

CHRISTOLOGY AND COMMUNION: WORSHIP AS DOCTRINAL CONFESSION IN THE SECOND CENTURY

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There is only one physician, who is both flesh and spirit, born and unborn, God in man, true life in death, both from Mary and from God, first subject to suffering and then beyond it, Jesus Christ our Lord (Ignatius of Antioch, *Ephesians* 7.2)

“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”¹ In these words the apostle Paul teaches that the Lord’s Supper is an act of communal announcement. A church’s continual, worthy partaking of the Supper heralds two aspects of the Christian Gospel. First, the gathered brothers and sisters in their taking of the bread and cup declare that the “the Lord died!” Second, as they faithfully and enduringly join each other for the sacred gathering, intending to gather again, and again and again for Communion, they declare that “the Lord will return!” Both the crucifixion and second advent of Jesus are announced in the repetitive celebration of the ordinance performed in a worthy manner. Jesus himself indicates an eschatological aspect to celebrations of the Lord’s Supper. While Paul teaches that the church persistently takes the cup until Christ’s second coming, Jesus places the cup aside until the establishment of the future Kingdom of God: “I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”² In taking the bread and cup, churches look *back* and remember the humble, meek, bloody, bodily death of Jesus with its New Covenant blessings of the forgiveness of sins and *forward* to his glorious advent with the blessings

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¹1 Cor 11:26; New International Version.

²Matt 26:29.

of resurrection from the grave and the promised consummation of other redemptive victories over sin and the devil. Not to be missed is Paul's indication that the purpose of the gathering of the Corinthian church was to share in a worthy manner the Lord's Supper.³ In whatever way contemporary Christian communities perceive of "worship gatherings," they may wish to consider that the ordinance of Communion was an essential feature. It was Jesus's ordained way of remembering him and, along with the teaching of the apostles, fellowship, and prayer, was one of the disciplines to which they were devoted.⁴

But my main interest in this short discussion on the Lord's Supper is not its frequency or merely its recollection of the Lord's death and the church's expectation of his return. Instead, I wish to draw our attention to some second-century Christian understandings of the Lord's Supper that view it, in part, as demonstrative of the church's faith in the Son of God's incarnation, or in John's language, the Word's becoming flesh, and his bodily resurrection.⁵ In an early Christian context in which some teachers and pastors denied the true enfleshment of God's preexistent Son, the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, functioned as a prime Christian ritual that recalled and confessed not only the death of Christ in which his flesh was torn and his blood poured out of him, but also his true existence as a flesh and blood human being in birth, death, resurrection, ascension, and return. We find that in the early Christian contemplation of the Lord's Supper at the weekly worship gathering around the Lord's Table where the faithful broke bread while the Good News of Jesus was celebrated. The sharing in the loaf and the fruit of the vine was a communal means through visible tangible elements of coming face to face with the memory of Jesus's past acts and the expectation of his future coming in his flesh, blood, and bone revealed by the prophets and apostles in Scripture.

Some of John's letters, written near the end of the first century, bear witness to a group of false teachers that were already countering the apostolic teaching regarding the real flesh and blood Christ. They insisted that Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh.⁶ Such antiapostolic instruction

³1 Cor 11:19; cf. Acts 20:7.

⁴Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24-25. Acts 2:42. In Paul's passage, "remembrance" is a term parallel with "proclaim." They are simultaneous, for gathered believers proclaim in their act of remembrance.

⁵John 1:14. For themes running from early Christianity to the beginning of the Reformation see D. Jeffrey Bingham, "Eucharist and Incarnation: The Second Century and Luther," in *Rediscovering the Eucharist*, ed. Roch Kereszty (New York: Paulist, 2003), 116-41. Elements of some of those themes are discussed here.

⁶1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 7.

continued into the second century. Although the apostles and evangelists had emphasized not only the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ from the beginning of their Gospel narratives, in their accounts of his passion, in his post-resurrection appearances and within their epistles, there persisted a dedicated campaign to declare only the deity and spiritual nature of the Christian Savior. Contrary to this campaign, John was adamant that the eternal Word became flesh, the apostles confirming his fleshness by sound, sight, and touch.⁷ Luke records that the risen Jesus had to take steps to calm and reassure the disciples that even after his resurrection he remained enfleshed and was not a ghost or some type of mere spirit. He proves he is flesh and bone, as we are told in 1 John, by their hearing his words, their seeing and touching his extremities, and their watching him eat:

Now while they were telling these things, Jesus Himself suddenly stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were looking at a spirit. And He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why are doubts arising in your hearts? *See my hands and my feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, because a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you plainly see that I have.*" And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. While they still could not believe it because of their joy and astonishment, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They served Him a piece of broiled fish; and He took it and ate it in front of them.⁸

Paul, on the other hand, testifies to his full, physical humanity by pointing to his Davidic human lineage, not unlike Matthew's Gospel.⁹ Paul links Christ's fleshly nature to the flesh of his father David and goes on to relate his deity to his divine Father on the authority of the Spirit's witness and his bodily resurrection. This Pauline construct of two lineages, one human and one divine, lays a foundation for the reality of Christ's flesh and deity. He is as much one as the other; he is as truly of David as the Father.

⁷John 1:14; 1 John 1:1.

⁸Luke 24:36-43. Italics mine.

⁹Matt 1:1-17.

From Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God. This gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son who was a descendant of David with reference to the *flesh*, who was appointed the Son-of-God-in-power according to the Holy Spirit by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.¹⁰

Yet, despite such a consistent, diverse apostolic testimony, rejections of Jesus Christ's flesh and blood nature continued, or at least their teachings were perceived by others as denials of his having come in the flesh. The orthodox theologians of the second century corrected such denials.

I. THE SECOND CENTURY AND THE FLESH AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

1. *Ignatius of Antioch*. For example, in the early second century, Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch (ca. 110), speaks of "certain people [who] ignorantly deny him," and consequently, "have been denied by him."¹¹ Such people, he goes on to say, must relish death rather than the truth. For in denying him, by denying "that he was clothed in flesh," they must be advocating for death rather than bodily resurrection, for their refusal to confess his incarnation, leave them "clothed in a corpse" with no hope of rising from their graves. Such unbelievers are best left unnamed and forgotten, he says, because in denying Christ's enfleshment, they deny his suffering in flesh and blood, which is the basis for the believer's resurrection in flesh and blood.

In answer to such people, Ignatius speaks to the real flesh of Christ, especially his death, in an attempt to accomplish his doctrinal responsibilities as bishop. It is Jesus's crucifixion and suffering in the flesh in real space and time under Pontius Pilate and Herod that renders life.¹² Yet, consistent with Paul's mention of his appearances to more than five hundred people including the disciples, and the Gospel accounts of his appearances, he recognizes that the biblical text has just as keen an interest in the flesh of Jesus after he came forth from the grave. Luke's post-resurrection account,

¹⁰Rom 1:1-4. Italics mine. Cf. Rom 9:5.

¹¹Smyrnaeans 5.1-3; trans. Michael W. Holmes, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. after the earlier work of J. R. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 253.

¹²*Smyrnaeans* 1.2.

mentioned above, is summarized by Ignatius to demonstrate that his union with flesh continued after he was raised:

For I know and believe that *he was in the flesh* even after the resurrection; and when he came to Peter and those with him, he said to them: "Take hold of me; handle me and see that I am not a disembodied demon." And immediately they touched him and believed, *being closely united with his flesh and blood*. For this reason, they too despised death; indeed, they proved to be greater than death. And after his resurrection he ate and drank with them *like one who is composed of flesh*, although spiritually he was united with the Father.¹³

So important to Ignatius and his communities in Asia Minor is the doctrine of Jesus's true flesh and blood during death and after resurrection, that in one of his letters he makes the teaching part of his closing. He signs off "in the name of Jesus Christ and *in his flesh and blood*, his suffering and resurrection (which was both physical and spiritual), in unity with God and with you."¹⁴

2. *Irenaeus of Lyons*. Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons (ca. 180), also had a variety of theological adversaries all of whom he represents as denying that the Word of God (the eternal Son of God) became flesh. His opponents included the followers of Valentinus, the Valentinians, especially the descendants of Ptolemy, the Ptolemaeans, and a variety of "gnostics." He emphasizes that they had many ways to account for a human Jesus, but none of them embraced John's teaching that the Word became incarnate.¹⁵ In a manner very similar to Ignatius, we see Irenaeus linking the possibility and promise of the resurrection of human beings in the flesh to the Word of God becoming flesh. Although in his pre-incarnate ministry to humanity Christ was present with his creation in one fashion, he had not yet joined his divine nature to human nature. But when he did, by his suffering, resurrection, and glorious return in the flesh, he will raise the dead, reveal salvation, and exercise judgment. To this point he says of his adversaries that in their Christology they were:

¹³*Smyrnaeans* 3.1-3; trans. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 251. Italics mine.

¹⁴*Smyrnaeans* 12.2; trans. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 261. Italics mine.

¹⁵*Against Heresies* 3.11.3.

... ignorant that His only-begotten Word, who is always present with the human race, united to and mingled with His own creation, according to the Father's pleasure, and *who became flesh*, is Himself Jesus Christ our Lord, who did also suffer for us, and rose again on our behalf, and who will come again in the glory of His Father, *to raise up all flesh*, and for the manifestation of salvation, and to apply the rule of just judgment to all who were made by Him.¹⁶

In Irenaeus's mind, to significant degree, the gospel is the good news of Christ's fleshly past and future, for by being flesh he redeemed flesh, by being human, visible, and corporeal, he redeemed visible, corporeal humanity.¹⁷

Citing four words of the evangelist John, briefly referenced above, that Irenaeus believes apply to the opponents of his own day and clearly set forth the church's faith, he sternly notes that John warned the church to avoid the false teachers who deny the Word's visible, corporeal advents attested to by the apostle: (1) "I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist;" and (2) "many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world;" (3) "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us;" and (4) "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."¹⁸ By knitting these Johannine passages together, Irenaeus forms a testimony to the present-day threat of false teachers who deny the fleshly, corporeal coming of the Word of God, lays an apostolic foundation for the church's incarnational faith, and declares that, to believe in Jesus Christ means, in specific, to believe in one Jesus Christ, the Word, who came, died, and will return in flesh. He puts it this way: "[Since we know] Jesus Christ to be one and the same,

¹⁶ *Against Heresies* 3.16.6; trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* [ANF 1]: *The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 442.

¹⁷ See *Against Heresies* 3.16.6.

¹⁸ *Against Heresies* 3.16.8: 2 John 1:7; 1 John 4:1-3; John 1:14; 1 John 5:1.

to whom the gates of heaven were opened, *because of His taking upon him flesh: who shall also come in the same flesh in which He suffered, revealing the glory of the Father.*¹⁹

Some of Irenaeus's adversaries teach that Christ only appeared as, or seemed to be, flesh, but he was not truly flesh. In Irenaeus's faith, a Savior with real flesh was required to save humanity. True salvation necessitated a true incarnation, so the incarnate work of God had to be true, not merely appearance. He calls in the ancient Moses to testify as to the true works of God, which seals the claim that what Christ appears to be, he is in truth:

Thus, then, was the Word of God made human, as also Moses says: "God, true are his works." But if, not having been made flesh, he did appear as if flesh, his work was not a true one. But what he did appear, that he also was: God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man; and therefore, his works are true.²⁰

But it is not as one who is merely human that Jesus Christ brings salvation. No, Irenaeus proceeds to prove through the prophets Isaiah, Micah, Joel, Amos, and Habakkuk, that he is also the Lord, the Word, the Son of God, and God, yet not only divine. He redeems not only as God; he delivers not merely as human. The Lord himself in his first advent came down as Savior in Bethlehem where he joined humanity to his deity and with feet of flesh walked and preached among the people.²¹ The Scriptures are replete with references to Messiah's human features and his divine properties. One should not be distracted by biblical material that points to one or the other nature, even when it does so in isolation from mention of attributes associated with the opposite nature. "We should not understand that he is a mere man only, nor, on the other hand . . . should we suspect him to be God without flesh."²²

As we saw Irenaeus knit several texts written by John together in witness to the Word's incarnation, he does the same thing with three passages from Paul to underscore that not only did the Word become flesh, but

¹⁹*Against Heresies* 3.16.8; trans. Roberts and Rambaut, ANF 1:443.

²⁰*Against Heresies* 3.18.7; trans. Roberts and Rambaut, ANF 1:448, slightly altered. The Moses quote is from Deut 32:4.

²¹*Against Heresies* 3.20.4. Isa 63:9; 33:20; Micah 7:9; Joel 3:16; Amos 1:2; Hab 3:3, 5.

²²*Against Heresies* 3.21.4; trans. Roberts and Rambaut, ANF 1:452, slightly altered.

Mary, his mother, in David's line, with a human ancestry going all the way back to Adam, was the source of that flesh. Irenaeus has in mind the analogy between Adam and Christ that aligns their common share in human nature in Romans 5 read in light of Genesis 2:7. The analogy lacks legitimacy if both are not truly human and if Christ was not really incarnated in the image and likeness of the first of the human species taken from the earth and formed by God.

Irenaeus is also mindful of two other relevant verses: one that links Christ to Mary and the other that connects him to David. First, he cites part of Galatians 4:4: "God sent his Son, *born of a woman*" and then, second, he quotes Romans 1:3-4: "concerning his Son, who was born of a descendant of David *according to the flesh*, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord." These Pauline words support his claim against his opponents. "Those, therefore, who allege that He took nothing from the Virgin do greatly err, [since,] in order that they may cast away [Christ's] *inheritance of the flesh*, they also reject the analogy."²³

Ultimately, in the theological schema of Irenaeus, the incarnation is necessary to the salvation of humanity. And in so many ways it finds its center in the manner in which the evangelist, Mark, begins his Gospel: the prophetic announcement of the messenger, John the Baptist. This announcement is also present in Matthew and Luke. Luke 3:4-6, however, refers to Isaiah 40:3-5, while Mark 1:3 and Matthew 3:3 have only Isaiah 40:3. Irenaeus cites Luke's version:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight the paths of our God. Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be brought low: and all the crooked ways shall become straight, and the rough places will become plains. And the glory of the Lord will appear, *and all flesh* will see the salvation of God: for the Lord has spoken."

Note that in Isaiah 40:5, "all flesh will see" the Lord and the salvation he brings. For Irenaeus, this is crucial for one only sees visible things, corporeal things, and in the case of humans, those who have flesh. As having flesh, ourselves, we know with our senses those things that are

²³*Against Heresies* 3.22.1; trans. Roberts and Rambaut, ANF 1:454, slightly altered.

sensible and, here, the prophet Isaiah emphasizes the sense of sight. The Word, in his incarnation, condescends to our bodily limitations, taking on our flesh, thereby providing to those with eyes the gift of knowing by sight the one who both judges and glorifies them. Irenaeus puts it this way:

There is therefore one and the same God, the Father of our Lord, who also promised, through the prophets, that he would send his forerunner; and his salvation—that is, his Word—he caused to be *made visible to all flesh*, [the Word] himself being made incarnate, that in all things their king might become manifest. For it is necessary that those who are judged do see the judge and know him from whom they receive judgment; and it is also proper, that those who follow on to glory should know Him who bestows upon them the gift of glory.²⁴

II. COMMUNION AND CHRISTOLOGY

1. *Ignatius of Antioch*. We return now to Ignatius as we consider his thought on the relation of Christ to the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, the meal of thanksgiving. In his letter to the Smyrnaeans his Christological discussion turns particularly to the Eucharist.²⁵ He argues that from cradle to post-resurrection meal, Christ was flesh and blood. Those who deny this are condemned. He reminds the reader that such persons are contrary to the mind of God, they think in an erroneous, blasphemous manner.²⁶ Also, he stresses the foundational importance of the flesh of Christ: it was in the incarnate revelation of Christ that the "grace of Jesus Christ" came to humanity. He then describes those who deny that such grace comes by Christ's flesh. The Christological denial of these false teachers leads them to abstain from "the Eucharist and prayer because they do not acknowledge that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ who suffered for our sins and who the Father by his goodness raised up."²⁷ Their doctrine of Christ leads them to abstain from Christian devotion. In avoiding the communal meal that included the Eucharist, they denied Christ's real fleshly presence in passion and post-resurrection meals. For the bishop

²⁴*Against Heresies* 3.9.1; trans. Roberts and Rambaut, ANF 1:422, slightly altered.

²⁵Cf. Bingham, "Eucharist and Incarnation," 118.

²⁶*Smyrnaeans* 6.2.

²⁷*Smyrnaeans* 7.1.

of Antioch, there is a pattern of Christ's presence in flesh from death to post-resurrection to Eucharist. Each is a pivotal moment in the revelatory history of the incarnate presence of Christ.

Ignatius obviously holds to a realistic view of the Lord's Supper. For him, the bread and cup *are* the body and blood of Christ. His opponents abstain because they disagree with both his Christology and the way it informs the worship of his communities. If they do not believe in the flesh and blood of Jesus, they certainly cannot partake in it at the Lord's Table. This point seems valid even for those with a memorial view. One must believe in the blessings brought uniquely through the flesh and blood of Christ in order to remember and announce with integrity the incarnate Christ's death symbolized by the bread and cup. If one does not confess that salvation was accomplished only by the Word become flesh, it is pointless and meaningless to remember something one does not believe was true.

In the conviction of Ignatius, the Eucharist entails a corollary of ethics. Paul's complaint about the Corinthians and their behavior at the Supper was that they refused to be concerned for their fellow worshipping Christians. They were not waiting for all to arrive before they feasted in a selfish, unworthy manner. Therefore, Paul instructs them to examine themselves before they take the bread and cup. In context, this means they are to examine themselves to ensure they have not been selfish and thoughtless toward their fellow believers. Paul's concern is communal care.

Ignatius might well have been meditating on this teaching as he developed his next point about the Eucharist. The celebration of the Eucharist as a communal confession of the *real flesh* of Christ draws his blueprint for the meaning of Christian love. The faith in Christ's real flesh expressed at the table is to have consequence in the community's *concrete acts of love* toward the oppressed. Belief in actual Christological corporeality should produce sensible, tangible acts of compassion and mercy.²⁸ Error in Christological doctrine breeds failure in humanitarian care; heresy yields hatred. It is against this background that he indicts the false teachers who do not believe in the flesh and blood of Christ:

Now note well those who hold heretical opinions about the grace of Jesus Christ that came to us; note how contrary they are to the mind of God. They have no concern for love, none for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the

²⁸Cf. Bingham, "Eucharist and Incarnation," 119.

oppressed, none for the prisoner or the one released, none for the hungry or thirsty. They abstain from Eucharist and prayer because *they refuse to acknowledge that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which the Father by his goodness raised up.*²⁹

William Schoedel points out that Ignatius manifests two central ways in which the Supper was related to communal concerns that the false teachers eluded by not attending the meetings. First, it was a gathering of the community at which each ideally showed care and compassion for the other. By avoiding the Supper, a love-feast, their opportunity and responsibility to minister and demonstrate love for each other was dodged. Second, Ignatius is teaching that the Eucharist anticipates tangible acts of love founded upon the example of the concreteness which the Lord's flesh signified. Caring for the oppressed, the cold, the hungry, the sick, the thirsty and the impoverished requires palpable, material, sensible care in continuity with the nature of Christ's real, incarnate flesh. Failure to embrace the revelation of the incarnate Lord leads to failure in love. But by loving in tangible ways, the community continues to reveal Christ in his flesh. Communal love must attend the Eucharist, as Paul taught the Corinthians, in order for it to be a worthy act of worship. Furthermore, the Supper teaches, along with its announcement of the Lord's death, that the members of his body are to imitate him with acts of love and mercy that minister emotionally and bodily, in attendance to the needs of the whole person.³⁰

Ignatius's perspective on the bread and wine being Christ's body and blood, of course, differs from the Baptist memorial view that the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* summarizes in this manner: "The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming."³¹ Yet, in Ignatius's view there is also a symbolism, or spiritualizing.³² For example, we find him using the flesh and blood of Christ as representative of the virtues of

²⁹*Smyrnaeans* 6.2; trans. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 253-55. Italics mine.

³⁰1 Corinthians 11:17-33; William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 21. Cf. Bingham, "Eucharist and Incarnation," 119.

³¹Article 7: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

³²Cf. Bingham, "Eucharist and Incarnation," 120.

faith and love.³³ From this we are to understand that the Eucharist is the communal event where the members proclaim their faith in Christ and practice their love for each other. His words are pastoral as they are meant to keep his flock from being entwined in the devil's snare:

You, therefore, must arm yourselves with gentleness and regain your strength in faith (which is the flesh of the Lord) and in love (which is the blood of Jesus Christ). Let none of you hold a grudge against his neighbor. Do not give any opportunity to the pagans, lest the godly majority be blasphemed on account of a few foolish people. For "woe to the one through whose folly my name is blasphemed among any."³⁴

The Eucharist stands as the witness to the truth announced by Jesus concerning his heavenly origin and fleshly state. Even in its symbolism, it produces life, for faith and love are life's beginning and end, together in mature unity they model godliness, for the one who believes steadfastly and the one who loves truly, does not sin or hate.³⁵ The Lord's Supper is a setting in which worshipers in gathered fellowship together contemplatively consider the Christology and the requisite Christian virtues that are to attend the bread and cup. Far from modern, contemporary individualism, the ancient perspective of Ignatius was that worship, engaged in by sharing the same elements of the Supper around one altar, was an event of communal participation in unity. This can be seen in his emphasis on the one flesh of Christ, the one body of Christ, the one loaf, and the one cup all shared from the one altar in the Eucharist. There is not a flesh of Christ for one believer and another flesh of Christ for another. There is not a blood of Christ for Ignatius and another blood for you. In Christ there is one flesh and one blood. Believers share together, not separately, in the one Christ.

One can hear in Ignatius's teaching echoes of Paul's own teaching: "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

³³ *Romans* 7.3.

³⁴ *Trallians* 8.1; trans. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 221. Cf. Ignatius, *Romans* 7.3.

³⁵ *Ephesians* 14.1.

the one bread.”³⁶ Consequently, the supper must be done with words and actions that highlight the oneness of the church in Christ. Such a Lord’s Supper, also, for Ignatius, takes place within a church that is connected in unity with other churches joined doctrinally in the apostolic teaching guarded by the regional and local ecclesiological leaders.³⁷ In his *Epistle to the Philadelphians*, he says,

Take care, therefore, to participate in one Eucharist (for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup that leads to unity through his blood; there is one altar, just as there is one bishop, together with the council of presbyters and the deacons, my fellow servants), in order that whatever you do, you do in accordance with God.³⁸

Participation in the Eucharist proclaims a church’s unified faith in the one flesh and blood of Christ. But the Lord’s Supper for Ignatius, as with Paul, involves more than simply eating bread and drinking from the cup. Love for each other, tangible, sincere, active compassion for the wholistic needs of one other, consistent with the real corporeality of the incarnate Christ’s flesh, must be the characteristic virtue of the community. Between Christ’s bodily resurrection and the flesh and bone resurrection of Christ’s followers at his coming, the Lord’s Supper announces the death of Christ and unifies in faith and love those who worthily eat and drink.

2. *Irenaeus of Lyons*. Irenaeus, about seventy years after Ignatius, writing in modern day France, takes issue with his understanding of his own theological adversaries, the Valentinians. In part he focuses on a theological point mentioned in our last words on Ignatius above: “the flesh and bone resurrection of Christ’s followers at his coming.” For Irenaeus, who also held to a realistic view, the Lord’s Supper signals not only Jesus’s incarnate flesh, but the salvation of the flesh of Christian believers. God’s ministry of redemption as loving creator of both the immaterial and material includes both body and soul, flesh and spirit. He uses the term “universal” to mean “total, entire” in order to teach that both corporeal and incorporeal things are included in the ultimate salvific work through Christ. Also, there is

³⁶1 Cor 10:16-17.

³⁷Cf. Bingham, “Eucharist and Incarnation,” 120-21.

³⁸*Philadelphians* 4.

a “universal (or general) resurrection” of all the dead in both body and soul.³⁹ God values humans as embodied souls and includes both created aspects in salvation as the Spirit imparts incorruptibility to the flesh.⁴⁰ With this in mind, in *Against Heresies* 5.2.2, Irenaeus rebukes the heretics who “deny the salvation of the flesh.”

He goes on to argue that there is no redemption through Christ’s blood and no meaning in the church’s communion with his blood and body through the wine and bread if in the end the flesh is not saved in resurrection.⁴¹ For him, the Eucharist which is founded upon the Lord’s taking and shedding blood promises the salvation of the flesh. The Eucharist has meaning only because God created and values not only spirit, but also flesh and blood, both in the incarnate Christ and in human believers. His world, his Son’s incarnation and death, his people, and the Lord’s Supper are all corporeal, and therefore consummative redemption includes the corporeal, not merely the spiritual. Here are Ignatius’s own words that allude to 1 Corinthians 10:16:

But if the flesh does not attain salvation, then neither did the Lord redeem us with his blood, nor is the cup of the Eucharist the communion of his blood, nor the bread which we break the communion of his body.⁴²

The allusion to 1 Corinthians 10:16 at the end of this passage, which we saw was informing Ignatius’s thought as well, is important. Earlier in *Against Heresies* 3.18.2 he had cited it in support of his point that the Son of God had become truly human. Against the heretics who deny Christ’s participation or communion with true blood Irenaeus cites Paul who speaks of the church’s participation in the *blood of Christ*. The death of Christ, the pouring forth of his blood, in which the church partakes at the Eucharist verifies the incarnation of the Word of God. Like Ignatius, the Eucharist points to both the incarnation and the death of Christ.

Irenaeus polemicizes not only against the Valentinians. Marcion, who

³⁹*Against Heresies* 5.31.1. See Dan 12:2; John 5:28-29.

⁴⁰*Against Heresies* 5.10.1; 13.2. Antonio Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo: Commentario al Libro V del “Adversus haereses”*, 3 vols. (Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1985–88), 1:130–31; Ysabell de Andia, *Homo Vivens* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1986), 243. Cf., too, Bingham, “Eucharist and Incarnation,” 127.

⁴¹Cf. on the development of this point, Bingham, “Eucharist and Incarnation,” 126-30.

⁴²*Against Heresies* 5.2.2; trans. Roberts and Rambaut, ANF 1:528, slightly altered. Cf. 1 Cor. 10:16.

sets forth two different gods, one of the Old Testament and its creation and the other of Christ and the heavenly kingdom, is also a concern for Irenaeus. Marcion, too, denies the real incarnation of Christ. In a passage that takes the reader back to Christ's own ordination of the Lord's Supper, where he invites the disciples to take, eat and drink in remembrance of him after giving thanks, Irenaeus counters the positions of Marcion and the Marcionites:

Moreover, how could the Lord, with any justice, if he belonged to a Father [other than the Creator], have acknowledged the bread to be his body, while he took it from that creation to which we belong, and affirmed the cup to be his blood? And why did he acknowledge himself to be the Son of Man, if he had not gone through a birth which belongs to a human being? How, too, could he forgive us those sins for which we are answerable to our Maker and God? And how, again, if he was not flesh, but was a human merely in appearance, could he have been crucified, and how could blood and water have poured forth from his pierced side? And what body, moreover, did those who buried him consign to the tomb? And what was that body that rose again from the dead?⁴³

With these rhetorical questions, Irenaeus joins the Eucharist to the issues of Christ's human birth, the identity of God, not only as Christ's Father, but also as Creator, and the reality of Christ's flesh, blood, death, burial, and resurrection. Irenaeus understands the Lord's words that ordain the Supper and unite the bread and wine with his body and blood, as disallowing the denial of Christ's flesh and a belief in two gods. The Father of Christ, the Son of Man, is the Creator who made the material world, including the flesh and blood of Christ which underwent birth, death, burial and resurrection. In the Lord's words Irenaeus sees the Christian doctrine of the one God, who is both Father of Christ and Creator; the Christian doctrine of Christ's mortal flesh and blood; and the Christian doctrine of the created, physical world, good and godly. He takes us from the Eucharist's implications for Christ's incarnation to its implications for theology and cosmology. Incarnation is now seen as a part of the

⁴³*Against Heresies* 4.33.2; trans. Roberts and Rambaut, ANF 1:507, slightly altered.

redemptive sequence beginning at God's initial communion with the world at Creation. The Eucharist reveals more than just the unity of the Word of God with humanity. It also reveals the enduring compatibility of the Father with the human creature and the material world. God the Father created human flesh and blood, sent his Son to become it, provided salvation through it in all of Jesus's incarnate acts from birth through second advent, and will through those acts transfers to us forgiveness of sin, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and our own confident expectation of bodily, fleshly resurrection at his glorious coming.⁴⁴

III. CONCLUSION

Joining the early church in its celebration and fellowship around the bread and cup by which the flesh and blood of Christ is recalled requires some basic doctrinal understandings. First, God values flesh and blood, and accomplishes miraculous blessings through them. Of course, he values, as its creator, the immaterial human spirit/soul as well. He is the Creator of both human aspects, material and immaterial, visible and invisible, and saves both aspects of the whole human. At the creation human flesh and bone were celebrated by Adam in his first words to Eve, for they shared them in common as the blessed creations of God.⁴⁵ And, we must not forget that when our adoption as God's children is consummated at Christ's coming our flesh will be raised, our bodies will be redeemed, and Christ will transform our mortal bodies making them like his resurrected, glorified body.⁴⁶ The *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* puts it this way: "The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord."⁴⁷

Second, we must distinguish two of the biblical meanings of the term "flesh" in Paul's writings: (1) Paul uses "flesh" in a very negative sense to signify the rebellious, ungodly, selfish deeds and vices of our fallen human nature that struggle against the godly, obedient, other-centered virtues of the indwelling Holy Spirit, his gifts, and his fruit; and (2) he uses the same word "flesh" in a neutral sense to signify human nature, human beings, and the material human body.⁴⁸ Jesus, as the incarnate Word of God, became a very real human being, a true human male person, but he did

⁴⁴Cf. Bingham, "Eucharist and Incarnation," 124-25.

⁴⁵Gen 2:23.

⁴⁶Rom 8:11, 23; 1 Cor 15:35-41; Phil 3:21; 1 John 3:2-3.

⁴⁷Article 10: Last Things.

⁴⁸E.g., Gal 5:16-25; Rom 7:5-6; 8:5-11; Rom 3:20; Gal 1:16; 2:16; 1 Cor 1:29; 15:35-41; Eph 6:12.

not possess a rebellious “flesh” in conflict with the Spirit and full of vice.

The early Christians entrust to us this pattern. When a believing community gathers together to worship, includes the Lord’s Supper as an essential component of their concept and practice of worship, and partakes of the Supper in a worthy manner that demonstrates love and concern for other worshipers the whole gathered body of Christ is edified in two ways. First, the gathered body, by compassionately attending to the needs of each other, finds blessing and a holy basis from which to partake worthily in the communion of the Lord’s Table. Second, as it shares together, each believer passing to and receiving the bread and cup from one another, the gathered, worshiping community remembers the death of the incarnate Word of God and hopes for his second coming in glorified flesh. Moreover, by extension, it recalls as well the Word’s incarnate ministry to the world in his birth, his resurrection, and his ascension to the Father’s right hand. Perhaps, too, we might think, that a fitting end to each such gathering would be to speak together the words of the Apostle John, the fulfillment of which would end the appointed season of the Supper: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”