferdinandi Schoeningh, 1905), 356-7. This citation appears in Book 6, Chapter 22, verse 5.

²¹ Marcel Metzger, trans., ed., *Les Constitutions Apostoliques Volume 2* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985), 368.

²² Funk, *op. cit.*, 356.

²³ Metzger, *op. cit.*, 368.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 461. This appears in Book 6, chapter 23, verse 5.

²⁵ James Donaldson, ed. "Constitutions of the Holy Apostles" in A. Cleveland Cox, ed. *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries* (Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VII. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 199-200.

²⁶ It may be possible to narrow the possibilities for the dating of this change.

If we assume the Didascalist was carrying on a received and accepted non-propitiatory eucharistic theology in 280, and that the Constitutionalists are accurate in their claim to be presenting received tradition, even as they modify the tradition of the Didascalia, then their received tradition probably has to go back at least fifty years or so or their argument to represent tradition would be easily refuted by older people who remembered the previous tradition and when it changed. This would take the shift back to at least 330, or around the time of the licensing of Christianity by Constantine and the beginnings of a new flood of people into the church. Working from the other direction, it is hardly conceivable that if the Didascalist represented a dominant tradition, it would die out or be replaced within the same generation, or even the next one, considering how conservative in general the document tends to be. This would also put 330 as a possible date for the shift.

There is of course an entirely different possibility. Namely, that the Didascalist did NOT represent the dominant view or at least not the only view of eucharistic sacrifice in third century Antioch. Since we know there were 4 bishops (Arian, Semi-Arian, Orthodox (i.e. Chrysostom sympathizer) and Athanasian (i.e. Egyptian sympathizer) in Antioch around the time of the writing of the Apostolic Constitutions, we also know that Christianity is pluralistic there by the late fourth century. We also know that there is strong biblical tradition for both a propitiatory sacrificial understanding of the death of Jesus and a connection between covenant (sealed by sacrifice), forgiveness of sins, and the Lord's Supper/last supper in Paul and the synoptics. These new testament traditions would not die easily, either, one imagines. The question would be, given the traditions we have surveyed earlier, why more hadn't been done with the idea of the eucharist as propitiatory sacrifice by the fourth century. Where are the communities who pay close attention to the New Testament for their eucharistic practice? Perhaps the answer is the New Testament was not collected and canonized until 325. I wonder if the canonization of the New Testament had something to do with this shift!

²⁷ Johnson, *op. cit.*, 48-51.

²⁸ Notably St. Mark and St. James.

²⁹ W. Jardine Grisbrooke, "Oblation at the Eucharist," *Studia Liturgica* 3:239, 236-237.

³⁰ As I have pointed out in my previous paper, Wesley deletes the offertory from his Sunday Service.

³¹ One need only look at "The Duty of Constant Communion" and the Three General Rules to establish this.

³² *Hymn Book of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1902), pp. 171-178. (This was my grandmother's hymnal.)

³³ James F. White, ed. *John Wesley's Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America* (United Methodist Publishing House, 1984), A1 (unnumbered).

³⁴ At the same time, I'm not sure that balance per se, if it is interpreted as presenting almost a smorgasbord of "menu" options from earlier traditions (I'll have mine heavy on the Didache, with a side of Sarapion please. Oh, yes, and I'll have fries with that) is necessarily a good idea theologically. It seems to me that one of the better reasons for Constantine to insist the Christians develop a canon and pay a lot of attention to the books in it was that there was already so much theological and liturgical variety that Christians in the same cities sometimes literally could not recognize each other's worship as Christian. While I personally lament the propitiatory sacrificial emphases in the New Testament, and their rapid adoption into eucharistic liturgies after the canon was established, in some ways this may have been a kind of salvation for the possibilities for church unity and the development of coordinated mission.