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“Joining the End to the Beginning”
Divine Providence and the Interpretation of Scripture in the Teaching
of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons

A Dissertation Submitted to
the School of Post-Graduate Studies
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Theology and Religion

By

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Durham, United Kingdom

2009

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Library Abstract
James G. Bushur

**“Joining the End to the Beginning”
Divine Providence and the Interpretation of Scripture in the Teaching
of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons**

In this dissertation, the author argues that Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons in the second century, reads the scriptures as the living proclamation of the Creator by which he creates and forms human flesh and blood. The scriptural narrative originates in God’s creation of all things *ex nihilo* and traces the movement of humanity toward its eschatological perfection in the incarnate, crucified, and risen Christ. Thus, the author argues that, for Irenaeus, the scriptures are as anthropological as they are theological. The biblical narrative possesses a continuity that is rooted in the substance of the human body. The very body that was created out of the dust in Adam, preserved from the flood in Noah, catechized by the law in Abraham and Moses, and became accustomed to the Spirit in the prophets is assumed by the Son of God from the Virgin Mary, crucified on the tree of the cross, and raised from the grave. The author maintains that Irenaeus views the scriptures as a single narrative describing precisely that flesh and blood given at the eucharistic altar in the fellowship of the church. Irenaeus reads the scriptures, not only in an intimate relationship with the creation of all things in the beginning and their recapitulation in Christ, but also in accord with an ecclesial dimension. The biblical narrative describes the identity of the baptized, who are joined to the body of Jesus through the baptismal and eucharistic life of the church. From this perspective, the author insists that the meaning of the scriptures, for the second century bishop, is not merely rational, moral or mystical, but truly ontological.

Candidate's Declaration:

No part of this thesis has previously been submitted by me for a degree in this or in any other University. Material from the work of others has been acknowledged and quotations and paraphrases suitably indicated.

Statement of Copyright:

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published in any format, including electronic and the internet, without the author's prior written consent. All information derived from this thesis must be acknowledged appropriately.

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The completion of this thesis calls for the acknowledgement of so many who have had a hand in supporting, encouraging, and influencing me in this endeavor. Family, friends, teachers, students, pastors, and parishioners have provided a community in which I have had the great privilege of living, learning, teaching, preaching, serving and sharing. While the content of this thesis is my own, the life of this community is a presence that permeates the pages. Thus, for all those who have allowed me to live and move and have my being in their company, I offer my sincere gratitude.

Within this community, there are a number of individuals that must be acknowledged by name. First, I want to thank my wife, Lori, and our three beautiful children, Lydia, Jacob, and Luke. Their love was the most powerful motivation encouraging the completion of this thesis and the best refuge making the burden light and the yoke easy. In addition, I must thank our extended family--especially my mother, Mary--whose financial and moral support allowed me to undertake this work. I also want to express my genuine gratitude to the community of Concordia Theological Seminary of Fort Wayne, Indiana for its willingness to aid the completion of this thesis in countless ways—President Dean Wenthe for his enthusiastic support, Dean Larry Rast for allowing me the time to write, all my colleagues whose willingness to engage in theological conversation has greatly shaped my thinking, and the library staff for their tireless efforts. I must also recognize Trinity Lutheran Church of Goodland, Indiana and Immanuel Lutheran Church of Decatur, Indiana where it was my privilege to serve as pastor for twelve years (1994-2006). The practical challenges of the pastoral ministry in these two congregations had a profound impact on my reading of the Christian tradition and allowed me to resonate with the pastoral perspective so evident in the writings of the ancient church fathers. Finally, I express sincere thanks to my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Carol Harrison. Her advice, critique, and encouragement as she engaged my writing helped me more than she knows; most notably, her counsel inspired me with a confidence that my thesis could make a worthy contribution to patristic scholarship.

Lastly, as I complete this thesis on a truly significant church father, I want to remember three men, who have had an influence on me that can only be likened to that of fathers. First, I give thanks to God for my father, Raymond, who gave me life both bodily and spiritually. Whether playing baseball in the backyard, disciplining his children, or supporting his family, my father set a profound example of what it means to be a true man—one of faithfulness, humility, and quiet godliness. Second, I give thanks for a pastoral father, Martin Taddey, whom it was my joy to serve as part of my seminary training. He remains for me the icon of a true pastor, whose love for Christ and the church manifested itself in all that he did. Finally, I give thanks for my theological father, William Weinrich, who was the first to introduce me to Irenaeus and the early Christian fathers. As Irenaeus noted about his mentor, Polycarp, I can often hear Dr. Weinrich's voice "ringing in my ears." To these three fathers and to all who have selflessly given their assistance, I dedicate this thesis and pray that it benefits those who read it.

James G. Bushur
Easter, 2009

Abbreviations

- Ad Autol.* = Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum*
AH = Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*
Barn. = *Epistle of Barnabas*
Dial. = Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*
Epid. = Irenaeus, *Epideixis*
Gos. Ph. = *Gospel of Philip*
Gos. Tr. = *Gospel of Truth*
HE = Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*
IApol. = Justin, *First Apology*
IEph = Ignatius, *Ephesians*
IMag = Ignatius, *Magnesians*
IPhil = Ignatius, *Philadelphians*
IRom = Ignatius, *Romans*
ITrall = Ignatius, *Trallians*
LXX = Septuagint
Mart. Lyons = *The Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*
Mart. Pol. = *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*
Passio = *Passio Sanctarum Perpetua et Felicitatis*

Citations Conventions

References to Irenaeus

Quotations of primary texts for books 1-3 of *Adversus Haereses* are taken from Harvey (1857) and those for books 4-5 are taken from *Sources Chretiennes*. Translations of *Adversus Haereses* are based on *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, though the language has been updated. Substantive alterations to this translation are referenced in footnotes. Quotations of the *Epideixis* are taken from the translation in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 16.

Scripture References

Old Testament references are taken from the LXX, Greek text and the English translation of Sir Lancelot Brenton. New Testament references are taken from *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle-Aland, 26th edition. English translation is taken from the Revised Standard Version, 2nd edition.

**“Joining the End to the Beginning”
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of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons**

Introduction

I. The Beginning: A Study of Irenaeus’ *Adversus Haereses*

The study that follows offers a reading of Irenaeus’ theological argument against his various opponents with special attention to his use and interpretation of the scriptures. There has been a resurgence of interest in patristic exegesis; this author has been inspired by the substantive scholarship that has invited renewed attention to patristic sources. However, much of this scholarship concentrates on patristic representatives following Origen and, therefore, considers the relationship between Antiochene and Alexandrian styles. This concentration on the third through the fifth centuries is certainly warranted due to the relatively abundant patristic sources dating from this time period. The comparative paucity of second century sources allows the topic of second century exegesis to be dominated by the so-called “Gnostic” sects of the second century. As important as such studies are, they can give the skewed impression that Valentinian, Marcionite and other “heretical” catechists were the first interpreters of the scriptures and the engine that drove the Christian exegetical tradition. In this context, the figure of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in the latter half of the second century, is an appealing one. He precedes Origen and the supposed dichotomy between Antioch and Alexandria and testifies to a highly developed and theologically complex tradition of Christian interpretation.

A. Irenaeus and His Opponents

Irenaeus’ chief writing, *Adversus Haereses*, has been engaged by scholars for a variety of purposes. It has received special attention for its testimony to the various cosmological systems present in the second century historically referred to under the general title of “Gnosticism.” The term “Gnosticism,” though perhaps attractive for pragmatic reasons as a shorthand reference for the various spiritual groups that came to prominence in the second century, is nevertheless a misleading and

inadequate classification.¹ Such a term gives the false impression that a theological homogeneity exists among these groups; the truth is that the differences among them are profound and cannot be ignored. The “Gnostic” classification further suggests that the common characteristic of these traditions revolves around the idea of “gnosis” or secret knowledge, which is likewise deceptive. Thus, in this paper, the language of “Gnosticism” will be avoided wherever possible in favor of more specific references to Irenaeus’ principal opponents such as the Valentinians, Marcionites, and Ebionites.

Irenaeus’ work, *Adversus Haereses*, is generally known to be a polemical work against “Gnosticism.” However, it must be noted that three main opponents emerge in the course of his work, two of which are not normally classified as “Gnostic,” namely, the Marcionites and the Ebionites. Thus, the generalization inherent in the “Gnostic” terminology, not only distorts the variety inherent in these groups, but also distorts the reading of Irenaeus himself. By referring more specifically to the Valentinians, Marcionites, and Ebionites, this author hopes to avoid this pitfall. Indeed, the recognition of the distinctiveness of these three opponents enriches one’s reading of Irenaeus’ work.

If one sees Irenaeus as merely arguing against “Gnostics” generally, the theological significance of the second century Bishop is narrowed; his argument appears to be limited to certain groups and the peculiarities of their cosmological systems. However, Irenaeus, not only argues against the Valentinians and their dualistic perspective, but also engages Marcionite and Ebionite teachings. Taken together, these three opponents allow Irenaeus to be read as a proponent of a truly catholic theology. Irenaeus’ chief opponent is the Valentinian tradition represented by Valentinus and his most prominent follower, Ptolemaeus. From the beginning of his work, Irenaeus makes it his most important duty to expose the cosmological narrative peculiar to the Valentinians. For Irenaeus, Valentinian thought consists in a narrative that divides the spiritual realm called the Pleroma from the

¹ Concerning the use of “Gnostic” terminology, cf. Michael Williams’ foundational work. Williams (1999, p. 28) points out the basic problem: “The problem is not with the data, but with the category. The data, the phenomena that have come collectively to be called “gnosticism,” are a truly fascinating assortment of religious phenomena. What has happened, however, in the history of their study is that they have come to be routinely herded into the same corral and treated as though they are best understood when considered to be the same breed, with the same ancestry, the same essential constitution, the same disposition, and the same habits.” I certainly sympathize with Williams’ point; however, the elimination of the “Gnostic” terminology seems unlikely. Shorthand language is always sought by scholars and the “Gnostic” terminology enjoys an historical familiarity. Since in this paper I am not studying the “Gnostic” phenomena in any detail, I will simply avoid this language wherever possible. I will generally refer to these phenomena as “Irenaeus’ opponents.” Thus, my interest in such systems is limited to their influence on Irenaeus and the way he perceives them.

material realm in which fleshly humanity lives and moves. Thus, against the Valentinians, Irenaeus certainly argues for the unity of the spiritual and the material in one cosmos through the recapitulating work of Christ.

However, while the first two books of *Adversus Haereses* concentrate on the exposure and overthrow of the Valentinian perspective, the final three books often group the Valentinians with two other more traditional opponents—Marcionites and Ebionites. The Marcionites and Ebionites represent, for Irenaeus, a narrative or historical dualism that is equally dangerous to the ontological or cosmological dualism of the Valentinians. The Marcionites emphasize the newness of Christ and his gospel to such an extent that it requires the repudiation of the Old Testament. On the other hand, the Ebionites, as the second century heirs of the Apostle Paul's opponents, favor the ancient Torah to such an extent that the newness of Christ is severely muted. As a result, the Valentinians, Marcionites, and Ebionites represent a fragmentation of theology in the vertical, ontological dimension as well as the horizontal, narrative dimension. Thus, against these three principal opponents, Irenaeus' theological polemic manifests its full catholic character. Christ's recapitulating work unifies the spiritual and the physical as well as the old and the new in his own flesh.

Thus, by avoiding the generalization of the "Gnostic" terminology, this author hopes to preserve, not only a truer picture of Irenaeus' opponents, but also a true depiction of Irenaeus' own theological vision. However, in spite of this resistance to the "Gnostic" classification, generalizations are at times necessary. The "Gnostic" terminology has a long history of use among foundational scholars. Thus, a simple elimination of this language appears unrealistic. In addition, there is no better language available to communicate such a general classification. Therefore, where such a generalization is needed, "Gnostic" terminology will be employed with quotation marks; however, most often, these groups will be referenced simply as Irenaeus' "opponents" in accord with their place in Irenaeus' writing.

This study does not wish to engage the vast literature and complex issues that characterize contemporary interest in the various systems represented in the documents of Nag Hammadi. The discoveries at Nag Hammadi have sparked an explosion of research into the origins of these groups

and their writings. Such texts have raised the question of Irenaeus' reliability as a heresiologist.² While such a question is certainly important, it lies outside the scope of this paper. The manuscripts of Nag Hammadi are fourth century Coptic translations. The relatively late date of such manuscripts makes a comparison between the teaching represented in these texts and that characterized in Irenaeus' writing a complex and hazardous task.³ Thus, concerning the complex issue of "Gnosticism," this thesis focuses on the teachings of these groups as Irenaeus himself perceived them. In other words, this thesis will not consider whether or not Irenaeus' account of his opponents' systems is true to reality. The influence of his second century opponents will be considered for the light they shed on Irenaeus' own theological vision. Indeed, it is the view of this author that Irenaeus' work, *Adversus Haereses*, has a purpose much greater than a mere refutation of what he calls "heretical" teachings. Irenaeus offers a positive exposition of the scriptures that seeks to answer the profound ontological questions of Christian identity raised, not merely by various adversarial catechists, but also by the pagan world and the imperial policy of prosecution simply for bearing the Christian name.

In addition to Irenaeus' relevance for contemporary research into "Gnostic" thought, it is tempting to read him in relation to the patristic exegesis that follows after. Does Irenaeus offer a foretaste of Origen? Does his use of scripture belong more to the methods of Antioch or Alexandria? Such questions are surely important, but secondary. As far as possible, this paper seeks to understand the mind of Irenaeus in his own terms. This can be accomplished only from a detailed engagement with Irenaeus' own writing. Thus, this thesis is a kind of exegetical paper that interprets Irenaeus' words within the context of his own argument. Irenaeus' most influential work, *Adversus Haereses*, especially lends itself to such an examination. Irenaeus' only other extant writing, *Epideixis*, is certainly intriguing in its own right. However, it seems to be written for new catechumens offering them a basic summary of the scriptural narrative. On the other hand, *Adversus Haereses* appears to be written to a fellow bishop or catechist, perhaps even a fellow student with Irenaeus of the famed

² Concerning this important question cf. Mary Donovan (1997, pp. 175ff).

³ Cf. H. Jonas (2001, p. 290-319). Cf also Charles Hedrick (1986, p. 1-11).

martyr, Polycarp.⁴ As a result, Irenaeus expresses his theological perspective with a depth and fullness in *Adversus Haereses* that makes it a compelling subject for study. Although the *Epideixis* will not occupy the center of this examination, it will be considered from time to time as a corroborating witness to Irenaeus' theological perspective.

B. Vantage Point for Examining Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*

Irenaeus and his five books, *Adversus Haereses*, have inspired great interest throughout history. From the beginning, his work was useful as a resource for understanding and combating teachings many in the church considered heretical. Later, theologians of the fourth and fifth centuries offer some evidence that Irenaeus' thought shaped orthodox arguments against Arius, Nestorius, and others.⁵ At the time of the Reformation, Erasmus greatly appreciated Irenaeus' work and hoped for the advent of others with like character to guide the church into the way of peace. In the nineteenth century, Irenaeus' work was subjected to systematic analysis by Duncker, Harnack and others. As it did for the New Testament scriptures, the scientific method described Irenaeus' work as hopelessly fragmented, confused, and incoherent. Thus, early in the twentieth century, F. Loofs claimed that Irenaeus was a theologian of "small" stature, who merely compiled sources. Indeed, Irenaeus did not even have the mind to recognize that his sources were often contradictory. The force of Loofs' work produced an equally forceful reaction defending the coherence of Irenaeus' thought. M. Hitchcock demonstrated fundamental errors in Loofs' analysis. Gustaf Wingren claimed a basic synthesis for Irenaeus' writing around the theme of anthropology. This interest in the work of Irenaeus has not waned in the present day. Bacq, Behr, Houssiau, Orbe, Osborn, Donovan, Steenberg and many others continue to find an engagement with the second century bishop of Lyons to be a fruitful endeavor.⁶

⁴ Cf. AH iii, 3, 4 where Irenaeus speaks of Polycarp as the one "we saw in our early years (*ὃν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐωράκαμεν ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ ἡλικίᾳ*)." Cf. also AH i, praef., 2 where Irenaeus expresses his purpose for writing: "I do this, in order that you, obtaining an acquaintance with these things (*σὺ μαθὼν αὐτὰ*), may in turn explain them (*φανερὰ ποιήσης*) to all those with whom you are connected, and exhort them to avoid such an abyss of madness and of blasphemy against Christ." Irenaeus calls the recipient of his books a "beloved friend (*ἀγαπητέ*)" and refers to him as one in a position to make the threat of various heresies clear to those with him. While it is not clear if the recipient is a bishop or presbyter, it can be assumed that he is one well acquainted with the Christian faith and possessing some influence within the church.

⁵ Concerning the prominence and authority of Irenaeus' work for the early Christian church, cf. Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, bks. 2-5. Against Paul of Samosata, Eusebius can simply write, "For who does not know the works of Irenaeus and of Melito and of others which teach that Christ is God and man" (*HE V, 28*)?

⁶ This outline of Irenaean scholarship is by no means exhaustive. For a more detailed account, cf. Osborn (2001, pp. 1ff).

Irenaeus' writing is at times prolix, confusing, and puzzling; his rhetoric defies precise systematic analysis and logical consistency. However, precisely because his work bears such qualities, it possesses a compelling charm. Irenaeus does not write as an unrivaled expert, who possesses all the answers and offers a definitive and detailed doctrinal system. He writes as a humble witness and a fellow journeyman, who has experienced a profound reality. Rather than simply imparting knowledge to passive students, Irenaeus' writing invites the reader to an active engagement. The reader cannot help but desire to experience what Irenaeus has witnessed. Thus, instead of a great theological edifice perfectly constructed, ordered, and finished, Irenaeus' writing is a simple doorway that beckons the reader to enter the theological vision of the church at its very origins. For Irenaeus, the gospel is not yet formalized in dogmatic expressions or reduced to ancient writings; rather, it consists in the living experience of Christ in the concrete life of the ecclesial community. Though perhaps lacking systematic detail, Irenaeus' writing offers a passionate testimony to the cosmological scope and the incarnate practice of the early Christian gospel.

This study does not proceed primarily out of academic curiosity, but out of pastoral concern. My interest in the bishop of Lyons sprouted from the practical challenges of the pastoral ministry. Confronting a cultural context that seems increasingly materialistic yet permeated by pagan spiritualities, this author found Irenaeus to be a truly relevant companion. This pastoral approach to Irenaeus' thought offers one distinct advantage—an inherent resonance with the purpose of Irenaeus' writing. Irenaeus' writing is not the product of personal choice, but the result of episcopal necessity. Irenaeus is compelled to write because of his love for the church and the burden of his divine office. Thus, Irenaeus' writing against his opponents lacks scientific objectivity and a systematic precision; nevertheless, his rhetoric bears a certain passion and emotion that belongs to the preaching genre.⁷ The *kerygmatic* quality of Irenaeus' work underlies this study and forms the vantage point from which Irenaeus' writing is considered. Therefore, this study can be reduced to a simple proposal. Irenaeus reads the scriptures within a *kerygmatic* framework. This proposal does not mean that Irenaeus uses

⁷ Cf. the interesting section in Osborn (2001, pp. 18ff). Osborn calls attention to what he refers to as Irenaeus' "theological aesthetic." I prefer to root this aesthetic quality in his *kerygmatic* duties as a bishop and catechist. For Irenaeus, the act of preaching cannot be reduced to a formal beauty. Rather, his passionate expression proceeds from a substantive theological confession. When he preaches, Irenaeus understands himself to be participating in the very preaching of God, by which he communicates his *Logos* to his people. Thus, in this paper, I want to resist the notion that Irenaeus' use of rhetoric is merely a matter of artistic packaging.

texts for his own personal agenda. Rather, it means that Irenaeus perceives the scriptures as operating within the economy of God's own self-proclamation. The Father's communication of his Word not only defines the essence of the Christian scriptures, but also gives them an ecclesial purpose. The scriptures are meant to be preached for the sake of the church. Thus, the *kerygmatic* framework shapes Irenaeus' reading of the Bible and, in a significant way, defines his own pastoral identity.

I. Martyrdom: The Context for Irenaeus' Work

Irenaeus' five books against his opponents is a little like stumbling upon the magnificent pyramids in the midst of the desert. *Adversus Haereses* is an unexpected treasure that appears without much precedence. The writings of the apologists can give the impression that second century Christians were mainly interested in the reconciliation of Christian teaching with the political and philosophical landscape that surrounded them. In the church's struggle with the Roman Empire and its civic religions, the philosophical tradition appeared to be a powerful ally that supplied a foothold for the apologists' defense of Christian doctrines and their critique of pagan religions. However, while Justin and other apologists freely employed philosophical arguments in their *libelli* to Roman emperors, Irenaeus' writing reveals a much more cautious and skeptical approach to the philosophical tradition. Logos Christology seems to have possessed an effectiveness outside the ecclesial community that it lacked within its sanctified boundaries. Thus, while Irenaeus is often numbered with the apologetic tradition of the second century, his work against his various opponents has a different character. The apologists present Christianity to the external world, but Irenaeus offers a rare glimpse of the church's discourse for its own members. This ecclesial context allows Irenaeus to present the Christian gospel in its fullness. He is not merely trying to persuade a judge, gain sympathy from alien hearers, or prove his case by meeting certain legal standards. Rather, he is a paternal catechist instructing his own children into the heart of the Christian narrative.⁸ He is not

⁸ Irenaeus' catechetical purpose underlies the entire work and is often expressed in the prefaces to his five books. In the preface to the first book, Irenaeus refers to his pastoral duty of exposing the wolves hidden under sheep's clothing. In the preface to the third book, he refers to the apostolic gospel that is handed over by the church to her sons. He begins the fourth book with the hope that his work will aid his "friend" in the task of "turning (*convertens*)" the heretics into the "port of truth (*veritatis portum*)."⁸ Finally, at the beginning of book five, Irenaeus refers to his own place in the "ministry of the Word (*administratione sermonis*)," to the confirmation of the church's neophytes (*neophytorum confirmare*), and to Jesus Christ as the "only true and steadfast catechist (*solum verum et firmum magistrum*)."⁸

merely attempting to persuade the mind, but to incorporate the entire life of his readers into the living reality of the crucified and risen Christ.

It may be objected that the distinction just made between the apologists' presentations to the Roman world and Irenaeus' catechetical discourse for the church is too drastic. Was the boundary between the church and the world really so well defined? It is the perspective of this author that such distinct boundaries between the church and the world were fundamental to second century Christianity and were erected by the reality of early Christian martyrdom. Little is known about the personal life and history of Irenaeus. However, from the beginning, his name is inseparably joined to early Christian martyrs. He was certainly the catechumen of Polycarp;⁹ he may have been an eyewitness to his martyrdom and perhaps even had a hand in constructing the written account that so powerfully impacted early Christian communities throughout the world.¹⁰ In addition to his association with Polycarp, Irenaeus was familiar with the letters of Ignatius written while journeying to Rome for execution, and with the writings of Justin, martyred around c.165.¹¹ Finally, he became bishop because of an uprising in Gaul against the Christians of Lyons and Vienne in c.177. While it is not known if Irenaeus was the author of the encyclical letter that reports the cruel events of this conflict, he is certainly familiar with its contents and resonates with its theological perspective.¹² The

⁹ Cf. AH iii, 3, 4 where Irenaeus describes himself as one who "had seen (*ἑώρακάμεν*)" Polycarp. I do not think that the language of seeing Polycarp should be limited to a mere physical glimpse of the famed martyr. In the immediate context, Irenaeus refers to Polycarp as one "instructed (*μαθητευθείς*)" by the apostles and in "conversation (*συναναστραφείς*)" with others who "had seen (*ἑωρακόσιν*)" the Lord. Thus, Irenaeus has seen Polycarp in the same way that the apostles had seen Christ. It seems that "seeing" entails an act of discipleship and tradition.

¹⁰ Cf. *Mart. Pol.* 22:2. The account of Polycarp's martyrdom expressly refers to its origins: "These things were transcribed by Gaius from the things of Irenaeus (*ταῦτα μετεγράψατο μὲν Γάιος ἐκ τῶν Εἰρηναίου*), disciple of Polycarp (*μαθητοῦ τοῦ Πολυκάρπου*), who also dwelt together with Irenaeus (*συνεπολιτεύσατο τῷ Εἰρηναίῳ*)...." It is an appealing thought that Irenaeus may have been one of Polycarp's companions with whom he stayed as mentioned in *Mart. Pol.* 5:1. Indeed, the statement from Gaius mentioned above may refer to Polycarp as the one who "dwelt (*συνεπολιτεύσατο*)" with Irenaeus. However, the statement is certainly ambiguous and may refer to Gaius' relationship to Irenaeus. It must be admitted that Gaius' statement does not claim that Irenaeus was the author of Polycarp's martyrdom or even an eyewitness to it. Another manuscript (Moscow MS) maintains that Irenaeus was in Rome when his teacher was martyred. Nevertheless, even if he is not one of the authors, he seems acquainted with the account. In AH iii, 3, 4, Irenaeus describes Polycarp as a "steadfast witness to the truth (*βεβαιότερον ἀληθείας μάρτυρα*)." Polycarp's steadfastness is a major rhetorical theme in the account of his martyrdom.

¹¹ Cf. AH v, 28, 4 where Ignatius is quoted in regard to the significance of martyrdom. Cf. also AH iv, 6, 2 where Justin's work is quoted against Marcion.

¹² There are a number of themes common to the encyclical letter concerning the martyrs of Lyons and Vienne and Irenaeus' work against his opponents. The interaction between "power (*δύναμις*)" and "weakness (*ἀσθένεια*)" underlies the whole martyrdom account, especially the story of Blandina. The same theme is of major importance in AH v, 2, 3ff. In addition, the image of the tree, the theme of divine glory, and the description of the church as a mother are all common to both writings. Finally, there is also an interesting literary connection between Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* and the *Mart. Lyons*. In the martyrdom account, Blandina is the last to be executed. She is described as a mother who "sent her children before her in triumph to the King (*νικηφόρους προπέμψασα πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα*)." In AH iii, 16, 4, Irenaeus refers to the children murdered by Herod at the time of Jesus' birth (Mt 2). He describes them as martyrs, whom Jesus "sent before him into his

reality of martyrdom meant that the boundaries between the Christian church and the Roman Empire were drawn by both sides. In other words, the boundaries were not merely matters of doctrines and rituals, but of communal life and personal identity. The martyr church is the fundamental context that shapes Irenaeus' theological vision and underlies the entirety of his work, *Adversus Haereses*.

A. Martyrdom and the Disharmony of the World

For Roman Emperors and the ruling class, the expansion of the Roman Empire was a matter of philanthropy. As disparate tribes and peoples were conquered, they were given a place in the benefits that trickled down from the gods, through the Roman hierarchy, to the world. The city of Rome was transformed from the parochial center of a nation into the capital of the cosmos. This universalizing trend made the Roman Empire a sign of a divine and cosmic harmony. Such a harmony was reflected in the philosophical traditions that resonated with the Greco-Roman intelligentsia. The underlying element, out of which the harmony of the universe grew, was the rational essence.¹³ As divergent as the various philosophical traditions may have been, they all sought to aid humanity in the cultivation, discipline, and training of a rational (*λογικόν*) life. Such training allowed the rational mind to conquer the unstable passions of the body; it established the foundation for cosmic harmony; and it opened a passage whereby the gods and the universe were joined in one communion. Thus, rationality was not merely to reside in the inner soul, but also to be expressed in the external body. The truly educated gentleman thinks reasonably, speaks properly, and lives ethically. Such a perspective necessitated the rise of rhetoric so that the orator began to rival the philosopher in Greco-Roman culture.

However, such a harmony came at a cost. While for the ruling class the expansion of the Empire was a philanthropic enterprise, for the subservient masses it was the loss of personal identity

kingdom (*praemitteret in suum regnum*).” While such correspondence does not prove Irenaeus to be the author, it does demonstrate a deep resonance between the theological perspective of Irenaeus and the letter recounting the persecution of the churches at Lyons and Vienne. The *Mart. Lyons* can be found in Musurillo (1972, pp. 62ff).

¹³ Cf. Walter Wagner (1994, pp. 45ff). Wagner considers the concept of *logos* as a seminal element making unity and harmony possible. “Logos seemed to dwell in all, giving order, balance, and unity to things and processes. In short, logos made *kosmos*, harmonious arrangement, possible.” Wagner points out that this *logos* concept was foundational for Platonists, Pythagoreans, Aristotelians, and Stoics.

and individual freedom.¹⁴ What was a stable harmony for the ruling elite was a stagnant despair for many of their subjects. For many in the middle and lower classes, the harmonious façade of the Empire did not match reality. Thus, a discontentment rumbled under the surface of the Roman world. This discontentment manifested itself in the rise of new religions, social associations and alternative philosophies. Many sought a new personal identity beyond their status within the vast Roman regime and a freedom from the destiny being imposed upon them.¹⁵ Such yearning certainly fueled the growth of Christianity; yet it also ensured its countercultural character. The clash between Christianity and the Roman Empire took place in large part because Christianity refused to accept its place under the expanse of the imperial umbrella. The Christian church excluded the pagan pantheon and, thereby, challenged the philanthropic character of the Roman government and threatened the cosmic harmony it claimed to offer.

From the perspective of Roman emperors, since the time of Trajan, punishment of Christians was intended to preserve the order and harmony of Roman society. Christians were being prosecuted, not so much for their privately held beliefs, but for their public associations. In the opinion of Roman officials, Christianity was a public superstition; its public life and confession, indeed its very existence, disrupted the symphonic character of the imperial cosmos so treasured by the Roman ruling class. Such a public challenge demanded a public policy. Christian martyrdoms were not intended to annihilate Christians, but to shame and persuade them.¹⁶ The cruelty apparent in early martyrdom accounts testifies to the rhetorical character of these trials and executions. For Roman officials, punishment and execution of individuals simply for bearing the name of Christian was a public

¹⁴ Cf. Peter Brown (1971, pp. 13ff). Brown speaks of the “ceaseless effort” Rome made “to hold itself together.” This quest for harmony “was maintained by men who felt obscurely that their classical culture existed to exclude alternatives to their own world.”

¹⁵ Cf. Robert Wilken (2003, pp. 31ff). Wilken notes that “associations became a familiar feature” in imperial cities. Such associations drew their members from those who were excluded from the upper classes. One of the reasons for their popularity among the laborers, as Wilken notes, was that they provided “a sense of belonging.”

¹⁶ Public rhetorical challenges seem to lie at the heart of early martyrdom accounts. Such rhetorical sparing shapes the four gospel accounts, in which religious leaders attempt to bring shame upon Jesus and discredit him before the people. Jesus’ success in these debates is a cause of his murder. This same pattern underlies early Christian martyrdom accounts such as that of Polycarp. There is an attempt to “persuade (ἐπειθεῖν)” Polycarp to “change his mind (μετανοήσης)” (*Mart. of Poly.* 10-11). When Polycarp remains steadfast and does not “collapse (μὴ συμπεσεῖν),” the proconsul goes into a “frenzy (ἐκστήναι, 12:1).” The language of “standing (στάσις)” seems to contrast Polycarp, who stands firm (*εὐσταθές*, 7:2), and the proconsul, who is overtaken by a frenzy (*ἐκστήναι*, 12:1). Thus, the proconsul loses his balance in the rhetorical debate. The inability to publicly shame Polycarp with superior rhetoric compels the authorities to execute the Christian catechist with fire.

display of Rome's power over life and death. The church's allegiance to *Christos* could be tolerated only if Christian disciples accepted their place within the harmonious hierarchy of the Roman cosmos.

However, the public and rhetorical character of early Christian martyrdoms bore an unintended consequence. While such punishment certainly persuaded many individuals to repent of their association with the Christian church, it also testified in graphic display to the fundamental disharmony that permeated the Roman world. In its execution of Christians, Rome was not bending the will of an alien race, conquering foreign gods, or suppressing strange and unfamiliar superstitions; rather, Rome was punishing fellow citizens, that is, native sons and daughters who shared the culture and tradition of Roman society.¹⁷ Christian martyrdoms did not just reveal an external conflict, but an internal rupture that was shattering the illusion of Roman philanthropy.¹⁸

This internal disharmony was not limited to the social and political spheres of the Roman world. The Roman ruling class saw itself as an integral part of the divine economy, through which philanthropic benefits were conferred. Thus, the repercussions of the public rupture manifested in early Christian martyrdoms also affected the spiritual and philosophical foundations of the empire. These repercussions were certainly evident in the rise of Valentinian thought as well as other second century cosmological systems. Valentinians, for instance, tended to make disharmony the center of their cosmological systems. Ptolemaeus and other Valentinian teachers preserved the harmony of the divine realm by limiting disruptive chaos to the material existence. Such cosmological systems may have existed independent of Christianity, but they gained new appeal within the milieu of the martyr church.

¹⁷ Peter Brown (1971, pp. 16-17) suggests a differentiation in the treatment of non-conformists by the Roman upper classes. "Those who were in no position to participate were dismissed: they were frankly despised as 'country-bumpkins' and 'barbarians'. Those who could have participated and did not—most notably the Jews—were treated with varying degrees of hatred and contempt, only occasionally tempered by respectful curiosity for the representatives of an ancient Near Eastern civilization. Those who had once participated and had ostentatiously 'dropped out'—namely the Christians—were liable to summary execution. By AD 200 many provincial governors and many mobs had had occasion to assert the boundaries of the classical world with hysterical certainty against the Christian dissenter in their midst...." Thus, Christians were somewhat unique in that they were not separated from the Roman Empire in an external way, that is, by race or nationality. Christianity represented an internal rupture of the Roman world that required an especially harsh response.

¹⁸ Cf. Wilken (2003, pp. 68ff). Wilken notes an interesting dichotomy or development in Roman criticisms of Christianity. He (2003, p. 79) writes, "As we have already observed, earlier critics had agreed in calling Christianity a superstition. That Galen does not use this term may be significant; yet what is more significant is that he chose a new term—namely, *philosophical school*. The term *superstition* accented that Christianity was a foreign cult whose origin and practices stood outside the accepted religious standards of the Greco-Roman world. Superstition, by definition, was opposed to genuine religious feelings. The philosophical schools, on the other hand, were part of the public life of the empire."

Traditional philosophical perspectives maintained that the cosmos should be inherently rational—the visible expression of the *logos* that gives it order and harmony. In spite of their formal differences, the Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, and other philosophical traditions shared this fundamental presupposition. Indeed, the *logos* provided a common foundation and allowed for the growth of a philosophical eclecticism in the second century. The concrete and public display of early Christian martyrdoms posed real challenges to the harmonious and rational character of the Roman Empire. Valentinians capitalized upon this internal disharmony by offering a narrative and dramatic explanation for the cosmic chaos that prevailed. Instead of a harmonious derivation of the rational essence, the material world was the product of a profound schism in the spiritual order. A truly harmonious and rational existence was relegated to the spiritual essence, which stood in absolute opposition to an unstable world rooted in the unfulfilled and irrational passions of the flesh. Thus, a rational life was no longer a cosmic possibility, but a parochial privilege accessible only to the elite. Such a perspective appealed to many intellectuals whether Christian or pagan.

The cosmological systems of Irenaeus' opponents not only resonated with the disharmony displayed in the church's conflict with the Roman Empire, but also offered an escape from such an unpleasant reality. Martyrdoms demonstrated that Christians were equally subject to the weaknesses of corruptible flesh and blood. The threat of such a horrific destiny forced Christians to consider the issue of their fundamental identity. What is the Christian's ultimate ground of being? Does the Christian's life grow out of the spiritual essence of God's own being? Does the Christian's identity include the weakness and corruptibility of the material body? Is the Christian's ground of being different from the pagan citizen of Rome? Valentinian teachers offered simple, clear, and compelling answers to these questions. By rooting themselves and their disciples in the spiritual essence, Valentinian disciples could transcend the flesh and blood conflict that surrounded them.¹⁹ The unfulfilled passions and inherent weaknesses of the body remained external to one's spiritual identity. Thus, Valentinian thought preserved a spiritual harmony in the midst of a tragic material chaos. At

¹⁹ Cf. Elaine Pagels (1980, pp. 262ff). Pagels suggests that the issue of martyrdom was central to the debate between various "Gnostic" groups and their orthodox opponents. Valentinians certainly questioned the orthodox enthusiasm for martyrdom. Cf. also AH iii, 18, 5 and iv, 33, 9.

the cost of a cosmic wholeness, the disciples of Valentinus were able to disengage from the profound troubles of the material realm and find harmony and hope in their own spiritual destiny.

It is within this philosophical context that Irenaeus writes his refutation of his opponents and his positive exposition of the Christian confession. As the bishop of Lyons writing for a community all too familiar with martyrdom, Irenaeus must not merely refute these heresies; he must offer real answers to the fundamental issues raised by the church's conflict with the Roman Empire. The first two chapters of this examination attempt to understand Irenaeus' thought in this regard. First, Irenaeus' emphasis on the creation of all things out of nothing both repudiates the Valentinian cosmology and challenges common philosophical traditions. By rooting the origin of all things in God's creative will alone, Irenaeus allows harmony and disharmony, growth and decay, even life and death to exist in a dynamic interaction within the providential care of the Creator. The ultimate ground of being for the cosmos is not the rational essence of philosophy, which offers a stable, but stagnant world; material existence does not arise from a rupture in the spiritual realm, which pessimistically surrenders the hyllic world to chaos and ultimate destruction. Rather, creation's ground of being is the will of its Creator, which offers a world in which things can become more or less in the end than what they are in the present.

However, Irenaeus' optimism about the future is not built upon a blissful ignorance that denies reality. For the bishop of Lyons, the destiny of flesh and blood humanity has already been made manifest in the incarnate life, death, and resurrection of God's Son. The Creator of the cosmos has orientated all things toward fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Thus, to deny Christ is to reject the true cosmic harmony and the genuine philanthropy of the one God. In the person of Christ, flesh and blood humanity has been given a new ground of being that triumphs over death and corruption without denying the essential weakness of the body. This Christological core of Irenaeus' thought is considered in the second major section of this study. Christ's recapitulating work is not a radically new reality disrupting or destroying an ancient harmony, but a perfecting reality that fulfills the creative will for the universe. For Irenaeus, the creation of all things out of nothing and the recapitulation of all things in Christ act as a new framework, within which a Christian cosmology takes shape and the issues of Christian identity and ontology are settled. It is also within this

theological framework that Irenaeus reads the scriptures and catechizes his flock, which is the subject of the third and final section of this examination.

B. Martyrdom and the Catechumenate

The Roman Empire did not prosecute Christians because of privately held beliefs. Trajan's letter to Pliny at the beginning of the second century establishes a general policy for the imperial treatment of Christians.²⁰ It was public Christian gatherings and associations that Roman authorities felt compelled to suppress. Thus, the cruel punishment inflicted upon Christian martyrs was not intended to annihilate individuals as if Christians were a race that had to be banished at the level of human DNA. Rather, it was intended to persuade the Christian will so that Christian gatherings were as sparsely attended as the pagan temples. Indeed, Pliny's letter betrays his optimism that an imperial policy toward Christians would bring the masses back to the civic deities and strengthen the unity and harmony of the Roman cities.²¹ The punishments inflicted upon Christians were not merely a matter of legal precedence, but of rhetorical display. Christian martyrdoms were intended to preach; such acts publicly shamed prominent members of Christian associations, demonstrated the weakness and irrationality of the Christian superstition, and proclaimed the power of the imperial will to preserve the harmony of Roman cities. It is for this reason that as Christianity grew in number and influence, the Roman practice became more public and increasingly violent.

The Roman policy toward Christianity put growing pressure upon the church's public gatherings and the catechumenate. Already in the New Testament, the church's eucharistic gathering was being neglected (Heb 10:25); and Ignatius' letters testify to a certain fragmentation of the ecclesial community. Some Christians were gathering apart from the bishop.²² Such a fragmentation was certainly encouraged by the imperial policy expressed in the correspondence between Trajan and Pliny. To gather in public association with known Christian leaders—such as the bishop—surely put

²⁰ Cf. the helpful discussion of the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan in Wilken (1984, pp. 1-30).

²¹ Pliny writes in his letter to Trajan, "The contagion of that superstition (Christianity) has penetrated not the cities only, but the villages and country; yet it seems possible to stop it and set it right. At any rate it is certain enough that the almost deserted temples begin to be resorted to, that long disused ceremonies of religion are restored, and that fodder for victims finds a market, whereas buyers till now were very few. From this it may easily be supposed, what a multitude of men can be reclaimed, if there be a place for repentance." Translation of Pliny's letter is taken from J. Stevenson (1957, p. 13-14). The Original Latin text can be found in H. M. Gwatkin (1902, p. 26-31).

²² Cf. *IEph* 4-5; *IMag* 3-6; *ITral* 7; and *IPhil* 3-4

one in some danger. It was simply safer to gather more secretly and in smaller, more politically insignificant groups. This schismatic tendency was not only encouraged from without by external forces, but also justified from within by Irenaeus' opponents. Valentinian catechists provided a theological rationale for schismatic gatherings. For these pneumatic systems, the Christian identity was not rooted in the public, external gatherings of Christians around their bishop. Rather, Irenaeus' opponents typically promoted a spiritual identity found within the inner being of the elect. Such a pneumatic identity was impervious to imperial law and transcended the public, ecclesial gathering around a bishop and his altar. For Irenaeus' opponents generally, the Christian identity was not public and corporate, but truly private and utterly personal.

The very fragmentation the Roman authorities were trying to inflict upon Christianity from the outside was being encouraged and promoted by Irenaeus' opponents from the inside. This momentum in favor of a crumbling Christianity had to be resisted with an equally fervent and persistent catechesis. This task fell squarely on the shoulders of bishops and the catechetical programs in their charge. While the Roman ruling class drew its boundary with an imperial policy suppressing public Christian associations, the church drew the boundary from its side with the catechumenate incorporating individuals into the ecclesial community.²³ If Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* is a representative example, Christian bishops recognized the forces of fragmentation and engaged in an intense catechesis designed to reinforce the unity of the Christian church. In this enterprise, Irenaeus was traversing a well worn path traced by the fourth gospel, the letter of Clement to the Corinthians, the exhortations of Ignatius to the churches of Asia Minor, and the living example of Polycarp.²⁴ These testimonies from the early Christian church demonstrate that, for Christian

²³ Cf. Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*. The extensive scrutinies present in Hippolytus' catechetical program testify to the sharp boundary between the church and the world. The movement of the early Christian catechumenate begins when catechumens leave the world, that is, disentangle themselves from the pagan culture that surrounds them. Having forsaken the civic religion of the Empire, catechumens are prepared to be incorporated into the body of Christ and ordered under one head, one Lord, and one God. While Hippolytus' work comes from the third century, it almost certainly reflects a traditional practice inherited from the second century.

²⁴ Concerning the importance of ecclesial unity and catholicity for Irenaeus, cf. Eusebius, *HE* 5, 24. In the paschal controversy between Asia Minor and Rome, Eusebius praises Irenaeus' letter that pleads for peace. However, in this controversy, Irenaeus is not just interested in peace for its own sake. He wants to preserve an ecclesial catholicity. In this regard, he mentions the example of Polycarp's relationship with Anicetus, bishop of Rome. In the debate concerning the celebration of Easter, Irenaeus sees both sides as preserving an apostolic tradition. Thus, Irenaeus resists a narrowing of the apostolic tradition resulting in the loss of catholicity. For Irenaeus, heresies are not just those that contradict traditional doctrines, but those that exclude part of the church thereby narrowing the apostolic tradition. Thus, orthodox teachers are

bishops, the unity of the church was not merely a matter of morality or public witness, but one of theological confession and practical survival.

However, where was such a unity to be found? For Rome, Christianity was merely another dangerous association which was bound together by human will or choice. Thus, the goal of Roman governors was to bring about Christian repentance, that is, to turn the rebellious will away from a harmful superstition. While Rome reduced Christianity to an external, voluntary association, Valentinian teachers rejected such a vulgar definition. For them, Christian unity and identity did not consist in an external, visible association, but in an internal, spiritual possession. For the Valentinians, the unity of the elect was established by a boundary that split the spirit from the flesh. Within this context, Irenaeus argues for a fundamental Christian unity that is defined neither by a reduction to an external, voluntary association, nor by a repudiation of the fleshly, corporate communion around the bishop and his altar. As has already been mentioned, the first two sections of this thesis explore Irenaeus' argument in this regard. For Irenaeus, the whole universe exists within the power of God's creative will. The creation of all things *ex nihilo* establishes a primordial unity that cannot be challenged. Every human being begins existence as the recipient of a divine gift. However, the fullness of this gift and, therefore, the fullness of one's creaturely existence are found in the person of Jesus Christ. In his flesh, humanity receives a new and perfect identity within the being of God himself. These two theological pillars are bookends defining the beginning and end of the early Christian catechumenate. The church escorts those created by the will of God on a path that, through baptism and the eucharist, ultimately incorporates them into the body of Christ.

Thus, for Irenaeus, Christian identity is radically corporate and communal. Christianity is not a private gnosis possessed by the autonomous individual, but a common life in which one participates. The church's unity in Christ is not merely voluntary, but familial and organic. Christianity's use of familial terminology—father, mother, brother, sister—was more than metaphorical; it expressed a real change of being experienced in the church's sacramental life. Within this catechetical environment, Irenaeus reads and preaches the sacred scriptures. The third part of this study considers Irenaeus' use

equally interested in drawing distinct external boundaries between the church and the world and maintaining an internal catholicity rooted in the revelation of Christ as handed over through the apostolic witness.

of the scriptural narrative within this catechetical context. The reality of martyrdom certainly changed the way early Christians read the Bible. Indeed, while many have located the rise of the Bible's prominence in the need to combat Marcion, it is my view that the role of martyrdom should not be ignored. The reality of martyrdom forced the church to seek after a stable and enduring identity that could withstand the corrupting forces surrounding it. In the biblical narrative, the church found a tradition that rooted its identity in the very foundations of the cosmos itself. Within the martyrological context, the Bible was no longer merely a guide to the distinctive moral life demanded of Christian catechumens; nor was the Bible merely a prophetic authentication for Christian doctrines or an allegorical instruction concerning the church's sacramental rituals. Rather, the Bible was now employed to prepare for martyrdom. In other words, Christians were reading the scriptures not only to reconcile their doctrines with philosophical reasoning or to shape the moral will, but also to find a narrative identity that confronted the weakness of the flesh and the reality of death.

While the reality of martyrdom certainly affected how Christians were reading the scriptures, it may have also influenced the process of canonization. In the second century, the relation between the apostolic tradition unique to Christianity and the prophetic texts of Judaism remained a fundamental issue within the church. The Jewish scriptures were repudiated by Marcion and relegated to the inferior realm of the demiurge by Valentinian teachers.²⁵ Even for many orthodox teachers, the prophetic scriptures were full of ambiguous shadows and irrelevant laws and, therefore, were relegated to a secondary status. Within the context of martyrdom, the prophetic scriptures possessed a new and valuable dimension. Against the common charge that Christianity was a recent innovation, the apologists employed the prophetic tradition to establish the ancient character of the church's teaching and practice. Christianity was not a new superstition invented by a few charlatans, but the divine fulfillment of an ancient narrative. On the strength of the Jewish scriptures, Christians could claim to be in continuity with a primordial wisdom.

However, while the apologists found a certain value in the prophetic writings for their defense of Christianity before the external world, the importance of the Jewish scriptures within the church

²⁵ Cf. Ptolemaeus' *Letter to Flora*. Ptolemaeus, a successor of Valentinus, ascribes the Mosaic law to the Demiurge, who is inferior to the perfect God and superior to the evil adversary, the devil.

was assured for a different reason. The reality of martyrdom and the resulting emphasis on the formation of Christian identity through the catechumenate encouraged the pre-eminence of the four apostolic gospels. The narrative of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection resonated with the martyr church on more than an intellectual level. This inherent resonance is evident in the various written accounts of early Christian martyrs. The account of Polycarp's martyrdom styles the elderly catechist of Smyrna as an imitator of Christ's passion in support of its claim to show us a martyrdom that is "in accord with the gospel." Within the martyr church, the four gospels were not only the center of its ecclesial life, but were also becoming the center around which the scriptural canon was coalescing. The four gospels sanctified the prophetic scriptures and ensured their incorporation into the Christian canon. For the second century church, the martyrological tradition was not limited to the passion of Christ, but included Abel, Joseph, Job, Moses, David, and the prophets.²⁶ These biblical narratives allowed Christian martyrs to make sense of their destiny and to identify themselves with a long succession of patriarchs, prophets, and saints.

It may be overstating things, but there is a certain sense in which martyrdom unites the prophetic and apostolic scriptures. The martyrological narrative includes the ancient patriarchs and prophets, but it also includes Stephen, James, Peter, John, and Paul. Thus, the sufferings of ancient Israel and the persecution of the Christian church encouraged a certain fellowship between the two covenants. Israel and the church were both participants in the passion of Christ. Such a fellowship is quite evident in the writings of Irenaeus. For the bishop of Lyons, the scriptures are not read for the intellectual knowledge they possess or the moral wisdom they confer; rather, he reads them for a meaning that can only be called ontological. The reality of martyrdom compels Irenaeus to expound the scriptures as a narrative about God's interaction with flesh and blood humanity. Within the story of Adam, the patriarchs and the prophets, Irenaeus sees the story of that humanity created by God, assumed by Christ, and sanctified by the Spirit. This very flesh perfected in Jesus' death and

²⁶ For example, cf. Clement of Rome's *Letter to the Corinthians* 3-7. Beginning with Cain and Abel, Clement recounts a narrative of suffering and persecution caused by jealousy and envy. This narrative includes Abel, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Paul, and early Christian martyrs such as Danaids and Dircae. Clement concludes this martyrological narrative saying, "We write these things, dear friends, not only to admonish you, but also to remind ourselves. For we are in the same arena and the same contest awaits us" (1 Clement 7:1). These words suggest that, for Clement, the church is involved in the same conflict revealed in the scriptural narrative. In this way, the martyr church resonated with the sufferings of the ancient patriarchs and prophets beyond the intellectual level.

resurrection is the same humanity in which the church participates by means of its baptismal and eucharistic life. Thus, the third section of this study considers Irenaeus' ontological reading of the scriptures from a simple presupposition. He reads the scriptures as if they constitute his own story. The baptized are present within the text; they are present in Adam's flesh formed from the ground, present in the martyred flesh of Abel, present in the sacrifice of Isaac, and especially present in the passion of Jesus.

III. The Structure of Irenaeus' Chief Work, *Adversus Haereses*

The challenge presented by his adversaries compels the second century bishop of Lyons to present a lively and passionate discourse in defense of his theological perspective. The depth of Irenaeus' argument in *Adversus Haereses* allows the modern reader to gain a certain familiarity with the ancient bishop's mind as he constructs a theological bulwark against what he considers to be a most dangerous opponent. Thus, while the *Epideixis* will enter the examination occasionally, the *Adversus Haereses* occupies the center of this study. Having described the vantage point from which this study proceeds and the general context that shapes Irenaeus' theological vision, it is helpful to introduce the basic structure of Irenaeus' five books, *Adversus Haereses*. Such an overview of Irenaeus' chief work provides a broad context within which the more detailed reading of certain texts that follows becomes more easily understood.

Many scholars have accused Irenaeus of a disorderly presentation of his argument against the heresies.²⁷ This charge seems substantiated when the reader confronts Irenaeus' pastoral prolixity and rhetorical style. The second century bishop moves freely from sacred text to sacred text engaging his

²⁷ Typical of this point of view is Denis Minns (1994, pp. 6-8). He writes, "Irenaeus had much more than a nodding acquaintance with the techniques of rhetoric, as his preference for long, complicated, and carefully balanced sentences makes plain. But this should not obscure from us the fact that *Adversus Haereses* was written out of a pressing sense of pastoral need (AH i, praef.; v, praef.), and that Irenaeus several times changed his mind about the length and scope of the work. He seems, at times, distinctly embarrassed at the way the project has escaped from his original plan, and at his consequent prolixity." There is no question that Irenaeus is somewhat verbose by modern standards. However, I question whether Irenaeus really "changed his mind about the length and scope of the work." Minns maintains that Irenaeus wrote the five books without planning their structure and content from the beginning. It is difficult for me to believe that Irenaeus did not plan the five books in advance. First, the essence of Irenaeus' argument is that the only true God is the benevolent Creator who orders all things toward a good end realized in Christ and the preaching of the church. With such a vision of God's orderliness, it seems probable that Irenaeus would count the orderliness and structure of his own work to be important. Second, Minns refers to AH iii, 12, 9 where Irenaeus implores the reader's patience in the face of his prolixity. However, in that same passage Irenaeus also gives a preview of book five. He writes, "But that all his (Paul's) epistles are consonant to these declarations, I shall, when expounding the apostle, show from the epistles themselves, in the right place." This statement indicates that Irenaeus already knows what he hopes to accomplish in his future writings.

opponents on a wide variety of theological fronts. This rhetorical variety makes the unity of Irenaeus' presentation difficult to define.²⁸ His method is of the shotgun variety; each passage containing prophetic scriptures, apostolic texts, ecclesial tradition, common philosophical rhetoric, and personal digressions.

The perceived disorderliness of Irenaeus' presentation proceeds from the difficulty of finding a single principle that unifies the five books, *Adversus Haereses*.²⁹ Some have considered Irenaeus' work to be doctrinally based.³⁰ From this perspective, Irenaeus attacks the systematic position of his opponents with his own doctrinal system. The unity of God, the reality of the incarnation, the doctrine of recapitulation, and the creation and redemption of the flesh are all doctrinal themes of Irenaeus' work. However, it is difficult to consider any one of these doctrines to be the unifying principle of his argument. Others have maintained that Irenaeus' writings are unified by a desire to establish the authority of the church. From this point of view, Irenaeus seeks to stifle the diversity and creativity of fringe Christian groups with a demand to submit to the catholic, orthodox, and authoritative faith. The second century bishop is only protecting his own power by his appeal to a sanctioned gospel and an apostolic tradition. Yet, while such appeals to the proper authority have their place in Irenaeus' work, they do not seem to be his primary interest. His appeal to the public traditions of the catholic churches is more an appeal to a witness than to a judge. For Irenaeus, the catholic tradition is a tool to be used in the service of the truth of Christ and his gospel, rather than

²⁸ Cf. Johannes Quasten (1993, pp. 289). He writes, "The whole work suffers from a lack of clear arrangement and unity of thought. Prolixity and frequent repetition make its perusal wearisome. The reason for this defect is most probably that the author wrote the work intermittently. According to the preface of the third book, he had already sent the first two books together to the friend at whose request they had been composed; the other three followed one by one. But it seems that the project was designed from the beginning, because the author refers already in the third book to his later remarks about the Apostle Paul, which follow only in the fifth book. Moreover, at the end of the third book he announces the fourth and at the end of the fourth the fifth. But it would appear that Irenaeus inserted addition and enlargements from time to time. Evidently he did not have the ability to shape his materials into a homogeneous whole. The defects of form which offend the reader are the result of this lack of synthesis."

²⁹ Cf. F. Loofs (1930). Loofs presents Irenaeus as merely a collector of traditional sources. For Loofs, Irenaeus was inept at seeing the inherent theological contradictions in his sources. Thus, Irenaeus' inability to use his sources in service of a central theological concept was proof of his "small" stature as a theologian. A similar vision of Irenaeus is found in H. Koch (1925, pp. 183-214). Cf. also the helpful overview of Osborn (2001, pp. 9ff).

³⁰ Cf. Gustaf Wingren (1959, pp. ix-xxii). Wingren stands against the fragmentary view of Irenaeus promoted by F. Loofs. Wingren finds a unifying principle in Irenaeus' anthropology. Wingren writes, "The early Church opens up to us a world of thought which is largely untouched by the whole of modern controversies, viz. the thought-world of the early Church. In a theologian like Irenaeus there are parts of the biblical message which are interpreted in greater clarity and power than in any later period of Christian thought. It is my hope that in the formula which I have suggested—man and the Incarnation—we possess the key to understanding Irenaeus and his age" (Wingren, p. xi). Wingren's work helped restore the legitimacy of Irenaeus as a theologian and inspired others to reconsider a unified vision of Irenaeus' work. However, the attempt to establish one theological concept as the center of Irenaeus' thought invariably tends to end in a reduction of the complex whole of Irenaeus' thought.

Christ and his gospel being used to uphold the authority of the church hierarchy. Irenaeus is not primarily interested in the submission of all Christians to ecclesial authority, but in their real conversion to the only true God who created and redeemed all things in Christ.

Finally, Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* has been understood as an exegetical work. This point of view is closer to the truth. If rightly understood, Irenaeus can be truly labeled a "biblical theologian." The last three books are certainly organized around an exegetical program.³¹ In the third book, he begins with the supremacy of the four gospels and moves to the apostolic witness in *Acts*. In the fourth book, he concentrates on the unity of the two covenants. Then, Irenaeus concludes with his fifth book, in which he provides a detailed exegesis of Paul's epistles in order to refute the Valentinian and Marcionite claims to Pauline authority. However, I do not think that correct exegesis is Irenaeus' ultimate concern. His exegetical work is employed in service of a more profound agenda. It is the argument of this paper that Irenaeus' chief concern is the Christian hermeneutic. In other words, for Irenaeus, his adversaries do not merely challenge the form of Christianity—Christian doctrines, church hierarchies, or scriptural explanations—but the essential ground of being for the Christians relation to God. Irenaeus seeks to challenge the vantage point that governs his various opponents' explanations of God, the scriptures, Christ's redemptive work, the church's life, the universe, and their own identity. Thus, while Irenaeus certainly argues for correct doctrine, authoritative tradition, and proper exegesis, all of these aspects are used as testimonies to the fundamental Christian vision that underlies the entirety of the church's life.

The question of hermeneutic is a recurring theme throughout all five books of Irenaeus' work, *Adversus Haereses*. In his first book, Irenaeus seeks to "set forth the opinion of those, who are promulgating heresy" (AH i, Praef., 2). The exposure of heretical opinions entails more than merely a factual summary of various doctrines promoted by Irenaeus' opponents. For Irenaeus, it consists in a cosmological story. In chapters 1-3, Irenaeus records the Valentinian account of the spiritual

³¹ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar (1990, p. 7). Balthasar points out the importance of scripture for the final three books of Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*. He writes, "The five books were not written at the same time, but at intervals, though a logical plan underlies them. After describing the erroneous doctrines (Book 1) and reducing them to absurdity (Book 2), Irenaeus begins a detailed, positive refutation on the basis of Sacred Scripture. The truth of the Scriptures proves the uniqueness of God, the Creator of the world, the Lord of the Old Testament as well as the New. The Scriptures also prove the uniqueness of the Word of God, who spoke and acted in the old covenant and became man in Jesus Christ (Book 3). The pedagogical meaning of the Old Testament is considered in the light of its fulfillment in the New (Book 4). The resurrection of the flesh, prepared for by the Eucharist, presupposes that matter has been created by God and is good (Book 5)."

Pleroma; and in chapters 4-7, he recounts their corresponding story of the material world that exists outside the Pleroma. However, this cosmological story is not recorded simply for its own sake. Rather, the Valentinian account of the universe is the ontological foundation for their particular interpretations of scripture, explanations of God, doctrines of Christ, and pneumatic identity. At the end of chapter 3, Irenaeus attaches the Valentinian economy of the spiritual world to their use of scripture. He writes, “Such, then, is the account which they all give of their Pleroma, and of the formation of the universe, striving, as they do, to adapt the good words of revelation to their own wicked inventions” (AH i, 3, 6). The Valentinian story of the cosmos is not only a contradiction of certain Christian doctrines and a challenge to the authoritative tradition of the church, but it also undermines the Christian’s hermeneutical vantage point from which he reads and proclaims scripture.

A distinctive cosmological drama is the hidden foundation on which Valentinian teachers build their diverse interpretations of scripture, their innovative explanations of theological doctrines, and their various sacramental and ethical practices. Since Christian laity may be intrigued by the creativity of Irenaeus’ opponents in scriptural interpretation and liturgical practice, Irenaeus intends to expose the foreign cosmological hermeneutic that underlies their systems. This cosmological hermeneutic is the “wild beast” that must be exposed to view. Irenaeus’ purpose is revealed already in the first book. After summarizing his opponents’ story of the cosmos in chapters 1-7, Irenaeus connects it to their use of scripture in chapters 8-10. He writes,

Such, then is their system (*τῆς ὑποθέσεως*), which neither the prophets announced (*ἐκήρυξαν*), nor the Lord taught (*ἐδίδαξεν*), nor the apostles delivered (*παρέδωκαν*), but of which they boast that beyond all others they have a perfect knowledge. They gather their views from other sources than the scriptures (*ἐξ ἀγράφων ἀναγινώσκοντες*); and, to use a common proverb, they strive to weave ropes of sand, while they endeavor to adapt with an air of probability to their own peculiar assertions the parables of the Lord, the sayings of the prophets, and the words of the apostles, in order that their scheme (*τὸ πλάσμα*) may not seem altogether without support (AH i, 8, 1).

With this statement, Irenaeus reveals his intent to show that the Valentinian cosmology leads to an erroneous use of scripture. For the second century bishop, it is not the details of a particular interpretation of scripture that need to be refuted, but the cosmological hermeneutic that underlies them.

Irenaeus' interest in refuting the cosmological narrative that supports his opponents' systems continues in the second book. In chapters 1-10, Irenaeus attacks the theology of his adversaries showing the absurdity of a dualistic doctrine of God. Irenaeus uses common philosophical reasoning to reveal the logical inconsistencies in his opponents' theology. In chapters 11-19, the bishop of Lyons turns his attention to the cosmological narrative of the pneumatic aeons. In the first book, Irenaeus summarized the Valentinian account of both the aeonic conjunctions within the Pleroma and the production of the physical world outside the Pleroma. In chapters 11-19 of the second book, Irenaeus seeks to show that this narrative conflicts with reason and common sense. However, Irenaeus attacks this dualistic cosmology not merely to show its inconsistencies, but to undermine its hermeneutical value. By destroying the cosmological story of his Valentinian opponents, Irenaeus destroys the foundation on which their interpretation of scripture, their explanation of redemption, their confession of Christ, and their sacramental practices are built. Thus, Irenaeus writes at the end of chapter 19, "And who will tolerate the remainder of their vain talk, which they cunningly endeavor to accommodate to the parables (*parabolis adaptare conantes*), and have in this way plunged both themselves, and those who give credit to them, in the profoundest depths of impiety?" (AH ii, 19, 9).

Following his refutation of his opponents' story of the universe, Irenaeus proceeds to uncover the consequences of this story for their interpretation of scripture and their confession of the faith. In chapters 20-28 of the second book, Irenaeus demonstrates how the Valentinian cosmology leads to a foreign exegesis of scripture. He writes, "That they improperly and illogically apply both the parables and the actions of the Lord to their falsely devised system (*figmento suo*), I prove as follows..." (AH ii, 20, 1). For Irenaeus, the speculations of his opponents and their allegorical method of interpretation are used in service of a false cosmological narrative. His adversaries begin with the fanciful story of the divine aeons and then move to the scriptures so that the sacred texts are set upon a foreign ground of being and become witnesses to another world and an unknown god.

In book one, Irenaeus exposes the hermeneutic that governs his opponents' use of scripture, their confession of Christ, and their liturgical and ethical practices. In book two, Irenaeus refutes his adversaries' cosmological hermeneutic on the basis of reason and common sense. However, it is not enough for the bishop of Lyons to tear down his opponents' systems; he must also reveal the proper

Christian hermeneutic and demonstrate its superiority to the worldview of his opponents.³² Irenaeus seeks to accomplish this purpose in books three through five. For Irenaeus, the demonstration of the true Christian hermeneutic is his primary task. Books 1-2 set the stage for Irenaeus to fulfill his mission. In books three to five of *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus attempts to show that the Christian gospel consists precisely in a cosmological narrative that proceeds from the Creator's own hands. This Christian story begins with the creation of the world and the formation of fleshly humans; it continues through the calling of the patriarchs, the establishment of Israel, and the preaching of the prophets; it is fulfilled in the narrative of Christ's birth, death, resurrection, and ascension; and it concludes in the sacramental life of the church and the consummation of the eschatological kingdom. This Christian narrative contradicts the cosmological fantasies of his adversaries and acts as the hermeneutic that governs the church's interpretation of scripture, her confession of the faith, her preaching of the gospel, and her liturgical practice.

The third book of *Adversus Haereses* is the center of Irenaeus' presentation and the heart of his theological thought. In the first two books, Irenaeus exposes what he considers to be a heretical and alien hermeneutic. His opponents begin with a cosmological narrative (book 1) and, then, move to the scriptures and the confession of Christ (book 2). For Irenaeus, the truly Christian cosmological account has a christological core.³³ In book three, Irenaeus shows that the Christian vision of the

³² From this perspective, it seems probable that Irenaeus is not writing against his opponents as much as he is writing for the sake of the church. Irenaeus writes, "I shall endeavor in this fifth book of the entire work (*in hoc libro quinto operis universi*) which treats of the exposure and refutation of knowledge falsely so called, to exhibit proofs (*ostensiones facere*) from the rest of the Lord's doctrine and the apostolic epistles: thus complying with your demand, as you requested of me (since indeed I have been assigned a place in the ministry of the word); and, laboring by every means in my power to furnish you with large assistance against the contradictions of the heretics, as also to reclaim the wanderers (*errantes retrahere*) and convert them to the church of God (*convertere ad Ecclesiam Dei*), to confirm at the same time the minds of the neophytes (*neophytorum quoque sensum confirmare*), that they may preserve steadfast the faith (*stabilem custodiant fidem*) which they have received, guarded by the church in its integrity..." (AH v, Praef.). The references to the "wanderers (*errantes*)" and the "neophytes (*neophytorum*)" suggest that Irenaeus is writing for the sake of the church's catechetical task. Thus, he is not merely concerned with the question of how to destroy his opponents, but with the question of how to turn pagans and heretics into orthodox Christians. For Irenaeus, this conversion to true Christianity cannot be accomplished by emphasizing a few doctrinal details; it can only be accomplished by accepting an entirely different cosmological narrative.

³³ Cf. Eric Osborn (2001, pp. 12-24). Osborn (2001, p. 15) writes, "A good image is that of the hourglass lying on its side so that it presents a movement from left to right. It begins with creation and ends with the consummation of all things. The first half of the hourglass bears on its sides the message of the prophets. The vision of the prophets represent the mind of God, and take the place for Irenaeus of the world of Platonic forms. Like the forms, they reach a first principle in Christ as the Christian equivalent of the form of the good. The narrow neck of the hourglass is the recapitulation of all things in Christ, and the second half of the hourglass bears on its side the message of the prophets and the words of Christ and the apostles. Within the hourglass the believer lives, looking to the prophets through Christ and looking to the Gospels and the writings of the apostles." The hourglass is a worthwhile image that illustrates the structure of Irenaeus' theological thought. However, Christ is not merely the center of an historical movement, but also the center of an ontological movement. Christ not only unites the two covenants, but also unites God and man. In addition, the movement for Irenaeus is not merely "left to right" or from beginning to end as Osborn implies. Rather, for the second century bishop, the movement flows in both

world begins with the person of Christ as the one who recapitulates all things. This christological core leads Irenaeus to defend the supremacy of the four gospels. The four apostolic narratives of Jesus' birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension form the hermeneutical center of the Christian faith. The four gospels are four aspects of one and the same Christ. Thus, the catholic gospels form a kind of canon within the whole of God's revelation.³⁴ Only from the perspective of the gospel of Christ can one interpret the Old Covenant and understand the apostolic kerygma and the ecclesial tradition.

The argument for the supremacy of the four gospels is not merely a refutation of fringe, non-sanctioned gospels, but also an argument for a christocentric hermeneutic.³⁵ Whereas his opponents begin with a cosmology and, then, move to a confession of Christ and an interpretation of the scriptures, Irenaeus begins with Christ and the apostolic narrative of his person and work. This hermeneutical program is revealed in the structure of book three. In chapters 1-11, Irenaeus begins his argument for the unity of God by proclaiming the unified witness of the four catholic gospels. From the gospels, he moves to the apostolic witness as recorded especially in the book of *Acts*. Irenaeus clearly announces this method. He writes, "The opinion (*sententia*) of those men, therefore,

directions. In God's eternal plan for the world, the end determines the beginning as much as the beginning establishes the foundation for the end. Finally, while it is perhaps true that Irenaeus thinks within a platonic framework as Osborn asserts, it should be kept in mind that Christ as the "first principle" and "form of the good" is nevertheless a fleshly form and an incarnate good. Thus, I do not think that Platonism controls Irenaeus' thought; rather, Irenaeus uses platonic argument when it serves his christological vision.

³⁴ Cf. John Behr (2001, p. 116). Behr writes, "The key to Irenaeus' understanding of the mechanism of prophecy is to be found in the manner in which he relates the Gospel to Scripture. Irenaeus' focus is not on a continuous history of the Word of God, from the 'Old Testament' to the 'New Testament,' in the sense of a continuity of personal subject acting throughout time in different ways and revealing God in a variety of forms, but rather on the unchanging and eternal identity of the Word of God as the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, is revealed first in the Gospel, which is, as we will see, an epitome of Scripture, the same one is nonetheless the author of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenant...and is indeed the author of the whole of Scripture and its subject throughout." For Irenaeus, the canonical gospels do not merely stand in an historical relationship with the rest of scripture. In other words, the gospels do not simply reveal the historical fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Rather, for Irenaeus, the catholic gospels form a canonical center or a hermeneutical rule that governs the whole of God's revelation in the scriptures from beginning to end.

³⁵ Cf. Graham N. Stanton (1997, pp. 317-346). Stanton argues that codices of the four gospels were already in use by the time of Justin. Thus, Irenaeus' testimony to the supremacy of the four gospels is not an innovative argument forced upon him by his opponents. Rather than asserting the supremacy of the four gospels, Irenaeus is defending the traditional view of the church. Stanton (1997, p. 336) writes, "It has often been urged that the fourfold Gospel was adopted in order to counter the rapid growth and success of various groups of heretics, especially Gnostics. Of course the production and use of gospels by Gnostics may have encouraged 'the great church' to clarify its position. But if heretics were primarily in view, would it not have been wiser to opt for just one Gospel? Why four? When Irenaeus attacked the Valentinians of his day, he had to show that all four gospels supported the theological point he was making; it is hard to see how four gospels gave him a stronger case than one." However, Stanton prefers the view that the Christian preference for the codex gradually led to the collection of the four gospels into one codex and to their supremacy in the eyes of the church. It is perhaps possible for this perspective to be reversed. It is the church's reverence for the four gospels that leads to the eager adoption of the codex. Indeed, Irenaeus is not merely defending the church's use of four apostolic narratives of Jesus' life. Rather, his testimony to the supremacy of the fourfold Gospel serves his hermeneutical purpose. The gospel of Christ is not merely the historical fulfillment of the prophetic hope and the historical cause of the apostolic kerygma. The fourfold gospel forms a unifying hermeneutical center that governs the interpretation of the prophetic and apostolic witness.

who handed the gospel down to us (*qui nobis tradiderunt Evangelium*), having been investigated, from their fountainheads (*ex ipsis principiis ipsorum*), let us proceed also to the remaining apostles (*reliquos Apostolos*), and inquire into their doctrine with regard to God (*sententiam eorum de Deo*)...” (AH iii, 11, 9). This structure suggests the priority of the gospels. The narrative of Christ is the proper vantage point from which the apostolic witness is interpreted properly.

After establishing the unity and catholicity of the four gospels and the apostolic kerygma, Irenaeus comes to the real purpose of his third book. In chapters 16-19, Irenaeus explains the recapitulating work of Christ. For Irenaeus, the doctrine of recapitulation establishes Christ’s person and work as the ontological ground for the Christian knowledge of God. The person of Jesus is, first of all, the center of a vertical chiasm. He sums up in his own person all things in heaven and all things on earth. For the bishop of Lyons, this recapitulation that is accomplished in Christ means that all theology and all anthropology are simply aspects of Christology. The narrative of Jesus’ life communicates all there is to know about God and all there is to know about humankind. This vertical chiasm in which God and humanity, heaven and earth, Creator and creature are united in Christ means that the Christian gospel consists in a two-part plot. First, there must be a true incarnation in which the divine Logos descends into human flesh (AH iii, 18). Second, God’s plan is completed in a true deification in which the humanity becomes what the Creator has always intended it to be (AH iii, 19). The vertical chiasm moves in both directions. Christ’s recapitulation consists in God’s descent and man’s ascent, God’s death and man’s resurrection, God’s humiliation and man’s exaltation.

However, Irenaeus’ doctrine of recapitulation is concerned not only with the ontological unity of God and man in the person of Christ, but also with the historical unity of God and humanity in one narrative.³⁶ For the bishop of Lyons, Christ is the center of a cruciform chiasm.³⁷ He is the center of

³⁶ Cf. Robert M. Grant (1997, p. 53). In his introduction to Irenaeus’ writings, Grant emphasizes the importance of rhetoric in Irenaeus’ theology. Grant considers three key terms that serve as “structural beams” in Irenaeus’ thought. He concludes, “He was treating the *hypothesis* as the plot of the whole sacred story from creation to the coming of God’s kingdom, while his *oikonomia* are the subplots included in the plot as a whole. One might even call them ‘chapters.’ And *anakephalaiosis* explains why the events repeat one another, as well as why the story involves not progress but restoration. It is always going back as well as forward. These are the key terms of a theology not philosophical but historical, recalling the *Heilsgeschichte* of half a century ago. Like that understanding, it offers the prospect of fresh insights into the biblical story from the creation to redemption and the new creation.” These three terms certainly emphasize the narrative character of Irenaeus’ theology and are used in service of his christological vision. Yet, I wish to suggest that these terms are not merely used horizontally to join God and man in one historical narrative, but also vertically to join God and man ontologically in one Christ. It is this ontological aspect that transforms these terms from rhetorical devices into theological confession.

the vertical relationship between God and humanity; but He is also the center of the horizontal relationship between prophets and apostles, Israel and the church, creation and the eschatological kingdom. This horizontal dimension is introduced at the end of book three. At the end of chapter 19, Irenaeus summarizes the consequences of recapitulation for the relationship between God and his fleshly creatures. “Wherefore also the Lord himself gave us a sign (*signum*)...that what was thus born should be ‘God with us,’ and descend (*descendere*) to those things which are of the earth beneath, seeking the sheep which had perished, which was indeed his own peculiar handiwork, and ascend (*ascendere*) to the height above, offering and commending to his Father that man which had been found (*offerentem et commendantem Patri eum hominem qui fuerat inventus*), making in his own person the first fruits of the resurrection of man (*primitias resurrectionis hominis in semetipso faciens*)” (AH iii, 19, 3). Then, in chapters 20-25, Irenaeus turns to the horizontal dimension of Christ’s redemptive work. Irenaeus speaks of this horizontal dimension under the theme of divine providence.

For Irenaeus, Christ not only sums up God and man in an ontological unity, but also joins them in a single historical narrative. In book three, chapter 20, Irenaeus immediately introduces the notion of God’s “long-suffering.” God endures a providential patience in his interaction with the human race. “From the beginning (*ab initio*), God permitted (*fuit patiens*) man to be swallowed up by the great whale...” (AH iii, 20, 1). For Irenaeus, God has guided human history toward one goal, which is realized in the narrative of Christ. Christ comes for the purpose of “connecting the end with the beginning (*finem conjungens initio*)” (AH iii, 22, 3). For Irenaeus, the doctrine of recapitulation establishes Christ as the hermeneutical core, not only for the understanding of God and human nature, but also for the interpretation of the two covenants.

³⁷ The image of a cruciform chiasm as the structure of Irenaeus’ thought is suggested by Hans Urs von Balthasar (1990, p. 13). He writes, “The thought of Irenaeus forms a great axis. Its first movement is steep and Godward. From the icy arrogance and worldly secrecies of Gnosticism, it flies straight to the saving heights of the ever greater God, whom no finite mind can grasp. The other movement is broad, slow, heavy, a line drawn across the face of the earth.... At the center of the axis is the image of the Son of Man, who unites heaven and earth. He is the first touchstone of Christian truth. Only in Him is there resolution of the paradox which Gnosticism tried in vain to master: God by nature is invisible, yet man by nature desires the vision of God. But this uniting of God and the world takes place in the passion of Christ, when He is stretched out between height and depth, breadth and length. The cross-beams are the world’s true center, and since it is in this sign that all creation is redeemed, they become the ‘watermark’ of any kind of existence in the world.”

In book three, Irenaeus establishes Christ as the center of a cruciform chiasm, uniting God and man in his own person as well as administering God's plan for creation from beginning to end. In book four, the bishop of Lyons demonstrates how his christological vision shapes his interpretation of scripture and the two covenants.³⁸ Thus, book four counterbalances book two. In book two, Irenaeus shows that the cosmological narrative of his opponents leads to a faulty exegesis of scripture. The theological speculations of these teachers manifest themselves in fantastic allegories and speculative interpretations of sacred texts. In addition, the divisive theology of Marcion results in a divided narrative and a divided canon. In book four, Irenaeus demonstrates the hermeneutical value of his Christology. Instead of beginning with a speculative cosmology and then moving to the scriptures, Irenaeus begins with Christ so that the narrative of Jesus' life determines his interpretation of the ancient prophets and the apostolic preaching. Irenaeus begins book four with a promise to "add weight by means of the words of the Lord (*per Domini sermones*), to what I have already advanced..." (AH iv, Praef, 1). This leads the modern reader to expect an exposition of the gospels and the parables of Jesus. This expectation goes unfulfilled until the very end of the fourth book. For Irenaeus, the "words of the Lord" include the words of the ancient prophets. In chapters 1-10 of book four, Irenaeus argues for the ontological unity that underlies the two testaments. He accomplishes this task by interspersing prophetic and apostolic quotations showing their theological unity. Yet, for Irenaeus, the two testaments are not merely united in content; rather, they share a deeper ontological unity.³⁹ "He (Christ) shows that all are from one essence (*ex una substantia*), that is, Abraham, and Moses, and the prophets, and also the Lord himself, who rose from the dead..." (AH iv, 2, 4).

Irenaeus uses this same language in chapter 9, "All things therefore are of one and the same substance

³⁸ Concerning the detailed structure of Irenaeus' argument in book four, Philippe Bacq (1978) remains unsurpassed. My modest proposal is not meant to challenge or subvert his analysis in any way. In fact, Bacq's (1978, p. 41) proposal that Irenaeus thinks in "cercles concentriques" has been an encouragement for my own chiasmic interpretation of Irenaeus' work. While Bacq's work masterfully considers the detailed internal argument that holds the fourth book together, I am more interested, for the purposes of this introduction, to consider how the theological argument of book four fits into the larger purpose of the five books as a whole.

³⁹ A major aspect of this thesis is to show that, for Irenaeus, the unity of the two covenants is not merely a unity of content or conceptual truth. Rather, the scriptures have their ontological ground of being in the divine Logos. The language of "substance" reveals the ontological character of Irenaeus' perspective. This language is typically used in the first two books in reference to the Valentinian understanding of the cosmos. For instance, in AH i, 2, 3, Irenaeus refers to the Valentinian view that the passion of Sophia is an "amorphous substance (*οὐσίαν ἀμορφον; substantiam informem*)" out of which the psychic and hylic world is formed. Cf. also AH i, 4, 2; i, 5, 1; i, 5, 4; ii, 2, 4; ii, 10, 3-4; ii, 14, 4; ii, 17; ii, 30, 9. In AH ii, 30, 9, Irenaeus clearly challenges the Valentinian perspective when he asserts that God's creative will is "the substance of all things (*substantia omnium voluntas ejus*)."³⁹ This challenge to the Valentinian ontology affects Irenaeus' perspective of the scriptures and God's revelation through his incarnate Son.

(*unius et ejusdem substantiae*), that is, from one and the same God” (AH iv, 9, 1). Christ is not merely the content of the prophetic discourse and the apostolic witness, but also the author whose own words proceed from the prophetic and apostolic tongues. This principle, that Christ is not merely the fulfillment of scripture but also the author, has enormous implications for Irenaeus’ vision of the text. For the second century bishop, Christ’s person and work is the hermeneutical ground from which the scriptures must be read and interpreted.

However, this ontological unity of the old and new covenants in Christ does not negate the distinctiveness of each. In chapters 11-18 of the fourth book, Irenaeus emphasizes the historical progression from the old to the new.

Thus, therefore, has the one and the same Lord granted, by means of his advent (*per suum adventum*), a greater gift of grace (*majorem gratiae*) to those of a later period, than what he had granted to those under the Old Testament dispensation. For they indeed used to hear, by means of his servants, that the King would come (*audiebant venturum regem*), and they rejoiced to a certain extent (*mediocriter gaudebant*), inasmuch as they hoped for his coming; but those who have beheld him actually present (*qui autem praesentem viderunt*), and have obtained liberty, and been made partakers of his gifts (*potiti sunt ejus muneratione*), do possess a greater amount of grace (*majorem gratiam*), and higher degree of exultation (*abundantioorem exultationem*), rejoicing because of the king’s arrival (AH iv, 11, 3).

Irenaeus’ cruciform vision of Christ leads to a cruciform vision of the scriptures. Vertically and ontologically, it is one and the same God, who authors the scriptures revealing himself in both covenants. However, horizontally and historically, God’s revelation grows toward perfection. While the old covenant consists in the hearing of the Father’s Word, the new covenant consists in both seeing and hearing the Father’s eternal Word made flesh. The Son administers God’s dispensations adapting the revelation of his Father according to the times and bringing all things to perfection in his own advent in the flesh.

Christ’s recapitulating work described in book three is the ontological foundation that unites the prophetic oracles and the apostolic tradition in one essence as well as provides for an historical progression of the scriptures from Old Testament infancy toward New Testament maturity. Thus, Christ’s person and work is the hermeneutical context in which the sacred scriptures must be interpreted. It is precisely this christological interpretation of scripture that forms the essence of the church’s kerygma. Christ’s person and work is not only the ontological foundation of the scriptures,

but also the essence of the church's tradition. Irenaeus allows no schism between the sacred scriptures and the ecclesial witness. Both the scriptures and the church proceed from the same essence. Thus, the church's sacramental life is itself the interpretation of scripture; it is the incarnation of the prophetic and apostolic words; it is the concrete fulfillment of their preaching. It is for this reason that Irenaeus cannot describe the unity of the Old and New Testaments without testifying to the authority of the church.

For Irenaeus, it is not enough to uphold the authority and unity of the canonical scriptures. Irenaeus is well aware that his opponents make use of the same scriptures to support their cosmological speculations. Therefore, at the end of book four, Irenaeus emphasizes the place of the church as the place of true interpretation. Irenaeus accomplishes this task not by an assertion of the legal authority of church hierarchies, but by a confession of the church's intimate communion with the Triune God.

Where, therefore, the gifts of the Lord have been placed (*Ubi charismata Domini posita sunt*), there it behooves us to learn the truth (*ibi discere oportet veritatem*), namely, from those who possess the succession of the church which is from the apostles (*ab apostolis Ecclesiae successio*), and among whom exists that which is sound and blameless in conduct, as well as that which is unadulterated and incorrupt in speech. For these also preserve this faith of ours in one God who created all things; and they increase that love for the Son of God, who accomplished such marvelous dispensations for our sake; and they expound the scriptures to us without danger (*Scripturas sine periculo nobis exponunt*), neither blaspheming God, nor dishonoring the patriarchs, nor despising the prophets (AH iv, 26, 5).

Because the church communes with Christ, she alone is able to interpret the scriptures christologically. The church's authority proceeds from her union with Christ. Thus, the church is of one and the same substance as the scriptures. In the same way that a father's life is perpetuated in his child, so the prophetic and apostolic writings are inherited by the church and preserved in her christocentric life.

Book three is the center of Irenaeus' five books against his opponents in which the bishop of Lyons testifies to the person of Christ as the one who recapitulates all things in himself. Book four, which demonstrates the church's christological hermeneutic of scripture, counterbalances book two, which shows that the Valentinian interpretation of scripture proceeds from a speculative cosmology.

Irenaeus' Christ unites God and man ontologically in one person and historically in one narrative; the heretical Christ divides the spiritual world from the material and the New Testament from the Old.

In order to finish his argument, Irenaeus writes a fifth book. This fifth book accomplishes two purposes. First, he challenges the Valentinian and Marcionite interpretations of Paul. According to Irenaeus, heretical teachers use Paul's epistles to testify to a foreign cosmology. Thus, for Irenaeus, the use of Paul's epistles is not merely a matter of exegetical detail, but primarily a matter of hermeneutical vision. Irenaeus' opponents tend to exalt Paul above other apostles and claim that the true interpretation of Paul's letters must begin with Paul's own intent. In book three, Irenaeus argued that Paul must be interpreted in communion with all the apostles.⁴⁰ Now in book five, his argument focuses on the christological hermeneutic.⁴¹ Paul's letters must be interpreted in continuity with Jesus' own person and work. Irenaeus' use of the Pauline language of recapitulation accomplishes this task. Thus, Irenaeus writes,

Into this paradise the Lord has introduced those who obey his call, "summing up in himself all things which are in heaven, and which are on earth," but the things in heaven are spiritual, while those on earth constitute the dispensation of human nature (*secundum hominem est dispositio*). These things, therefore, he recapitulated in himself: by uniting man to the Spirit (*adunans hominem spiritui*), and causing the Spirit to dwell in man (*spiritum collocans in homine*), he is himself made the head of the Spirit (*ipse caput spiritus factus est*), and gives the Spirit to be the head of man (*spiritum dans esse hominis caput*): for through him we see and hear and speak (AH v, 20, 2).

Whether he is interpreting the prophetic utterances or the Pauline epistles, Irenaeus' hermeneutic remains consistent. He begins with the narrative of Christ's incarnate life and, then, explains the

⁴⁰ Cf. AH iii, 13-15 where Irenaeus maintains that Paul is in agreement with all the apostles. This agreement of the apostles forms the foundation for his exposition of the recapitulating work of Christ in AH iii, 16-19. Irenaeus writes, "I judge it necessary therefore to take into account the entire mind (*universam sententiam*) of the apostles regarding our Lord Jesus Christ..." (AH iii, 16, 1).

⁴¹ For Irenaeus' interpretation of Paul's epistles Cf. Rolf Noormann (1994). Noormann believes that for Irenaeus, Paul is the theological representative of the whole apostolic witness. However, as important as Paul's epistles are for understanding Irenaeus' theology, Irenaeus never allows Paul's letters to become independent of the gospel of Christ. Commenting on Irenaeus' use of Paul in his rebuttal of his opponents' interpretation of 1 Cor 15:50, Noormann (1994, p. 507) writes, "Das letzte, sachlich besonders gewichtige Argument des Irenaeus ist ein christologisches (14,1-4): Paulus könne Fleisch und Blut deshalb nicht vom Heil ausschliessen wollen, weil er überall vom Fleisch und Blut Christi rede und damit sowohl seine wirkliche Menschwerdung als auch die *carnis salus* unterstreiche (14, 1; 1-10). Die Ausführungen dieses Kapitels beruhen zum einen auf der Vorstellung, die Rettung des Menschen setze eine substantielle Identität zwischen Erlöser und Erlöstem voraus; nach dieser Auffassung begründen sich Inkarnation und *carnis salus* wechselseitig." Irenaeus' agenda concerning the interpretation of Paul is to demonstrate the inseparable union between Paul's epistles and the narrative of Christ's life as revealed in the fourfold Gospel. This agenda seems to be the reason for connecting Paul and Luke in an "inseparable" bond (Cf. AH iii, 14). Paul cannot be interpreted without the whole of Luke's gospel.

scriptures as a witness to his recapitulating work.⁴² For Irenaeus, Valentinian and Marcionite catechists separate Paul's epistles from the four gospels that narrate Jesus' incarnate life. This division allows these teachers to employ Paul and the rest of the scriptures in service of their cosmology.

However, the purpose of Irenaeus' fifth book is not limited to a refutation of the opposition's interpretation of Paul's epistles. Rather, his fifth book fulfills a larger and more profound agenda. The fifth book counterbalances the first. In the first book, Irenaeus describes the Valentinian cosmology. The narrative of the spiritual aeons within the Pleroma and the separation of the material substance from the spiritual world is the ontological foundation that informs the Valentinian vision of God, Christ, scripture, and one's own pneumatic identity. In this fifth book, Irenaeus describes the orthodox cosmology that proceeds from Christ and is confessed by the church. In Christ, it is not merely humanity that is redeemed, but also the entire physical universe. The death, resurrection, ascension and deification of Jesus mean that Satan no longer rules the world. Jesus is the man through whom the entire cosmos is reordered. The perfection of all creation is the goal of Christ's work and the end that God has intended from the beginning. In this way, Christ accomplishes his task of joining the end to the beginning. In the perfection of the cosmos in Christ, Irenaeus describes the full implications of his doctrine of recapitulation as the essence of the church's worldview.

Irenaeus' five books, *Adversus Haereses*, are arranged in a chiasm. The center of his work is book three, which describes the recapitulating work of Christ. Books two and four contrast the opposition's interpretation of scripture based upon their cosmological speculations with the orthodox interpretation based upon the ontological and historical unity present in Christ. Books one and five contrast the opposition's cosmology, which excludes the material universe from the spiritual Pleroma, with Irenaeus' cosmology that envisions the redemption, reordering, and perfection of all things.

⁴² Cf. AH v, 9-14 where Irenaeus refutes the Valentinian interpretation of 1 Cor 15:50. For Irenaeus, the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ must govern the interpretation of Paul's words. Irenaeus writes, "And inasmuch as the apostle has not pronounced against the very substance of flesh and blood (*substantiam carnis et sanguinis*), that it cannot inherit the kingdom of God, the same apostle has everywhere adopted the term 'flesh and blood' with regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, partly indeed to establish his human nature (*uti hominem ejus statueret*) (for he did himself speak of himself as the Son of man), and partly that he might confirm the salvation of our flesh (*uti salutem carnis nostrae confirmaret*). For if the flesh were not in a position to be saved, the Word of God would in no wise have become flesh. And if the blood of the righteous (*sanguis justorum*) were not to be inquired after, the Lord would certainly not have had blood" (AH v, 14, 1). For Irenaeus, the narrative of Christ in the fourfold gospel is the canon that provides the proper context for the interpretation of Paul's words.

Thus, Irenaeus' work is a testimony to the profound depth of his Christology. Christ is the center of a cruciform chiasm uniting God and humanity, heaven and earth, spirit and flesh, and Creator and creature in an ontological and historical unity.

**“Joining the End to the Beginning”
Divine Providence and the Interpretation of Scripture in the Teaching
of St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons**

Chapter 1: *Creatio Ex Nihilo*: The Divine Will as the Essence of Divine Providence

Introduction: Patristic Origins of *Creatio Ex Nihilo*

The Christian teaching of creation develops in the first couple of centuries according to the theological and rhetorical needs of the church. From its beginning, Christianity assumed the doctrine of creation contained in the Mosaic Law, which fostered a common cosmological foundation with Judaism. Concerning the origin of the universe, no real conflict arose. This shared perspective concerning creation’s origin meant that Christianity’s debate with Judaism focused more on the ordering and providential care of creation. While Judaism subscribed to a divine governance of the world mediated through angels and the Torah, Christians confessed the mediation of Jesus Christ. According to Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus’ work reunites the heavens and the earth into one new cosmos under the authority of the risen Christ (Mt 28). In a similar way, John’s Gospel describes a universe mediated from the beginning through the divine *Logos*, who has become flesh in the last days and dwelt in the midst of the apostles (Jn 1).

The emphasis on the mediation of the Creator’s governance places the discussion of creation within a hermeneutical framework, rather than a philosophical one. The significance of creation resided in its relation to the knowledge of God and his self-revelation. The ground of being for the Christian knowledge of God was not a text or a written code, but the flesh and blood of God’s own Son. “God spoke to his people of old by the prophets,” writes the author of *Hebrews*, “but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb 1). Within this debate, creation becomes a kind of hermeneutical trump card that Christians used to thwart Jewish appeals to the Mosaic Law. This strategy is evident already in the four gospels and seems to reflect Jesus’ own interpretive practice. The fact that the Creator continues to do his life-giving work even on the Sabbath day legitimizes

Jesus' performance of miracles on the same day.⁴³ For Jesus, the command to rest is subservient to God's more fundamental and absolute will manifested in creation—the will to give life.⁴⁴ In a similar way, Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce focuses on Genesis 2:24, not Deuteronomy 24 (cf. Mt 19). Indeed, for Jesus, God's will in creation relegates the Mosaic tolerance for divorce to a practical adaptation of the divine ideal for the sake of a fallen humanity. This hermeneutical strategy ascribed to Jesus in the four gospels continues in Paul and the early Christian fathers especially as they consider the issue of circumcision. Paul notes that Abraham was justified before he was circumcised (Gal 3; Rom 4); and Justin Martyr asserts that, because God creates humanity in a state of uncircumcision, the command to circumcise cannot be universal or eternal (*Dial.* 19).

As Christianity enters into more direct conversation with the Greco-Roman culture, the doctrine of creation plays an even more profound role and receives greater theological significance. Creation served Christianity well in the context of Judaism acting as a hermeneutical bulwark limiting the universality and eternity of the Mosaic Law given on Sinai. In a similar way, the apologists of the second century naturally used the doctrine of creation as a hermeneutical foundation for their interpretation and critique of popular philosophies. Seeking to ally Christianity with the philosophical tradition and its critique of pagan cults, Justin Martyr suggests a harmony between the Christian view of creation and Plato's *Timaeus*. "We have been taught that he (God) in the beginning did of his goodness, for man's sake, create (*δημιουργῆσαι*) all things out of unformed matter (*ἐξ ἀμόρφου ὕλης*)" (*IApol.* 10). Justin appears to intentionally refrain from discussing the origins of the primordial matter used by God to shape the universe. This omission was certainly politically advantageous. An agreement with the philosophical tradition could protect Christianity from the charge of innovation and aid its critique of civic religions. However, Justin's apparent disinterest in the origin of matter may also arise from his understanding of the Christian tradition. Within the context of Judaism, Christians were more interested in God's mediation and providential care of creation than in its origins. In other words, Christians concentrated on creation's end (*τέλος*) in Christ and the

⁴³ Cf. John 5:1ff. When Jewish leaders criticize Jesus for healing the paralytic on the Sabbath, Jesus simply retorts, "My Father is working still, and I am working."

⁴⁴ Cf. Mt 12:1-14 where Jesus' will to heal and give life even on the Sabbath is contrasted with the Pharisees desire to destroy.

resurrection. This same eschatological emphasis is evident in Justin's first apology. "Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world (ἐν ᾗ ὁ θεὸς τὸ σκότος καὶ τὴν ὕλην τρέψας κόσμον ἐποίησε); and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead" (*IApol.* 67).

Following Justin, Christian apologists realized that they could not remain silent concerning the question of matter's origin. The Christian emphasis on God's providential ordering of the material universe through Christ was soon combined with a doctrine of matter's primordial origin from God. As a result, early apologists suggest a two-stage process of creation.⁴⁵ First, God produces the matter he will use to form creation. Second, God shapes and orders the primordial chaotic substance into a cosmic beauty. This two-stage process is suggested by Tatian in his *Address to the Greeks*,⁴⁶ but explicitly explained by Theophilus in his three books addressed to Autolycus.

Theophilus writes,

And Moses, who lived many years before Solomon, or, rather, the Word of God by him as by an instrument, says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." First he names the "beginning," and "creation," then he thus introduced God; for not lightly and on slight occasion is it right to name God. For divine wisdom foreknew that some would trifle and name a multitude of gods that do not exist. In order, therefore, that the living God might be known by his works, and that by his Word God created the heavens and the earth, and all that is therein, he said, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Then having spoken of their creation, he explains to us: "And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the water." This, sacred scripture teaches at the outset, to show that matter, from which God made and fashioned the world, was in some manner created, being produced by God (*Ad Autol.* 2, 10).

For Theophilus, Genesis 1:1-2 refers to the divine production of matter which was without form. The following verses describe the long process by which the Creator forms matter into an ordered cosmos for the sake of humanity.

The explanation of creation in terms of a two-stage process was used by certain teachers to support their peculiar cosmologies. Indeed, the Valentinian drama describing the origins of the material world appears to be structured according to a two-stage process. Valentinian teaching maintains that the primordial matter used by the demiurge derived from the divine realm. However,

⁴⁵ My discussion is certainly indebted to the insightful article by Jacques Fantino. Fantino (1996, p. 592) describes Theophilus' perspective of creation in terms of "deux étapes successives." Cf. also the discussion in M. Steenberg (2008, p. 38-49) and A. Orbe (1978, p. 71-127).

⁴⁶ Cf. Tatian's *Address to the Greeks*, chap. 5.

the manner of its derivation was not positive or rational, but negative and tragic. The original chaotic matter comes from the spiritual Pleroma by a necessary expulsion, not by a deliberate, well-planned intention. The unfulfilled desire of Sophia, the least of the spiritual aeons, resulted in an unwanted and shameful substance that had to be excluded from the divine world. This exclusion conveyed the fact that matter stands outside the pneumatic realm; its relation to the supreme father is always external. The Valentinian drama explains the origin of matter and the dark, chaotic, and vacuous character of the primordial substance. The demiurge is then brought forth to accomplish the second stage of the material world's creation. He works to give shape to the formless mass expelled from the transcendent Pleroma.

In his conflict with Valentinian teaching, Irenaeus is compelled to re-evaluate the two-stage creative process espoused by early apologists. From Irenaeus' perspective, the two-stage process has been exploited by Valentinian teachers to devalue the substance of creation and distort the character of the Creator. For such catechists, primordial matter is essentially a shameful and unfulfilled waste product duly expelled from the divine realm. In addition, the demiurge is reduced to a lower class god who lacks freedom; his creative work is severely limited by the capacity of the matter he forms. For Irenaeus, the two-stage process allows the primordial material of creation to be placed outside the will and intention of God producing a dualistic cosmology. Thus, in Irenaeus' theology, the *creatio ex nihilo* receives a new and profound prominence. God's creation of all things out of nothing is no longer merely a first stage in the creation process explaining the origin of matter. Rather, the *creatio ex nihilo* becomes the only stage expressing the entirety of God's relation to creation. The ramifications of this perspective are enormous. Matter is no longer merely an external product of God's will, but resides eternally within the divine volition. God's life-giving will or intention is now the ground of being for the material universe. God's good will governs creation's beginning and its end in Christ and the resurrection. In other words, the divine will is not only the origin of primordial matter, but also the essence of his providential care.

Therefore, for Irenaeus, the *creatio ex nihilo* is more than a philosophical point employed to defend Christianity against hostile doctrines. God's creation out of nothing shapes Irenaeus' entire vision of God and his revelation. The *creatio ex nihilo* establishes an absolute distinction between

God and creation. The Creator is the only true God because he is the only God who exists. His being and life are eternal, absolute, and unchangeable. In contrast, the substance of creation exists within the divine will. Creation has no substance of its own. Apart from God's will, creation descends into the nothingness from which it came.

However, the *creatio ex nihilo* does not merely establish an absolute substantial distinction between God and the world, but also expresses God's unchangeable intent to relate to creation. The fleshly matter of creation not only receives shape at the hands of God, but also existence. The very substance of creation itself is the product and expression of God's creative will. Created matter bears the imprint of God's hands. Thus, the *creatio ex nihilo* allows Irenaeus to perceive creation in two ways. First, the substance of creation in itself is nothing. Here Irenaeus can accept a certain pessimism that even resonates with the worldview of his opponents. However, Irenaeus' emphasis on the divine will allows him to transcend the pessimism of his adversaries. While in its own substance creation is nothing, in God's will it is destined for a divine fulfillment. Irenaeus' doctrine of creation promotes a dynamic view of created matter. Creation is not static but, in Irenaeus' words, plastic (*πλάσις*). Yet, creation's capacity for change is not ruled by evil nor governed by fate. Rather, creation's destiny is firmly rooted in the economy of the divine will.

This dynamic view of creation means that the changing substance of creation is a real manifestation of God's will. In this context, the world, the scriptures, and the church are intimately united.⁴⁷ The same God, who speaks and acts in the scriptures, continues to act upon the very substance of creation within the church's sacramental life. The created world, the scriptures, and the church must be interpreted within the dynamic movement of God's creative will. Every moment of a creature's existence as well as every word of the scriptures are real manifestations of God's providential care. This providential will that begins with the *creatio ex nihilo* leads to the incarnation,

⁴⁷ Cf. L. S. Thornton (1950, pp. 115-128). My interpretation of Irenaeus is certainly indebted to Thornton's analysis. Thornton sees orthodoxy as developing out of an organic perspective of God's revelation. Creation, scripture, and church are three distinct structures that manifest the same divine character. Thornton (1950, pp. 124-125) writes, "What Irenaeus sees, however, is a structure of a much more enduring kind. Here creation, scripture and the church are so fused into one whole that, although we can and must distinguish them, yet they cannot be separated...The threefold structure of orthodoxy presented to us in the teaching of Irenaeus has this peculiarity: it consists in three forms of unity which interpenetrate one another." It is the argument of this paper that this threefold structure of God's revelation is interpreted by Irenaeus within a certain framework. Creation, scripture, and church proceed out of God's creative will that gives life *ex nihilo* and serve the ultimate purpose of manifesting Christ as the one who recapitulates all things. It is the loss of this unifying framework that allows creation, scripture, and church to fragment into competing sources of supernatural gnosis.

death and resurrection of Jesus, and ends in the church and the eschatological kingdom. The reality of recapitulation, which originates in God's creation and culminates in the person of Christ, establishes a hermeneutical framework. For Irenaeus, the material world, the scriptures, and the church's tradition have no meaning except within God's creative intent.

I. The Place of *Creatio ex Nihilo* in Irenaeus' Cosmology

According to Irenaeus, Valentinian teachers define the fleshly world as a waste product expelled from the spiritual world. Sophia, the least of the spiritual aeons, desires to "search into the nature of the Father" (AH i, 2, 2). Sophia's unfulfilled desire brings forth an "amorphous substance (*οὐσίαν ἄμορφον*)" that is of necessity expelled from the spiritual realm. In another passage, Irenaeus describes the exclusion of Sophia's passion as an "untimely birth (*ἔκτρωμα*)" (AH i, 4, 1).

For Irenaeus, this view of the fleshly world is catastrophic for the Christian faith. First, such a view denigrates the Demiurge, that is, the God of this material universe. The Valentinians view the Creator of this world condescendingly as a kind of garbage collector.⁴⁸ Regardless of his skill, the Creator is still defined as one who works with material waste. The Demiurge fulfills a necessary, but repulsive function. Second, the Valentinian view of the material world destroys the integrity of the flesh and its place in the salvific plan of God. Such a dualistic cosmology defines the material universe as a passive substance. Its exclusion from the spiritual world leaves it utterly incapable of fulfillment. The flesh is essentially an unfulfilled passion; and the life of the flesh is unworthy of sharing in any spiritual providence. Thus, at best, the fleshly world is the passive arena in which a "spiritual" drama unfolds. The fleshly world cannot be an object of the supreme father's salvation, a participant in the divine will, or a revelation of the divine purpose.

⁴⁸ Jonas indicates that Valentinianism held a mediating position concerning the Demiurge. He considers Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora* as a representative example. Jonas (2001, p. 192) sums up Ptolemy's view by saying, "Those who attribute creation and legislation to an evil god are as much in error as those who ascribe the Law to the supreme God: the former err because they do not know the god of justice, the latter, because they do not know the Father of All." Thus, the demiurge is neither essentially evil nor essentially spiritual. This mediating position also seems to affect their view of providence. The future of the material world is not subject to evil, but to an indifferent chance or fate.

A. *Creatio Ex Nihilo* and the Knowledge of God

For Irenaeus, the key to understanding his opponents' thought in all of its variety is its focused contemplation on the spiritual substance.⁴⁹ The Valentinian cosmology consists in the production of spiritual entities out of a single substance.⁵⁰ Fullness (Pleroma) is accomplished through the conjunction of aeons in which each new aeon produced possesses an attribute of the spiritual substance they all share in common. This concern for the divine substance shapes the Valentinian view of the material world. The need to protect the spiritual world and preserve its purity demands the production of *Horos* or *Stauros* to act as a boundary that stabilizes the Pleroma and expels the "amorphous substance" of Sophia's unfulfilled desire. Thus, cosmological dualism is not necessarily original to the Valentinian worldview; rather, it is forced upon them as a consequence of their concern for the purity of the divine essence.⁵¹

This obsession with the divine essence has profound consequences for the Valentinian perspective of the theological task. All knowledge of God is limited to the spiritual substance. Within the spiritual substance there is knowledge, light, life, fullness, and goodness; outside the spiritual substance there is ignorance, darkness, death, emptiness, and evil. For Irenaeus, the Valentinian god has a fundamental weakness. He cannot communicate his knowledge, his life, or his

⁴⁹ Cf. Einar Thomassen (2000, pp. 1-17). Thomassen argues convincingly that Valentinianism is closely associated with certain monistic Neopythagorean theories. Thomassen (2000, p. 4) writes, "In Valentinianism as well, cosmogonic matter only comes into being at the end of a process. The main feature of this process is the passion of Sophia. Is it possible, then, that the passion of Sophia here serves to express the same idea as the Dyad in monistic Pythagoreanism? In my view there exists conclusive evidence that these Neopythagorean theories about the derivation of matter were known to the Valentinian theologians and that they formed a source from which Valentinian systems were persistently built." The derivation of matter from the spiritual realm is not a derivation from the free will, intention, or power of the supreme god, but a derivation of substance. Matter is a distant and corrupt emanation from the least of the spiritual aeons. For Irenaeus, the failure of all philosophical systems consists in their attempts to explain the Spiritual essence and its relationship to the material essence. I believe that Irenaeus makes a conscious decision to challenge all such attempts by building his theological vision upon the foundation of the divine will.

⁵⁰ Cf. Hans Jonas (2001, pp. 174). Jonas sees Valentinianism as a representative of the Syrian-Egyptian type of "Gnostic" speculation. Jonas maintains that the distinguishing characteristic of this type of "Gnosticism" is the derivation of cosmic dualism from a theological monism. He writes, "The distinguishing principle of the type is the attempt to place the origin of darkness, and thereby of the dualistic rift of being, within the godhead itself, and thus to develop the divine tragedy, the necessity of salvation arising from it, and the dynamics of this salvation itself, as wholly a sequence of inner-divine events. Radically understood, this principle involves the task of deriving not only such spiritual facts as passion, ignorance, and evil but the very nature of matter in its contrariety to the spirit from the prime spiritual source: its very existence is to be accounted for in terms of the divine history itself."

⁵¹ Jonas considers the consequences of seeing the material cosmos as a distant derivation from the divine essence. Jonas (2001, p. 174) argues that, in Valentinian speculation, knowledge and ignorance are "raised to an ontological position of the first order." He continues, "...both are principles of objective and total existence, not merely of subjective and private experience." Knowledge and ignorance are not limited to a conflict within the heart and mind of the individual; rather, they are cosmological realities that condition and determine all that dwell within their respective realms.

goodness outside of his own being.⁵² Thus, from the Valentinian perspective, theology proceeds from one's substantial union with the spiritual realm. The knowledge of God begins with the understanding of one's own inner identity as a pneumatic Christian, that is, one possessing a shard of the spiritual substance within one's own being. For Irenaeus, such a claim to divine knowledge is the height of arrogance and consists in a self-proclaimed deification.⁵³ "Such being the state of the case, these infatuated men declare that they rise above the Demiurge (*super Demiurgum ascendere*); and, inasmuch as they proclaim themselves superior (*meliores*) to that God who made and adorned the heavens, and the earth, and all things that are in them, and maintain that they themselves are spiritual (*spiritales*), while they are in fact shamefully carnal on account of their so great impiety (*impietatem*)" (AH ii, 30, 1). For Irenaeus, a theology that begins with a gnosis of the spiritual substance is not merely unreasonable, but immoral.

Against his opponents' speculation of the divine essence, Irenaeus asserts the superiority of God's almighty will, which creates all things out of nothing. The *creatio ex nihilo* shapes Irenaeus' entire vision of God, the world, and the nature of theology.⁵⁴ It is difficult to overestimate the importance the bishop of Lyons places on God's work of creation. With this fundamental truth,

⁵² Cf. AH ii, 14, 4 where Irenaeus asserts that his opponents and the philosophers share the same idea. They present a weak creator, whose will and power are limited by the material substance. He writes, "This opinion, too, that they hold the Creator formed the world out of previously existing matter (*ex subjecta materia*), both Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and Plato expressed before them; as, forsooth, we learn they also do under the inspiration of their Mother. Then, again, as to the opinion that everything of necessity passes away to those things out of which they maintain it was also formed, and that God is the slave of this necessity (*hujus necessitates servum esse Deum*), so that he cannot impart immortality to what is mortal (*non posit mortali immortalitatem addere*), or bestow incorruption on what is corruptible (*corruptibili in corruptelam donare*)...." For Valentinians and philosophers alike, the will or intention of the demiurge is limited by the material substance. In other words, the demiurge can only make what the material substance allows. Irenaeus repudiates this perspective with his understanding of God's creation *ex nihilo*. The supremacy of God's will allows him to assert God's absolute freedom. In Irenaeus' thought, the divine will or power represents the ability of God to communicate his own life and goodness outside his own substance.

⁵³ H. Jonas (2001, pp. 296-297) argues that the elevation of man to a "supracosmic deity" is fundamental to the Valentinian worldview. He writes, "Now this elevation...of 'Man' to a transmundane deity, prior and superior to the creator of the universe, or, the assigning of that name to such a deity, is one of the most significant traits of Gnostic theology in the general history of religion.... It signifies a new metaphysical status of man in the order of things; and by being advised of it is the creator of the world put in his place."

⁵⁴ Cf. John Behr (2000, p. 35). He writes, "Although, as a consequence of his insistence on the creative activity of the one God, Irenaeus does develop a fairly sophisticated theology of creation *ex nihilo*, the question of the origin of matter in an original act of creation is not central for him. Rather, his attention is captivated by the continual divine activity of the Hands of God, the Son and the Spirit, fashioning the creature formed from mud into the image and likeness of God." John Behr is correct that Irenaeus' primary concern is God's ongoing providential care of creation. However, I wish to argue that, for Irenaeus, the creation *ex nihilo* does not merely refer to the origin of matter. Rather, it is my argument that the *creatio ex nihilo* expresses how God relates to the world from beginning to end. In this regard, cf. Jacques Fantino's (1996) article, which argues convincingly that Irenaeus' approach to the *creatio ex nihilo* is not primarily philosophical, but theological in character. While many philosophers and dualistic teachers conceive of the creator as one who is subject to the material with which he must work, Irenaeus sees God as possessing an absolute freedom. In contrast to the Valentinian demiurge, the true Creator can form his creation into that which transcends its material substance. Thus, Irenaeus' understanding of God's continuing creation is governed by an eternal and absolute freedom that consists in his ability to create all things out of nothing by his will alone.

Irenaeus tears down the opposition's speculations concerning the divine essence and constructs his own theological structure built upon the foundation of the divine will. This theological revolution from the spiritual substance to the creative will interpenetrates the entirety of Irenaeus' theological vision.

First, the *creatio ex nihilo* establishes an essential and absolute distinction between the Creator and creature. God alone possesses a real and eternal existence, while creation proceeds out of nothing. Creation has no essence of its own; it does not possess an independent substance or an autonomous existence. In its essence, creation is "nothing." In this context, Irenaeus identifies the true God as the one who "really exists" in contrast to all other gods who have no real existence. Irenaeus writes, "Affirming that He (the Creator) lies, they are themselves liars, attributing all sorts of wickedness to Him; and conceiving of one who is not above this Being as really having an existence, they are thus convicted by their own views of blasphemy against that God who really exists (*qui est*), while they conjure into existence a god who has no existence (*qui non est*), to their own condemnation" (AH ii, 9, 2). Irenaeus' description of God as the one who "really exists" should be interpreted in contrast to creation's former nothingness. In this way, Irenaeus avoids a dualistic cosmology that promotes the independent existence of a world outside of God's being. Irenaeus uses the *creatio ex nihilo* to establish the theological foundation for a cosmological unity.

The absolute essential boundary between the Creator, who is, and creation, which comes from nothing, means that God's essence is unknowable. According to his own substance, God is a mystery; He is incomprehensible and unfathomable.⁵⁵ There are no human words or concepts that can declare the secrets of God's inner being. While his opponents exalt themselves claiming an essential kinship with the divine, Irenaeus asserts that their speculations merely impose human attributes onto the divine nature. "By their manner of speaking, they ascribe those things which apply to men to the Father of all, whom they also declare to be unknown to all" (AH ii, 13, 3). For Irenaeus, the theology of his adversaries is nothing more than the deification of the human mind. While they assume their

⁵⁵ Cf. Juan Ochagavia (1964). Ochagavia notes that Irenaeus refers to eleven divine attributes in order to describe God's transcendent essence. All of these attributes are negative attributes, that is, they communicate what God is not. Cf. also Nathanael Bonwetsch (1925, pp. 50ff). Bonwetsch (1925, p. 51) writes, "Daher die Beschreibung des Wesens Gottes in negierenden Abstraktionen." Bonwetsch refers to AH iv, 20, 5; ii, 34, 2; iii, 8, 3.

own deification, Irenaeus begins his own theological reflection by recognizing humankind's creaturely weakness. Irenaeus maintains that "God is not as men are (*non sic Deus, quemadmodum homines*)" (AH ii, 13, 3). Then, Irenaeus continues,

For the Father of all is at a vast distance from those affections and passions which operate among men. He is a simple, uncompounded Being (*simplex et non compositus*) without diverse members (*similimembrius*), and altogether like, and equal to Himself (*totus ipse sibi similitipsum similis et aequalis est*), since He is wholly understanding, and wholly spirit, and wholly thought, and wholly intelligence, and wholly reason, and wholly hearing, and wholly seeing, and wholly light, and the whole source of all that is good (*totus fons omnium bonorum*). . . . He is, however, above (*super*) all these properties, and therefore indescribable (*inenarrabilis*). For He may well and properly be called an Understanding which comprehends all things, but He is not on that account like the understanding of men; and He may most properly be termed Light, but He is nothing like the light with which we are acquainted. And so, in all other particulars, the Father of all is in no degree similar to human weakness (*nulli similis erit omnium Pater hominum pusillitati*) (AH ii, 13, 3-4).

All theology of the divine essence is a negative theology. The church's confession begins with silence and proceeds from due humility recognizing the proper boundaries of the human mind.

Second, while the *creatio ex nihilo* establishes an essential boundary between Creator and creature, it also declares the unchangeable intent of the Creator to interact with the material cosmos.⁵⁶ For Irenaeus, true theology begins when God declares his will to give life to the world. The human knowledge of God does not begin with the divine essence, but with the divine will. God is not known except in his free and personal association with creation.⁵⁷

The *creatio ex nihilo* gives Irenaeus' theology its distinctive character. While his opponents are concerned to maintain the purity and perfection of the divine essence, Irenaeus is concerned with the real communication of God's knowledge, life, and goodness to the world. In order to protect the spiritual realm from contamination with evil, Irenaeus' adversaries employ the use of mediators. These angelic mediators accomplish two purposes. They protect the integrity and perfection of the spiritual Pleroma and also provide the basis for a divine revelation in this world. The knowledge of

⁵⁶ Cf. T. F. Torrance (1995, pp. 63). Torrance writes, "Thus Irenaeus had to present a doctrine of God as the one and only Lord God, the Creator of heaven and earth who is the source of all rationality, and a doctrine of the creation in which God gives reality to the world of sensible being thereby relating the world to God in a positive and not just a negative way. But that involved a rejection of the radical dualism in Hellenic philosophy and religion, and a unitary (but not a monistic) understanding of the whole universe of intelligible and sensible realities which God through his Word had endowed with a created rational order, with appropriate Laws and limits within which the world should abide in accordance with the determination given it by the Creator." Irenaeus is able to establish both a negative and a positive relation between God and the world because of his distinction between God's essence and his will. Essentially, God relates negatively to the world. He is that which the world is not. However, the world remains a positive revelation of God's character because it exists as the concrete product of God's will and intent.

⁵⁷ J. Lebreton (1926, p. 392) emphasizes the distinction in Irenaeus between "l'ordre de la grandeur et de l'ordre de l'amour." One cannot see God on his or her own effort; but God in his love can reveal himself as he wills.

God can be attained without the divine essence being stained by involvement in this fleshly world.

However, for Irenaeus, the *creatio ex nihilo* means that God's relationship to the cosmos is immediate, intimate, and personal. After pointing out the inadequacy of mediators to protect the "supreme Father" from the reality of the fallen world, Irenaeus asserts God's immediate connection with the material universe. He writes,

But it (the argument for mediators) will not be regarded as at all probable by those who know that God stands in need of nothing (*nullius indigens omnium Deus*), and that He created and made all things by His Word (*verbo condidit omnia et fecit*), while he neither required angels to assist him in the production of those things which are made, nor of any power greatly inferior to himself, and ignorant of the Father, nor of any defect or ignorance, in order that he who should know him might become man. But he himself in himself (*ipse in semetipso*), after a fashion which we can neither describe nor conceive (*inenarrabile et inexcogitabile*), predestinating all things (*omnia praedestinans*), formed them as he pleased (*fecit quemadmodum voluit*), bestowing harmony on all things (*omnibus consonantiam*), and assigning them their own place (*ordinem suum*), and the beginning of their creation (*initium creationis donans*) (AH ii, 2, 4).

For Irenaeus, the need for mediators or instruments is a sign of weakness. The Valentinian's supreme god is unable to communicate his goodness outside of his own being; he is a limited god who is bound to his own nature. The Creator's work of forming all things out of non-existence demonstrates his ability and intent to communicate his own life and goodness outside of himself to the world.⁵⁸

Irenaeus' focus on the divine will establishes the basis for his understanding of God's providential care of creation. From Irenaeus' point of view, the Valentinian god "exercises no providence at all" (AH iii, 24, 2).⁵⁹ Such a god governs the spiritual realm of his aeons, but excludes the fleshly world from his rule. Thus, the material world is, at best, surrendered to the forces of fate,

⁵⁸ Cf. AH ii, 34. In this section, Irenaeus contrasts the Greek philosophical understanding of the soul's immortality with his own doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. While some maintain that the soul's immortality demands its essential eternity, Irenaeus argues for the soul's utter dependence upon the will of God. For Irenaeus, the soul has a beginning in God's creative will and exists "as long as God wills..." (AH ii, 34, 2). Irenaeus continues, "For life does not arise from us (*non ex nobis*), nor from our own nature (*neque ex nostra natura vita est*); but it is bestowed according to the grace of God (*secundum gratiam Dei datur*)" (AH ii, 34, 3). Thus, the *creatio ex nihilo* becomes a fundamental principle that guides Irenaeus' thought. It establishes God as the one and only source of life whose character consists in the intent to communicate life outside of himself to his creatures. It also establishes the absolute need of all creatures to participate in the life that God's offers. Irenaeus concludes, "But as the animal body is certainly not itself the soul, yet has fellowship (*participatur*) with the soul as long as God pleases (*Deus vult*); so the soul herself is not life, but partakes in that life bestowed upon her by God (*participatur a Deo sibi praestitam vitam*). Wherefore also the prophetic word declares of the first-formed man, 'He became a living soul,' teaching us that by the participation of life the soul became alive (*secundum participationem vitae vivens facta est anima*); so that the soul, and the life which it possesses, must be understood as being separate existences (*separatim*). When God therefore bestows life and perpetual duration, it comes to pass that even souls which did not previously exist should henceforth endure, since God has both willed (*voluerit*) that they should exist, and should continued in existence. For the will of God ought to govern and rule in all things (*principari enim debet in omnibus et dominari voluntas Dei*)..." (AH, ii, 34, 4). For the bishop of Lyons, the soul is immortal not because it possesses its own life, but because it participates in the life communicated by God.

⁵⁹ Cf. Karl Prümmer's (1938, p. 209) article in which he observes that Irenaeus repeatedly maintains "daß die Leugnung der Vorsehung der eigentliche Grundirrtum der Gnostiker sei."

and, at worst, subjected to evil purposes.⁶⁰ At its essence, the fleshly world consists in unfulfilled desires. It originates in the unfulfilled passion of Sophia and, therefore, is condemned to perpetual imperfection and dissatisfaction. However, for Irenaeus, God exercises “a providence over all things” (AH iii, 25, 1). God’s creative power, not only causes the world’s existence, but also governs and moves it toward a destiny. Irenaeus expresses this perspective with the image of a sculptor.⁶¹ God’s hands are ever at work shaping his formation (*τό πλάσμα*), which is human flesh.

It was not angels, therefore, who made us, nor who formed us, neither had angels power to make an image of God (*nec angeli potuerunt imaginem facere Dei*), nor any one else, except the Word of the Lord, nor any Power remotely distant from the Father of all things (*nec virtus longe absistens a Patre universorum*). For God did not stand in need of these beings, in order to the accomplishing of what he had himself determined with himself (*ipse apud se*) beforehand should be done, as if he did not possess his own hands (*quasi ipse suas non haberet manus*). For with him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom freely and spontaneously (*per quos et in quibus omnia libere et sponte*), he made all things, to whom also he speaks, saying, “Let us make man after our image and likeness;” he taking from himself the substance of the creatures formed (*ipse a semetipso substantiam creaturarum*), and the pattern of things made (*exemplum factorum*), and the type (*figuram*) of all the adornments in the world (AH iv, 20, 1).

God’s relationship to the material world, and especially the flesh of his human creatures, is intimate and personal.⁶² However, the image of God’s hands shaping the flesh does not merely express the divine origin of creation, but also its divine end.

⁶⁰ Hans Jonas (2001, pp. 252-253) emphasizes the relationship between “Gnostic” dualism and their view of cosmic governance. He writes, “To Gnostic piety the true God is chiefly defined by this contraposition. As the world is that which alienates from God, so God is that which alienates and liberates from the world. God as the negation of the world has a nihilistic function with regard to all inner-worldly attachments and values. But the world is none the less real for its nihilistic exposure. In other words, the removal of true divinity from the world does not deprive it of reality and make it a mere shadow or illusion (as in certain teachings of Indian mysticism). As theologically seriously as the Stoic cosmos was an object of love, veneration, and confidence, so seriously is the Gnostic cosmos an object of hate, contempt, and fear. And here we remind once more of the role of the idea of order. As already stated, the universe of the Gnostic vision, though having none of the venerability of the Greek cosmos, is still cosmos, that is, an order, but order with a vengeance. It is called that now with a new and fearful emphasis, an emphasis at once awed and disrespectful, troubled and rebellious: for that order is alien to man’s aspirations.” Such dualism leads to a completely new evaluation of the cosmos and its governing Law. Jonas continues, “But cosmic Law, once regarded as the expression of a reason with which man’s reason can communicate in the act of cognition and which it can make its own in the shaping of conduct, is now seen only in its aspect of compulsion which thwarts man’s freedom. The cosmic *logos* of the Stoics is replaced by *heimarmene*, oppressive cosmic fate.”

⁶¹ Cf. Godehard Joppich (1965, pp. 47-55). Joppich emphasizes Irenaeus’ use of “*plasma*.” For Joppich (1965, p. 48), the term, *plasma*, does not merely refer to the substance of man’s flesh, but refers to “das ganz Geheimnis der gottlichen Leibe zum Menschengeschlecht.” Irenaeus’ use of *τό πλάσμα* communicates God’s personal and immediate interaction with humanity. John Behr (2000, p. 38) agrees with Joppich when he writes, “This word (*plasma*) has the advantage of emphasizing the immediacy of the fashioning of man by God: it is, quite literally, a ‘hands-on affair’.” It also emphasizes the materiality of man, the fact that man is made from the earth, from mud. Human beings are, for Irenaeus, essentially and profoundly fleshy or earthy: they are skillfully fashioned mud. Furthermore, the term *plasma* indicates the solidarity of the whole human race ‘in Adam’, a prominent and important principle for Irenaeus.”

⁶² G. Florovsky (1972, p. 13) captures Irenaeus’ view of God’s personal and intimate care of the world. He writes, “The divine providence therefore is not merely an omnipotent ruling of the universe from an august distance by the divine majesty, but a kenosis, of ‘self-humiliation’ of the God of glory. There is a personal relationship between God and man.” Cf. also M. Steenberg (2008, p. 62ff) where he explores the trinitarian character of Irenaeus’ interpretation of God’s creative work. Steenberg (2008, p. 81) maintains that “...Irenaeus’ use of this hands-imagery forms the natural conclusion or culmination of his working out of the relationships of Father, Son and Spirit as they come to bear on the creation of the

... That as, at the beginning of our formation in Adam (*ab initio plasmationis nostra in Adam*), that breath of life (*adspiratio vitae*) which proceeded from God, having been united to what had been fashioned, animated the man, and manifested him as being endowed with reason (*rationabile*); so also, in the end (*in fine*), the Word of the Father and the Spirit of God, having become united with the ancient substance of Adam's formation (*antiquae substantiae plasmationis Adae*), rendered man living and perfect (*viventem et perfectum*), receptive of the perfect Father (*capientem perfectum Patrem*), in order that as in the natural (*in animali*) we all were dead, so in the spiritual (*in spiritali*) we may all be made alive. For never at any time did Adam escape the hands of God, to whom the Father speaking, said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." And for this reason in the last times (*in fine*), not by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, but by the good pleasure of the Father (*ex placito Patris*), his hands formed a living man, in order that Adam might be created after the image and likeness of God (*uti fiat Adam secundum imaginem et similitudinem Dei*) (AH v, 1, 3).

By referring to humanity as the "formation (*τό πλάσμα*)" of God's hands, Irenaeus expresses both, the intimate and immediate interaction between God and the world as well as God's providential care in bringing all things toward a perfect fulfillment.⁶³

The focus of Irenaeus' opponents on the spiritual substance leads to an absolute division between the spiritual Pleroma and the fleshly world. Both realms possess their own independent and autonomous existence. This perspective shapes Valentinian theology. The god of Valentinus and his followers is one of contemplation and passivity, who is content to reside within the boundaries of his own nature. Irenaeus combats this theological perspective with an emphasis on the *creatio ex nihilo*. For Irenaeus, God is, above all else, the one who acts upon this world. In itself, creation is nothing; it does not possess an independent existence; it exists only within the power of the divine will. However, God's will is not merely the cause of the world's existence, but also its ontological ground of being that moves all things toward a certain destiny. Thus, God's work of creating out of nothing is the first essential aspect of Irenaeus' hermeneutic that governs his vision of God and the world.

cosmos. In this regard, it becomes clear that this bearing rests in a definition of the Father's immediacy to the creation through his Son and Spirit, as borne testimony to in the intimacy of the Son to the cosmos in the incarnation, and of the Spirit to humanity in the Pentecostal indwelling."

⁶³ Cf. Eric Osborn (2001, pp. 51ff). Osborn maintains that Irenaeus' doctrine of creation unites the concepts of God as the almighty king and as the wise architect. According to Osborn (2001, p. 53), the image of the sovereign king communicates the truth of creation's origin. As sovereign king, God "makes, disposes and perfects all things freely, by himself and of his own power, so that the substance of all things is not matter but is his will." On the other hand, the image of the wise architect suggests God's wise ordering of creation toward a certain goal. Osborn (2001, p. 61) writes, "God's providence gives each thing its nature, rank and number. There is nothing accidental, but everything is appropriate to the divine way of thinking, which produces the proper causes of each kind." For Osborn, the union of these two images establishes God's immediate relationship to the world. He (2001, p. 73) concludes, "*Creatio ex nihilo* leads to an awareness of the immediacy of God whose right hand will hold us, even when we take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea." However, for Irenaeus it is not just the philosophical fact of God's immediacy in relation to creation that is important. Rather, the *creatio ex nihilo* establishes a fundamental theological truth about God's character. Essential to God's being is the will to give life to all things.

B. *Creation ex Nihilo* and the Sacramental Character of Creation

Irenaeus' appeal to God's creation of all things out of nothing is the foundation for his understanding of God's being and his revelation. The theological task does not begin with God's essence, but with his will to create the world. According to Irenaeus, his opponents fall into the abyss of error because they arrogantly seek after the divine essence and must resort to tenuous speculations. For Irenaeus, the theological task begins with humility. One must recognize his own weakness before he is prepared to declare the fullness of God's power.

...But learning by experience that we possess eternal duration from the excelling power of this Being, not from our own nature (*οὐκ ἐκ τῆ ἡμετέρας φύσεως*), we may neither undervalue that glory which surrounds God as He is, nor be ignorant of our own nature (*μήτε τῆν ἡμετέραν φύσιν ἀγνοήσωμεν*), but that we may know what God can effect (*τί ὁ Θεὸς δύναται*), and what benefits man receives (*τί ἄνθρωπος ἐργεῖται*), and thus never wander from the true comprehension of things as they are (*περὶ τῶν ὄντων*), that is, both with regard to God and with regard to man (AH v, 2, 3).

The theologian's desire for knowledge is as dependent upon God's will to reveal himself as a creature's desire to live is dependent upon God's gifts of food, drink, and breath. Thus, a correct understanding of the material creation is essential for a correct understanding of God. The *creatio ex nihilo* means that theology and cosmology are forever joined.⁶⁴ A false view of God leads to a false view of the world; and a false view of the world leads to a false view of God.

God's creation of all things out of nothing is not only the foundation for theology, but also the source of the material world's dignity. In the Valentinian system, the fleshly realm is nothing more than a byproduct of the Pleroma. It can reach no greater dignity than to become the passive arena in which a spiritual salvation takes place. The fleshly world cannot be the object of God's salvific plan; nor can it be the means by which God communicates his knowledge and goodness; nor can it be a real participant in the spiritual life. Thus, for Irenaeus, his adversaries only see the world's infirm essence.

⁶⁴ Here Irenaeus' emphasis on God's creation of the universe out of nothing challenges the heart of his opponents' dualism. Hans Jonas' description of "Gnosticism" illuminates the way in which Irenaeus' doctrine of creation engages the heart of his opponents' speculation. Jonas (2001, p. 251) writes, "The Gnostic God is not merely extra-mundane and supra-mundane, but in his ultimate meaning contra-mundane. The sublime unity of cosmos and God is broken up, the two are torn apart, and a gulf never completely to be closed again is opened: God and the world, God and nature, spirit and nature, become divorced, alien to each other, even contraries."

In the same way that they make the supreme father a prisoner of his own spiritual essence, so they bind the material world to infirmity, chaos, ignorance, and perpetual unfulfillment.⁶⁵ The fleshly realm can never become anything more than what it is at the present moment. Both the spiritual and the material realms are limited by their essence leaving them static, passive, and without hope of development.

Irenaeus agrees that the substance of the flesh and the material of the cosmos are essentially weak, ignorant, and unfulfilled. Indeed, at one time, creation had no existence. However, the power of God's will to create life out of non-existence offers hope for the future. Irenaeus writes, "Neither the nature of any created thing (*φύσις τινὸς τῶν γεγονότων*), therefore, nor the weakness of the flesh (*ἀσθένεια σαρκός*), can prevail against the will of God (*ὑπερισχύει τῆς βουλής τοῦ Θεοῦ*). For God is not subject (*οὐ ὑποτέτακται*) to created things, but created things to God; and all things yield obedience to his will (*ἐξυπηρετεῖ τῷ βουλήματι αὐτοῦ*). Wherefore also the Lord declares, 'The things which are impossible with men, are possible with God'" (AH v, 5, 2). The power of the divine will allows God to transgress the boundaries of his own essence and that of his creatures. Through his will, God can communicate his own life and goodness outside of his own eternal being to the creature. In addition, God's creative will liberates creation from its present infirmity and makes it free to become more than what it is.⁶⁶ "For God is superior to nature (*φύσεως κρείττων ὁ Θεός*)," writes Irenaeus, "and has in Himself the disposition (*τὸ θέλειν*) to show kindness, because He is good; and the ability to do so, because He is mighty (*δυνατός*); and the faculty of fully carrying out his purpose, because He is rich and perfect" (AH ii, 29, 2). The superiority of the Creator's will establishes the freedom of God to do what he pleases and the freedom of his creature to become what God intends.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ The fullness of the spiritual realm and the corresponding emptiness of the material world are prominent themes in Valentinian thought. The following text from the *Gospel of Truth* is an example: "For where there is envy and strife there is a lack, but where unity is there is completion. Inasmuch as the lack came into being because the father was not known, from the moment that the father is known the lack will not exist. As with one person's ignorance of another—when one becomes acquainted, ignorance of the other passes away of its own accord; and as with darkness, which passes away when light appears: so also lack passes away in completion, and so from that moment on, the realm of appearance is no longer manifest but rather will pass away in the harmony of unity." Translation of the *Gos. Tr.* is from Bentley Layton (1987).

⁶⁶ Cf. D. B. Reynders (1936), who shows the intimate connection between Irenaeus' optimism and his doctrine of God. Reynders (1936, p. 251) concludes that Irenaeus' "admiration de l'homme est inseparable de son monothéisme."

⁶⁷ Cf. Richard Norris (1979, pp. 99-100). Norris emphasizes the relationship between the limitlessness of God and his freedom in relationship to the world. He writes, "Irenaeus' assertion of the freedom of the all-encompassing God leads, or contributes, to a reconception of humanity and the world of human history. As 'creature', the world of human experience is intrinsically finite. Its finitude, however, does not consist in an incapacity, a mere inferiority to the 'higher' world. Rather, its finitude consists in a potentiality: an openness to the purpose of the Creator. Irenaeus' doctrine of God, therefore, opens

The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* allows Irenaeus to transcend the opposition's pessimism about the material world. While Valentinians see creation as it is in the present, Irenaeus sees creation as it shall be in the end. Creation's present infirmity is counterbalanced by its future destiny in the plan of God.

Those men, therefore, set aside the power of God (*potentiam Dei*), and do not consider what the word declares, when they dwell upon the infirmity of the flesh (*infirmiorem carnis*), but do not take into consideration the power of Him who raises it up from the dead (*virtutem ejus qui suscitavit eam a mortuis*). For if He does not vivify what is mortal and does not bring back the corruptible to incorruption, He is not a God of power (*οὐκ ἔστι δυνατὸς ὁ Θεός*). But that He is powerful in all these respects, we ought to perceive from our origin, inasmuch as God, taking dust from the earth, formed man. And surely it is much more difficult and incredible, from non-existent bones, and nerves, and veins, and the rest of man's organization (*κατὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπον οἰκονομία*), to bring it about that all this should be, and to make man an animated and rational creature (*ἔμψυχον καὶ λογικὸν ζῶον*), than to reintegrate again (*ἀποκαταστήσαι*) that which had been created and then afterwards decomposed into earth (for the reasons already mentioned), having thus passed into those elements from which man, who had no previous existence, was formed. For He who in the beginning caused him to have being who as yet was not, just when He pleased, shall much more reinstate again those who had a former existence, when it is His will (*θελήσας*) that they should inherit the life granted by Him. And that flesh shall also be found fit for and capable of receiving the power of God (*τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ δυνάμεως*), which at the beginning received the skillful touches of God (*τῆν τέχνην τοῦ Θεοῦ*) (AH v, 3, 2).

This passage reveals that Irenaeus views the fleshly world from the perspective of the resurrection; his cosmology possesses an eschatological character. Irenaeus' fundamental teaching that God creates and orders the cosmos out of nothing is not merely a description of the world's beginning. Rather, it is a description of God's eternal relationship to the fleshly universe from beginning to end. The resurrection and perfection of human nature is merely the final unfolding of God's creative will. Irenaeus derives his understanding of the *creatio ex nihilo* not primarily from careful exegesis of the Old Testament, but from the role of the fleshly world in the incarnate Word and in the sacramental life of the church.⁶⁸

the way for his idea of a creative history of God with humanity, which looks to the finishing and completion of humanity's creation through its elevation to a new quality of life.... It is by his insistence on the ultimacy, the inclusiveness, and the immediate power of the one Creator God that Irenaeus makes room for his picture of a changing world-order within which significant growth, and hence redemption, can occur."

⁶⁸ Cf. E. P. Meijering (1979, pp. 248-276). Meijering's comparison of Irenaeus to Plotinus greatly illuminates their distinctive perspectives. Meijering rightly emphasizes the profound unity between creation and redemption in Irenaeus' thought. He (1979, p. 275) concludes, "The heart of Irenaeus' religion is that in the Redeemer there appears the Creator and nobody else." However, Meijering seems to limit the influence of this unity when he (1979, p. 274) writes, "Irenaeus interprets the redemption on the basis of the background of the creation, not the other way round." It is certainly true that, for Irenaeus, there is a definite order and progression in God's work from creation to redemption. However, Irenaeus' method of interpretation seems to move in both directions. God's creative work in the beginning is indeed foundational for Irenaeus' understanding of Christ's person and work. Yet, it is also true to say that Christ's redemptive work shapes Irenaeus' interpretation of creation.

Irenaeus' eschatological perspective frees Irenaeus from the pessimism inherent in dualistic cosmologies and allows him to maintain the dignity of the fleshly world. God's intimate relationship to the world means that it occupies a much greater place in God's plan than merely serving as the passive theater in which a spiritual drama commences. Rather, for Irenaeus, created matter becomes a real, active participant in God's salvific work.

...Let them inform us, when they maintain the incapacity of flesh (*μη̄ εἶναι δεκτικὴν τὴν σάρκα*) to receive the life granted by God, whether they do say these things as being living men at present, and partakers of life (*μετέχοντες τῆς ζωῆς*), or acknowledge that, having no part in life whatever, they are at the present moment dead men. And if they really are dead men, how is it that they move about, and speak, and perform those other functions, which are not the actions of the dead, but of the living? But if they are now alive, and if their whole body partakes of life (*ὅλον σῶμα αὐτῶν μετέχει τῆς ζωῆς*), how can they venture the assertion that the flesh is not qualified to be a partaker of life, when they do confess that they have life at the present moment (AH v, 3, 3)?

One cannot help but hear a note of sarcasm as Irenaeus asserts the ability of the body to share in God's own life-giving purpose. However, there is more than mere sarcasm in Irenaeus' criticism. This statement reveals the inseparable connection in Irenaeus' mind between cosmology and a proper understanding of the Christian faith. A dualistic cosmology allows them to assume a new identity as "spiritual" beings that really belong to another world. The pneumatic identity is the presupposition that shapes their interpretation of the text and their vision of the Christian gospel. The scriptures belong to the spiritual elite who long for an escape from the fleshly world and a union with the pneumatic aeons. For Irenaeus, the flesh cannot be excluded from one's identity. The scriptures belong to the fleshly creature that receives life *ex nihilo* from the beginning and longs for the resurrection and perfection of the flesh in the end.

However, created matter is not only capable of participating in God's gift of life, but also bears witness in its own substance to the creative will of God.⁶⁹ Irenaeus' appeal to the immediate connection between God's will and the fleshly world makes the natural orders of created life real,

⁶⁹ Denis Minns (1994, p. 33) is representative of those who maintain that the chief purpose of the *creatio ex nihilo* consists in the absolute transcendence of God's nature in relation to the creaturely world. He writes, "Irenaeus completely rejects this concept of the continuity of all reality, and this is one of his most profound points of disagreement with the Gnostics. It may also be one of his most significant contributions to the subsequent orthodox theological tradition. For Irenaeus, there is absolutely no continuity of being between God and creation." Minns' point is an important aspect of Irenaeus' argument. However, I think Irenaeus asserts the *creatio ex nihilo* in order to accent an additional point as well. For Irenaeus, the *creatio ex nihilo* also emphasizes the power of the divine will to overcome the natural barrier between God and his creatures. Through his creative will, God can communicate his own life to the world. Thus, while Platonism sees the material world as that which is devolving toward perdition, Irenaeus sees creation as that which has the ability to grow toward perfection according to the will of its Creator.

concrete manifestations of God's character and purpose. "For even creation reveals (*ostendit*) him who formed it," writes Irenaeus, "and the very work made suggests (*suggerit*) him who made it, and the world manifests (*manifestat*) him who ordered it" (AH ii, 9, 1). The agricultural process, the organization of the body, the economy of birth, the need of food, drink, and breath, etc., testify to the will of the Creator who intimately interacts with the fleshly world to accomplish his good pleasure. The inherent weakness of humanity and the cosmos as well as the almighty power of God are continually experienced in the world.

Irenaeus' vision of the cosmos as a concrete, even sacramental, manifestation of God's creative will has profound implications for his understanding of God and the world. First, God's immediate relationship to creation means that the intimate communion between Creator and creature is not extraordinary, but natural and expected. The Valentinian cosmology results in an essential alienation between the spiritual and physical worlds.⁷⁰ This alienation is overcome through a process of spiritualization or supernaturalization of one's inner being. Salvation consists in one's ability to transcend the present, fleshly existence and realize a connection to a higher world. For Irenaeus, God's intimate connection to the world is natural for both Creator and creature.⁷¹ Indeed, this immediate relationship has existed from the beginning. Thus, there is no "essential" alienation between God and his creatures. The will to give life is essential to God's being and the need to receive life is, likewise, essential to the world.

⁷⁰ Cf. Kurt Rudolph (1984, p. 60). Rudolph points out that "Gnostic" dualism has its own unique character. He writes, "The Gnostic dualism is distinguished from these (Iranian, Platonic, and Indian) above all in the one essential point, that it is 'anti-cosmic'; that is, its conception includes an unequivocally negative evaluation of the visible world together with its creator; it ranks as a kingdom of evil and of darkness." Cf. also Hans Jonas (2001, pp. 42ff).

⁷¹ Cf. AH, iv, 11, 1-2. Here Irenaeus expounds Genesis 1:28 where God's first command to man is to grow or increase. Irenaeus writes, "And in this respect God differs from man, that God indeed makes (*facit*), but man is made (*fit*); and truly, he who makes is always the same (*semper idem*); but that which is made must receive both beginning, and middle, and addition, and increase (*initium et medietatem et adjectionem et augmentum*). And God does indeed create after a skillful manner (*bene facit*), while man is created skillfully. God also is truly perfect in all things, himself equal and similar to himself, as he is all light, and all mind, and all substance, and the fount of all good; but man receives advancement and increase toward God (*homo vero profectum percipiens et augmentum ad Deum*). For as God is always the same, so also man, when found in God, shall always go on toward God. For neither does God at any time cease to confer benefits upon, or to enrich man (*Neque enim Deus cessat aliquando in benefaciendo et locupletando hominem*); nor does man ever cease from receiving the benefits, and being enriched by God. For the receptacle of his goodness (*exceptorium bonitatis*), and the instrument of his glorification (*organum clarificationis*), is the man who is grateful to him that made him (*homo gratus ei qui se fecit*)" (AH iv, 11, 2). For Irenaeus, the work of creating is not merely a work that God chooses to do from time to time. Rather, God *is* the Creator; the will to give life is essential to his being; God cannot cease giving life without ceasing to be God. In the same way, man's essence consists precisely in the reception of God's gifts. Through the power of the creative will, God and man have a natural affinity for one another. Thus, Irenaeus writes, "In the beginning, therefore, did God form Adam, not as if he stood in need of man (*non quasi indigens Deus hominis*), but that he might have one upon whom to confer his benefits (*ut haberet in quem collocaret sua beneficia*)" (AH iv, 14, 1).

Second, God's creation of the world *ex nihilo* establishes the public and clear character of God's revelation.⁷² Irenaeus' opponents posit a hidden and secret world beyond the material cosmos. This secret cosmology demands a secretive and mysterious gnosis. Only a hint of the spiritual realm is present in the fleshly existence of this world, the literal words of the scriptures, and the visible life of the church. However, for Irenaeus, God's creative will is clearly and publicly manifested in the physical world. The concrete economies of life are clear testimonies to the Creator's purpose. This view of creation profoundly influences his views of Christ's incarnate life, scripture's perspicuity, the apostolic tradition, and the sacramental life of the church.

II. *Creatio ex Nihilo* and the Conflict between Good and Evil

The strength of the Valentinian cosmology consists partially in its tidy solution to the problem of evil.⁷³ Good and evil, sin and righteousness, knowledge and ignorance arise from two separate worlds. Within the spiritual realm, true knowledge, life, and a dispassionate righteousness reside. Within the fleshly world, there is weakness, unfulfilled passion, ignorance, and death. Thus, dualistic systems vary in their attitude toward sin and evil. The legalists seek to impose spiritual values upon the flesh.⁷⁴ An ascetic life proves the adherent's true spiritual identity and his or her freedom from

⁷² Cf. Gustav Wingren (1959, pp. 168ff). Here Wingren correctly understands that Irenaeus emphasizes the succession of bishops in opposition to his opponents' assertion of a secret gnosis. However, for Irenaeus, a deeper connection exists between the public ministry of the church and the public character of God's creative work. In AH iii, 3, 1, Irenaeus appeals to the succession of the bishops as a testimony to the "tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the world (*traditionem Apostolorum in toto mundo manifestatam*)."⁷³ This public life of the church is built upon the foundation of God's public and manifest character as the Creator and Redeemer of all things. "We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation (*dispositionem salutis nostrae*), than from those through whom the gospel has come down to us (*per quos Evangelium pervenit ad nos*), which they did at one time proclaim in public (*praeconaverunt*), and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the scriptures (*per Dei voluntatem in Scripturis nobis tradiderunt*), to be the ground and pillar of our faith (*fundamentum et columnam fidei nostrae*)." Irenaeus continues, "These have all declared to us that there is one God (*unum Deum*), Creator of heaven and earth, announced by the Law and the prophets (*a lege et prophetis annuntiatum*); and one Christ, the Son of God. If any one do not agree to these truths, he despises the companions of the Lord (*pernit partiiipes Domini*); nay more, he despises Christ himself the Lord (*spernit et ipsum Christum Dominum*); yea, he despises the Father also (*spernit vero et Patrem*), and stands self-condemned, resisting and opposing his own salvation, as is the case with all heretics" (AH iii, 1, 1-2). The public kerygma of the church is a continuation of the public work of the Creator to redeem the world through the flesh of Christ.

⁷³ Marcion is perhaps the chief example of one who derives his theology from the question of evil. Cf. E. C. Blackman (1948, pp. 71ff). Blackman maintains that Marcion's dualism arises less from philosophical and metaphysical considerations than from moral and practical experience. Blackman (1948, p. 71) writes, "But Marcion's doctrine of two gods could not simply be dismissed as crude philosophy.... It was the expression of what were to him the fundamental facts of human life.... So stated, Marcion's theory appears as more than a piece of mythology. It is seen to be dealing with the moral problem of all men." Cf. also J. Gager (1972, pp. 53-59). In this short article, Gager maintains that Marcion may have been more philosophically aware than usually thought. Gager shows a possible connection between the arguments of Marcion and Epicurus. This connection may be suggested by Irenaeus in AH iii, 24-25. For an opposing view, cf. R. Joseph Hoffmann (1984, pp. 185ff).

⁷⁴ Cf. Irenaeus' discussion of the Encratites (AH i, 28, 1).

fleshly infirmities. However, the antinomian proclaims the irrelevance of the flesh and its works.⁷⁵ For him, the spiritual life is well protected from any fleshly contamination. Yet, both legalism and antinomianism proceed from the same dualistic cosmology that establishes an absolute boundary between the pneumatic and hylic worlds. Whatever one's strategy—to conquer the flesh or to ignore it—the most important principle for the dualist is the preservation of the Pleroma's purity. The supreme father is immune to any fleshly contamination and, therefore, holds out the promise of spiritual purity to all his spiritual kin.

For his opponents, Irenaeus' confession that the one and only God is the Creator of the material world leaves him vulnerable to the problem of evil. The *creatio ex nihilo* means that God and the physical universe form one cosmos. The Creator's intimate relationship to the world forces Irenaeus to consider God's relationship to sin, evil, death, and weakness. However, precisely in this context, Irenaeus' teaching that God creates all things out of nothing proves helpful. It allows him to take sin seriously and also provides him with a dynamic view of God's interaction with human weakness, sin, and death.

A. The Essence of Sin and Evil

Irenaeus' doctrine of creation focuses upon the almighty will of God that creates all things out of non-existence. The substance of every created thing arises from the power of God's creative will. Irenaeus asserts this principle repeatedly. God “made all things freely (*libere*), and by his own power (*ex sua potestate*), and arranged and finished them, and his will is the substance of all things (*substantia omnium voluntas ejus*)” (AH ii, 30, 9). Instead of various powers and forces being ascribed to numerous substances as is true for Valentinians, Irenaeus offers a revolutionary perspective. Every living substance originates in the creative will of God. For Irenaeus, the divine will precedes the substance of creation.⁷⁶ The substance of the flesh is malleable and subject to the will and power of the Creator.

⁷⁵ Cf. AH i, 6, 4; i, 26, 3.

⁷⁶ Cf. R. A. Norris (1966, pp. 9ff). In his first chapter, Norris shows a contrast between the Greek philosophical tradition and the Hebrew scriptures concerning the understanding of God and the world. Norris seems to suggest that the distinction between Greek philosophy and the Hebrew scriptures consists in the distinction between God known as a substance and God

The changeable character of creation allows the possibility of development and growth. Within the creative power of God, the fleshly substance of creation is destined to become something more in the end than what it was in the beginning. In this way, the weak and vulnerable character of the material universe offers the opportunity for God to show forth his almighty power and his good purpose.⁷⁷ However, the weakness inherent in creation also provides an opportunity for a sinful and evil will to pervert the world. For Irenaeus, evil does not consist in a substance that is independent of God's essence. Rather, evil consists in a will or power that seeks to reverse the will of God. While God's will brings the material world into being and moves it toward a good destiny, evil is an uncreating power that brings creation toward death, corruption, and nothingness.

For Irenaeus, sin is not defined chiefly in terms of morals, laws or ethics; it must primarily be defined physically. Above all else, God's will is defined as that power, which gives life to the flesh. This free and gracious bestowal of life on all things defines, for Irenaeus, the nature of righteousness and goodness. The ancient Law of Moses simply describes the character of the Creator who above all things seeks to create, protect, and fulfill the life of his creatures. In the same way, sin is an opposing power that seeks to undo God's creative purpose and bring all things into death. Thus, sin is not merely a legal or ethical reality, but a real, physical power that affects the very essence of creation.

Irenaeus expresses this perspective in his disagreement with his opponents' interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:50. Such teachers use Paul's words that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" as a testimony to the exclusion of the hylic substance from the pneumatic world.⁷⁸ Irenaeus

known as a personal will. Norris (1966, pp. 38-39) writes, "In the tradition which the Christian Church inherited from Israel, 'God' is not used to denote a *kind* of thing, but to name that specific will whose purposes were detected in the critical events of Israel's history and of world history.... The Greek deity is the final point of stability in a world of apparently senseless change. The Hebrew Lord is the initiator of significant change which transforms the character of historical experience." This emphasis on God as one who personally interacts with creation and is known only in that interaction is certainly a chief characteristic of Irenaeus' theology. The supremacy of God's will is the foundation for God's freedom in relation to the substance of creation.

⁷⁷ Cf. Denis Minns (1994, pp. 62-76). While somewhat critical of Irenaeus' polemical method, Minns notes how Irenaeus uses the creature's inherent weakness in support of an optimistic view of man's future. Minns (1994, p. 69) writes, "Irenaeus shares nearly all the premises of this theological outlook (the more pessimistic outlook of Augustine and Athanasius) and yet he is able to draw from them a far more optimistic theological ground plan. He agrees that God alone is Being and that creation will always be in a state of Becoming; he agrees that free will is the pivot on which the creation can incline towards reality, and be strengthened in its own existence, or incline towards non-being and begin to tumble into nothingness.... And yet, whereas Augustine and Athanasius are full of plangent, almost Gnostic, lamentation for the fact that, as changing creatures they are removed from unchanging Being, Irenaeus sees in the very creatureliness of the creature, in the fact that its nature is to Become, that is, to change, the possibility of an unending progression and development toward Being, toward God."

⁷⁸ Cf. *Gos. Ph.* 21, is an example of the Valentinian interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:50. "Some are afraid lest they rise naked. Because of this they wish to rise in the flesh, and they do not know that it is those who wear the flesh who are naked."

responds with an appeal to the Spirit. It is not the substance of flesh and blood itself that Paul condemns, but one's rejection of fellowship with the Spirit. Persons of the flesh, according to Irenaeus, are those "who have not the Spirit of God in themselves (*qui non habent Spiritum Dei in se*)" (AH v, 9, 1). On the other hand, the faithful "possess (*habent*) the Spirit of the Father, who purifies (*emundat*) man, and raises him up to the life of God (*sublevat in vitam Dei*)" (AH v, 9, 2). Irenaeus continues by emphasizing the interaction between the Spirit and the flesh.

For as the Lord has testified that "the flesh is weak," so does he also say that "the Spirit is willing." For this latter is capable of working out its own suggestions (*hoc est potens perficere quaecumque in promptu habet*). If, therefore, any one admix (*admisceat*) the ready inclination of the Spirit to be, as it were, a stimulus to the infirmity of the flesh, it inevitably follows that what is strong will prevail over the weak (*quod est forte superet infirmum*), so that the weakness of the flesh will be absorbed (*absorbeat*) by the strength of the Spirit; and that the man in whom this takes place cannot in that case be carnal, but spiritual, because of the fellowship of the Spirit. Thus it is therefore that the martyrs bear their witness, and despise death, not after the infirmity of the flesh, but because of the readiness of the Spirit. For when the infirmity of the flesh is absorbed, it exhibits the Spirit as powerful (*Ἡ γὰρ ἀσθένεια τῆς σαρκὸς καταποθείσα δυνατὸν ἐπέδειξε τὸ Πνεῦμα*); and again, when the Spirit absorbs the weakness, it possesses the flesh as an inheritance in itself, and from both of these is formed (*factus est*) a living man,--living, indeed, because he partakes of the Spirit (*τῆν μετέληψιν τοῦ Πνεύματος*), but man, because of the substance of flesh (AH v, 9, 2).

For Irenaeus, Paul is not contrasting the fleshly and spiritual substances, but the fleshly and spiritual powers. The power of the Spirit works in the flesh to animate his creature and make him a living being. Irenaeus speaks of the Spirit as the one, who can "effect his own promptings." The Spirit's power (*δυνατόν*) prevails over the weakness of the flesh and demonstrates its own effectiveness in the animation of the "living man."

However, without the Spirit's creative work, one is merely "flesh and blood" and cannot inherit the eternal kingdom. "The flesh, therefore, when destitute of the Spirit of God, is dead, not having life (*non habens vitam*), and cannot possess the kingdom of God (*regnum Dei possidere non potens*)" (AH v, 9, 3). Irenaeus' emphasis on the word, "power (*potentem; δυνατόν*)" expresses his conviction that apart from the Spirit the flesh lacks, not merely the ability to inherit the kingdom, but the very power of God that creates all things out of nothing. Without the Spirit's creative power, mortal flesh must return to the earth from which it came. Non-existence is like gravity that is

It is those who [...] to unclothe themselves who are not naked. 'Flesh and blood shall not be able to inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Cor. 15:50). What is this which will not inherit? This which is on us. But what is this very thing which will inherit? It is that which belongs to Jesus and his blood." The translation of *The Gospel of Philip* comes from Willis Barnstone (1984, pp. 88-100). Cf. also Irenaeus' account of the Sethian – Orphites in AH i, 30, 13.

overcome by the strength of the Creator's will. This creative purpose is embodied in the Spirit. "Where the Spirit of the Father is, there is a living man (*Ubi Spiritus Patris, ibi homo vivens*)" (AH v, 9, 3). The Spirit is given not merely to inspire a moral, ethical, or lawful righteousness; rather, he comes to make humanity a participant in the life-giving will of God. Thus, Irenaeus exhorts the faithful, "so now let us, receiving the Spirit, walk in newness of life, obeying God...lest having become non-participators of the Divine Spirit (*μὴ ἄμυροὶ τοῦ θεοῦ Πνεύματος*), we lose the kingdom of heaven..." (AH v, 9, 3). Obedience to God does not consist primarily in living an ethical or moral life; rather, for Irenaeus, obedience consists in a person's real, physical participation in the Divine will that brings forth life out of non-existence.⁷⁹

According to Irenaeus, good and evil are two opposing powers or wills that seek to take possession of the fleshly substance and use it according to their own purposes. From this perspective, goodness is inseparable from God's creative purpose to give life and to bring that life toward perfection. Similarly, evil is inseparable from death; it is the alien power that seeks to reverse the Creator's will and bring all things toward corruption.⁸⁰ In this framework, sin and righteousness are not merely ethical choices that confront the individual from time to time. Rather, they are real, physical powers that work in and through the flesh to achieve a cosmological supremacy. Sin is not merely an illegal action, but a physically harmful action; righteousness is not merely a good deed worthy of reward, but a manifestation of the Spirit's power to create life. Irenaeus illustrates this idea with the agricultural image of branches grafted into the good olive tree. The branch does not "lose the substance of its wood," Irenaeus says, "but changes the quality of its fruit..." (AH v, 10, 1). As a

⁷⁹ Cf. Gustav Wingren (1959, pp. 26ff). Wingren rightly emphasizes the connection between obedience and the creative will of God. He (1959, p. 29) writes, "From the very first Irenaeus connects life, that is, the physical factor, with the Commandments, the ethical, and continues to do so throughout his thinking. If man were to live in accordance with the Commandments he would continue in the state in which he once was, that is, he would be immortal, for obedience and life belong together." Cf. also Jaques Fantino's (1986) work, in which he distinguishes between two kinds of resemblance between man and God. First, there is a similitude (*ὁμοιότης*) that is natural to humanity and consists in the freedom of the human will as a reflection of God's freedom. Second, there is a likeness (*ὁμολοσις*) that consists in man's soteriological communion with the Spirit.

⁸⁰ Cf. Nathanael Bonwetsch (1925, pp. 75ff). Bonwetsch recognizes the inseparable connection between the power of sin and the reality of death in the thought of Irenaeus. He writes, "Der Tod, dem er anheimgefallen, bedeutet nicht bloss den Verlust der Unverganglichkeit, sondern der Ungehorsam ist seinem Wesen nach der Tod." Cf. also Gustaf Aulen (1931, p. 41). Aulen reiterates Bonwetsch's point: "Sin involves death.... It is not merely that death is mortality and the loss of immortality; disobedience to God *is* essentially death." Aulen continues, "It is then, wholly false to assume that in Irenaeus the idea of sin is thrown into the background by a naturalistic conception of salvation. The truth is rather that Irenaeus' organic view of sin as a state of alienation from God saves him both from a moralistic idea of sin and a moralistic idea of salvation."

participant in the goodness of the olive tree, the branch brings forth fruit; yet, if the participation in the tree's life is rejected, the branch is dead and cast into the fire. This image describes the intimate connection between sin and death on the one hand, and righteousness and life on the other. Irenaeus explains,

He (Paul) sets this forth still more plainly, where he says, "the body indeed is dead, because of sin; but the Spirit is life, because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, because of his Spirit dwelling in you." ... Now by these words he does not prohibit them from living lives in the flesh (*non conversationem quae in carne est repellens*), for he was himself in the flesh (*ipse in carne*) when he wrote them; but he cuts away the lusts of the flesh (*concupiscentias abscidens carnis*), those which bring death (*mortificant*) upon a man (AH v, 10, 2).

In this passage, the Spirit's life-giving power is equated with righteousness. It is not an individual's righteousness that allows the Spirit to give life to his or her flesh; rather, it is the Spirit's life-giving power that inspires righteous fruit. In a similar way, sin does not merely bring the punishment of death; rather, sin and death are organically connected. Sin itself is essentially a murdering power.

Sin and righteousness are much more than the lawful or unlawful action of an individual; they are physical powers that seek to accomplish a cosmological goal. Humankind's participation in the powers of sin or righteousness has an effect upon the very substance of the flesh.

Since, therefore, in that passage he recounts those works of the flesh (*numeravit eas carnis operationes*) which are without the Spirit (*sine Spiritu*), which bring death, he exclaimed at the end of his epistle, in accordance with what he had already declared, "And as we have borne the image of him who is of the earth, we shall also bear the image of him who is from heaven. For this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." ... When, therefore, did we bear the image of him who is of the earth? Doubtless it was when those actions spoken of as "works of the flesh (*carnis operationes*)" used to be wrought in us (*perficiebantur in nobis*). And then, again, when the image of the heavenly? Doubtless when he says, "Ye have been washed," believing in the name of the Lord, and receiving his Spirit. Now we have washed away, not the substance of our body (*non substantiam corporis*), nor the image of our formation (*neque imaginem plasmatis*), but the former vain conversation (*pristinam vanitatis conversationem*). In these members (*In quibus membris*), therefore, in which we were going to destruction (*periebamus*) by working the works of corruption (*operantes ea quae sunt corruptelae*), in these very members are we made alive (*in iisdem ipsis vivificamur*) by working the works of the Spirit (*operantes ea quae sunt Spiritus*) (AH v, 11, 2).

In this passage, Irenaeus speaks of sin and righteousness as profound operations in which humanity participates. From the beginning, sin works death in the body. Irenaeus calls sin the "works of corruption." For the bishop of Lyons, corruption refers literally to the breaking up of the body into particles of dust. However, the "works of the Spirit" effect the resurrection of the body. While the

Creator seeks to gather the dust and form it into a living being, sin is the uncreating power that seeks to divide the body into the dust from which it came.⁸¹ Thus, good and evil are not limited to the thoughts, words, or deeds of individuals; rather, they are opposing wills or operations that seek to accomplish their respective ends in the fleshly substance of creation. Irenaeus experiences righteousness and sin as two movements—a righteous movement toward life and a sinful withdrawing movement toward corruption and death—that interact in a profound struggle that is truly eschatological and cosmological.

B. Good and Evil in the Human Will

Valentinian teachers ascribe good and evil to separate, distinct and independent substances. Gnosis, goodness, and fulfillment reside in the spiritual realm of the aeons. Ignorance, evil passions, and unfulfillment dwell in the fleshly world. From this cosmological perspective, good and evil are bound to separate worlds. Thus, any interaction between good and evil is severely limited.⁸² This worldview influences the understanding of the pneumatic's own identity and his or her responsibility in the world. The spiritual elite are not oriented toward an engagement with the fleshly world in order

⁸¹ Cf. *Fragmenta* xii. Irenaeus writes, “We therefore have formed the belief that our bodies also do rise again (*ἀνίστασθαι*). For although they go to corruption (*φθείρεται, corrumpuntur*), yet they do not perish; for the earth, receiving the remains, preserves them, even like fertile seed (*δικην σπόρου*) mixed with the more fertile ground. Again, as a bare grain (*κόκκος γυμνός*) is sown, and, germinating by the command of God its Creator, rises again, clothed upon and glorious, but not before it has died and suffered decomposition (*λυθῆ*), and become mingled with the earth (*γῆ συμμιγῆ*); so we have not entertained a vain belief in the resurrection of the body. But although it is dissolved at the appointed time (*λίεται πρὸς καιρὸν*), because of the primeval disobedience, it is placed, as it were, in the crucible of the earth, to be recast again (*πάλιν ἀναπλασθησόμενοι, denuo reformandum*); not then as this corruptible body (*φθειρόμενοι*), but pure (*καθαρόν*), and no longer subject to decay: so that to each body its own soul shall be restored.” *Φθείρω* literally means to break into pieces as in the destruction of a house. This literal meaning seems to permeate Irenaeus' mind as he considers the power of sin, death, and the devil. The power of disobedience is manifested in the disintegration of the flesh into disparate particles of dust. However, the work of the resurrection is described as the “re-formation (*ἀναπλασθησόμενοι*),” that is, as a repetition of God's original formation of man, which consists in the gathering and unification of the dust into a new, living man. Cf. also AH iii, 18, 2.

⁸² Cf. Michel R. Desjardins (1990). Desjardins examines the sources to understand the Valentinian meaning of sin. Desjardins (1990, p. 131) concludes, “Our study has shown that the Valentinian understanding of sin is fundamentally Christian in nature, and that it emerges naturally out of Pauline speculations about sin. Moreover, we have seen how Valentinian ethics in general reflect the gospel injunctions in the NT, notably those in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount.” Desjardins seems too eager to legitimize Valentinianism as an authentic expression of Pauline Christianity. His conclusion seems to be more of an assertion. It may be true that Valentinianism uses sin in an ethical context, but do they use it in a cosmological context? In the sources that Desjardins mentions, sin is typically used in reference to the individual and his personal purity. Thus, the Valentinian solution to sin and evil is the establishment of a boundary. Sin is limited to the fleshly realm from which the pneumatic disciple seeks escape. Sin is not overcome; it is simply transcended. For St. Paul, Irenaeus, and the Christian tradition, sin is not merely a problem for the individual; it is a problem for the Creator. The sin of the individual affects all humanity and the entirety of creation. Thus, sin cannot be overcome by boundaries and limits, nor can sin simply be escaped and transcended. Rather, sin must be overcome through the real interaction of God with his creation.

to conquer evil and promote the good will of the Creator. Instead, their tendency is often to disengage from the world and seek a redemptive escape into their true spiritual home.

For Irenaeus, a continuous and profound conflict rages between the good will of the Creator, who seeks to perfect his creation, and the evil will of the devil, who seeks to dismantle the Creator's work. By ascribing good and evil to two opposing wills or powers, Irenaeus allows a dynamic interaction between good and evil to ensue. Indeed, this conflict is the heart of the Christian faith. It is a conflict that involves the entire cosmos; and it is a conflict that commences on the soil of human flesh and blood. Good and evil do not interact with each other immediately as if they are two equal and independent powers. Rather, God's goodness is focused on humanity, that is, his human creature's life, growth, maturity, righteousness and perfection. Having brought humankind's substance into existence, God continues to counsel and instruct humanity toward a divine destiny.⁸³ In a similar way, the devil's malice and hatred are also directed toward Adam and his offspring. The devil's purpose is to deceive humanity so that he rejects God's good counsel and shares in the devil's own hatred, selfishness, and pride. The devil seeks to take what God has formed and to bring it to an evil end.

For Irenaeus, good and evil interact in a dynamic conflict within the human will.⁸⁴ Both angels and humankind are created rational creatures, and, therefore, share in God's inherent freedom. "This expression, 'How often would I have gathered your children together, and you would not,' sets forth the ancient law of human liberty (*veterem legem libertatis hominis*), because God made man free from the beginning, possessing his own power (*ab initio habentem suam potestatem*), even as he does his own soul (*suam animam*), to obey the behests of God voluntarily (*voluntarie*), and not by compulsion of God (*non coactum*)" (AH iv, 37, 1). Irenaeus asserts humanity's "self-governing

⁸³ Cf. the discussion of Irenaeus' reading of God's interaction with Cain in M. Steenberg (2008, p. 195ff). Steenberg points out that Irenaeus emphasizes God's counseling of Cain to "be at peace." For Steenberg (2008, p. 198), Irenaeus' emphasis means "...that God, throughout every aspect of the economy, works for the betterment and growth of human creation."

⁸⁴ Cf. Wingren (1959, pp. 39ff). Wingren emphasizes man's position between God and the devil. He (1959, p. 40) writes, "The chief adversary of the Devil is God. But God is never subject to evil—it is us whom the Devil defeated, and we are in his power right up to the time when Christ will come and undertake the fight which we are unable to maintain. Here on earth a struggle rages between good and evil..." Then, Wingren continues, "Man stands in the middle of the line of conflict as the cause of the contest between God and the Devil."

power” against his opponents’ contempt for the hylic substance.⁸⁵ From the Valentinian point of view, human identity consists in one’s substance whether spiritual, psychic, or material. The substance prevails against the will and is limited to a destiny appropriate for its kind. However, for Irenaeus, the freedom of the will means that the human identity does not consist in the substances that compose one’s being, but in the righteousness of one’s works.⁸⁶ While his opponents seek to exclude the flesh from their true identity, Irenaeus establishes the basis for a positive view of the material body. The flesh is the necessary instrument for the accomplishment of the righteous will. The freedom of the will liberates humanity from the present weakness of the flesh without denigrating its essence. Through the exercise of the righteous will, the human being has the potential to become more than he is at present.

Humankind’s self-governing power not only contradicts the Valentinian contempt for the flesh, but also establishes its place in the order of creation. Adam’s rational freedom in the beginning implies his intimate relationship to God and establishes his authority over the created world.

⁸⁵ Irenaeus’ emphasis on the freedom of the will has caused some to claim a kinship between the second century bishop of Lyons and the fifth century monk, Pelagius. However, as Augustine points out, Pelagius’ error does not consist in his assertion of man’s free will, but in the separation of man’s will from his nature. Thus Augustine refers to Pelagius’ words in his treatise, *On Nature and Grace* 21. Augustine writes, “You may now see (what bears very closely on our subject) how he (Pelagius) endeavors to exhibit human nature, as if it were wholly without fault.... ‘We have,’ he (Pelagius) says, ‘first of all to discuss the position which is maintained that our nature has been weakened and changed by sin. I think,’ he continues, ‘that before all other things we have to inquire what sin is,—some substance, or wholly a name without substance, whereby is expressed not a thing, not an existence, not some sort of a body, but the doing of a wrongful deed.’ He then adds: ‘I suppose that this is the case; and if so,’ he asks, ‘how could that which lacks all substance have possibly weakened or changed human nature?’” Translation of *On Nature and Grace* is by Peter Holmes and Robert Wallis found in Philip Schaff’s (1887) *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5. Pelagius seems to have separated the will of man from his nature, which leads to a radical individualism. Each individual person possesses his own independent and self-governing will. Thus, by placing sin in the will of the individual, Pelagius liberates him from a natural and substantial connection to Adam and the human race. For Irenaeus, the human will is inseparably bound to the human essence formed by God in the beginning. In the same way that every living thing exists by a participation in the creative will of God, so human nature itself is affected by the sinful will of Adam. Thus, for Irenaeus, the human will must be understood corporately. The human will exercised in Adam as the head of the race also lives in his children. The freedom of the will does not liberate the individual from his fathers, but is a gift defined by the individual’s organic connection to the human race. Thus, Irenaeus in his stand against the Valentinians and Augustine in his argument against Pelagius testify to a common truth albeit from opposite perspectives. The Valentinians valued a salvation disconnected from creation and the Pelagians valued a creation without need of salvation. Both Irenaeus and Augustine maintain the unity of creation and salvation. Irenaeus maintains that salvation and grace can only be understood rightly on the foundation of creation, while Augustine argues for the absolute necessity of grace and salvation for the restoration and fulfillment of creation.

⁸⁶ Cf. AH v, 10, 2ff. Here Irenaeus emphasizes the ability of one’s will and works to change his own identity. He writes, “...when a man is grafted in by faith and receives the Spirit of God, he certainly does not lose the substance of the flesh (*substantiam carnis*), but changes the quality of the fruit, i.e., of his works (*qualitatem fructus operum immutat*), and receives another name, showing that he has become changed for the better (*in melius est transmutationem*), being now not mere flesh and blood, but a spiritual man (*homo spiritalis*), and is called such” (AH, v, 10, 2). Irenaeus’ anthropology must not be limited to the substances that are combined to make humanity. The ground of being for humanity is not the substance of the body, the soul, or the Spirit, but the dynamic will of the Creator. In this regard, cf. H. Lassiat (1978, 399ff.) who maintains that his opponents compelled Irenaeus to think of humanity in a different way. Traditionally the soul is defined by its relation to the body; however, Lassiat (1978, p. 401) says, the issue for Irenaeus is “de connaitre la condition existentielle et vitale de l’ame, non par rapport au corps, mais par rapport a Dieu et dans le cadre de l’universelle creation ex nihilo.” Thus, Lassiat goes on to emphasize that Irenaeus does not stress the immortal essence of the soul, but its utter dependence upon God’s creative will.

Humanity's "self-governing power" is a God-given power. "God therefore has given that which is good (*bonum*)...and they who work it (*qui operantur quidem illud*) shall receive glory and honor, because they have done (*operati*) that which is good when they had it in their power (*possint*) not to do it; but those who do it not (*non operantur*) shall receive the just judgment of God, because they did not work good when they had it in their power (*possint*) so to do" (AH iv, 37, 1). Human freedom, for Irenaeus, does not consist in an independence from God. The human will does not prevail against God's will; the human will is free only as a participation in God's absolute and eternal freedom. Goodness originates in God's creative will to give life. Inherent in humanity's origin from the dust is the capacity to participate fully in God's good intent. Precisely in his free will, humankind possesses the ability to be like the Creator. "But because man is possessed of free will (*liberae sententiae*) from the beginning, and God is possessed of free will (*liberae sententiae*), in whose likeness (*similitudinem*) man was created, advice (*consilium*) is always given to him to keep fast the good, which thing is done by means of obedience (*obaudientia*) to God" (AH iv, 37, 4). Thus, from the beginning, humanity is created to be the fleshly expression of God's own good will and purpose toward creation. Human flesh and blood is to be the instrument through which God's goodness is performed upon the earth.⁸⁷

Thus, humanity alone binds together the rationality of the spirit and the instrumentality of the flesh. In this way, humankind transcends the "animal" natures "which can do nothing of their own will (*sua voluntate nihil possunt facere*), but are drawn by necessity and compulsion (*cum necessitate et vi*) to what is good, in which there is one mind and one usage, working mechanically and without flexibility (*inflexibiles et sine iudicio*), who are incapable of being anything else except just what they had been created (*qui nihil aliud esse possunt praeterquam quod facti sunt*)" (AH iv, 37, 6). The power of the will and the instrumentality of the physical body make humanity the mediator between

⁸⁷ Cf. AH, v, 14, 3-4. Here Irenaeus, makes the point that flesh and blood are, not only capable of receiving salvation, but also capable of communicating life and salvation. He writes, "And in every epistle, the apostle plainly testifies, that through the flesh of our Lord, and through His blood (*per carnem Domini nostri et sanguinem*), we have been saved. If, therefore, flesh and blood are the things which procure for us life (*faciunt nobis vitam*), it has not been declared of flesh and blood in the literal meaning of the terms, that they cannot inherit the kingdom of God." For Irenaeus, Christ's humanity both receives the divine life and mediates that divine life for the world.

God and the cosmos.⁸⁸ As the image of God, human flesh is the place where God's goodness and righteousness are to be visibly expressed upon earth. However, in the same way that the human race is to be the mediator of God's goodness, he can also be the mediator of the devil's wickedness.⁸⁹ For this reason, Irenaeus labels the heretics, "agents of Satan (*organa Satanae*)." Irenaeus continues, "Through whose agency (agency of the heretics), Satan now, and not before, has been seen to speak against God (*maledicere*).... For he did not venture to blaspheme his Lord openly of himself (*ipse per semetipsum nude non audit blasphemare suum Dominum*); as also in the beginning he led man astray through the instrumentality of the serpent (*per serpentem*), concealing himself as it were from God (*quasi latens Deum*)" (AH v, 26, 2). The heretics are not merely expressing their own opinions, nor offering their own interpretations of scripture; rather, for Irenaeus, they are participants in the ancient will of the devil to bring the Creator's work to an evil end. In the heretics, Satan's malice and hatred become flesh before the world.

Good and evil do not originate in the human will. While God is the fount of all goodness in his creative will, the devil is the origin of sin and evil. The devil and his human victims share in the same rebellious will. However, they do not bear the same responsibility. The devil is the fount of sin, and Adam is sin's entrance into the world.⁹⁰ Irenaeus asserts this proposition in a discussion of

⁸⁸ Cf. *Epid.* 9-16ff. Humanity's place in the cosmos is often neglected in treatments of Irenaeus' anthropology. While most dwell upon Irenaeus' concern for the components of humanity, few consider Irenaeus' anthropology in the context of his cosmology. For Irenaeus, human nature consists in the union of the spiritual and physical substances. Yet, this union of the spiritual and the physical establish the human creature as mediator between God and the world. Humanity's place in the cosmos is implied in Irenaeus' *Epideixis*. After explaining the creation of angels (chapter 9-10), Irenaeus emphasizes the order of the world, namely, "that each one keep to his place and overstep not the bound laid down by God..." (*Epid.* 10). Then Irenaeus continues with God's formation of humanity. He writes, "But man He fashioned with His own hands, taking of the purest and finest of earth, in measured wise mingling with the earth His own power" (*Epid.* 11). God's creation of humanity is more intimate than His creation of the angels. The weakness and materiality of the flesh require God to relate to his creatures in a more tender and condescending manner. Irenaeus continues, "...for He gave his frame the outline of His own form, that the visible appearance too should be godlike—for it was as an image of God that man was fashioned and set on earth—and that he might come to life, He breathed into his face the breath of life, so that the man became like God in inspiration as well as in frame" (*Epid.* 11). Humankind is the image of God precisely because he is created both spiritual and physical. Thus, humanity is both the physical expression of God's character on the earth and the spiritual expression of creation in the kingdom of heaven. Adam and his offspring are the center of a cosmic chiasm in whom God and the world interact. Adam's place as mediator is implied in the cosmic consequences of his sin as well as the cosmic perfection resulting from his redemption in Christ.

⁸⁹ Cf. AH v, 24ff. Here Irenaeus speaks of the relationship between the devil and man. The devil is "envious" of man's mediatorial position. "And as his apostasy was exposed by man, and man became the means of examining his thoughts (*et examinatio sententiae ejus, homo factus est*), he has set himself to this with greater and greater determination, in opposition to man, envying his life, and wishing to involve him in his own apostate power (*in sua potestate apostatica volens concludere eum*)" (AH v, 24, 4). Cf also *Epid.* 16.

⁹⁰ Cf. AH v, 25. Irenaeus speaks of the antichrist as the "idol" who "recapitulates in himself all the devil's apostasy (*diabolicam apostasiam in se recapitulans*)" (AH V, 25, 1). The anti-christ is the instrument through whom the devil's will is revealed upon the earth. The place of humanity as the mediator through whom the cosmos is ordered is an aspect that is sometimes overlooked in studies of Irenaeus' anthropology. For instance, Ysabel de Andia's (1986) work, which presents a

Adam's personal salvation. Evidently some (Irenaeus accuses Tatian) maintained that Adam is excluded from salvation because he bears the curse of God. For Irenaeus, this discussion is directly relevant to his debate with his opponents. Like Tatian, Irenaeus' adversaries exclude fleshly creatures from salvation and assert the cursed and condemned nature of the hylic substance. This perspective compels Irenaeus to consider God's judgment of Adam in the beginning.

It was for this reason, too, that immediately after Adam had transgressed, as the scripture relates, he pronounced no curse against Adam personally (*non ipsum maledixit Adam*), but against the ground, in reference to his works (*sed terram in operibus ejus*), as a certain person among the ancients has observed: "God did indeed transfer (*transtulit*) the curse to the earth, that it might not remain (*non perseveraret*) in man." But man received, as the punishment of his transgression, the toilsome task of tilling the earth (*taedia et terrenum laborem*), and to eat bread in the sweat of his face, and to return to the dust from whence he was taken (*converti in terram ex qua assumptus est*). Similarly also did the woman receive toil, and labor, and groans, and pangs of parturition, and a state of subjection, that is, that she should serve her husband; so that they should neither perish altogether (*in totum perirent*) when cursed by God, nor, by remaining unrepined (*sine increpatione perseverantes*), should be led to despise God. But the curse in all its fullness fell upon the serpent (*omnis malediction decurrit in serpentem*), which had beguiled them (AH iii, 23, 3).

Irenaeus asserts that a difference of degree exists in God's judgment. Satan is cursed personally since he is the "prime mover in the guilty deed (*principem transgressionis factum*)" (AH iii, 23, 5).

However, Adam and Eve bear a curse upon their work and vocation in the world. Thus, God's curse does not reside in Adam's fleshly substance, but in the exercise of his will in the world. Thus, while the devil and Adam share in the same rebellion, their roles are qualitatively different. Satan is the cause and source of the rebellious will and must bear a personal condemnation. However, Adam is the victim of Satan's deception and is maliciously manipulated into a participation in the devil's rebellious power. Adam's sin carries cosmological consequences as he bears the burden of a cursed earth; but he also enjoys God's compassion as the Father sends his Son in human flesh to overcome the devil and perfect humankind.

very careful and insightful reading of Irenaeus' writings, does not recognize the full import of Irenaeus' cosmological vision. She rightly roots Irenaeus' anthropology in the history of salvation, which compels her to emphasize the dynamic and progressive character of Irenaeus' thought. However, without the cosmological dimension that emphasizes humanity's permanent place in how God relates to the world, she seems to overemphasize the spiritual or transcendent aspect of Irenaeus' anthropology. De Andia (1986, p. 70ff) indicates that humanity progresses beyond mere created life so that "la possession de l'Esprit ou son 'defaut'" distinguishes between humanity in the divine image and humanity attaining the divine likeness. This dynamic progression is certainly present in Irenaeus. However, without the cosmological dimension, the possession of the Spirit seems like a foreign and alien addition that supernaturalizes humanity or allows him to transcend his created life. For Irenaeus, the Spirit is not an alien substance added to human nature; rather, the Spirit incorporates humanity into Christ, which is not only the perfection of humanity, but also the restoration of its place in the cosmos. The incarnate Christ is the Mediator through whom God's relationship to the world is reordered. Thus, Christ's humanity is not only spiritual, but truly natural.

C. The Problem of Evil and Irenaeus' Eschatological Perspective

For Irenaeus, the conflict between good and evil is not only cosmological and anthropological, but also eschatological. Irenaeus' opponents find the solution to the problem of evil in the beginning. Good and evil originate in two separate and independent substances. They draw comfort from the fact that there is no real conflict in the present. The unfulfilled desire of Sophia has already been resolved. The spiritual elite need only wait for the final resolution when they will be rejoined to their spiritual home. However, for Irenaeus, the conflict between good and evil awaits an eschatological solution.⁹¹ The power of God to create and the power of the devil to destroy interact with the human will in order to accomplish their eschatological goals. God creates all things in the beginning and seeks to bring them to perfection and glorification in the end. In contrast, the devil has no power to thwart God's creative will in the beginning, so he seeks to bring it to an evil end.

This perspective leads Irenaeus to consider the problem of sin and evil not according to their origin, but according to their eschatological purpose. Viewed from the beginning, good and evil may seem to derive from two different substances, two opposing gods, or two independent worlds. However, viewed from the end and God's eschatological triumph in the resurrection of Christ, sin and evil can be seen in a more positive light. God's creative will and the devil's destructive power are not equal powers offsetting one another in a cosmic balance. Rather, all things must finally serve God's providential care of his human creatures. In itself, sin and evil are radically opposed to God's creative will. However, God demonstrates his power by using sin and evil in the service of his own eschatological purpose.

⁹¹ Cf. John Hick (1966, pp. 217ff). John Hick contrasts the views of Augustine and Irenaeus on original sin. He (1966, p. 220) writes, "Instead of the doctrine that man was created finitely perfect and then incomprehensibly destroyed his own perfection and plunged into sin and misery, Irenaeus suggests that man was created as an imperfect, immature creature who was to undergo moral development and growth and finally be brought to the perfection intended for him by his Maker." According to Hick, the Augustinian tradition defines sin from the perspective of the beginning. In other words, humanity's sin stands in stark contrast to his original perfection and righteousness. Thus, the catastrophe of sin is emphasized to such an extent that it counterbalances the Creator's goodness. Irenaeus, according to Hick, represents a different perspective. For Irenaeus, sin is defined from the perspective of the end. The problem of evil is resolved in the cross and resurrection of Christ. Thus, sin, as catastrophic as it is in itself, must finally submit to the good purpose of God. Whether or not Hick is correct in contrasting Irenaeus with Augustine, his characterization is certainly correct if applied to Irenaeus and his Valentinian opponents. Irenaeus' adversaries resolved the problem of evil by speculating about its beginning in the divine realm. Irenaeus' eschatological perspective effectively challenges his opponents and provides a new framework for the understanding of sin and evil.

Irenaeus' eschatological perspective of sin and evil comes to full expression at the end of *Adversus Haereses*, book four. Irenaeus argues against the supposition that good and evil originate in two independent substances. After asserting the freedom of humanity, Irenaeus anticipates some criticisms. Perhaps, the Creator should have created angels and human beings incapable of transgression. He responds,

But upon this supposition, neither would what is good be grateful to them, nor communion with God be precious (*neque pretiosa communicatio Dei*), nor would the good be very much to be sought after, which would present itself without their own proper endeavor, care, or study, but would be implanted (*insitum*) of its own accord and without their concern. Thus it would come to pass, that their being good would be of no consequence (*essent nullius momenti*), because they were so by nature rather than by will (*quod natura magis quam voluntate tales existerent*), and are possessors of good spontaneously, not by choice (*non secundum electionem*); and for this reason they would not understand this fact, that good is a comely thing (*pulchrum*), nor would they take pleasure (*fruentes*) in it. For how can those who are ignorant of good enjoy it? Or what credit is it to those who have not aimed at it? And what crown is it to those who have not followed (*consecuti sunt*) in pursuit of it, like those victorious in the contest (*victores in certamine*)?" (AH iv, 37, 6).

It is natural for Irenaeus' opponents to ask about the origin of sin and evil. For Valentinian thought, the problem of evil can only be resolved by excluding it from the spiritual realm. However, Irenaeus answers the question by appealing to an eschatological perspective. The struggle for good against evil is beneficial for humankind's growth, maturity, and fulfillment. For Irenaeus, evil is not the chief problem, but the sinner's willing subjection to evil.⁹² If humanity is to be truly free and like unto God, then one must conquer the devil's temptations and the sinful will.

For Irenaeus, maturity and perfection cannot be attained by avoiding or ignoring sin and evil. While pneumatic Christians claim knowledge of the good without interacting with evil, Irenaeus claims that good and evil can be known only by engaging in the conflict and experiencing both. Irenaeus writes,

Wherefore he has also had a twofold experience (*duplices habuit sensus*), possessing knowledge of both kinds, that with discipline he may make choice of the better things (*electionem meliorum*). But how, if he had no knowledge of the contrary (*ignorans quod est contrarium*), could he have had instruction in that which is good (*disciplinam boni*)? For there is thus a surer (*firmior*) and an undoubted comprehension of matters submitted to us than the mere surmise arising from an opinion regarding them (*ex suspitione conjectura*).

⁹² Cf. Gustaf Aulen (1931, pp. 32ff). Aulen rightly recognizes the importance of the struggle between good and evil in Irenaeus' thought. He (1931, p. 36) writes, "The main idea is clear. The work of Christ is first and foremost a victory over the powers which hold mankind in bondage: sin, death, and the devil." However, Aulen goes beyond Irenaeus when he maintains that, for the bishop of Lyons, Christ pays a ransom to the devil. For Irenaeus, the chief issue is not the devil and his power, but man and his willing bondage to the devil's evil will.

For just as the tongue receives experience of sweet and bitter by means of tasting (*per gustum*), and the eye discriminates between black and white by means of vision (*per visionem*), and the ear recognizes the distinctions of sounds by hearing (*per auditum*); so also does the mind, receiving through the experience of both (*per utrorumque experimentum*) the knowledge of what is good, become more tenacious (*firmior*) of its preservation, by acting in obedience to God: in the first place, casting away by means of repentance (*per paenitentiam*), disobedience, as being something disagreeable and nauseous; and afterwards coming to understand what it really is, that it is contrary to goodness and sweetness, so that the mind may never even attempt to taste disobedience to God. But if any one do shun the knowledge of both these kinds of things, and the twofold perception of knowledge, he unawares divests himself of the character of a human being (*latenter semetipsum occidit hominem*) (AH iv, 39, 1).

For Irenaeus' opponents, good and evil are mutually exclusive; they are ontologically independent of one another and form a substantial dualism. Thus, for the pneumatic disciple, it is possible to know good without evil, to be spiritual without a body, to be divine without being human, to gain life without enduring death. Irenaeus denies this ontological dualism in favor of a more dynamic and interactive vision of good and evil. For Irenaeus, to understand evil is, not only to understand what it is in itself, but also to understand its place in the economy of God's salvific purpose.⁹³ By itself, evil is contrary to God's good will; however, it can never prevail against God's will. Evil is never allowed to gain independent status; it is never allowed autonomous rule over its own realm. Thus, for Irenaeus, evil remains in the providential care of the Creator. Evil must be viewed in two ways.⁹⁴ On the one hand, it is a contradiction of God's desire. On the other hand, it ultimately serves God's purpose. From this perspective, evil is a negative revelation of God's glory. God is known not only

⁹³ Cf. Robert Brown (1975, pp. 17-25). Robert Brown notes two different soteriological themes in Irenaeus. First, Christ restores humanity to its original state. Second, Christ perfects an infantile humanity. Brown finds these themes to be contradictory. He (1975, p. 17) writes, "It is my view that both themes are prominent in *Adversus Haereses*, that each generates a separate theological system, and that the two systems are mutually incompatible on a number of important issues." Like Loofs, Brown's assertion makes Irenaeus a mindless theologian compiling different systems of thought without perceiving their incompatibility. In light of Irenaeus' insightful arguments, Brown's viewpoint is hardly credible. The two themes that Brown mentions should be read within the context of Irenaeus' understanding of God's creative will that interacts with creation from beginning to end. Irenaeus' dynamic perspective allows descriptions of reality from different vantage points. From the vantage point of the beginning, sin is defined as a catastrophic loss and salvation is defined as the restoration of what is lost. However, from the viewpoint of the end realized in the person of Christ, sin and death are less threatening and salvation is defined as being far greater than was imagined at the beginning. Thus, the two themes of salvation described by Brown ought to be considered a matter of perspective, not a matter of contradiction. Cf. also James G. M. Purves (1996, pp. 99-120). Purves comments on Irenaeus' eschatological perspective of perfection. He (1996, pp. 106-107) writes, "The perfection seen in Christ is, in fact, the true revelation of man as the image and likeness of God. The first Adam's failure and immaturity is interpreted in the light of the mature obedience of Jesus Christ."

⁹⁴ Cf. John Behr (2000, pp. 43ff). Behr comments on these two perspectives of sin and death present in Irenaeus' thought. He (2000, p. 52) writes, "It has to be noted, however, that despite the pedagogical character of the apostasy and the pedagogical and remedial characteristics of death, Irenaeus does not trivialize either. Whilst the apostasy and death can be seen positively from the point of view of the unfolding economy, they are, nevertheless, nothing less than a catastrophe: the being created by God for communion with himself in his glory turned his back on him; man, the image of God, created for life, rots in the earth. This is the victory of the Devil over man...." Behr concludes, saying, "Although one can discern two dimensions to the apostasy and death, pedagogical and catastrophic, these remain a matter of perspective: for Irenaeus, there is but the one economy of the one God, which is the history unfolded in Scripture."

by his presence, but also by his absence. Thus, evil becomes an opportunity for God to make himself known to his creatures.

For Irenaeus, to be human is to engage in the conflict between good and evil. This struggle is essential to gaining the knowledge of God and growing toward maturity and perfection. Thus, when his opponents deny this conflict and avoid the struggle, they are denying their own humanity. The issue of self-identity is the heart of Irenaeus' concern. For the bishop of Lyons, his opponents' theology consists in a false deification, that is, a deification by nature rather than by the struggle of the will. Irenaeus writes,

How, then, shall he be a god (*erit deus*), who has not as yet been made a man (*qui nondum factus est homo*)? Or how can he be perfect who was but lately created? How, again, can he be immortal (*immortalis*), who in his mortal nature did not obey his Maker (*non obaudivit Factori*)? For it must be that you, at the outset (*primo*), should hold the rank of a man (*ordinem hominis*), and then afterwards partake of the glory of God (*participari gloriae Dei*). For you do not make God, but God you. If, then, you are God's workmanship (*opera Dei*), await the hand of your Maker (*manum arificis tui exspecta*) which creates everything in due time; in due time as far as you are concerned, whose creation is being carried out. Offer (*praesta*) to him your heart in a soft and tractable state (*molle et tractabile*), and preserve the form (*figuram*) in which the Creator has fashioned you, having moisture (*humorem*) in yourself, lest, by becoming hardened, you lose the impressions of his fingers (*vestigial digitorum ejus*). But by preserving the framework you shall ascend to that which is perfect (*ascendes ad perfectum*), for the moist clay which is in you is hidden by the workmanship of God. His hand fashioned your substance (*fabricavit substantiam*); he will cover you over within and without with pure gold and silver, and he will adorn you to such a degree, that even 'the King himself shall have pleasure in your beauty.' But if you, being obstinately hardened, do reject the operation of his skill (*respuas artem ejus*), and show yourself ungrateful (*ingratus*) toward him, because you were created a man, by becoming thus ungrateful to God, you have at once lost both his workmanship and life (*artem ejus et vitam amisisti*). For creation is an attribute of the goodness of God; but to be created is that of human nature. If, then, you shall deliver up (*tradideris*) to him what is yours, that is, faith toward him and subjection, you shall receive his handiwork, and shall be a perfect work of God (*perfectum opus Dei*) (AH iv, 39, 2).

Irenaeus overcomes the ontological dualism of his opponents by emphasizing God's ongoing creative work. One must not merely see things as they are in the present moment. He must also have faith in what God will yet accomplish in the future. Perfection comes at the end.⁹⁵ Therefore, instead of blaming the Creator for present imperfections, Irenaeus calls for patience. He uses the image of the

⁹⁵ Cf. Jean Daniélou (1973, pp. 398-408). Daniélou maintains that Irenaeus' optimistic view of the future perfection was contrary to the thought of his day. He (1973, p. 404) writes, "It is well to pause and reflect how extraordinary are such passages as those which we have been considering. They seem to go utterly against the whole mentality of the world in which Irenaeus lived. In the thought of the ancient world perfection lies in the past, at the beginning of things, and time brings nothing but degradation. This point of view was to exert great pressure on the course of early Christian theology, and even such a man as Origen was never able to escape from it completely. The thought of Irenaeus unquestionably forms an exception to the general rule."

sculptor to describe the Creator's plan. The clay proceeds from imperfection to perfection through the sculptor's skill. Just as he uses water to keep the clay soft and malleable, so the Creator uses the waters of baptism to serve his goal of forming humanity as a vessel for his own glory. For Irenaeus, his adversaries are impatient and discontent. They see only what they lack in the present and ascribe their imperfections to the Creator's lack of skill or his evil intent. For Irenaeus, such present imperfections must be viewed with faith in what the Creator will accomplish in the end.

Irenaeus' view of evil grows out of his eschatological vision. Viewed from the beginning, evil is a complete contradiction of God's desire; but viewed from the end, evil must ultimately serve God's eschatological purpose. The teaching of divine providence allows the bishop of Lyons to admit the existence of evil without falling into the substantial dualism of his opponents. It is no surprise, therefore, that Irenaeus' eschatological view of evil concludes with a discussion of the final judgment. "Submission to God is eternal rest (*subjectio Dei requietio est aeterna*), so that they who shun (*fugiunt*) the light have a place worthy of their flight (*fugae*); and those who fly (*fugiunt*) from eternal rest, have a habitation in accordance with their fleeing (*fugae*). Now since all good things are with God, they who by their own determination flee from God (*qui ex sua sententia fugiunt Deum*), do defraud themselves of all good things; and having been defrauded of all good things with respect to God, they shall consequently fall under the just judgment of God (*Dei justum iudicium*)" (AH iv, 39, 4). The final judgment upon the faithless is not described as the infliction of God's wrathful will or the consequence of divine anger. Rather, the disobedient will attain exactly what it desires—a life without God or his goodness. Thus, God respects the freedom of humanity unto the end.

III. Cosmology and the Interpretation of Scripture

Irenaeus does not view his opponents as merely transgressing doctrinal points or threatening ecclesial authority. Rather, they are undermining the hermeneutical vision of Christianity.⁹⁶ The denial of the *creatio ex nihilo* entails a denial of the entire interpretive framework of the Christian

⁹⁶ Cf. Samuel Laeuchli (1962, pp. 18ff). Laeuchli studies the language of "Gnostic" movements in relation to the language of the scriptures. He maintains that the heart of "Gnosticism" is a hermeneutical shift that fills the scriptural language with new meaning. He (1962, p. 19) writes, "Gnosticism demonstrates that this exegetical conflict is not merely a matter of translation or of philology.... Many Gnostics spoke Greek that was no more than a century older than the Greek used in the oldest parts of the New Testament. But it was a Greek with other relations, a language full of different idioms. The same words have other implications; phrases stand in another light."

faith. A false view of the beginning means a false view of the end. As a result, Irenaeus is not merely confronting the opposition with exegetical or doctrinal arguments; rather, he is using exegesis to contradict the very essence of their vision of God, humanity, and the world.

From the outset of his treatise defending the orthodox faith, Irenaeus describes his task in hermeneutical terms. He does not seek to correct a few misguided points of doctrine; his defense is not merely philosophical or even exegetical. Rather, Irenaeus perceives Valentinian thought to be a challenge to the hermeneutical core of the Christian gospel.

These men falsify the oracles of God (*ῥαδιουργοῦντες τὰ λόγια Κυρίου*), and prove themselves evil interpreters of the good word of revelation (*ἐξηγηταὶ κακοὶ τῶν καλῶς εἰρημένων γινόμενοι*). They also overthrow the faith of many, by drawing them away, under a pretence of superior knowledge, from him who founded and adorned the universe (*τὸ πᾶν συστησαμένου καὶ κεκοσμηκότος*); as if they had something more excellent and sublime to reveal, than that God who created the heaven and the earth, and all things that are therein. By means of specious and plausible words (*διὰ λόγων τέχνης*), they cunningly allure the simple-minded to inquire into their system; but they nevertheless clumsily destroy them, while they initiate them into their blasphemous and impious opinions (*ἐν τῷ βλάσφημον καὶ ἀσεβῆ τὴν γνώμην αὐτῶν κατασκευάζειν*) respecting the Demiurge (AH i, Praef., 1).

This passage reveals the fundamental conviction of Irenaeus that Valentinianism is challenging the ground of being for the Christian knowledge of God. The Valentinians do not err in one or two points; the very intent of their words seeks an evil end. They have become “evil exegetes of the good sayings.” For Irenaeus, the heretics are not changing the meaning of a temporal text or a written code, but the meaning of those words that proceed from the Creator’s own mouth. Irenaeus uses a number of expressions in this passage that point to the centrality of creation in his defense of orthodoxy. The “good sayings” are not merely those recorded in the sacred texts, but those that gave life to all things in the beginning. The falsification of the Lord’s oracles exalts the pneumatic teacher over the one who founded the universe. Thus, for Irenaeus, his opponents claim the power to create their own world. Their “artful words”⁹⁷ bring the words of the Creator to a false end and “construct (*κατασκευάζειν*)”⁹⁸ a different world.

⁹⁷ Irenaeus uses the phrase, “artful words (*διὰ λόγων τέχνης*)” to contrast his opponents’ systems with the work of the Creator. The word, *τέχνης*, recalls the work of a carpenter or artist. Irenaeus uses this word to refer to Joseph who did not participate in the conception of Jesus.

⁹⁸ The word, *κατασκευάζειν*, indicates that Irenaeus views his second century adversaries as a challenge to the Creator. This word comes from Genesis 1:2 (LXX) and refers to God’s overcoming the formlessness of creation. The Valentinian accounts of the transcendent Pleroma are an attempt to construct a new reality.

For Irenaeus, the Valentinians are not merely promoting a new philosophy; they are claiming the power to create a new world better and more spiritual than the Demiurge. They exalt themselves above the Creator of the material universe. This point is made clear in the language that Irenaeus employs to describe his opponents' systems. After recounting the narrative of the Pleroma (AH i, 1-3), Irenaeus concludes with a summary criticizing the Valentinian method.

Such, then, is the account, which they all give of their Pleroma, and of the formation of the universe (*τοῦ πλάσματος πάντες*), striving, as they do, to adapt the good words of revelation (*τὰ καλῶς εἰρημένα*) to their own wicked inventions (*τοῖς κακῶς ἐπινενοημένοις*). And it is not only from the writings of the evangelists and the apostles that they endeavor to derive proofs for their opinions by means of perverse interpretations and deceitful expositions: they deal the same way with the Law and the prophets, which contain many parables and allegories that can frequently be drawn into various senses, according to the kind of exegesis to which they are subjected. And others of them, with great craftiness, adapted such parts of scripture to their own figments (*τῷ πλάσματι αὐτῶν*), lead away captive from the truth those who do not retain a steadfast faith in one God, the Father almighty, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God (AH i, 3, 6).

The Valentinian account of the Pleroma leads to a false interpretation of scripture. For Irenaeus, the scriptures are inseparable from creation. If one has a false cosmology, he must have a false interpretation of scripture. The sacred writings are not merely words, syllables, and grammar; they bear a certain ontology. Irenaeus' opponents have disconnected the words of scripture from created life and attached them to a new cosmos.⁹⁹ The scriptures are no longer interpreted within the context of the fleshly world. Valentinian teachers have transferred the sacred texts to the new cosmological context of the pneumatic Pleroma.

The importance of cosmology for the interpretation of scripture is evident in Irenaeus' use of the term, "*τό πλάσμα*" At the beginning of AH i, 3, 6, Irenaeus uses it to refer to the creative act, which forms the universe. According to the Valentinians, the material universe is formed due to a defect in the spiritual world of the Pleroma. However, at the end of this section (AH i, 3, 6), Irenaeus

⁹⁹ Laeuchli's study of "Gnostic" language agrees with Irenaeus. Laeuchli (1962, p. 90) writes, "What distinguishes biblical speech from Gnostic speech is nothing less than its very center." Finally Laeuchli (1962, p. 93) concludes, "Once and forever, the lesson has been taught that Christian language depends upon the axis of Christian faith." For Irenaeus, the axis around which the language of scripture revolves is the teaching that the only true God is the Creator of heaven and earth. Thus, an inseparable tie binds the language of scripture to the Word of God that creates all things out of nothing. It is precisely this tie that Irenaeus believes has been torn asunder by his opponents. Cf. also Kurt Rudolph (1984, pp. 54-55). Rudolph refers to "Gnosticism" as "parasitic." He (1984, p. 54) writes, "A further peculiarity of the gnostic tradition... lies in the fact that it frequently draws its material from the most varied existing traditions, attaches itself to it, and the same time sets it in a new frame by which this material takes on a new character and a completely new significance."

employs the same term to describe his opponents' construction of speculative systems.¹⁰⁰ The dualistic cosmology of Valentinian thought is a new "formation" that stands in contrast to the formation of the cosmos by the hands of God. Irenaeus' use of this word reveals the heart of his argument. The scriptures grow out of a real ontological foundation. By changing the cosmology, the opposition is not merely changing the context or meaning of the scriptures, but the very substance of the words themselves. The same God whose words give life to the world also speaks forth the scriptures. Both creation and the sacred writings proceed from the same ontological foundation, which is the divine will. The same divine power that animates creation also inspires the prophets.¹⁰¹ The divine will establishes an ontological ground of being that unites the scriptures and the cosmos.

In the following chapters (AH i, 4-7), Irenaeus explains the origin of material and animal substances in his opponents' systems. The Valentinian account of the formation of the universe leads Irenaeus to comment on the relationship between cosmology and the interpretation of the scriptures.

Such, then, is their system (*ὑποθέσεως αὐτῶν*), which neither the prophets announced, nor the Lord taught, nor the apostles delivered, but of which they boast that beyond all others they have a perfect knowledge. They gather their views from other sources than the scriptures; and, to use a common proverb, they strive to weave ropes of sand while they endeavor to adapt with an air of probability to their own peculiar assertions the parables of the Lord, the sayings of the prophets, and the words of the apostles, in order that their scheme (*τὸ πλάσμα αὐτῶν*) may not seem altogether without support. In doing so, however, they disregard the order and the connection of the scriptures, and so far as in them lies, dismember and destroy the truth (*λύοντες τὰ μέλη τῆς ἀληθείας*). By transferring passages, and dressing them up anew, and making one thing out of another, they succeed in deluding many through their wicked art in adapting the oracles of the Lord to their own opinions. Their manner of acting

¹⁰⁰ Cf. John Behr (2001, pp. 29ff). Behr is one of the few scholars who notes this dual use of "*τὸ πλάσμα*" in Irenaeus' thought. He (2001, p. 32) writes, "The Valentinians have used the words and phrases from Scripture, but have creatively adapted them to a different hypothesis, and so have created their own fabrication." Then in footnote 38, he writes, "the term *πλάσμα* is used primarily to describe the 'fabrication of God,' the flesh fashioned by the Hands of God, to which the Word is finally united, manifesting the image and likeness of God. ... the two uses of *πλάσμα* should not be completely separated: the issue is, who is the *ποιητής*, the poet/creator?" It is certainly true that the two uses of *πλάσμα* referring to God's real creative act and the pneumatic's imaginary Pleroma should be interpreted together. It is my argument that the use of this language shows the inseparable connection in the mind of Irenaeus between the scriptures and creation.

¹⁰¹ Cf. AH iv, 2; iv, 9. In these two passages, Irenaeus asserts that the unity of Moses and Christ as well as the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles is not merely a matter of historical continuity or even theological content. The unity of the old and new consists in a real ontological unity. He writes, "But since the writings of Moses are the words of Christ, He does himself declare to the Jews, as John has recorded in the Gospel: 'If ye had believed Moses, you would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if you believe not his writings, neither will you believe my words.' He thus indicates in the clearest manner that the writings of Moses are his words (*manifestissime significans Moysi litteras suos esse sermones*)" (AH iv, 2, 3). For Irenaeus, Christ, the Word of God, is not only the historical fulfillment of the prophetic utterance, but also the ontological source of the prophetic inspiration. Irenaeus concludes, "He shows that all are from one essence (*ex una substantia*), that is, Abraham, and Moses, and the prophets, and also the Lord himself, who rose from the dead, in whom many believe who are of the circumcision, who do also hear Moses and the prophets announcing the coming of the Son of God" (AH iv, 2, 4). The use of the term "essence (*substantia, οὐσίας*)" suggests that Irenaeus defines the relationship of the Old and New Testaments in the context of God's creative will. The scriptures are not merely historical and rational; they bear the creative power of God. The same divine will that is the "substance of all things" is also the substance of the scriptures.

is just as if one, when a beautiful image of a king (*βασιλέως εικόνας καλής κατασκευασμένης*) has been constructed by some skilful artist (*ὑπὸ σοφοῦ τεχνίτου*) out of precious jewels, should then take this likeness of the man all to pieces, should re-arrange the gems, and so fit them together as to make them into the form (*μορφῆν*) of a dog or of a fox, and even that but poorly executed (*φάυλως κατασκευασμένην*); and should then maintain and declare that this was the beautiful image of the king which the skilful artist constructed, pointing to the jewels which had been admirably fitted together by the first artist to form the image of the king, but have been with bad effect transferred by the latter one to the shape of a dog, and by thus exhibiting the jewels, should deceive the ignorant who had no conception what a king's form was like, and persuade them that that miserable likeness of the fox was, in fact, the beautiful image of the king (AH i, 8, 1).

In this passage, Irenaeus employs the illustration of iconography to contrast his opponents' creation of a cosmological system with God's formation of humanity. The use of *τό πλάσμα* indicates that Irenaeus sees his adversaries' doctrine as a challenge to God's formation of the flesh. They not only present their own "formation," but also "dissolve the members of the truth." The scriptures, like the human body, are an orderly system of organs and members. The created body is more than a sum of independent members; it consists of diverse members working together in an ordered harmony. In the same way, the scriptures are not a collection of individual passages, but an ordered whole.¹⁰² Irenaeus believes that his opponents destroy the ordered structure of the scriptures.¹⁰³ This argumentation shows the importance of cosmology for Irenaeus' interpretation of scripture. The divine will that

¹⁰² Cf. Denis Farkasfalvy (1968, pp. 319-333). Farkasfalvy notes the importance of harmony (*consonare*) in Irenaeus' understanding of scripture. He (1968, p. 328) writes, "The method of harmonizing is, for Irenaeus a method postulated by the very essence of the Bible as record of the history of salvation. Harmonizing becomes a theological norm for exegesis: an interpretation is proved to be correct if its agreement with other texts can be proved. The word "consonare" used by Irenaeus repeatedly in exegetical context, sounds almost as a technical term of his exegesis." Cf. also Bertrand de Margerie (1993, pp. 51ff). Margerie, likewise, comments on harmony as an important aspect of Irenaeus' interpretation of scripture. He writes, "The third rule can be formulated thus: an interpretation has a chance of being correct if one can prove its 'consonance' and its harmony with other texts of Scripture. The verb *consonare*, used repeatedly by Irenaeus in an exegetical context, takes on a technical character in Irenaeus' language and exegesis. He regards as one of the principal aims of his exegesis that the perfect mutual harmony of the scriptures be brought out. The Scriptures are in symphony." While Farkasfalvy and Margerie are certainly correct that, for Irenaeus, harmony is essential to the scriptures, it should also be recognized that this harmony derives from Irenaeus' view of God as Creator. The term *consonare* is not only used in exegetical contexts (cf. AH ii, 28, 3), but also and primarily in reference to God's creative work. "But He himself in himself, after a fashion which we can neither describe nor conceive, predestinating all things, formed them as he pleased, bestowing harmony (*consonantiam*) on all things, and assigning them their own place" (AH ii, 2, 4). The scriptures are harmonious precisely because they are the product of the God who creates and orders all things.

¹⁰³ Cf. Robert M. Grant (1965, pp. 121ff). In the course of his discussion about the use of the New Testament among the Valentinians, Grant points out that they did not employ the term 'scripture' in reference to New Testament books. He (1965, p. 129) writes, "None of the Valentinians seems to have employed the word 'scripture', and this silence can be explained in various ways. First, of course, and probably most important is the fact that for them what mattered was not the written word as such but what it mysteriously signified. Second, they may have avoided the term 'scripture' because at the time when they began to separate from the Church it was not commonly used in regard to the New Testament books and, indeed, in their own time was not often employed." Grant's first explanation for the Valentinian omission of the term 'scripture' is worth noting. Valentinian allegory did not merely undervalue the actual words of the sacred text, but also led to a fragmentation of the scriptures. Such catechists valued certain words, phrases, and sayings because they could employ them in service of their own cosmology. This method invites the division of sayings and texts from the whole. Thus, the Valentinian omission of the term 'scripture' may show a devaluation of the whole.

creates *ex nihilo* not only provides the ontological foundation for creation and the scriptures, but also orders each member to fulfill a certain purpose.

Irenaeus argues that the scriptures and the cosmos proceed from one and the same substance. The same divine will that creates all things also inspires the words of the sacred texts. However, if scripture and creation share the same beginning, they must also share the same end. The same God who “artfully” forms the flesh in the beginning finishes his work in the revelation of the king. The divine will orders everything for the purpose of revealing Christ. The incarnate Word is not only the fulfillment of the scriptures, but also the perfection of the cosmos. Every word of scripture and every member of creation is ordered so that the icon of Christ may be manifest in the end times. The ordered body of Christ shows forth the goal of the “wise artist.” Without Christ, the cosmos and the scriptures lack foundation, meaning, and purpose. The scriptures fragment into disconnected texts, which Irenaeus’ opponents transfer to another cosmology.¹⁰⁴ In a similar way, creation disintegrates into the darkness, chaos, and nothingness from which it came.

Irenaeus’ use of *τό πλάσμα* as a reference to the Valentinian system reveals that he views Valentinian thought as a hermeneutical challenge. The Valentinians are not contradicting the scriptures at one or two points; rather, they are altering the very substance and meaning of the whole of scripture by promoting a new cosmology. For Irenaeus, the scriptures are inseparable from creation. The God who speaks in the scriptures is the same God who forms human flesh in the beginning and brings it to completion in the incarnate Christ. Thus, for Irenaeus, the scriptures must be interpreted within a proper cosmological framework.¹⁰⁵ The world and the scriptures proceed from the same essence and are destined to be fulfilled and perfected in the same Christ.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. H. E. W. Turner (1954, p. 232ff). In his brief appendix concerning the “Gnostic” use of scripture, Turner considers the allegorical character of their interpretation of the fourth Gospel. He (1954, p. 233) writes, “Gnostic sacramentalism made its appeal to well-known Johannine themes. It is however, clear that Gnosticism used the Fourth Gospel rather as a source-book than as a source. The work is raided for proof-texts or scriptural marginalia without any attempt to treat the Gospel as a whole or absorb the real kernel of its message.” Turner (1954, p. 237) later concludes that “Gnostic exegesis bears all the traces of the flight from history which characterizes their systems as a whole.” Turner is certainly right to recognize the “Gnostic” fragmentation of scriptures which separates individual texts from the whole. However, for Irenaeus, this fragmentation is, not merely a flight from the historical and factual basis of scripture, but a denial of scripture’s connection to creation. Valentinian allegory leads to a fragmentation of scripture since the true spiritual and transcendent world is only reflected in certain key words and phrases that can be adapted to their viewpoint. Irenaeus’ typology seeks to maintain the unity of the scriptures by referring the whole of scripture to the almighty will of God that creates and governs the universe.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. James Kugel & Rowan Greer (1986, pp. 155ff). With great insight, Rowan Greer recognizes this historical framework in Irenaeus’ interpretation of scripture. He (1986, p. 156) writes, “Irenaeus addresses all these issues and does so

IV. *Creatio ex Nihilo* and the Church

The doctrine of God's creation *ex nihilo* forms the foundation for Irenaeus' understanding of God and the world. Weak and mortal humanity is incapable of comprehending the divine essence. In himself, God is unknowable and beyond human conception. Thus, the creature's knowledge of God begins when God calls the cosmos into existence. In this way, theology and cosmology are inseparable for the second century bishop. The substance of the material world is not merely the context in which God reveals himself, but also the concrete, visible expression of God's will and intent. Irenaeus asserts the *creatio ex nihilo* in order to unite God and the material universe in one cosmos.

Irenaeus' cosmology challenges his opponents in the most profound way. It does not merely contradict one element of their cosmological systems, but challenges their entire worldview. For the Valentinian system, the purity of the spiritual essence is ensured by the exclusion of the fleshly substance from the pneumatic Pleroma. Thus, true knowledge of God demands liberation from the hyllic world. In no sense can the substance of the flesh be characterized as an expression or revelation of the true God. The fleshly substance is like an unbearable weight that prevents the spiritual elite from ascending into a higher realm in which there is knowledge, goodness, and true fulfillment.

However, for the bishop of Lyons, creation is not a burdensome weight, but a salutary anchor keeping theology grounded in reality. God's creation of all things *ex nihilo* limits vain speculations about the nature of God. It demands humility since it confronts mortals with their own infirmity; and it demands courage since it allows a real struggle between the powers of good and evil, life and death. Yet, Irenaeus' cosmology affects more than just the content of his confession; it affects the very foundation on which his confession is built. His cosmology influences his vision of the scriptures and

by employing the notion of salvation history that focuses on the story of the incarnate Word of God but relates that story to the Word's activity in creation and in the history of Israel. By defining the incarnate Lord, Irenaeus clarifies the identity of the hero of the Christian story, a story that includes all of human history. This, in turn, enables him to give a coherent account of the story as a whole, that is, of what he calls the apostolic faith. And the clarified view of the Christian preaching embodied in the Rule of faith supplies him with a framework of interpretation that orders Christian transformations of the Hebrew Scriptures into a coherent pattern." Greer is correct in understanding that Irenaeus sees the scriptures as the word of the God who created all things in the beginning and who redeems all things through Christ in the end. However, his emphasis on the centrality of the incarnate Word should be combined with an emphasis on the significance of creation in Irenaeus' thought. Creation does not merely establish the historical beginning point for the story of the scriptures; rather, it defines God's relationship to creation and mankind from beginning to end. Thus, from beginning to end, it is always the Creator, who gives life *ex nihilo*, that is revealed in the scriptures and is present to redeem the world in Christ.

the church's sacramental life. The same divine will that creates all things out of nothing also interacts with the human race throughout the scriptures and continues to interact with his creatures in the church. Thus, the church, for Irenaeus, is not a band of the spiritual elite, but a congregation of fleshly mortals among whom the Creator continues to accomplish his creative purpose. Thus, for Irenaeus, cosmology and ecclesiology are inseparable; they are organically related sharing in the same creative power.

A. The Church and the Power of the Spirit

Foundational for Irenaeus is the idea that the fleshly substance does not exist as an independent and autonomous entity. Rather, the material world originates in the will and power of God. Irenaeus repeats this principle often. "For, to attribute the substance of created things to the power and will (*virtuti et voluntati*) of him, who is God of all, is worthy both of credit and acceptance" (AH ii, 10, 4). Irenaeus uses similar language later in the second book: "He (the Creator) made all things freely, and by his own power (*libere et ex sua potestate*), and arranged and finished them, and his will is the substance of all things" (AH ii, 30, 9). Irenaeus' consistent reference to the power and will of God as the substance of all things testifies to its fundamental importance for his cosmology. The fleshly substance is not static, passive, and dead; rather, it is alive, truly participating in the power of the Creator's will.

Irenaeus employs this same cosmological language when he expresses his understanding of the church. However, the power of God is more specifically attributed to the Spirit who descends upon the church at Pentecost. Irenaeus writes,

The Spirit did David ask for the human race, saying, "And establish me with your all-governing Spirit;" who also, as Luke says, descended at the day of Pentecost upon the disciples after the Lord's ascension, having power to admit all nations to the entrance of life (*potestatem omnium gentium ad introitum vitae*), and to the opening of the new covenant; from whence also, with one accord in all languages, they uttered praise to God, the Spirit bringing distant tribes to unity, and offering to the Father the first-fruits of all nations. Wherefore also the Lord promised to send the Comforter, who should join us to God. For as the compacted lump of dough cannot be formed of dry wheat without fluid matter, nor can a loaf possess unity, so, in like manner, neither could we, being many, be made one in Christ Jesus without the water from heaven. And as the dry earth does not bring forth (*non fructificat*) unless it receive moisture, in like manner we also, being originally a dry tree, could never have brought forth fruit unto life (*fructificaremus vitam*) without the voluntary rain from above (*sine superna voluntaria pluvia*). For our bodies have received unity among

themselves by means of that laver which leads to incorruption (*ad incorruptionem*); but our souls, by means of the Spirit. Wherefore both are necessary, since both contribute toward the life of God (*proficient in vitam Dei*)... (AH iii, 17, 2).

The Spirit comes with the “power to introduce all nations to life.” This language suggests that Irenaeus thinks of the Spirit’s work in the church in connection with his work in creation.¹⁰⁶ The same power that creates all things out of nothing is present in the church working for the benefit of all nations. The imagery of the dry wheat and the dry ground gives support to this interpretation. The Spirit rests on the church in order that the world might “bear fruit.” The Spirit’s work in the beginning is brought to a fruitful perfection in the end. For Irenaeus, the life of the church is organically connected to the fleshly existence of this world. The incorruptible life accomplished in the spiritual waters of baptism is not the life of another world. Rather, it is the intended perfection of earthly life.

This creative power of the Spirit is precisely the power that continues to work in the apostolic ministry of the church.¹⁰⁷ For Irenaeus, the same power that brings forth life out of non-existence creates the church through the apostles’ baptism and preaching.

It certainly was in the power of the apostles to declare that Christ descended upon Jesus, or that the so-called superior Savior came down upon the dispensational one, or he who is from the invisible places upon him from the Demiurge... But what really was the case, that did they record (*quod autem erat, hoc et dixerunt*), that the Spirit of God as a dove descended upon him; the Spirit, of whom it was declared by Isaiah, “And the Spirit of God shall rest upon him,” as I have already said. And again, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me.” That is the Spirit of whom the Lord declares, “For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaks in you.” And again, giving to the disciples the power

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Hans-Jochen Jaschke (1976, pp. 249ff). Jaschke recognizes both the distinction and the unity that exists in Irenaeus’ understanding of the animating breath and the life-giving Spirit. He (1976, p. 254) writes, “Nicht ohne Grund sind Lebenshauch und Geist in einem Spannungsverhältnis miteinander verbunden. Zwischen beiden besteht die Relation einer Anknüpfung, sei es, dass man an eine schon Adam zuteil gewordene Geistbegabung oder die für die faktische Heilsordnung bedeutsame Geistausgiessung am Ende der Zeit denkt. Sieht man vom ersteren einmal ab, dann spannt sich zwischen der natürlichen Erschaffung des ersten Menschen und dem zweiten Adam des neutestamentlichen Heilsgeschehens, zwischen der Belebung durch den Hauch und dem Empfang des lebenspendenden Geistes eine Entwicklungslinie.” For Irenaeus, the Spirit’s work in the church must be understood in connection with God’s creation of man in the beginning. In the church, the Creator’s intent for man from the beginning is manifested and perfected through the gift of the Spirit.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Terrance L. Tiessen (1993, p. 186). Tiessen writes, “However, Irenaeus goes on to tie the Spirit expressly to the Church; to the Church as an institution which is visible in its catholicity because of the unity of its profession of faith and the succession of its bishops from the apostles. Not to have the Spirit is to be without life. But, not to be a part of the Church, to which the Spirit gave apostles, prophets and teachers, and in and through which the Spirit does all his work, is not to have a part in the Spirit. It is possible that one could believe without the Scriptures, as many did in Irenaeus’ day. However, they were able to do so because the Spirit spoke to them through the oral proclamation of the Church.” Tiessen rightly notes the inseparable connection in Irenaeus’ thought between the Spirit and the church. However, for Irenaeus, the church is not defined simply as an institution. Like creation, the church exists, not as an independent substance, but as a participant in the creative power of the Spirit. Thus, the church is not a static institution, but a growing and maturing body. While the church is given birth at Pentecost, it continues to grow and mature through the apostolic ministry until it is fully manifested and perfected in the eschatological kingdom. This energetic and dynamic vision of the church is what Irenaeus expresses when he speaks of the church as being “handed over” through the succession of bishops (AH, iv, 33, 8).

of regeneration into God (*potestatem regenerationis in Deum; ἡ δύναμις τῆς ἀναγεννήσεως εἰς Θεόν*), he said to them, “Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” For God promised in the last times he would pour him upon his servants and handmaids, that they might prophesy; wherefore he did also descend upon the Son of God, made the Son of man, becoming accustomed in fellowship with him to dwell in the human race, to rest with human being, and to dwell in the workmanship of God (*habitare in plasmate Dei*), working the will of the Father in them (*voluntatem Patris operans in ipsis*), and renewing (*renovans*) them from the old into the newness of Christ (AH iii, 17, 1).

In this passage, Irenaeus defends the truthfulness of the apostolic witness. What happened in reality is what the apostles declared in their preaching and their writings. The same Spirit that rested upon Isaiah and anointed Jesus also speaks through the apostles. Thus, the main point for Irenaeus is not merely that baptism is the “power of regeneration unto God;” rather, he wants to emphasize that this creative power is given into the apostles hands.¹⁰⁸ The baptismal command means that the divine creative purpose is accomplishing its intended goal precisely in the apostolic ministry. The apostolic church is not merely a product of God’s creative will, but makes God’s life-giving power accessible to the world.

The powerful presence of the Spirit upon the church implies that the church is not merely the product of the creative will, but the concrete manifestation of God’s intent. For Irenaeus the church is the reordering of the cosmos according to God’s plan. The church’s ordered life is a manifestation in this fallen world of the world as God intended it to be.

The preaching of the church is everywhere consistent, and continues in an even course, and receives testimony from the prophets, the apostles, and all the disciples—as I have proved—through the beginning, the middle, and the end, and through the entire dispensation of God, and that well-grounded operation (*solidam operationem*) which tends to man’s salvation, which is in our faith; which, having been received from the church (*perceptam ab ecclesia*), we do preserve (*custodimus*), and which always, by the Spirit of God, renewing (*juvenescens*) its youth, as if it were some precious deposit in an excellent vessel, causes the vessel itself containing it to renew its youth also. For this gift of God has been entrusted to the church (*ecclesiae creditum*), as breath was to the first created man (*aspiratio plasmationi*), for this purpose, that all the members receiving it may be vivified (*omnia membra percipientia vivificentur*); and the communion of Christ has been deposited in it, that is, the Holy Spirit, the earnest of incorruption, the confirmation of our faith, and the ladder of ascent to God.

¹⁰⁸ The language, “power of regeneration unto God (*potestatem regenerationem in Deum*),” ties baptism to God’s creative will. This language is used also in AH i, 10, 2 where Irenaeus speaks of the tradition of the church. He writes, “...the church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points of doctrine just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony (*συμφύτως; consonanter*), as if she possessed only one mouth. For, although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the power of the tradition (*ἡ δύναμις τῆς παραδόσεως*) is one and the same.” The use of the term “power” to refer to the church’s life as well as the description of the church in terms of “harmony” testify to the inseparable connection between creation and ecclesiology in Irenaeus’ thought.

“For in the church,” it is said, “God hath set apostles, prophets, teachers,” and the remaining universal operation of the Spirit (*universam reliquam operationem Spiritus*); of which all those are not partakers who do not join themselves to the church, but defraud themselves of life through their perverse opinions (*sententiam malam*) and evil operation (*operationem pessimam*). For where the church is, there is the Spirit of God (*Ubi enim ecclesia, ibi et Spiritus Dei*); and where the Spirit of God is, there is the church (*et ubi Spiritus Dei, illic ecclesia*), and every kind of grace; but the Spirit is truth. Those, therefore, who do not partake of him, are neither nourished into life from the mother’s breast, nor do they enjoy that most limpid fountain which issues from the body of Christ (AH iii, 24, 1).

The church’s gospel, which has been handed down from the beginning, is the “well-grounded operation.” This language suggests that, for Irenaeus, the church’s gospel consists in the powerful working of God’s will from the beginning.¹⁰⁹ The power of his Spirit is deposited in the church and “renews” the church, as a precious deposit is able to renew the vessel that contains it. The Spirit orders the church according to his wisdom providing apostles, prophets, teachers and what the bishop of Lyons calls the “universal operation of the Spirit.” Thus, for Irenaeus, the church is the perfection of the cosmos and the recreation of humanity.¹¹⁰ The Spirit is entrusted to the church in the same way that the divine breath was given to animate Adam. The church regenerates humanity, brings it to its divine destiny, and makes it a participant in God’s own life.

For Irenaeus, ecclesiology and cosmology are inseparable. Without the fleshly world, the church becomes a band of spiritualized disciples longing for escape to another world.¹¹¹ However,

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Roch Kereszty (1984, pp. 202-218). Kereszty describes the unity of the church in Irenaeus’ theology as a unity of structure and a unity of action. He (1984, p. 204) writes, “The unity of the church manifests itself not only in the same basic organization. There appears an even more fundamental unity than the same church order everywhere in the world. Even though scattered and isolated like islands in the midst of a turbulent sea and suffering under the storm of blasphemies, the church is, as it were, one subject of action.” Kereszty observes both a unity of order and a unity of action in Irenaeus’ vision of the church. These two aspects of the church arise from Irenaeus’ understanding of God’s creative power. His almighty will both orders the church and works in and through the church’s sacramental life. Thus, the same divine power that orders and gives life to creation and the scriptures also orders and gives life to the church.

¹¹⁰ Cf. AH iv, 33, 8. Irenaeus writes, “True knowledge is the doctrine of the blessed apostles (*γνώσεις ἀληθῆς ἢ τῶ ἀποστόλων διδαχή*), and the ancient constitution of the church throughout all the world (*τὸ ἀρχαῖον τῆς ἐκκλησίας σύστημα κατὰ παντός τοῦ κόσμου*), and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops by which they have handed down the church which exists in every place (*quae in unoquoque loco est Ecclesiam tradiderunt*). . . .” The language Irenaeus employs to describe the church is very suggestive. The phrase, “the ancient constitution of the church (*τὸ ἀρχαῖον τῆς ἐκκλησίας σύστημα*)” expresses the intimate connection of creation and the church in Irenaeus’ mind. Lamp defines *σύστημα* as a “composite” or “orderly whole” (Lamp, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, pp. 1350-1351). This word is often employed to describe creation as the ordered unity of heaven and earth and the body as consisting of many members. This word expresses Irenaeus’ organic understanding of the church. In addition, the adjective, *ἀρχαῖον*, is used by Irenaeus to describe the flesh of Adam, the first-formed (cf. AH, iv, 33, 4; v, 1, 3).

¹¹¹ Cf. Hans Jonas (2001, pp. 264). In this passage, Jonas describes the “Gnostic” acosmic fellowship. He writes, “Thus is founded the new brotherhood of the elect, or the believers, or the knowers, to which even those who by the standard of worldly virtue are the ‘basest’ belong if they are bearers of the pneuma. That these ‘basest’ are superior to the sun and all the stars is self-evident with the new evaluation of selfhood and nature. It is equally evident that the mutual concern of the eschatological brotherhood cannot consist in furthering the integration of man into the comic whole, as far as feeling is concerned, nor in making him ‘play his proper part,’ as far as action is concerned. He is no longer a part of this whole, except in violation of his true essence. Instead, the mutual concern of the brotherhood, thrown together by the common

without the church, the cosmos remains in a state of infancy, immaturity, and imperfection. Its growth is stunted, and it is destined to return to the nothingness from which it came. The church's ministry bears the divine power that created all things in the beginning and seeks to perfect all things in the end. Thus, the church is the reordering of the universe where the will of the devil is overcome and all things are placed again under the headship of the true humanity.¹¹² Thus, the church does not belong to the spiritually elite, but to that fleshly humanity shaped by God's own hands, who faithfully gives thanks to the Creator and expects to participate in his eschatological purpose.

B. The Significance of Creation in the Church's Sacramental Life

The intimate union of cosmology and ecclesiology in the mind of Irenaeus is expressed most fully in his statements regarding the church's sacramental life. Irenaeus emphasizes the use of earthly elements in the economy of the church's ministry to challenge the Valentinian repudiation of the hylic substance. For his opponents, salvation consists in liberation from the fleshly existence of this world.¹¹³ Thus, while such dualistic groups may continue to practice a semblance of the sacraments, they fill them with new meaning. Irenaeus testifies to one such development among the Marcosians.

They maintain that those who have attained to perfect knowledge must of necessity be regenerated into that power which is above all (*εἰς τὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα δυνάμιν ᾧσιν ἀναγεγεννημένοι*). For it is otherwise impossible to find admittance within the Pleroma, since this regeneration leads them down into the depths of Bythus. For the baptism instituted by the visible Jesus (*τοῦ φαινομένου Ἰησοῦ*) was for the remission of sins, but the redemption (*ἀπολύτρωσις*) brought in by that Christ who descended upon him, was for perfection (*εἰς τελείωσιν*); and they allege that the former is animal, but the latter spiritual. And the baptism

cosmic solitude, is to deepen this very alienation and to further the other's redemption, which to each self becomes a vehicle of his own."

¹¹² Cf. AH v, 31ff. In this section, Irenaeus emphasizes the indissoluble connection between the resurrection of the righteous and the reordering of the cosmos. Christ's victory over the devil results in the redemption of all creation. The universe is reordered around the authority of Christ and his church. "It is fitting, therefore, that the creation itself, being restored to its primeval condition, should without restraint be under the dominion of the righteous (*servire justis*)" (AH v, 32, 1). Thus, the church does not exist simply for the sake of individuals; rather, the church is the manifestation of a new creation under the dominion of Christ and his saints.

¹¹³ Cf. John D. Turner (2000, pp. 83-139). Turner (2000, p. 137) examines the various "Gnostic" rituals and concludes, "By way of conclusion, it can be seen that the purpose of gnostic ritual was uniformly salvific, a means to restore the primordial unity of the human person.... The Gnostics illustrated the original perfection of the soul by the pairing and agreement of the Pleromatic aeons, and its degradation is illustrated by the lack of cooperation between male and female at the moment of the inception of the physical cosmos and its creator, which become characterized by victimization and oblivion on the one hand, and by presumption and antagonism on the other. The physical bodies into which the divine substance was thereby incarnated must be stripped away like an old garment and replace with the luminous garment made of that substance; they must be thoroughly washed away and the inner person immersed in the living water of wisdom, anointed with the fragrance of the divine spirit, and wed with its other by higher self." For Irenaeus, it is precisely this separation of salvation from creation that transforms the meaning of the sacraments of the church.

of John was proclaimed with a view to repentance (*εἰς μετάνοιαν*), but the redemption by Christ was brought in for the sake of perfection (*εἰς τελείωσιν*) (AH i, 21, 2).

According to Irenaeus, the Marcosians tolerate water baptism, but promote a second sacramental action for those possessed of spiritual gnosis. This second sacramental action seems to be called, “redemption.” While water baptism may apply to all Christians who repent and desire entrance into the visible church, the ritual of redemption grants a higher status offering admittance into the pneumatic Pleroma. In this way, dualistic cosmologies are altering the church’s practice of the sacraments, transforming their meaning, and even inspiring new rituals.¹¹⁴

Against the opposition’s understanding of the sacraments, Irenaeus seeks to root the church’s sacramental life in the firm soil of creation. According to Irenaeus, his adversaries proclaim the inherent incapacity of the flesh to participate in the spiritual life. Thus, the supreme god’s relationship to the pneumatic disciple is not physical, but spiritual, mental, and intuitive. For Irenaeus, the sacrament of the eucharist establishes a different truth.

And just as a cutting from the vine (*τρόπον τὸ ξύλον τῆς ἀμπέλου*) planted in the ground fructifies in its season (*τῷ ἰδίῳ καιρῷ ἐκαρποφόρησε*), or as a corn of wheat falling into the earth and becoming decomposed (*διαλυθείς*), rises with manifold increase (*πολλοστὸς ἠγέρθη*) by the Spirit of God, who contains all things, and then, through the wisdom of God, serves for the use of men (*χρησιν ἀνθρώπων*), and having received the Word of God (*προσλαμβάνομενα τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ*), becomes the eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ; so also our bodies, being nourished by it (*ἐξ αὐτῆς τρεφόμενα*), and deposited in the earth (*κλιθέντα εἰς τὴν γῆν*), and suffering decomposition there (*διαλυθέντα*), shall rise at their appointed time (*ἀναστήσεται ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ καιρῷ*), the Word of God granting them resurrection to the glory of God, even the Father, who freely gives to this mortal immortality, and to this corruptible incorruption, because the strength of God is made perfect in weakness (*ἡ δύναμις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελείται*)... (AH v, 2, 3).

For Irenaeus, the agricultural imagery is more than a rhetorical analogy or a useful illustration. The very same divine power that works in the earth to produce fruit in its season also works in human flesh through the eucharistic bread.¹¹⁵ The resurrection of the body and the fruitful harvest share one and the same cause. Through the agricultural imagery, Irenaeus repudiates the spiritualization of the

¹¹⁴ Cf. AH i, 21, 3-5. Here Irenaeus gives an account of his opponents’ sacramental practices. For Irenaeus, all of these practices are inspired by the dualistic cosmology so that earthly materials and rituals symbolize a connection to the Pleroma. Cf also *Gos. Ph.*, which is generally considered a Valentinian work. The teachings seem to be collected around the theme of the five sacraments—baptism, chrism, eucharist, ransom, and bridal chamber. *The Gospel of Philip* can be found in Bentley Layton (1987).

¹¹⁵ Wingren emphasizes this same aspect of Irenaeus’ sacramentology. He (1959, p. 14) writes, “The Creator has power to give life to the grain which is cast into the earth and is changed, and it is the same Creator who has power to nourish and feed us with Christ in the Eucharist, so that when we die and are buried in the earth we may await the resurrection from the dead. The bread and wine of the Holy Communion both testify that the Creator of the world is in Christ, and that our earthly bodies share in the life which the Creator wills to bestow upon mankind through the incarnate Son.”

sacrament.¹¹⁶ The eucharist is not an other-worldly event; nor is it to be a supernatural experience; nor is it to be the means by which one escapes the fleshly world and enters the spiritual realm. Irenaeus' cosmology grounds the eucharist in reality.

From this perspective, the eucharist is intended for flesh and blood creatures. For Irenaeus, God's relationship to his creatures is always physical. The body is never excluded from God's providential care of humankind. Irenaeus, refers to the eucharist primarily to prove the physical character of God's interaction with the human race.

But how can they be consistent (*constabit*) with themselves, when they say that the bread over which thanks have been given is the body of their Lord, and the cup his blood, if they do not call himself the Son of the Creator of the world (*non ipsum Fabricatoris mundi Filium dicant*), that is, his Word, through whom the wood fructifies (*Verbum ejus per quod lignum fructificat*), and the fountains gush forth, and the earth gives "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." Then, again, how can they say that the flesh, which is nourished (*τρεφομένην*) with the body of the Lord and with his blood, goes to corruption (*εἰς φθοράν χωρεῖν*), and does not partake of life (*μη μετέχειν τῆς ζωῆς*)? Let them, therefore, either alter their opinion (*τὴν γνώμην*), or cease from offering (*προσφέρειν*) the things just mentioned. But our opinion is in accordance with the eucharist (*Ἡμῶν δὲ σύμφωνος ἡ γνώμην τῇ εὐχαριστίᾳ*), and the eucharist, in turn, establishes our opinion (*καὶ ἡ εὐχαριστία πάλιν βεβαιοῖ τὴν γνώμην*). For we offer to him his own (*προσφέρομεν αὐτῷ τὰ ἴδια*), announcing consistently the fellowship and union (*κοινωνίαν καὶ ἕνωσιν*) of the flesh and the Spirit. For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God (*προσλαβόμενος τὴν ἐπίκλησιν τοῦ Θεοῦ*) is no longer common bread, but the eucharist, consisting of two realities (*ἐκ δύο πραγμάτων*), earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the eucharist, are no longer corruptible (*φθαρτά*), having the hope of the resurrection to eternity (*τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς ἀναστάσεως*) (AH iv, 18, 4-5).

In this passage, the eucharist is employed as a hermeneutical touchstone that challenges dualistic cosmologies. The eucharist testifies to the "union of the flesh and the Spirit." Irenaeus' cosmology is certainly foundational for his sacramentology. However, it is also true to say that his sacramentology affects his cosmology. In other words, the sacramental elements are not simply objects used for an other-worldly purpose. Rather, they testify to the Creator's original intent for the entire cosmos. In the sacraments, creation is being used according to God's eternal plan from the beginning.

Irenaeus appeals to the sacramental life of the church to emphasize the fleshly character of God's relationship to his creatures. Irenaeus' cosmology binds the church's sacramental life to the

¹¹⁶ Cf. Thornton (1950, pp. 115ff). Thornton's analysis of Irenaeus' eucharistic teaching is foundational for my own interpretation. He (1950, p. 119) writes, "Accordingly, as against those who would tear the gospel out of the order of creation and make it purely other-worldly, he dwells upon the creaturely reality of the bread and wine which are offered to God in the eucharist. He then goes on to emphasize the processes of nature from which these offerings come, the sowing and the harvesting of wheat, the planting and growth of the vine. For these bear witness to the God who created and nourished them."

concrete reality of the material universe. However, Irenaeus also appeals to the eucharist in the context of the old testament Law and the required sacrifices.¹¹⁷ The sacrificial character of the eucharist establishes not only an ontological communion between God and creation, but also an historical continuity between Israel and the church. In this way, the eucharist testifies against all of Irenaeus' opponents.¹¹⁸

Irenaeus' explanation of the sacrificial character of the eucharist leads to an interesting connection between his cosmology and his sacramentology. In the sacrificial context, Irenaeus does not merely emphasize the material elements of the sacrament; he also considers the ritual activity of the one who offers the sacrifice.¹¹⁹ Irenaeus continually emphasizes that God has no need of humanity's service. "In the beginning, therefore, did God form Adam, not as if he stood in need of man, but that he might have someone upon whom to confer his benefits" (AH iv, 14, 1). The liturgical act of offering sacrifices does not affect God as much as it benefits the one offering. "But for this reason does God demand service from men, in order that, since he is good and merciful, he may benefit those who continue in his service. For as much as God is in want of nothing, so much

¹¹⁷ L. S. Thornton (1950, p. 120) emphasizes the way Irenaeus connects his eucharistic teaching to both creation and the liturgical life of Israel. He writes, "Two points are to be noticed in this teaching. Irenaeus connects the central act of Christian worship with the order of creation and its processes. But secondly he connects the eucharistic offering of created things with the religious cultus of the Old Testament. It is clear that, whereas the heretics must logically spurn all 'natural' religion as gross and materialistic, the tradition of the church, for which Irenaeus stood, was consciously in line with the religion of Israel at the point where that religion took into itself the whole world of creaturely things." Thus, for Irenaeus, Christianity's connection to creation allows both a substantial continuity as well as a formal discontinuity with Old Testament Israel.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Godehard Joppich (1965, p. 73).

¹¹⁹ Most scholars give little attention to this aspect of Irenaeus' eucharistic theology. They focus on Christ's relationship to the material elements of the sacrament and fail to notice the significance of the sacrificial act itself in Irenaeus' thought. Thus, Ferguson (1999, p. 119) comments, "Irenaeus introduces a further development, for he speaks more explicitly of the bread and cup as an oblation. He identifies the sacrifice more closely with the elements by dwelling on the aspect of an offering of the first fruits of the earth...." Ferguson ignores the significance of man's sacrificial act, which is equally essential to Irenaeus' exposition of the eucharist. The sacrificial act of the church is largely ignored because it does not seem relevant to Irenaeus' polemical purpose. Thus, Denis Minns (1994, p. 116) writes, "Nevertheless, in his relatively sparse remarks on the subject, he does reveal one or two aspects of his doctrine of the Eucharist which seem not related to the polemical purpose at hand. He is insistent, for example, that Eucharistic offerings are not made because God needs them, requires them, or profits from them. God has no need of our oblations; but he allows us to make them because we have a need to make them: they give us the opportunity to be fruitful and grateful." Since Minns cannot see how the sacrificial act of the eucharist relates to Irenaeus' argument, Minns suggests that Irenaeus' comments reflect "an anxiety" in the church of Irenaeus' day. Gustaf Wingren (1959, p. 165) also disregards the centrality of sacrifice in Irenaeus' understanding of the eucharist. He writes, "In the Eucharist man receives the body of Christ and the Christian community is thereby built up as the body of Christ. The main emphasis in Irenaeus is laid on man's participation in Christ, and his nourishment by the bread and the wine, and not on the offering." It is my contention that the sacrificial act of the eucharist is as important and essential to his argument as the eucharistic elements and Christ's material presence in them. Irenaeus is not only concerned with the resurrection of man's flesh, but also with the restoration of man as the mediator between God and the world. While the eucharistic elements are emphasized to support Irenaeus' argument for the real, physical salvation of man, the eucharistic sacrifice is emphasized to testify to the reordering of the cosmos under man's headship. Christ's self-offering on the cross is the perfect worship rendered by created humanity to the Father in which the church participates through the eucharistic oblation.

does man stand in need of fellowship with God. For this is the glory of man, to continue and remain permanently in God's service" (AH iv, 14, 1).

For Irenaeus, humankind is not created to be a passive object for God's amusement. Rather, he is created to become an active participant in God's creative work. In the liturgical service of offering the eucharistic sacrifice, the human race takes its proper place in relationship to God and to the cosmos.¹²⁰ In the sacrificial liturgy, humanity acquires the "sacerdotal rank" as he serves God with his own created things and "sanctifies what has been created." The eucharist is the fulfillment of the sacrificial liturgy and restores the human creature's place as mediator between God and his creation.

And giving directions (*consilium*) to his disciples to offer to God the first-fruits of his own created things (*primitias Deo offerre ex suis creaturis*)—not as if he stood in need of them, but that they might be themselves neither unfruitful nor ungrateful (*neque infructuosi neque ingrati*)—he took that created thing (*eum qui ex creatura*), bread, and gave thanks, and said, "This is my body." And the cup likewise, which is part of that creation to which we belong (*qui est ex ea creatura quae est secundum nos*), he confessed to be his blood, and taught the new oblation of the new covenant (*novi Testamenti novam docuit oblationem*); which the church receiving from the apostles, offers to God throughout all the world (*in universo mundo offert Deo*), to him who gives us as the means of subsistence the first-fruits of his own gifts (*primitias suorum munerum*) in the new testament, concerning which Malachi, among the twelve prophets, thus spoke beforehand: "I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord omnipotent, and I will not accept sacrifice at your hands. For from the rising of the sun, unto the going down of the same, my name is glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and pure sacrifice; for great is my name among the Gentiles says the Lord omnipotent,"—indicating in the plainest manner, by these words, that the former people (*prior populus*) shall indeed cease to make offerings to God, but that in every place sacrifice shall be offered to him, and that a pure one (*purum*); and his name is glorified among the Gentiles (AH iv, 17, 5).

The eucharist is not offered to fulfill a want or need in God; it does not appease his wrath or ensure a favorable demeanor. Rather, the eucharist is commanded so that humanity would not be "unfruitful or ungrateful."

¹²⁰ The restoration of humankind's place in creation is almost wholly ignored by Irenaeus scholars. Most studies in Irenaeus' anthropology concentrate on man's relationship to God. However, for Irenaeus, humanity's salvation is not only a reconstitution of his relationship to God, but also a reordering of his relationship to the world. Gustaf Wingren (1959, p. 184) is one of the few who recognizes this essential aspect of Irenaeus' anthropology. He writes, "The Kingdom of the Son is the last phase in the restoration of Creation. It was through man who lived on earth that sin got power to destroy the earth. Since it is man in particular over whom the enemy of God has gained control, the restoration of man must occupy a central place in the purification of Creation." While Wingren discusses the human rule of creation in the context of the eschatological kingdom, it must be remembered that the reign of the just is realized already in Christ and the sacramental life of the church. The sacraments not only perfect humanity's relationship to God, but also restore his proper relationship to creation. Precisely in its sacramental action, the church is manifested as the kingdom of God.

The eucharistic sacrifice differs from old testament sacrifices in two respects. The eucharist is universal including the Gentiles. Secondly, the eucharist is offered by a different kind of humanity.

The oblation of the church therefore (*Ecclesiae oblatio*), which the Lord gave instructions to be offered throughout all the world is accounted with God a pure sacrifice (*purum sacrificium reputatum*), and is acceptable (*acceptum*) to him; not that he stands in need of a sacrifice from us, but that he who offers is himself glorified (*glorificatur*) in what he does offer, if his gift be accepted.... And the class (*genus*) of oblations in general has not been set aside; for there were both oblations (*oblaciones*) there, and there are oblations here. Sacrifices (*sacrificia*) there were among the people; sacrifices there are, too, in the church; but the species (*species*) alone has been changed, inasmuch as the offering is now made, not by slaves, but by freemen (*non a servis sed a liberis offeratur*) (AH iv, 18, 1-2).

In the old covenant, sacrifices were performed under the letter of the Law. The Israelite offered what he was compelled to offer under the threat of punishment. However, the eucharist is offered by “freemen.” Christ’s free offering of himself to the Father on the wood of the cross changes the “species” of the sacrificial liturgy.¹²¹ In the eucharist, the church offers herself freely into the hands of the Creator so that he can form her according to his own desire. Thus, the eucharist not only proclaims the dignity of the created substance, but also the restoration of the human creature as the voluntary mediator between God and his creation.

C. Creation and the Relationship between Scripture and the Church

The dualistic cosmology of the Valentinians has a profound influence upon their vision of scripture and the tradition of the church. A pessimistic view of the fleshly world compels Irenaeus’ opponents to exclude the material world from participating in the revelation of spiritual gnosis. Liberated from the ontological foundation of creation, the scriptures and the church are defined according to their relationship to the spiritual realm. In dualistic cosmologies, the scriptures and the church’s tradition become sources of “supernatural” revelation. The spiritual disciple searches them for spiritual wisdom and the secret knowledge of a higher existence. Instead of concrete, public accounts of the Creator’s interaction with his creation, the scriptures and the church’s tradition

¹²¹ Cf. AH iii, 19, 3. Irenaeus describes Jesus’ salvific work as the “offering and commending to His Father (*offerentem et commendantem Patri*) that human nature (*eum hominem*) which had been found, making in His own person the first-fruits of the resurrection of man (*primitias resurrectionis hominis in semetipso faciens*)....” Here Irenaeus identifies Jesus’ own humanity with the sacrifice of first-fruits. The sacrifice of first-fruits is also identified with the church (AH iii, 17, 2). In the eucharist, Christ is the perfect priestly man who offers the church in and with himself to the Father. The voluntary self-sacrifice of Christ lives in the church as she voluntarily offers herself with the bread and wine of the eucharist.

become mysterious and enigmatic messages subject to the pneumatic imagination.¹²² Thus, for Irenaeus' opponents, the scriptures and the church's kerygma are merely tools of the spiritual elite. Since they possess a substantial union with the spiritual realm, their knowledge is supernatural and their authority is absolute.

At the beginning of the third book, Irenaeus comments on his opponents' appeals to authority. His statements are certainly biased, but seem to proceed from his own personal encounters. According to the bishop of Lyons, his adversaries are "like slippery serpents" moving from one authority to the next. Against scripture, they argue tradition. Against written tradition, they argue the "living voice" of the apostles. Irenaeus concludes that the only real authority for his opponents is the pneumatic individual himself. "For they maintain that the apostles intermingled (*admiscuisse*) the things of the Law with the words of the Savior; and that not the apostles alone, but even the Lord himself, spoke as at one time from the Demiurge, at another from the intermediate place, and yet again from the Pleroma, but that they themselves, without doubt or contamination (*indubitate et intaminate*), yet with purity, have knowledge of the hidden mystery (*sincere absconditum scire mysterium*)" (AH iii, 2, 2). The fragmentation of the cosmos leads to a fragmentation of truth and authority. Released from an attachment to the created world, the scriptures, and the church's tradition, pneumatic teachers compete with each other for a share of supernatural authority.

Irenaeus responds to his opponents' appeal to a secret, mysterious, and supernatural revelation with a clear, public, and incarnate revelation. For Irenaeus, the scriptures and the church's tradition are grounded in the real, fleshly existence of the created world. The same creative will that gives life to the cosmos also interacts with humanity as recorded in the scriptures and continues to accomplish its purpose within the church. Creation, scripture, and church participate in the dynamic movement of God's power to create, restore, and fulfill the life of his creatures. In Irenaeus' cosmology, the revelation of God is thoroughly natural, that is, it consists in the real and continuing interaction

¹²² Cf. Rudolph (1984, pp. 53). Rudolph writes, "The external variety of Gnosis is naturally not accidental but evidently belongs to its very nature. As we shall see, there was no Gnostic "church" or normative theology, no Gnostic rule of faith, nor any dogma of exclusive importance. No limits were set to free representation and theological speculation so far as they lay within the frame of the Gnostic view of the world."

between God and the world.¹²³ In addition, his revelation is public, manifest, and clear. From this perspective, the scriptures and the church's tradition are not competing sources of "supernatural" knowledge. Rather, they both proceed from the same substance. The Spirit, who inspired the prophets and apostles, also rests upon the church and continues to regenerate the baptized.

For Irenaeus, the scriptures and the concrete life of the church share the same ontological foundation. Creation, scripture, and church are not three independent, autonomous revelations, but three aspects of the same divine will. The truth revealed in the scriptures and the church's life is not strictly rational, but ontological.¹²⁴ Knowledge of the truth is not merely a matter of the intellect or the imagination, but a matter of bodily participation and communion. The truth declared in the scriptures and handed down in the church is, above all things, the divine word that gives life to the flesh. As a result, Irenaeus' thought often moves freely from creation to the scriptures to the church. This freedom of movement is illustrated in Irenaeus' interpretation of the parable of hidden treasure (Matthew 13:44).

If anyone, therefore, reads the Scriptures with attention (*intentus legat Scripturas*) he will find in them an account of Christ (*de Christo sermonem*), and foreshadowing of the new calling (*novae vocationis praefigurationem*). For Christ is the treasure, which was hid (*absconsus*) in the field, that is, in this world (for "the field is the world"); but the treasure hid in the scriptures (*absconsus in Scripturis*) is Christ, since he was pointed out by means of types and parables (*typos et parabolas significabatur*). Hence his human nature (*secundum hominem*) could not be understood, prior to the consummation (*consummatio*) of those things, which had been predicted, that is, the advent of Christ (AH iv, 26, 1).

¹²³ Cf. Jeffrey D. Bingham (2001, pp. 184-199). Bingham convincingly argues that Irenaeus contrasts the novelty of his opponents' knowledge with his own emphasis on love manifested in God's providential care of creation. He (2001, pp. 198-199) concludes, "Third, Irenaeus insists that sincere love, as the human knows it, is not disconnected from the mundane, either for the Creator or creature. Finally, God's immanence, providence, love for the mundane, flows out of God's surpassing greatness, his transcendence."

¹²⁴ Cf. Thomas F. Torrance (1995, pp. 31ff). Here Torrance emphasizes Irenaeus' understanding of divine knowledge. He (1995, p. 33) writes, "For Irenaeus, then, knowledge of the truth of God or the truth of the Gospel is not given in an abstract or detached form but in a concrete embodied form in the Church, where it is to be grasped within the normative pattern of the faith imparted to it through the teaching of the apostles, and is therefore to be grasped only in unity and continuity with the faith, worship and godly life of all who are incorporated into Christ as members of his Body. He regarded the truth revealed through the Holy Scriptures as an organic structure, 'the body of truth', within which various truths, and correspondingly beliefs, may be distinguished but which form a coherent whole from which they cannot be separated, any more than the limbs of a living body can be severed from the body without dismemberment and destruction of the whole." This "organic structure" that Torrance emphasizes proceeds from Irenaeus' vision of God's creative work. The divine will revealed in the scriptures is the same will that gives life to the flesh and growth to every living thing. Thus, the divine revelation that proceeds from the scriptures involves human flesh as much as it involves the human mind. Humanity's participation in God's truth is not limited to his reasoning powers or his clever intuition, but includes the whole of his being.

Irenaeus understands this parable in the context of the relationship between the two covenants.¹²⁵ He begins his exposition by ascribing two interpretations to the passage. First, the field refers to the world for “the field is the world.” For Irenaeus, the Creator’s work in the beginning is a hidden work. Humankind was not present to witness the glory and power of God’s formation of the cosmos. However, Irenaeus immediately asserts a second interpretation of the parable. The field not only refers to the world, but also the scriptures. Throughout the old covenant, God interacts with humanity; yet, his own personal presence remains invisible and secret. These two interpretations demonstrate that, for Irenaeus, the world and the scriptures are intimately connected. They proceed from the same Creator and contain the same treasure.

However, for Irenaeus, the secret presence of God in his creative work and his interaction with Israel ends with the advent of Christ.¹²⁶ In his incarnate life, the Creator’s face is revealed and Israel’s God is made known. As Irenaeus says, the incarnation of Christ is the “explanation of all things.” He is the treasure hidden within creation and the old covenant, but now revealed in the new covenant. This emphasis on Christ as the explanation of creation and the scriptures leads Irenaeus to allude to a third interpretation of the parable. Christ is the treasure hidden in the world and the ancient scriptures, but he is manifest in the church.

And for this reason, indeed, when at this present time (*ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ*) the Law is read to the Jews, it is like a fable (*μύθος*); for they do not possess the explanation of all things (*τῆν ἐξήγησιν τῶν πάντων*) pertaining to the advent of the Son of God (*ἡ παρουσία τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ*), which took place in human nature (*κατ’ ἀνθρώπων*); but when it is read by the Christians, it is a treasure, hid indeed in a field, but brought to light by the cross of Christ (*σταυρῷ δὲ Χριστοῦ ἀποκαλυπτόμενος*), and explained, both enriching the understanding of men, and showing forth the wisdom of God... (AH iv, 26, 1).

¹²⁵ Cf. Thornton (1950, pp. 122ff). Thornton’s insightful explanation of Irenaeus’ use of Matthew 13:44 is foundational for my own understanding. He (1950, p. 123) writes, “As surely as sowing and reaping belong to one operation, so surely do the two parts of the bible belong to a single divine economy. So far then there is analogy between creation and revelation. But the bold application which Irenaeus gives to our Lord’s parable goes further. When he says that the scriptures are ‘the field’ in which Christ is hidden and in the same breath identifies ‘the field’ with the world, it is clear that in some sense he is identifying the ‘order’ of scripture with the order of creation.”

¹²⁶ Cf. James Kugel & Rowan Greer (1986, pp. 155ff). Greer maintains that Irenaeus deals with two issues—the interpretation of the old testament and the confession of Christ’s identity. For Greer, Irenaeus resolves these central issues by a reference to savior history. He (1986, p. 166) writes, “Christ is not confined, then, to the incarnation, but, as the Word of God, is active throughout the whole history of creation. In his polemic with the Gnostics this understanding of the Savior identifies the agent of salvation with the agent of creation and of the dispensations of the Hebrew Scriptures. And quite apart from the polemic, it demands that we set the story of the incarnate Word within the larger story of all God’s dispensations beginning with creation itself. Defining the Savior as God integrates redemption with creation and with the sacred history of Israel.” Thus, for Irenaeus, God’s creative work in the beginning, his interaction with Israel, and his perfection of all things in Christ and the church constitute an organic harmony. This harmony is a fundamental presupposition that shapes Irenaeus’ vision of every sacred text.

The passion of Christ is the living explanation that reveals the meaning of creation and the scriptures. This is precisely the explanation that is the substance of the church's tradition. The Lord declared this explanation to the apostles and the apostles are "like the householder, who brings forth from his treasure things new and old" (AH iv, 26, 1). Irenaeus identifies the treasure hid in the field with the treasure administered by the householder (Matthew 13:52). The Christ manifested in the apostolic ministry is precisely the one, who created all things in the beginning, and the one, who has interacted with humankind as recorded in the scriptures.

Therefore, Irenaeus exhorts all to remain in communion with the church. "Wherefore it is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the church..." (AH iv, 24, 2). Thus, the treasure hid in the field and the scriptures is found in the church.

Paul, then, teaching us where one may find (*inveniat*) such, says, "God hath placed in the church, first, apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, teachers." Where, therefore, the gifts of the Lord have been placed (*ubi charismata Dei posita*), there it behooves us to learn the truth (*ibi discere oportet veritatem*), namely, from those who possess that succession of the church (*Ecclesiae successio*) which is from the apostles and among whom exists that which is sound and blameless in conduct (*conversacionis*), as well as that which is unadulterated and incorrupt in speech (*sermonis*). For these also preserve this faith of ours (*fidem nostrum custodiunt*) in one God who created all things; and they increase that love for the Son of God, who accomplished such marvelous dispensations for our sake (*tantas dispositiones propter nos fecit*); and they expound the scriptures to us without danger, neither blaspheming God, nor dishonoring the patriarchs, nor despising the prophets (AH iv, 26, 5).

Irenaeus' use of the word, "find," suggests a connection to his exposition of the parable. At the beginning of his exposition, Irenaeus referred to the reader "finding" in the scriptures the account of Christ. He seems to conclude his exposition by using the same verb in reference to the church. "Paul, then, teaching us where one may find (*inveniat*) such, says, 'God hath placed in the church, first, apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, teachers.' Where, therefore, the gifts of the Lord have been placed, there it behooves us to learn the truth." If this interpretation is correct, it certainly reveals the intimate connection in the bishop's mind between creation, scripture, and church.¹²⁷ They all share

¹²⁷ This intimate connection between creation, scripture, and church in Irenaeus' thought is the primary emphasis of L. S. Thornton (1950) in his thoughtful presentation. He (1950, p. 125) writes, "What St. Irenaeus sees, however, is a structure of a much more enduring kind. Here creation, scripture and the church are so fused into one whole that, although we can and must distinguish them, yet they cannot be separated. All metaphors break down, because we are confronted with something wholly unique. The threefold structure of orthodoxy presented to us in the teaching of Irenaeus has this peculiarity: it consists in three forms of unity which interpenetrate one another." Thornton's emphasis on the threefold structure of revelation in Irenaeus' thought suggests a connection to the Trinitarian structure of Irenaeus' theology. T. F. Torrance (1995) makes this connection in his article on Irenaeus. Torrance (1995, pp. 60-61) writes, "Regarded in another way, however, the body of truth which constitutes the theological content of the apostolic proclamation, manifests an

the same ontological foundation; they proceed from the same divine will; and they participate in the same divine purpose realized in Christ.

intrinsic order or structure reflecting the economic design of God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ and the essential pattern of the self-revelation of the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. It is through bringing 'the order of the rule (or canon) of our faith' given with Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the three 'heads' of the Faith, to bear upon the body of truth, that the three 'members' of its organic structure become disclosed. In this way the objective substance of the harmonious structure of the Faith is found to be grounded in the ultimate truth of the Deity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." What Thornton sees from below, Torrance sees from above. The Trinitarian revelation of God manifests itself in the threefold structure of God's revelation upon the earth—creation, scripture, and church. The perspectives of Thornton and Torrance relate to one another as the two natures in Christ.

**“Joining the End to the Beginning”
Divine Providence and the Interpretation of Scripture in the Teaching
of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons**

Chapter 2: Christ’s Recapitulation of All Things as the Goal of Divine Providence

I. The Origins of Recapitulation in Irenaeus’ Thought

The work of Irenaeus cannot be studied without considering his reference to the doctrine of recapitulation. Christ’s recapitulation of all things confronts the modern reader with a puzzle in which most of the pieces are missing. In the writings of the New Testament, the doctrine of recapitulation receives scant attention—two references in the writings of Paul. In ancient classical works, recapitulation is rarely mentioned except in reference to rhetorical rules and techniques. With such humble beginnings, the rich, complex, and theological depth evident in Irenaeus’ use of this doctrine is at least surprising, if not astonishing. The development of the concept of recapitulation between Paul and Irenaeus is a mystery. The phenomenon in which Paul’s brief comments are transformed into a profound theological vision is an historical process without witness.

In the absence of historical testimony to the development of the recapitulation doctrine, it is tempting to ascribe its development to the originality of Irenaeus himself.¹²⁸ While this perspective certainly possesses some truth, it seems to contradict another truth that must be acknowledged. Irenaeus consistently claims no innovation. The second century bishop stands in a succession of teachers. He receives the tradition from the hands of his theological fathers and seeks to hand over the same tradition to his children. Thus, the mystery of the doctrine of recapitulation and its development coincides with the mystery of Irenaeus himself. Like the doctrine of recapitulation, Irenaeus arrives on the scene without many footprints. He claims a relationship to John through the venerable Polycarp. However, the details of this catechetical relationship are unknown. The doctrine of recapitulation does not explicitly appear in the writings of John or in the epistle of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. In addition, it must be acknowledged that the language of recapitulation seems to stem

¹²⁸ Cf. R. M. Grant (1990, pp. 96ff). Cf. also A. Houssiau (1955, pp. 231f). There is no question that Irenaeus’ doctrine of recapitulation reveals a fertile and creative mind. However, it must be remembered that Irenaeus uses the recapitulation language in service of a biblical and traditional Christology.

exclusively from St. Paul. Thus, the mystery of the origins of the recapitulation doctrine is compounded by the mystery of Irenaeus' own personal history.

The modern reader's interest in the novelty of Irenaeus' recapitulation doctrine tempts him or her to make it the center of Irenaeus' thought. In other words, the reader's fascination with the concept of recapitulation transforms it into the lens through which one reads all aspects of Irenaeus' teaching.¹²⁹ From this perspective, the doctrine of recapitulation becomes the means by which Irenaeus distorts the original meaning of the scriptures and manipulates the tradition of Paul and the apostles for his own polemical advantage.¹³⁰ Against this viewpoint, it must be acknowledged that the doctrine of recapitulation is not mentioned by Irenaeus with any theological freight until the third book of his work, *Adversus Haereses*. It is rarely expressed in the fourth book and returns to prominence in the fifth book. It is the argument of this paper that, while the doctrine of recapitulation is central in Irenaeus' thought, Christology is the center.¹³¹ It is not recapitulation that drives his understanding of Christ, but his Christology that is expressed under the metaphor of recapitulation. While Irenaeus' use of the recapitulation language is unique and original, it is employed in defense of a truly catholic and traditional Christology.

¹²⁹ Cf. Eric Osborn (2001, pp. 97ff). Osborn's presentation of Irenaeus' recapitulation doctrine begins with the various ideas present in the doctrine of recapitulation, rather than with Irenaeus' Christology. He (2001, pp. 97-98) writes, "The complexity of the concept is formidable. At least eleven ideas—unification, repetition, redemption, perfection, inauguration and consummation, totality, the triumph of Christus Victor, ontology, epistemology and ethics (or being, truth and goodness)—are combined in different permutations." Thus, Osborn's more philosophical presentation of the recapitulation concept tends toward some fragmentation and a lack of cohesiveness. However, he redeems himself in the end as he concludes that all the complexity of the recapitulation doctrine is united in Irenaeus' Christology. Osborn (2001, p. 115) writes, "The mass detail which Irenaeus brings to describe recapitulation reflects the theme of inclusive totality. ... All the questions of human destiny and salvation find their answer in the work of Christ." It is my contention that Irenaeus does not have an independent concept of recapitulation. Rather, the recapitulation language is merely an expression of the Logos' person and work. It is his confession of Christ that fills his teaching of recapitulation with meaning and purpose. Thus, for Irenaeus, recapitulation is not, first of all, a collection of ideas, but a Christological reality. Recapitulation expresses the concrete truth that Christ is the origin, the fulfillment, and the center of all things.

¹³⁰ Cf. Wilhelm Bousset (1970, pp. 437). For Bousset, Irenaeus' recapitulation doctrine is "thoroughly anti-Gnostic in orientation." This "anti-Gnostic" bias leads Irenaeus to distort the theology of Paul. He (1970, p. 446) writes, "One can even say: Irenaeus ecclesiastically accepted Paul and made him into a recognized theologian at a price, the price being that in a grandiose manner he distorted the genuine Pauline ideas and divested them of their essential nature." The differences between Paul and Irenaeus are not a matter of essence, but of emphasis and practical application. Bousset begins with the different emphases evident in the writings of Paul and Irenaeus and, on that basis, tries to convince his readers that an essential theological contradiction exists. It is my view that, while both Paul and Irenaeus share the same Christological vision, they must apply it in radically different contexts. Both agree that God's relationship to the world is ordered through Christ alone. Paul must present this Christological vision against Judaizers who define Christ as servant of the Torah. Irenaeus must present this same gospel against those, who define Christ as servant of an anti-cosmic spiritual gnosis. Thus, while Paul must emphasize the formal contrast between the old and the new covenants, Irenaeus must emphasize their essential continuity. It must always be remembered that Paul and Irenaeus are engaged, not merely in expressing their theological vision, but also in defending that vision against its opponents.

¹³¹ Cf. Aloys Grillmeier (1975, pp. 98ff). Grillmeier (1975, p. 99) notes that in response to his opponents, "...it was his (Irenaeus') task not so much to put forward anything new as to preserve the *depositum fidei*. This means above all the emphasizing of the true incarnation of Jesus Christ and the true historicity of his act of redemption."

A. Recapitulation as Polemic against the “Heresies”

At the heart of the Valentinian system resides a narrative of the divine drama that seeks to explain one’s plight in the material world and his or her destiny in the spiritual realm. This narrative encourages a longing for the restoration of the divine Pleroma, which consists in a reunification of the spiritual essence. This eschatological unity is the Valentinian disciple’s great desire and fervent hope.

As with one person’s ignorance of another—when one becomes acquainted, ignorance of the other passes away of its own accord; and as with darkness, which passes away when light appears: so also lack passes away in completion, and so from that moment on, the realm of appearance is no longer manifest but rather will pass away in the harmony of unity. For now their affairs are dispersed. But when unity makes the ways complete, it is in unity that all will gather themselves, and it is by acquaintance that all will purify themselves out of multiplicity into unity, consuming matter within themselves as fire, and darkness by light, and death by life. So since these things have happened to each of us, it is fitting for us to meditate upon the entirety, so that this house might be holy and quietly intent on unity (*Gos. Tr.* 24:32-25:22).

For the Valentinians, gnosis is the means by which the individual comes to unity in himself and the means by which the cosmos is brought to a consummation in the restoration of the spiritual Pleroma.

For Irenaeus, the Valentinian emphasis on unity is an illusion. Like a wolf that disguises himself as a lamb, so opposing catechists cover their lies with words that sound truthful. For the bishop of Lyons, divisiveness, not unity, is the essence of the Valentinian doctrine.¹³² A focus on the spiritual essence leads to a disregard for the psychic and hylic substances.¹³³ The unity of the spiritual realm is accomplished through separation, divisiveness, and exclusivity. Valentinians preserve the unity and purity of the Pleroma by the establishment of firm boundaries. It is precisely these substantial boundaries that Irenaeus wishes to expose and attack.

Irenaeus commences with this exposure and attack in the second book of his *Adversus Haereses*. In the preface to the second book, Irenaeus specifically mentions the need to overthrow the pneumatic “conjunctures (*ipsorum conjugationes*).” The fullness of the spiritual realm is

¹³² Cf. AH i, 1-8. Irenaeus concludes his description of the Valentinian system in AH i, 5ff. with an emphasis on the divisiveness of their doctrine

¹³³ Cf. Hans Jonas (2001, pp. 174ff). Jonas (2001, p. 196) writes, “The spirits transformed by knowledge rest in the middle region of the Ogdoad, where their Mother the Sophia clothed with them awaits the consummation of the world. Her own final salvation takes place when all the pneumatic elements in the world have been ‘formed’ by knowledge and perfected. Then the spirits, stripped of their souls, with their Mother enter the Pleroma, which becomes the bridal chamber in which takes place the marriage of Sophia with Jesus and that of the spirits with their bridegrooms, the angels around Jesus. With this, the Fullness is restored in its integrity, the original breach finally repaired, the pre-temporal loss retrieved; and matter and soul, the expression of the fall, with their organized system, the world cease to exist.” For Valentinianism, the reunification of the spiritual substance is accomplished through its separation from the hylic and psychic natures.

accomplished through the conjoining of aeons resulting in substantial emanations.¹³⁴ For Irenaeus, this implies that the divine essence comes to fullness, not through unity, but through multiplicity. The divine drama consists in the fragmentation of the spiritual essence, in which each aeon possesses its own property independent of the others. It is precisely the nature of these aeonic conjunctions that Irenaeus questions.

I ask, then, in what manner were the rest of the aeons produced (*emissi sunt*)? Was it so as to be united (*uniti*) with him who produced them, even as the solar rays are with the sun; or was it actually and separately (*efficabiliter et partiliter*), so that each of them possessed an independent existence (*separatim*) and his own special form (*suam figurationem habens*¹³⁵), just as has a man from another man, and one herd of cattle from another? Or was it after the manner of germination (*germinationem*), as branches from a tree? And were they of the same substance (*eiusdem substantiae existebant*) with those who produced them or did they derive their substance from some other substance (*ex altera quadam substantia substantiam habentes*)? (AH, ii, 17, 2).

While his adversaries wish to emphasize the unity of the Pleroma, Irenaeus exposes the divisiveness. The bishop of Lyons answers his own questions concerning the relationship between the spiritual aeons. He writes, “Further, too, according to this principle, each one of them (the aeons) must be understood as being completely separated from every other (*eorum separatim divisus ab altero*), even as men are not mixed with or united the one to the other, but each having a distinct shape of his own, and a definite sphere of action, while each one of them, too, is formed of a particular size, --qualities characteristic of a body, and not a spirit” (AH ii, 17, 3).

Irenaeus perceives that the Valentinian fragmentation of the spiritual essence allows a distinction between Bythus, the source of the Pleroma, and the multiplicity of lower aeons.¹³⁶ While the lower aeons possess a shard of the spiritual substance, Bythus possesses the whole of the divine essence in himself. This substantial distinction allows imperfection to infect the lower aeons without

¹³⁴ Concerning the significance of marital conjunctions in “Gnostic” thought, cf. R. A. Markus (1954, pp. 193-224). According to Markus (1954, p. 205), “The bridal myth is at the heart of gnosticism....” In this regard, consider also Irenaeus’ description of the Marcosian eucharistic practice in AH i, 13, 2-3; i, 21, 3.

¹³⁵ Irenaeus uses “*habens*” to emphasize the idea of possession in contrast to participation. The pneumatic possesses a shard of the spiritual essence as that which belongs to his own nature, while psychic Christians only receive it from an external source. Cf. AH i, 6, 4.

¹³⁶ Cf. Hans Jonas (2001, p. 184). Jonas notes the twofold function of the Limit in Valentinian thought. He writes, “The Limit has thus a twofold function, a steadying and a separating: in the one he is called Cross, in the other, Limit. Both functions are exercised in two different places: between the Abyss and the rest of the Pleroma, in order to delimit the begotten Aeons from the unbegotten Father—it was in this capacity that he encountered the Sophia in her blind quest; and again, between the Pleroma as a whole and the outside, i.e., the expelled substance of passion, in order to secure the Pleroma against the re-entry of the disturbance from without.”

contaminating the whole of the divine essence.¹³⁷ This perspective is certainly the object of Irenaeus' scorn and ridicule. He writes,

The same conclusion will follow, although they affirm that the production of aeons sprang from Logos (*a Logos natam esse emissionem Aeonum*), as branches from a tree, since Logos has his generation from their Father (*Logos a Patre ipsorum generationem habeat*). For all are formed of the same substance (*ejusdem substantiae*) with the Father, differing from one another only in size, and not in nature, and filling up (*complementes*)¹³⁸ the greatness of the Father, even as the fingers complete (*complent*) the hand. If therefore he exists in passion and ignorance, so must also those aeons who have been generated by him. But if it is impious to ascribe ignorance and passion to the Father of all, how can they describe an aeon produced by him as being passible (AH ii, 17, 6)?

Irenaeus perceives that his adversaries use the substantial conjunctions of the aeons for two purposes. First, the divine essence needs the multiplicity of aeons to attain fullness and completion. Second, the multiplication of aeons protects the purity of the spiritual essence at its source.

For Irenaeus, the substantial emanations within the spiritual realm reveal the divisive nature of Valentinian thought. Fragmentation on the divine and spiritual level leads to a fragmentation on the cosmic level. The purity of the spiritual realm is preserved by its separation from the unfulfilled passion of Sophia, the lowest aeon. Thus, for Irenaeus, his opponents are not promoting a religion of unity, but one of multiplicity, exclusivity, and schism. This divisiveness is the consequence of the Valentinian obsession with the divine essence. To preserve the pure unity of the divine essence, Valentinian teachers must isolate it from everything else. For Irenaeus, such a unity is accomplished only through the most extreme fragmentation of reality. Divisiveness infects the dualistic systems from beginning to end. Their theological fragmentation requires a divisive view of the cosmos, Christ, the scriptures, the church, and the consummation. In this context, Irenaeus' charge that his opponents seek to “destroy the members of the truth (*λύοντες τὰ μέλη τῆς ἀληθείας, solventes membra veritatis*)” receives its full significance. Schism is not merely one of the consequences of Valentinian teaching; schism is the essence of their gospel.

¹³⁷ Cf. G. L. Prestige (1959, p. 112). Prestige notes the Valentinian use of emanations to lessen the impact of creation's contact with the divine world. He writes, “A doctrine of emanations lent itself with peculiar appropriateness, in the circumstances of the ancient world of thought, to a principle of subordinationism, according to which each successive emanation was not merely more remote from the source, but also further detached from the ideal substance of the divine original.”

¹³⁸ Irenaeus uses derivatives of the Greek word, “*πληρόω*,” to attack the character of the spiritual Pleroma. In the above passage, Irenaeus suggests that the lower aeons are needed to “fill up” the greatness (*magnitudinem*) of the supreme Father.

Irenaeus attacks the theology of fragmentation from two perspectives. In the second book of his *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus confronts the opposition's fragmentation from the perspective of the beginning.

It is proper, then, that I should begin with the first and most important head (*maximo capitulo*), that is, God the Creator (*Demiurgo*¹³⁹ *Deo*), who made the heaven and the earth, and all things that are therein (whom these men blasphemously style the fruit of a defect) (*extremitatis fructum*), and to demonstrate that there is nothing either above him or after him; nor that, influenced by any one, but of his own free will (*sua sententia et libere*), he created all things, since he is the only God, the only Lord, the only Creator, the only Father, alone containing all things (*solus continens omnia*), and himself commanding all things into existence (AH ii, 1, 1).

Valentinian thought begins with the emanations of spiritual entities filling the divine Pleroma. The spiritual aeons possess a shard of the divine substance and an attribute of the divine character. In opposition to this fragmentation of the spiritual substance, Irenaeus begins with the Creator who makes all things by his own free will. The opposition's emphasis on the divine substance is countered by an appeal to the divine will that creates all things *ex nihilo*.

This appeal to the divine will is important for the bishop of Lyons for two reasons. First, his emphasis on the divine will lays the foundation for true divine gnosis. For Irenaeus, God cannot be known in his essence. The true knowledge of God begins when God manifests his will by calling all things into existence.¹⁴⁰ In this context, the claim to know the emanations of the spiritual world is not only a fantasy, but also the result of utter arrogance. "Such being the state of the case, these infatuated men declare that they rise above the Creator (*super Demiurgum se ascendere*); and, inasmuch as they proclaim themselves superior (*meliores*) to that God who made and adorned the heavens, and the earth, and all things that are in them, and maintain that they themselves are spiritual (*spiritalis esse*)..." (AH ii, 30, 1). In contrast to his opponents' claim to a superior nature, Irenaeus shows the inferiority of their deeds and the weakness of their will. "The better man is shown by his works (*ex operibus*), and all works have been accomplished by the Creator (*omnia enim opera a*

¹³⁹ Irenaeus insists on referring to the only true God as the "Demiurge." This suggests that Irenaeus is not merely concerned to demonstrate the oneness of God as some scholars seem to indicate. Cf. for example, Denis Minns (1994, pp. 23ff). Irenaeus' chief concern is not so much the transcendent unity of the divine nature, but the intimate character of God's relationship to creation.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Ysabel de Andia's (1987) article, in which she suggests that the pneumatic defined his own identity as consisting in a consubstantiality with the spiritual realm. Against this consubstantial relationship, Irenaeus argues for the notion of humanity's likeness to God. Andia argues that this "likeness" involves a participation in the Spirit, not a possession of the spiritual substance.

Demiurgo facta sunt); but, they, having nothing worthy of reason (*nihil dignum ratione factum*) to point to as having been produced by themselves, are laboring under the greatest and most incurable madness” (AH ii, 30, 5).

Second, Irenaeus’ appeal to the divine will that creates all things out of nothing leads to the removal of substantial boundaries and provides the foundation for a true unity. By ascribing spiritual unity to the divine essence, Irenaeus’ opponents surrender the material world to disharmony, disintegration, and fragmentation. Valentinian teachers preserve the unity of the divine essence by isolating it from the chaos of this world’s unfulfilled passions. However, Irenaeus’ doctrine of the divine will establishes the basis for a dynamic unity that is always being accomplished from beginning to end and that overcomes the substantial barriers separating the spiritual and the physical.¹⁴¹ “For God is superior to nature (*Deus enim melior est quam natura*), and has in himself the disposition to show kindness because he is good (*quoniam bonus est*); and the ability to do so, because he is mighty (*potens est*); and the faculty of fully carrying out his purpose, because he is rich and perfect (*dives et perfectus est*)” (AH ii, 29, 2). For Irenaeus, the divine will is limitless. The Creator is not restrained in any way by the substances that he makes. Therefore, the multiplicity of substances present in creation does not threaten the unity of the spiritual essence. Rather, all creatures testify to one and the same divine will that seeks to give life where no life exists. “He made all things freely, and by his own power (*fecit libere et ex sua potestate*), and arranged and finished them, and his will is the substance of all things (*est substantia omnium voluntas ejus*), then he is discovered to be the one and only God who created all things, who alone is omnipotent, and who is the only Father founding and forming all things...” (AH ii, 30, 9). The oneness of the divine essence is not known independently of the harmony and order of creation.

In the second book of *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus confronts his opponents’ divisiveness from the perspective of the beginning. He counters their focus on the divine substance with an appeal to the divine will that creates all things *ex nihilo*. However, in the third book, Irenaeus argues against

¹⁴¹ Cf. Richard A. Norris (1987, pp. 13-24). Norris shows points of affinity between Irenaeus and the philosophical trend toward Middle Platonism. However, Norris (1987, p. 23) also notes a clear difference. He writes, “No more does he (Irenaeus) intend to suggest that creation is a momentary event rather than an abiding relationship: the genesis of the world is, for him, merely the *initium creationis* (AH 2, 2, 4), and God’s project in creation is still in process of being carried out. Nevertheless, Irenaeus’ God, as we have seen, is more *will* than he is *contemplation*. He acts in relation to something outside himself, and this, if Plotinus is correct, implies not merely change in God, but imperfection.”

his opponents' fragmentation from the perspective of the end. While the creative will establishes the foundation for true unity, the recapitulation of all things in Christ is the fulfillment and perfection of the creative will and, therefore, the manifestation of true unity.

The first time Irenaeus presents his teaching of the recapitulation doctrine with theological depth occurs in the middle of the third book.¹⁴² In the first fifteen chapters, Irenaeus emphasizes the authoritative and consistent testimony of the apostles and their successors. The agreement between the apostles and their successors stands in stark contrast to the succession of "heretics" with their diverse and contradictory opinions. In the sixteenth chapter, Irenaeus introduces a new subject. "I judge it necessary therefore to take into account the entire mind (*universam sententiam*) of the apostles regarding our Lord Jesus Christ..." (AH iii, 16,1). Irenaeus counts a discussion of Jesus Christ to be a necessity because his opponents divide his person and work according to substance. According to Irenaeus, the practice of his adversaries consists in "confessing, indeed, in tongue one Christ Jesus, but being divided in opinion (*divisi sententia*)..." (AH iii, 16 1). He continues, "It is the rule of these men (*ipsorum regula*¹⁴³) to say that there is one Christ, who was produced (*praemissus*) by Monogenes, for the confirmation of the Pleroma; but that another, the Savior, was sent (*missum*) for the glorification of the Father; and yet another, the dispensational one (*ex dispositione*), and whom they represent as having suffered, who also bore Christ, that Savior who returned into the Pleroma" (AH iii, 16, 1).

In light of the Valentinian Christologies, it is incumbent upon Irenaeus to defend the unity of Christ's person and work. Irenaeus' defense finds its most profound and significant expression in the language of recapitulation.

They (his opponents) thus wander from the truth (*errantes a veritate*), because their doctrine departs from him who is truly God, being ignorant that his only-begotten Word, who is always present with the human race (*qui semper humano generi adest*), united to and mingled with his own creation (*unitus et conspersus suo plasmati*), 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 (*universam carnem*), and for the manifestation of salvation (*ostensionem salutis*), and to apply

¹⁴² Cf. AH i, 10, 1 where Christ's recapitulation of all things is indeed mentioned in a creedal statement. However, its theological significance is not presented until book three. Cf. also AH iii, 11, 8; i, 9, 2.

¹⁴³ The use of *regula* indicates that Irenaeus understands his opponents to be interpreting scripture in line with the drama of the spiritual Pleroma. In contrast, Irenaeus' refers to the creedal rule of the church as the *regula veritatis* distinguishing it from the false rule of his adversaries. Irenaeus' *regula veritatis* consists in the real incarnate life of Christ as recorded in the gospels and confessed in the church's brief creedal statements.

the rule of just judgment (*regulam justii iudicii*) to all who were made by him. There is therefore, as I have pointed out, one God the Father and one Christ Jesus, who came by means of the whole dispensational arrangements (*veniens per universam dispositionem*), and recapitulated all things in himself (*omnia in semetipsum recapitulans*). But in every respect, too, he is man, the formation of God (*homo plasmatio Dei*); and thus he recapitulated man into himself (*hominem in semetipsum recapitulans*), the invisible becoming visible, the incomprehensible being made comprehensible, the impassible becoming capable of suffering, and the Word being made man, thus recapitulating all things in himself (*universa in semetipsum recapitulans*) (AH iii, 16, 6).

In this passage, the doctrine of recapitulation appears at the end of a creedal statement.¹⁴⁴ A litany describing the works of the *Verbum Dei* from creation to the final judgment culminates in his recapitulation of all things in himself. Indeed, Irenaeus uses the recapitulation terminology as a shorthand expression that includes the whole work of Christ.¹⁴⁵

The doctrine of recapitulation arises in Irenaeus' defense of the unity of Christ's person and work. In this regard, the recapitulation concept combines two types of unity in one expression. First, it expresses an historical or horizontal unity present in the person and work of Jesus. The same *Verbum Dei* who created all things in the beginning and interacted with humankind throughout history, has also brought all things to an end in himself. The Logos, who is "always present with humanity," will come to "apply the rule of just judgment to all who were made by him." In these expressions, Irenaeus reveals his understanding that the unity of all history from beginning to end is present precisely in the Word of the Father, who "came by means of the whole dispensational arrangements." In addition, recapitulation expresses an ontological or vertical unity in Christ. Recapitulation is a work accomplished when the Word of the Father assumes human flesh. Thus, recapitulation expresses the dynamic unity accomplished in Christ. This unity overcomes every boundary whether historical, moral, or ontological.

Thus, the creation of all things *ex nihilo* and the recapitulation of all things in Christ are two aspects of one Christology. In the same way that sowing and reaping are two aspects of the same agricultural economy, so creation and recapitulation are both essential to Irenaeus' Christology.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. also AH i, 10, 1 where Christ's recapitulating work also appears at the end of a creedal statement.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Wingren (1959, pp. 79ff). The great value of Wingren's work is his persuasive argument that the recapitulation doctrine entails the entirety of Christ's work. He (1959, p. 80) writes, "The use of the terms *ἀνακεφαλαίωσις* and *recapitulatio* is an attempt by Irenaeus to embody the whole of the Biblical proclamation about the work of Christ in a single word." For Wingren, Irenaeus' doctrine is unified and balanced. To emphasize the incarnation over and above the cross is a distortion of Irenaeus' theological vision. Thus, Wingren (1959, p. 82) asserts, "Christ alone is the subject of recapitulation, and there is nothing which he does from his birth until the end which is not an integral part of recapitulation—everything is a part of the *ἀνακεφαλαίωσις*."

Without recapitulation, the Logos' creative work would lack its intended fulfillment; and without creation, the Logos would have nothing to recapitulate. Thus, if either creation or recapitulation is made the center of Irenaeus' theology, a distortion undoubtedly ensues. These two essential aspects are kept in their proper place when understood as expressions of Irenaeus' Christology. The Logos, who calls all things into existence in the beginning, is the same one who comes in the flesh to recapitulate all things in the end. Thus, Irenaeus' Christology consists not only in the union of God and man, but also in the union of beginning and end.

B. Recapitulation and Logos-Christology

The recapitulation language originates in a literary and rhetorical context.¹⁴⁶ It appears as a technical term referring to the concluding part of a speech in which the orator summarizes his argument. Quintilian's work, *The Orator's Education*, refers to recapitulation in a typical manner. He writes,

My next subject was to be the Peroration (*Peroratio*), which some call the Culmination (*cumulum*), some the Conclusion (*conclusionem*). There are two aspects of it: the factual (*in rebus*) and the emotional (*in affectibus*). The repetition and assemblage (*repetitio et congregatio*) of facts, which in Greek is called *ἀνακεφαλαιώσεις*, and by some Latin writers *enumeratio*, both refreshes the memory of the judge, and places the whole cause before his eyes at once (*totam simul causam*); even if this had not made much impression when the points were made individually, it is cumulatively powerful (*turba valet*). The points to be repeated (*repetemus*) here must be treated as briefly (*brevissime*) as possible and (as the Greek shows) we must run quickly through all the "headings (*per capita*)" for if we spend too much time, it will become almost a second speech rather than an "enumeration." On the other hand, the points which we think should be enumerated must be treated with a certain weight, enlivened by apt sententiae (*excitanda sententiis*), and of course diversified by figures; otherwise, nothing is more off-putting than the straightforward repetition of facts, which suggests a lack of confidence in the judge's memory.¹⁴⁷

From this passage, it is evident that recapitulation is a Greek word for the summary that brings a speech to a conclusion. An effective recapitulation accomplishes two functions. It repeats or enumerates the orator's points. Yet, this summary must not be a bare repetition of facts. The

¹⁴⁶ Cf. R. M. Grant (1997, pp. 46ff). Grant offers a worthwhile summary of the rhetorical terms Irenaeus employed in service of his theological perspective. He (1997, p. 47) writes, "In spite (or because) of such criticisms, Irenaeus took terms from his rhetorical studies for describing key theological ideas. Indeed the very title of his work bears rhetorical overtones: 'Detection and Refutation of the Knowledge Falsely So Called.' ... Irenaeus took three more words with primary literary meanings from 'secular' writers, and like other Christians proceeded into theology with them. These terms were *hypothesis*, *oikonomia*, and *anakephalaiosis*, all used in the old grammatical scholia on the *Odyssey*."

¹⁴⁷ Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, Books 6-8. The translation above comes from Donald A. Russell (2001) and is found in *The Loeb Classical Library*. Cf also Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Lysias*, also found in *The Loeb Classical Library* and translated by Stephen Usher (1974).

recapitulation must concentrate all the important points in one brief conclusion so that the full force of the orator's argument is experienced. As Quintilian expresses it, the recapitulation presents the "whole cause at once." Thus, the recapitulation is not merely a repetition of the facts, but also, in some sense, the perfection or fulfillment of the speech.

The literary or rhetorical sense of recapitulation is certainly evident in its use among early Christian writers. In this regard, it is not surprising that the language of recapitulation appears in relationship to the scriptures and the sacred words of God. The apostle Paul employs recapitulation in this precise connection in his epistle to the Romans. "For he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the Law (*νόμον πεπλήρωκεν*). The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, and You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word (*ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ ἀνακεφαλαιούται*), 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, the fullness of the Law is love" (Rom 13:8-10). For Paul, one's relationship to his or her neighbor, which is expressed in the second table of the Law, is reduced to one "word," the command to love. Here recapitulation is not so much a repetition of the Law, but a concentration of the whole Law in one word. The command to love is a recapitulation of the Law, that is, a perfection or fulfillment of the ancient commandments.

The rhetorical sense of recapitulation appears again in the epistle of Barnabas, the only reference to recapitulation in the apostolic fathers. In the context of explaining the purpose of Christ's suffering, the epistle of Barnabas connects Jesus' passion to the ancient prophets. The epistle concludes, "Therefore the Son of God came in the flesh for this reason, that he might recapitulate the completion of the sins (*τὸ τέλειον τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἀνακεφαλαιώση*) of those who persecuted his prophets to death" (*Barn.* 5:11). Just as Paul used recapitulation to connect the commandment of love to the Old Testament Law, so the *Epistle of Barnabas* employs it to connect the cross and passion of Jesus to the persecution of the ancient prophets. In this historical connection between the Old and New Testaments, recapitulation is less an enumeration or repetition and more a perfection or fulfillment of the scriptures.

Irenaeus certainly retains this rhetorical and literary use of recapitulation.¹⁴⁸ His first use of the recapitulation terminology occurs in the course of his argument concerning John's gospel. Some Valentinians interpret the prologue of John's gospel as referring to the aeonic order of the Pleroma. In this way, Irenaeus' opponents assert that the Logos refers to the spiritual aeon, not to the earthly Jesus. Irenaeus responds,

But that the apostle did not speak concerning their conjunctions, but concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, whom he also acknowledges as the Word of God, he himself made evident. For, recapitulating his statements respecting the Word previously mentioned by him (*ἀνακεφαλαιούμενος γὰρ περὶ τοῦ εἰρημένου αὐτῷ ἄνω ἐν ἀρχῇ Λόγου*), he further declares, 'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' But according to their hypothesis (*ὑπόθεσιν*), the Word did not become flesh at all, inasmuch as he never went outside of the Pleroma, but that Savior became flesh who was formed by a special dispensation out of all the aeons, and was of later date than the Word (AH i, 9, 2).

For Irenaeus, the Valentinians are cutting up John's prologue and then using the pieces to express a foreign "hypothesis."¹⁴⁹ Thus, Irenaeus describes his task as restoring "every one of the expressions quoted to its proper position," and reattaching them to the "body of truth" (AH i, 9, 4). John's prologue must remain whole and complete. For Irenaeus, John 1:14 is the recapitulation of all John's previous statements concerning the Logos. In other words, John's statement that the Word became flesh presents John's whole understanding of the Logos in one brief statement.

In the above passage, Irenaeus uses recapitulation to express a literary connection between verses of scripture. However, it may also reveal the way in which the recapitulation language begins to assume a more profound theological role in Irenaeus' thought. The recapitulation language is filled with new meaning by its association with Irenaeus' understanding of Jesus as the Logos. In relation to human orators, recapitulation merely expresses the connection between human words and texts. However, once recapitulation is employed in relation to scripture, it must function to express the person and work of the divine Logos. For Irenaeus, the same Logos has interacted with humankind from beginning to end. The Logos speaks in the beginning creating all things out of nothing; the same Logos speaks in the middle through the prophets; and the same Logos becomes flesh perfecting all things in the end. Irenaeus uses recapitulation to express the concluding and perfecting work of the

¹⁴⁸ Cf. also AH v, 33, 4 where recapitulation is used in connection with the prophecy of Isaiah.

¹⁴⁹ Concerning the importance Irenaeus attaches to the concept of "hypothesis," cf. Richard A Norris (1994, pp. 285-295). Cf. also Philip Hefner (1964, pp. 525-557).

Logos. However, the recapitulation terminology also assumes the previous works of the Logos in creation and in the history of Israel.

The movement from a strictly literary and rhetorical use to a Christological expression is evident in the middle of the third book. As we have already seen, Irenaeus first uses recapitulation in the third book in close connection to a creedal statement concerning the person and work of the Logos. The Word of God, “who is always present with the human race,” comes in the flesh to suffer, to rise from the dead, and to judge all whom he created. This creed that recounts the works of the Logos concludes with his “recapitulation of all things in himself” so that the “Word of God is supreme” in things spiritual and corporeal (AH iii, 16, 6). Irenaeus connects his doctrine of recapitulation to the Logos again in chapter 18 of the third book.

As it has been clearly demonstrated that the Word, who existed in the beginning with God (*in principio Verbum existens apud Deum*),¹⁵⁰ by whom all things were made, who was also always present with mankind (*semper aderat generi humano*), was in these last days (*in novissimis temporibus*), according to the time appointed by the Father, united to his own workmanship, inasmuch as he became liable to suffering, it follows that every objection is set aside of those who say, ‘If our Lord was born at that time, Christ had therefore no previous existence.’ For I have shown that the Son of God did not then begin to exist, being with the Father from the beginning (*existens semper apud Patrem*); but when he became incarnate, and was made man, he recapitulated in himself the long exposition of humanity (*longam hominum expositionem in seipso recapitulavit*) and furnished us, in a brief, comprehensive manner, with salvation (*in compendio nobis salutem praestans*); so that what we had lost in Adam—namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God—that we might recover in Christ Jesus (AH iii, 18, 1).

In this passage, recapitulation, as a literary term, is applied to the Logos’ relationship to humanity. Thus, Irenaeus describes the history of the human race as a “long exposition.” From the beginning, humanity has been a concrete expression of the divine Logos who creates and forms all things according to his Father’s will. However, in the end, the Logos becomes incarnate. This incarnation is the foreordained conclusion of the Logos’ relationship to his human creatures. The entirety of the Logos’ work in creation is fulfilled and perfected in the one man, Jesus, who is the salvation of humanity in abbreviated form (*in compendio*).

¹⁵⁰ Notice that in this passage, the language of John’s Gospel seems inherent in Irenaeus’ description of his recapitulation teaching. Cf. also AH iii, 16, 6 where Irenaeus’ creedal statement concerning the person and work of the Logos ends with the recapitulation of all things. Irenaeus brings Christ’s recapitulating work to a Johannine end when he concludes that Christ is head of the church so that “he might draw (*attrahat*) all things to himself at the proper time.”

Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation originates in his application of this literary and rhetorical term to the scriptures. The use of recapitulation in relation to scripture leads inevitably to a connection with the divine Logos. Thus, while the recapitulation terminology stems from Paul's epistles, Irenaeus understands it in association with John's Logos-Christology.¹⁵¹ Indeed, it seems that Irenaeus derives his understanding of recapitulation from the prologue of John's gospel.¹⁵² The Logos, who was with the Father in the beginning, who spoke creation into existence, and who was always present with humanity, is the same Logos, who became flesh to recapitulate all things in himself. In this way, Irenaeus' Christology unites the beginning and the end. From the perspective of the beginning, the Word is the Creator, who wills all things into existence. From the perspective of the end, the Word is Jesus Christ, who by his death and resurrection brings all things to perfection.¹⁵³ The recapitulation doctrine expresses a profound continuity in which Christ is beginning and end, source and fulfillment, origin and perfection of all things.

However, it is precisely in this Christological context that Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation assumes another dimension. Irenaeus employs the recapitulation doctrine to express, not only the horizontal and historical unity between creation and redemption in Christ, but also the vertical and

¹⁵¹ Most scholars recognize that Irenaeus' recapitulation doctrine stems from Paul's letters. Cf. Rolf Noormann (1994, pp. 427ff). For Noormann, Irenaeus derives his notion of recapitulation from the Pauline emphasis on the relationship between Adam and Christ. He (1994, pp. 447-449) writes, "Die Anwendung des Rekapitulationsbegriffs auf das Gegenüber von Adam und Christus dürfte auf Irenaeus selbst zurückzuführen sein. Von hier aus kommt es zu einer produktiven Entfaltung dieses Begriffs, welche die Rekapitulationslehre zu einem Spezifikum der irenaischen Theologie hat werden lassen. In bezug auf die paulinischen Adam-Christus-Texte stellt die irenaische Rekapitulationslehre eine eigenständige Weiterentwicklung dar, die es ermöglicht, die Repräsentation der adamitischen Menschheit durch Christus zu denken: Indem Christus als der zweite Adam die Geschichte Adams und der adamitischen Menschheit in allen ihren Aspekten zusammenfassend und wiederholend in sich hineinnimmt, kann er an ihre Stelle treten und ihre Geschichte revidieren." It is certainly true that Paul's letters are essential to the development of the recapitulation doctrine in Irenaeus. For Irenaeus, the connection between Adam and Christ is fundamental. However, Irenaeus develops this Pauline connection between Adam and Christ with a Johannine emphasis. The Pauline emphasis on the contrast between Adam's sin and Christ's righteousness is combined in Irenaeus with an emphasis on the substantial continuity of the human nature. Irenaeus' emphasis on this fleshly connection, while consistent with Paul, seems to proceed from John's assertion that the Logos became flesh. In addition, Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation is not merely about the relationship between Adam and Christ as men, but also about the creative will of the divine Logos. Recapitulation is the work of the incarnate Logos who perfects in the end the same humanity that he created in the beginning. This Johannine emphasis on the work of the divine Logos is the lens through which Irenaeus understands Paul's notion of recapitulation. Against his opponents' interpretations of Paul, Irenaeus makes a special effort to interpret Paul in agreement with the four gospels (cf. AH iii, 13-14).

¹⁵² Concerning Irenaeus' use of the fourth Gospel cf. J. N. Sanders (1943, pp. 66ff). Sanders maintains that Irenaeus refers to the fourth Gospel precisely when it is most relevant to his core theological points. Sanders (1943, p. 72) concludes that Irenaeus uses the Gospel of John "as the *regula veritatis*." While direct quotations from John's gospel are less frequent, it seems evident that Irenaeus thinks in the spirit and pattern of the fourth gospel. Cf. also Eric Osborn (2001, pp. 186ff). Osborn maintains that the Gospel of John "has a dominant role in the theology of Irenaeus, not because it is cited more frequently than others, but because it contains an understanding of one God, incarnation, creation, glory, life, and knowledge which forms his thought." Finally cf. AH iii, 11, 1 in which Irenaeus seems to identify John's Gospel very closely with the rule of truth.

¹⁵³ Cf. AH iv, 20, 8. Here the "economies of recapitulation (*recapitulationis dispositiones*)" are the substance of the prophet's proclamation concerning the coming redemption through Christ. For Irenaeus, recapitulation refers to the end in which the Logos becomes incarnate to bring all things to their intended fulfillment.

ontological unity between God and his human formation. This vertical dimension is already suggested to Irenaeus by Paul's reference to recapitulation in his epistle to the Ephesians. "For he (God) has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will (*τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος*), according to his purpose set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time (*εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος*), to recapitulate all things in him (*ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ*), things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:9-10). Paul combines both the horizontal unity evident in his reference to the divine "plan for the fullness of time," with the vertical unity manifested in the union of heaven and earth. Yet, for Paul this vertical union is explained primarily in reference to Jesus' power and authority. For the apostle Paul, the relationship between God and the world is reordered through Christ, who is "head over all things for the church" (Eph 1:22).

In Irenaeus, this vertical dimension certainly includes the reordering of the universe under Christ's headship. However, Irenaeus' primary emphasis concerns the real, physical union of God and man in Christ. This emphasis seems to arise again from John's Logos-Christology in which the Word truly becomes flesh.¹⁵⁴ It is precisely the Logos' union with the flesh that is Irenaeus constant refrain.

For if he did not receive the substance of flesh from a human being (*ab homine substantiam carnis*) he neither was made man nor the son of man; and if he was not made what we were, he did no great thing in what he suffered and endured. But every one will allow that we are composed of a body taken from the earth, and a soul receiving spirit from God. This, therefore, the Word of God was made (*Hoc itaque factum est Verbum Dei*), recapitulating in himself his own handiwork (*suum plasma in semetipsum recapitulans*)" (AH iii, 22,1).

The Pauline "recapitulation of all things" has been transformed by Irenaeus into the Word's "recapitulation of his own formation." This real, physical communion between divinity and humanity

¹⁵⁴ Cf. A. Harnack (1961, pp. 262). Harnack recognizes a difference between the Logos doctrine of Irenaeus and the Logos doctrine of Tertullian and Hippolytus. He writes, "Whereas Tertullian and Hippolytus developed their Logos doctrine without reference to the historical Jesus, the truth rather being that they simply add the incarnation to the already existing theory of the subject, there is no doubt that Irenaeus, as a rule, made Jesus Christ, whom he views as God and man, the *starting-point* of his speculation. Here he followed the Fourth Gospel and Ignatius. It is of Jesus that Irenaeus almost always thinks when he speaks of the Logos or of the Son of God; and therefore he does not identify the divine element in Christ or Christ himself with the world idea or the creating Word or the Reason of God." Harnack's words also apply to the relationship between Irenaeus and the apologists. While Irenaeus certainly inherits the Logos-Christology of the apologetic tradition, he develops it to serve his own purpose. Irenaeus uses his doctrine of recapitulation to move beyond the apologists emphasis on the Logos as an attribute or instrument by which God governs the cosmos. Rather, through his recapitulation teaching, Irenaeus binds the Logos doctrine to the real, incarnate person of Jesus and his work of salvation. It is his recapitulation doctrine that inspires Irenaeus to speak of Christ, not merely as the Logos, but also as the Son of the Father. The Logos is not merely an attribute of God, but the real, living person of Jesus with whom the church communes. In this regard, Irenaeus follows John's gospel. While John begins with the pre-existent Logos, his gospel centers on Jesus and his identity as God's Son.

in Christ is the final development in Irenaeus' teaching of recapitulation. Irenaeus' Christology fills the concept of recapitulation with new meaning. Irenaeus employs the recapitulation language to express a profound unity against the schismatic theology of his opponents. This unity in Christ is both historical, uniting the beginning and the end, and ontological, uniting God and creation.

II. The Recapitulation of All Things

According to Irenaeus, the substantial division between the spiritual and material worlds is the fundamental pillar on which his opponents' systems are constructed. This cosmological schism is not merely ontological, but also historical. The pneumatic disciple envisions God as if he has no connection to the material world; similarly, he envisions the material world as if it has no connection to the supreme God. While the spiritual Pleroma has an ancient and tragic role in the origin of the material universe, its connection to the physical world has been severed. This ontological schism has profound historical consequences. The history of this world cannot be construed as the continuing interaction between the spiritual God and his creation. In this way, the substantial separation of God and creation becomes the fundamental hermeneutic that shapes the opposition's interpretation of Christ, the church, and the sacred scriptures.

Irenaeus enters this conflict on the battlefield of creation and its connection to God. For the bishop of Lyons, God cannot be known except in and through the created world and the created world cannot be known except as the product of God's work. Thus, the first and most fundamental confession of the true God consists in his creative work. "The church, though dispersed throughout the whole world (*καθ' ὅλης τῆς οἰκουμένης*), even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them" (AH i, 10, 1). The oneness of God and the universality of his creative work are absolutely inseparable concepts. The Valentinian god is known through spiritual emanations; but Irenaeus' God is known in his intimate relationship to creation.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Hans-Jochen Jaschke (1976, pp. 186ff). Jaschke maintains that Irenaeus' opposition to his adversaries compels him to develop a more explicit Trinitarian theology. He (1976, pp. 342-343) writes, "An die Stelle des AonenPleromas und der gnostischen Denominationem tritt bei Irenaus der trinitarische Gott. Heir gibt es keinen Raum für inferiore, abgeleitete Zwischenwesen, sondern nur den einen Gott, der sich durch sich selber offenbart, das Geschaffene positiv setzt und es

Irenaeus establishes the unity of God and his creation on two foundations. First, the unity of God and creation is built upon the foundation of the divine will that creates all things out of nothing. God is the beginning of the universe and his will is the substance of all things. Second, the unity of God and creation is established on the pillar of Christ's recapitulation of all things. The recapitulating work of Christ means that God is not merely the beginning, but also the end of all things. God's creative work in the beginning comes to its perfect conclusion in the recapitulating work of Christ. However, for Irenaeus, the unity of creation and recapitulation is not merely located in the divine will or work, but in the divine person who accomplishes the work. The divine Logos, who in the last days becomes flesh and gathers all things into his own person, is the same Logos, who in the beginning called into existence all things. Thus, the unity of creation and redemption is not primarily energetic, but personal. Creation is not merely a product of the divine will, but becomes a manifestation of the Creator's personal presence. Irenaeus establishes the unity of creation and recapitulation on the basis of Christology.

A. Creation as the Foundation of Recapitulation

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul speaks of "all things being united in Christ" (Eph 1:10). In this passage, recapitulation is an action accomplished by the "Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ." This recapitulating work of the Father is accomplished in Christ, when he raised Jesus from the dead and made him head over all things for the church. In his letter to the Romans, Paul uses recapitulation in the passive voice. The second table of the Law is summed up by the command to love one's neighbor. However, Irenaeus intentionally ascribes the work of recapitulation to the agency of the incarnate Logos, Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁶ "The church...has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith in one God (*ἕνα Θεόν*), the Father...and in one Christ Jesus (*ἕνα Χριστόν Ἰησοῦν*), the Son of God...and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the

schliesslich zur Teilhabe an ihm selber erhebt, so dass die ganze Wirklichkeit von dem Heilswerk von Vater, Sohn und Geist zusammengehalten wird. Der Gegensatz zur Gnosis fordert die Entwicklung einer trinitarischen Theologie heraus...."

¹⁵⁶ Sesboüé (2000, p.159) makes this same observation, "Qui récapitule? La réponse est ici très simple. Le sujet actif de la recapitulation est toujours le Christ, c'est-à-dire le Verbe incarné." This fact shows that Irenaeus' use of the recapitulation language is different from the Apostle Paul, who ascribes the work of recapitulation to the Father. This observation suggests that Irenaeus is filling the Pauline expression with his own Johannine content.

ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his manifestation (*παρουσίαν αὐτοῦ*) from heaven in the glory of the Father to recapitulate all things (*ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα*)...(AH, i, 10, 1).” The work of recapitulation is inserted at the end of creedal statements in reference to the final work of Christ. The same Word, who called all things into existence, comes in the end to recapitulate all things. Irenaeus’ use of the recapitulation language reveals a clear intent to unite the works of creation and redemption in Christ, the *Verbum Dei*.

The Christological unity between creation and recapitulation reveals itself in two other ways. Not only are creation and redemption ascribed to the agency of the Logos, but also both are employed in reference to the same object—“all things.” In the second book of his *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus’ constant emphasis is that “God’s will is the substance of all things” (AH, ii, 30, 9). Nothing exists in creation that is not the will of the Father and the accomplishment of his Word.

But he himself in himself, after a fashion which we can neither describe nor conceive, predestinating all things (*omnia praedestinans*), formed them as he pleased, bestowing harmony on all things (*omnibus consonantiam*), and assigning them their own place (*ordinem suum*), and the beginning of their creation (*initium creationis*).¹⁵⁷ In this way, he conferred on spiritual things a spiritual and invisible nature, on supercelestial things a celestial, on angels an angelical, on animals an animal, on beings that swim a nature suited to the water, and on those that live on the land one fitted for the land—on all, in short, a nature suitable to the character of the life assigned them—while he formed all things (*omnia*) that were made by his Word that never wearies (AH ii, 2, 4).

Irenaeus’ reference to God, as the Creator of “all things,” expresses the universality of God’s creative work. While Valentinians ascribe the multiplicity of material substances to the multiplicity of unfulfilled emotions present in the passion of Sophia, Irenaeus maintains their unity in the one will of the one God. All things exist, not only as the product of God’s work, but also as the manifestation of his ongoing intent to give life and his power to perfect it.

When Irenaeus describes the Word’s recapitulation of “all things,” he is doing more than simply quoting the words of Paul. Rather, he is expressing the profound continuity between God’s creative and redemptive works. Christ’s recapitulation of all things presupposes his creation of all things *ex nihilo*; and his creation of all things looks forward to their recapitulation in Christ. Thus, Christ’s recapitulating work is as universal as his creation of all things in the beginning. Just as

¹⁵⁷ Notice that Irenaeus speaks of the origin of all things as the “beginning of creation (*initium creationis*).” This language suggests that Irenaeus does not consider creation and redemption as two separate and independent works. Rather, the Logos is always—from beginning to end—doing the work of creation.

nothing is excluded from his creative will, so nothing is excluded from his redemptive work. In this way, Irenaeus' emphasis on the Word's relationship to "all things" counters his opponents' emphasis on the spiritual Pleroma. The Valentinian deity is known in the spiritual emanations that proceed from his essence. However, Irenaeus' God is known in his continuing interaction with creation.

Irenaeus refers both creation and recapitulation to the same agent, the Logos, and to the same object, "all things." The profound unity of the creating and recapitulating works is also revealed in Irenaeus' use of the recapitulation language itself. In classical usage, recapitulation is typically a noun referring to the concluding part of a speech that summarizes the orator's argument. In Irenaeus, it is typically an active verb connecting the Logos to his creatures. This active sense of Christ's recapitulating work flows naturally from its association to creation. For Irenaeus, creation is not a static collection of substances; rather, all created substances are products of the dynamic will of God. Creation is, first of all, an act of the divine will that grants existence to all things in the beginning and drives them toward a planned destiny in the end. The substances of creation are not static, but malleable, that is, capable of being shaped and molded according to the active will of God. This active and energetic understanding of creation influences Irenaeus' understanding of recapitulation. Recapitulation is not a static condition, but a dynamic and continuous accomplishment in which the Logos is always uniting all things in himself. Thus, the work of recapitulation is the continuation and goal of that work, which began when God created all things *ex nihilo*. In Christ's recapitulating work, the hidden plan and intent of the Creator is made public for all to see.¹⁵⁸

B. Recapitulation as the Fulfillment of Creation

It is certainly evident that in Irenaeus' thought there is the most profound unity between creation and recapitulation. Both creation and recapitulation are actions; both are actions accomplished for the sake of "all things;" and both are actions performed by the Logos.

For the Creator of the world is truly the Word of God (*Mundi enim factor vere Verbum Dei est*): and this is our Lord, who in the last times was made man, existing in this world (*in hoc*

¹⁵⁸ Cf. AH v, 15, 2. In this passage, Irenaeus interprets Jesus' healing of a man blind from birth (John 9). Jesus uses mud, according to Irenaeus, in order that "he might show forth the hand of God, which at the beginning had molded man." In creation, we learn what God can do and accomplish; but in the incarnate Christ, we see who the Creator is. Cf. also AH v, 16, 2 where Irenaeus explains Christ's work as the "showing forth (*ostendit; ἔδειξεν*)" of the image of God.

mundo existens), and who in an invisible manner contains all things created (*continet quae facta sunt omnia*)¹⁵⁹, and is inherent in the entire creation (*in universa conditione infixus*), since the Word of God governs and arranges all things (*gubernans et disponens omnia*); and therefore he came to his own in a visible manner, and was made flesh, and hung upon the tree, that he might recapitulate all things in himself (*universa in semetipsum recapituletur*) (AH v, 18, 3).

For the bishop of Lyons, creation and recapitulation are the beginning and end of his Christology.

The Word's creation of all things out of nothing and his recapitulation of all things in himself establish an historical frame in which the scriptures and the church's preaching must be interpreted.

However, the unity between creation and recapitulation is not merely temporal or historical.

Recapitulation is certainly a continuation of God's creative work; yet recapitulation is not simply a restoration of God's original relationship to the material world. Irenaeus uses the recapitulation doctrine to communicate, not only a continuity of the Logos' relationship to creation, but also a perfection or fulfillment of that relationship. Irenaeus expresses this idea by emphasizing that Christ recapitulates all things *in himself (recapitulans in se)*.¹⁶⁰ In other words, Christ's recapitulating work consists in a fundamentally new relationship between God and his creatures.¹⁶¹ This new relationship is certainly in continuity with the Creator's intimate connection to the world in the beginning.

However, it also represents a growth or maturation of that original connection. To use an analogy favorable in the eyes of Irenaeus, creation and recapitulation relate to one another like sowing and reaping. Sowing and reaping are certainly interdependent and complementary. Yet, they are also

¹⁵⁹ Here Irenaeus connects the Logos' "containing all things" to his "recapitulation of all things." These two expressions express the beginning and end of the Logos' work. The work of "containing all things" is ascribed to all three divine persons (cf. AH ii, 1ff; v, 2, 2). However, the work of recapitulation is always ascribed to the incarnate Logos.

¹⁶⁰ The language "in himself (*in se*)" reveals that, for Irenaeus, the Word's work of recapitulation contains an ontological aspect. Humanity is assumed into an internal relationship with the divine Logos and, thereby, receives a new ground of being in the Son. This ontological perspective is often missed in scholarly expositions of Irenaeus' work. For instance, Sesboué (2000, pp. 125-163) focuses on "les trois temps de la recapitulation." While the history of salvation is certainly crucial to Irenaeus' thought, the ontological aspect is equally essential. The ground of being for the Christian is not the pneumatic essence, but that crucified and risen humanity that rests within the person of the Logos.

¹⁶¹ Cf. AH iv, 34, 1ff. Irenaeus speaks of the newness of Christ's advent against the doctrine of Marcion and his followers. For Marcion, the radical newness of the gospel demands a rejection of the old covenant. For Irenaeus, the newness of the gospel does not consist in a new God or a new message. Rather, the newness of the gospel consists in the personal presence of God with his creation. He writes, "But if a thought of this kind should then suggest itself to you, to say, 'What new thing (*novi*) did the Lord bring us by his advent?' --know that he brought all novelty by bringing himself (*omnem novitatem attulit semetipsum afferens*) who had been announced. For this very thing was proclaimed beforehand, that a novelty should come to renew and quicken mankind (*quoniam novitas veniet innovatura et vivificatura hominem*). For the advent of the King is previously announced by those servants who are sent, in order to the preparation and equipment of those men who are to entertain their Lord. But when the King has actually come, and those who are his subjects have been filled with that joy (*gaudio adimpleti*) which was proclaimed beforehand, and have attained to that liberty which he bestows, and share in the sight of him (*participant visionem ejus*), and have listened to his words, and have enjoyed the gifts which he confers (*fructi sunt muneribus ab eo*), the question will not then be asked by any that are possessed of sense what new thing (*novi*) the King has brought beyond those who announced his coming. For he has brought himself, and has bestowed on men those good things which were announced beforehand, which things the angels desired to look into."

fundamentally different. The farmer's relationship to the seed is intimate, but possesses the element of hope. Sowing takes place in hope of growth and maturity and fruitfulness. However, reaping commences in the joy of that original hope fulfilled and realized. In the beginning, God relates to creation by his will alone. This creative will contains the element of hope. All things are created in the hope of growth and fulfillment.¹⁶² In the end, this hope is realized when the Logos assumes human flesh and blood into his own person. Thus, the doctrine of recapitulation expresses the idea that God does not merely relate to the world by an act of will, but also by his personal presence.¹⁶³

The movement from creation to recapitulation is one of continuity and fulfillment. For Valentinians, the movement from an imprisonment in the material world to the freedom of a reunion with the spiritual realm is one of release and escape. The pneumatic disciple's reunion with the spiritual beings is accomplished through his or her separation from the material world. For Irenaeus, the journey from creation to recapitulation is not one of escape, but of fulfillment. The progression from creation to recapitulation consists in the removal of boundaries, both historical and ontological. In the beginning, God communes with his creation by an act of will; but through the work of recapitulation, God communes with his creation personally.

There is therefore, as I have pointed out, one God the Father, and one Christ Jesus, who came by means of the whole dispensational arrangements (*veniens per universam dispositionem*), and recapitulated all things in himself (*omnia in semetipsum recapitulans*). But in every respect, too, he is man, the formation of God; and thus he recapitulated man in himself (*hominem in semetipsum recapitulans est*), the invisible becoming visible, the incomprehensible becoming comprehensible, the impassible becoming capable of suffering, and the Word being made man, thus recapitulating all things in himself (*universa in semetipsum recapitulans*): so that as in super-celestial, spiritual, and invisible things, the Word of God is supreme, so also in things visible and corporeal he might possess the supremacy (*principatum habeat*), and, taking to himself the pre-eminence, as well as constituting himself head of the church (*caput Ecclesiae*), he might draw all things to himself at the proper time (*universa attrahat ad semetipsum apto in tempore*) (AH iii, 16, 6).

¹⁶² Cf. AH ii, 28, 1; iv, 38, 1ff. Here Irenaeus interprets God's first command given to man--to "grow (Gen 1:28 LXX: *αὐξάνω*)." This command is not merely a call to physical maturity, but a call to perfection. For Irenaeus, this growth to perfection is fulfilled in Christ's humanity.

¹⁶³ Cf. Jean Daniélou (1973, pp. 166ff). Daniélou notes that Irenaeus' emphasis on the Logos' personal and incarnate presence in creation allows him to relate the old and new covenants in an effective way. He (1973, p. 172) writes, "In this connection it is worth noting the reason why Irenaeus was more easily able than Justin to define both the difference and the resemblance between the two Testaments, namely that he lays more stress on the fact that Christ is the master not simply of thought, but also of resurrection and life. It is possible for one and the same Christ to be known in the Old Testament and in the New; in this respect they are identical, and there can be no doubt that Irenaeus held this view exactly as Justin did. It remains true, nevertheless, that between the two Testaments there is a great gulf fixed, the gulf between theoretical knowledge and actual presence, between salvation promised and salvation given." What Daniélou says concerning Irenaeus' relationship to Justin can be said to an even greater degree of Irenaeus' relationship to the Valentinians.

In this passage, Irenaeus expresses both the historical and the ontological dimensions inherent in his doctrine of recapitulation. The Christ, who recapitulates all things, is the one who comes through “the whole dispensational arrangements (*veniens per universam dispositionem*).” Historically and temporally, Christ unites all the covenants in himself. However, this temporal dimension is combined with an ontological dimension in which the Word unites with flesh and blood humanity. For Irenaeus, this implies the union of the spiritual and corporeal substances. Thus, from beginning to end, God overcomes every boundary that separates him from his creation.

Irenaeus’ doctrine of recapitulation fulfills and perfects his understanding of creation. The immediacy of God’s original relationship to the world, as expressed in his creation of all things *ex nihilo*, reaches its intended consummation in the redemptive work of the incarnate Word. In Jesus’ person and work, every boundary between God and his formation is overcome. The barriers of sin, death, the enmity of the devil, the rebellious human will, and even the mortal and corporeal nature of humanity are all torn down through Christ’s recapitulating work. Irenaeus expresses this immediate and intimate relationship between God and creation in two ways. He describes God as one who “contains” and “fills” his creation.¹⁶⁴ These two expressions describe God’s relationship to his creation from two perspectives. In relationship to God, there are no external boundaries separating him from what is beyond him. In this regard, God contains all things in that nothing is outside of his power or excluded from the governance of his will. Yet, Irenaeus rejects not only the notion of external boundaries, but also the idea of internal boundaries.¹⁶⁵ Thus, God fills his creation with his own life, light, and goodness through the power of his almighty will.

Irenaeus’ emphasis on God’s containing and filling his creation challenges his adversaries’ descriptions of the spiritual Pleroma. The Pleroma consists in both external and internal boundaries. Externally, it is separated from the material world; internally, each aeon possesses its own property independent of the others. For Irenaeus, such external and internal boundaries define the Valentinian teaching of the Pleroma.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. William R. Schoedel (1979, pp. 75-86).

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Richard Norris (1979, pp. 86-100). Norris emphasizes that, for Irenaeus, God cannot be limited externally or internally.

It is proper, then, that I should begin with the first and most important head (*primo et maximo capitulo*), that is, God the Creator, who made the heaven and the earth, and all things that are therein, whom these men blasphemously style the fruit of a defect (*extremitatis fructum*), and to demonstrate that there is nothing either above him or after him; nor that, influenced by any one, but of his own free will (*sua sententia et libere*), he created all things, since he is the only God, the only Lord, the only Creator, the only Father, alone containing all things (*solus continens omnia*), and himself commanding all things into existence. For how can there be any other Fullness (*alia plenitudo*), or Principle (*initium*), or Power (*potestas*), or God (*alius Deus*), above him, since it is a matter of necessity that God, the Pleroma of all these (*omnium Pleroma*), should contain (*circumcontinere*) all things in his immensity, and should be contained by no one? But if there is anything beyond him, he is not then the Pleroma of all, nor does he contain all (*neque continet omnia*) (AH ii, 1, 1-2).

For Irenaeus, the spiritual Pleroma is a passive fullness.¹⁶⁶ The spiritual substance is contained by external boundaries, but does not actively contain that which is substantially separate. These substantial boundaries demonstrate the weakness of the supreme God of the Valentinian cosmology. Surrounded by substantial boundaries, the supreme God is the “slave of necessity and fate (*necessitates et fati inveniatur servus*)” (AH ii, 5, 4). Irenaeus concludes, “Let them no longer declare that their Bythus is the fullness of all things (*Pleroma esse omnium*), if indeed he has neither filled nor illumined (*neque adimplevit neque illuminavit*) that which is vacuum and shadow; or, on the other hand, let them cease talking of vacuum and shadow, if the light of their Father does in truth fill all things (*adimplet omnia*)” (AH ii, 8, 2).

Irenaeus opposes the pneumatic Pleroma, which is passively contained by substantial boundaries, to the Creator who actively contains and fills his creation. By his creative will, God contains all creation and fills it with his own power and goodness. In every place and at every time, God’s will governs and his power prevails. However, God’s work of containing and filling his creation is not limited to God’s relationship to creation in the beginning. These expressions of God’s immediate connection to creation reach their full significance as expressions of Christ’s recapitulating work.

For the Creator of the world is truly the Word of God: and this is our Lord, who in the last times was made man, existing in this world, and who in an invisible manner contains all things created (*continet quae facta sunt omnia*), and is inherent in the entire creation, since the Word of God governs and arranges all things; and therefore he came to his own in a visible manner, and was made flesh, and hung upon a tree, that he might recapitulate all things in

¹⁶⁶ Concerning this aspect of Irenaeus’ argument, I am certainly dependent on the thoughtful essay of R. A. Markus, (1954, pp. 193-224. Markus (1954, p. 201) concludes, “In all these passages ‘Pleroma of life’ and similar phrases denote the whole cosmic totality in so far as it is alive, that is to say, in so far as it is filled with spirit or divinity. The ‘Pleroma’ is that which is filled or completed, not that which fills.”

himself (*uti universa in semetipsum recapituletur*).... For it is he, who has power from the Father over all things (*qui universorum potestatem habet a Patre*) (AH v, 18, 3).

The creative work of the Logos comes to conclusion and perfection in his recapitulating work. The same Word, who invisibly contains all things, comes in the end to visibly recapitulate all things. God's invisible relationship to creation becomes visible and personal in Christ. For Irenaeus, the incarnate Logos is the true Pleroma (Fullness), not passively by means of substantial boundaries, but actively through his "filling up all the dispensations pertaining to humanity (*πάσαν τήν κατὰ ἄνθρωπον οἰκονομίαν ἐκπληρώσαντος*)" (AH iii, 17, 4).¹⁶⁷

III. The Recapitulation of Humanity

According to Irenaeus, his Valentinian opponents preserve the unity of the spiritual essence through its separation and isolation from the hyllic world. The divine world is securely confined within the boundaries of its own substance. Even within the Pleroma, the spiritual emanations establish boundaries between aeons in order to preserve the transcendence of the supreme God, Bythus. Emanations allow a substantial relationship to exist between the spiritual aeons, while protecting their individual properties. Thus, Valentinian teaching defines the Pleroma as the relationship between the one and the many.¹⁶⁸ True oneness only resides in the original aeon, Bythus. Through successive emanations, his oneness is turned into multiplicity. While the multiplicity of aeons share in the same substance as the original aeon, they nevertheless lack wholeness. The lower aeons possess only a part of the spiritual substance, which is possessed in its entirety by Bythus alone.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Concerning Irenaeus' use of the verb, "fill," cf. AH iv, 34, 2. Irenaeus writes, "But the servants would then have been proved false, and not sent by the Lord, if Christ on his advent, by being found exactly such as he was previously announced, had not fulfilled their words (*adimpletset eorum sermones*). Wherefore he said, 'Think not that I have come to destroy the Law or the prophets; I came not to destroy, but to fulfill (*adimplere*). For verily I say unto you, until heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall not pass from the Law and the prophets till all come to pass' (Matthew 5:17-18). For by his advent he himself fulfilled all things (*Omnia enim ipse adimplevit veniens*), and does still fulfill in the church the new covenant (*adhuc implet in Ecclesia novum Testamentum*) foretold by the Law, onwards to the consummation." For Irenaeus, the true Pleroma consists in the recapitulating work of the Logos, in which he brings all things to fullness of perfection in his own flesh. This perfect fullness continues to be accomplished in the church through its communion with Christ. Cf. also AH iii, 12, 1ff. where the church is the place in which God "fills up" his promises.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Einar Thomassen (2000, pp. 1-17). Thomassen persuasively demonstrates a connection between Neopythagorean thought, which derives the dyad from the monad, and Valentinianism, which mythologizes the derivation of multiplicity from unity.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. *Gos. Tr.* 28:8ff., "Inasmuch as the completion of the entirety is in the father, the entirety must go to him. Then upon gaining acquaintance, all individually receive what belongs to them, and draw it to themselves. For whoever does not

For the bishop of Lyons, the Valentinian description of the Pleroma reveals a fundamental weakness in their understanding of God. Bythus and all the spiritual aeons are confined to their own territories and prisoners of their own individual properties. Bythus is perhaps high and transcendent, but he is unable to communicate his goodness outside his own essence. Even within the Pleroma, Bythus can emanate only a shard of his essence to other aeons. The movement from the one to the many allows some communication of the spiritual essence. However, the wholeness present in Bythus cannot be communicated or known.

Irenaeus exploits this theological weakness with an emphasis on Christ's creation and recapitulation of *all things*. As we have seen, Irenaeus refers to "all things" in order to express the universality and catholicity of God's relationship to creation. The Creator's freedom consists in his ability to overcome all boundaries that separate him from his creation. The spiritual and hylic substances do not limit the creating and recapitulating work of God. Irenaeus does not view God according to what he possesses, but according to what he gives and communicates.¹⁷⁰ God's creation of all things out of nothing by his will alone testifies to his ability to communicate his own goodness to the material world. This communication reaches perfection in the incarnate Logos and his recapitulation of all things in himself.

By making God's communication with creation the center of his theology, Irenaeus establishes a different framework for the knowledge of God.¹⁷¹ While the Valentinian disciple understands the Pleroma as the relationship between unity and multiplicity, Irenaeus understands God in terms of the relationship between universality and particularity. Unlike Bythus, the Creator is able

possess acquaintance is in need, and what that person needs is great, inasmuch as the thing that such a person needs is what would complete the person. Inasmuch as the completion of the entirety resides in the father, and the entirety must go to him and all receive their own, he inscribed these things in advance, having prepared them for assignment to those who emanated from him."

¹⁷⁰ Cf. AH ii, 2; ii, 30. Irenaeus knows God only according to his works accomplished in creation. Thus, Irenaeus is not simply arguing for God's unity of nature against a dualism. Rather, he argues for God's intimate relationship to his creatures. God cannot be known apart from his will to give life to the created world.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Maurice Wiles (1966, pp. 24ff). Wiles argues perceptively that, while the Logos terminology appealed to the apologists, it did not become the primary way in which the church confessed its belief in God. The needs of the apologist was trumped by the needs of the worshipping community. He (1966, p. 29) writes, "The use of the Logos concept largely grew out of the needs of the apologist. Apologetic was a part of the church's task. But it was not the Church's most basic and most characteristic activity. More fundamental was public worship and private devotion. For the ordinary Christian, Christ was the Savior God, the object of his worship, his praises and his love. It was hardly natural in such a context to think or speak of Christ as Logos. Logos was a scholar's term; it was not well fitted to meet the religious needs of ordinary folk." I think this shift in the framework for speaking of God is certainly evident in Irenaeus. For him, the Logos is not employed to protect the philosophical purity of the divine nature from contact with the material world. Rather, the Logos is the self-communicating God, whom the church experiences in the sacramental and liturgical life of the church.

to communicate the wholeness of his own being. This complete and perfect communication between God and his creation is precisely what Irenaeus seeks to express in his doctrine of recapitulation. In the beginning, God relates to all things by his will, but in the last days, he relates to creation by his personal presence. In this way, God's universal relationship to creation consists in his own particular relationship to humanity in the person of Jesus. It is for this reason that, while Irenaeus begins with the Pauline language concerning the recapitulation of "all things," he typically interprets it with his own language concerning the recapitulation of "man." The wholeness of God and the wholeness of creation are present in the one man, Jesus Christ. In Christ alone, God's relationship to all things reaches its intended fulfillment.

A. Recapitulation and the Human Essence

For Irenaeus, the Word's recapitulation of *all things* consists precisely in his recapitulation of *man*. God's relationship to creation revolves around a Christological center. The whole universality of God and the whole universality of creation are present in the one man, Jesus Christ. This implies that, for Irenaeus, theology and cosmology are expressions of Christology. Thus, the first truth Irenaeus seeks to express by his doctrine of God's recapitulation of humanity into himself is that God overcomes the boundary of substance dividing him from the material world. For Irenaeus' opponents, the barrier between the spiritual and hyllic substances is absolute and eternal. For Irenaeus, the difference of substance does not limit God's ability to communicate himself to his creature. However, while nothing prevents God from communicating himself to his formation, the infantile state of the human creature demands growth and maturation before he can participate in the fullness of divine fellowship. Thus, Irenaeus' recapitulation doctrine always presents the interdependence and intertwining of two dimensions. The vertical and ontological relationship between God and his fleshly formation is revealed throughout the temporal and horizontal progression of history.

God's relationship to the human essence begins in creation. Humanity, along with all creation, is the product of the divine will that creates all things *ex nihilo*. Irenaeus' second book of his *Adversus Haereses* culminates in an emphasis on God's creative power.

...Let them learn that God alone (*solus Deus*), who is Lord of all (*omnium Dominus*), is without beginning and without end (*sine initio et sine fine*), being truly and forever the same, and always remaining the same unchangeable being. But all things which proceed from him (*ab illo omnia*), whatsoever have been made, and are made (*fiunt*), do indeed receive their own beginning of generation (*initium...generationis*), and on this account are inferior (*inferiora*) to him who formed them, inasmuch as they are not unbegotten (*quoniam non sunt ingenita*). Nevertheless they endure (*perseverant*), and extend (*extenduntur*) their existence into a long series of ages in accordance with the will of God their Creator (*secundum voluntatem factoris Dei*); so that he grants (*donat*) them that they should be thus formed at the beginning, and that they should so exist afterwards (*ita ut sic initio fierent, et postea, ut sint*) (AH ii, 34, 2).

The substance of creation has no independent existence. Even the soul is not immortal due to its own separate nature; rather, its life arises from its communion with the almighty will of God. Thus, Irenaeus concludes, “For the will of God ought to govern and rule in all things (*Principari enim debet in omnibus et dominari voluntas Dei*)” (AH ii, 34, 4). Humanity shares a common beginning with all creation. All creation enjoys a common fellowship with the divine will, which gives life, light, and every good gift.

However, in the creation of Adam, Irenaeus sees an indication that God’s relationship to humanity is more intimate and personal. While man shares a common beginning with all creatures, he is destined for a more intimate communion with God in the end.

...As at the beginning of our formation in Adam (*ab initio plasmationis nostrae in Adam*), that breath of life, which proceeded from God (*a Deo aspiratio vitae*), having been united to what had been fashioned (*unita plasmati*), animated the man, and manifested him as a being endowed with reason; so also, in the end (*in fine*), the Word of the Father and the Spirit of God, having become united with the ancient substance of Adam’s formation (*adunitus antiquae substantiae plasmationis Adae*), rendered man living and perfect (*viventem et perfectum*), receptive of the perfect Father, in order that as in the natural we all were dead (*in animali omnes mortui sumus*), so in the spiritual we may all be made alive (*in spiritali omnes vivificemur*). For never at any time did Adam escape the hands of God (*Non effugit aliquando Adam manus Dei*), to whom the Father speaking, said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” And for this reason in the last times (*in fine*), not by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, but by the good pleasure of the Father (*non ex voluntate carnis neque ex voluntate viri sed ex placito Patris*)¹⁷², his hands perfected a living man (*manus ejus vivum perfecerunt hominem*), in order that Adam might be created after the image and likeness of God (AH v, 1, 3).

¹⁷² Notice here Irenaeus’ reference to John 1:13. This verse seems especially important for Irenaeus’ argument. Cf. AH iii, 16, 2; iii, 19, 2. Irenaeus reads *ὁς...ἐγεννήθη* instead of *ὁ...ἐγεννήθησαν*. Thus, Irenaeus consistently reads John 1:13 as a reference to Christ. This means that in the above passage Irenaeus has the substantial connection between Adam and Christ in mind.

In this passage, Irenaeus interprets the creation of the human race as an intimate and deeply personal act of God.¹⁷³ The plural pronouns of Genesis 1:26 are interpreted in reference to the Word and the Spirit. In a similar way, the “hands of God” and the “breath of life” reveal the personal communion between God and humanity. In this communion, the divine plan to create humankind in the “image and likeness of God” reaches its perfection.

Thus, Christ’s recapitulating work is a continuation, but also a progression or perfection of his creative will. In creation, human flesh and blood are capable of receiving a personal communion with God. However, in Christ, human flesh and blood actually participate in the divine life, and the divine Logos actually participates in human weakness. In other words, In Christ, there is both a real incarnation of God and a real deification of the human creature. This means that, in Christ, there is no boundary preventing God from communicating himself to his creatures and no boundary preventing humankind from giving himself to God. This mutual communication that allows God and his human creatures to relate internally to one another is the heart of Irenaeus’ Christology and his doctrine of recapitulation.

In the middle of his third book, Irenaeus defines the recapitulating work of Christ in terms of the mutual communication between the divine and the human essences in Christ. In response to his opponents’ Christologies that divide the person and work of Jesus, Irenaeus expresses his Christology in terms of recapitulation. He quotes Paul’s words in Ephesians 1:10, which refer to God’s “recapitulation of all things.” Irenaeus immediately interprets these words in terms of the recapitulation of humanity. “In every respect, too, he is man, the formation of God; and thus he recapitulated man into himself (*hominem in semetipsum recapitulans est*), the invisible becoming visible, the incomprehensible being made comprehensible, the impassible becoming capable of suffering, and the Word being made man, thus recapitulating all things in himself (*universa in semetipsum recapitulans*)” (AH iii, 16, 6). The recapitulation of “all things” and the recapitulation of

¹⁷³ Cf. D. E. Jenkins (1962, pp. 91-95). Jenkins emphasizes the “literal visualization of Genesis 2:7” in Irenaeus’ anthropology. Cf. also M. Steenberg (2009, p. 22ff). Steenberg (2009, p. 28) recognizes the importance of Genesis 1-2 in Irenaeus’ anthropology and concludes, “Irenaeus’ first anthropological conviction is thus one taken from the earliest pages of scripture, but only as read from the standpoint of the apostolic proclamation of Christ as incarnate Lord. In view of this, the simple statement that ‘God created humanity’ is transformed from a basic affirmation of divine action and power into a revelatory statement on the character and nature of man, precisely because it articulates more fully the reality of the Father as creator with and through his Son and Spirit, who together fashion the creature.”

“man” are interchangeable expressions. God’s relationship to creation consists precisely in the relationship between God and his human handiwork in the incarnate Logos, Jesus Christ.

Irenaeus’ first concern is to emphasize that God’s recapitulation of a particular man results in a real incarnation. In other words, God really and truly participates in human flesh and blood. This divine participation in humanity is expressed in the above passage. The recapitulation of man accomplished in Christ consists in the “invisible (*invisibilis*) becoming visible, the incomprehensible (*incomprehensibilis*) being made comprehensible, the impassible (*impassibilis*) becoming capable of suffering....”¹⁷⁴ For Irenaeus, the reality of God’s participation in humanity is proved by the gospel of Jesus’ life. “The only-begotten, who is also the Word of the Father, coming in the fullness of time (*ἐλθόντος τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ χρόνου*), having become incarnate in man for the sake of man, and filling up all dispensations pertaining to humanity (*πᾶσαν τὴν κατὰ ἀνθρώπου οἰκονομίαν ἐκπληρώσαντος*)” (AH iii, 17, 4). The primary dispensation that the Word fulfilled was the dispensation of suffering and death. The cross is the clearest testimony to God’s real participation in human flesh. “As it has been clearly demonstrated that the Word, who existed in the beginning with God (*in principio Verbum existens apud Deum*), by whom all things were made, who was also always present with mankind, was in these last days (*in novissimis temporibus*), according to the time appointed by the Father, united to his own workmanship (*unitum suo plasmati*), inasmuch as he became a man liable to suffering (*passibilem hominem factum*)” (AH iii, 18, 1).

God’s real and authentic participation in the life, suffering, and death that belong to human beings effects humanity’s real and authentic participation in God’s glory. For the bishop of Lyons, the real incarnation of God finds its purpose in the real deification of man.

He speaks undoubtedly these words to those who have not received the gift of adoption (*πρὸς τοὺς μὴ δεξαμένους τὴν δωρεάν τῆς υἰοθεσίας*), but who despise the incarnation of the pure generation of the Word of God (*τὴν σάρκωσιν τῆς καθαρᾶς γεννήσεως τοῦ λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ*), defraud humanity of promotion into God (*ἀποστεροῦντας τὸν ἄνθρωπον τῆς εἰς Θεὸν ἀνόδου*), and prove themselves ungrateful (*ἀχαριστοῦντας*)¹⁷⁵ to the Word of God, who became flesh for them. For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and he

¹⁷⁴ Notice here that Irenaeus uses the apophatic language of the philosophical description of God to serve his own purpose of expressing the mystery and reality of the incarnation.

¹⁷⁵ The references in this passage to the Ebionites who refuse the “gift of adoption (*τὴν δωρεάν τῆς υἰοθεσίας*)” and who show themselves “ungrateful (*ἀχαριστοῦντας*)” suggests that Irenaeus has the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist in mind. Cf. AH iv, 17, 5ff where Irenaeus defines the eucharist as the offering of firstfruits. The eucharist is established that man might be “neither unfruitful nor ungrateful (*neque infructuosi neque ingrati sint*).”

who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word (*ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸν λόγον χωρήσας*), and receiving adoption, might become the son of God. For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united (*nisi adunati*) to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up (*absorberetur*) by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive the adoption of sons (AH iii, 19, 1)?

In the person of Christ, the substantial boundary separating divinity and humanity does not prevent their real and authentic communion with one another. In creation, the human creature is the external product of the divine will, which nevertheless renders him capable of a personal communion with God. In Christ's recapitulating work, this intimate and personal communion is realized and perfected in an internal assumption of humanity into the divine Logos. God no longer merely relates to the material world by his will, but also by his personal presence.¹⁷⁶

However, there is one more aspect of this progression from the creation to the recapitulation of humanity that must be considered. Through Christ's recapitulating work, humanity is not only made a true participant in the divine life, but also becomes the means by which the divine life is communicated to the world. Irenaeus makes this point at the beginning of his fifth book. "For he (Christ) would not have been one truly possessing flesh and blood (*vere sanguinem et carnem habens*), by which he redeemed us (*per quam nos redemit*), unless he had recapitulated in himself the ancient formation of Adam (*nisi antiquam plasmationem Adae in semetipsum recapitulasset*)" (AH v, 1, 2). The real communion between the divine and the human in Christ allows the fleshly nature of Christ to become the means by which (*per quam*) God's own life is communicated to the world. In Adam, humanity receives life; but in Christ, human flesh and blood actually communicate life to the world. This point leads Irenaeus to consider the salvific character of the eucharist.

But vain in every respect are they who despise the entire dispensation of God (*universam dispositionem Dei*), and disallow the salvation of the flesh (*carnis salutem*), and treat with contempt its regeneration (*regenerationem*), maintaining that it is not capable of incorruption. But if this indeed do not attain salvation, then neither did the Lord redeem us with His blood (*Dominus sanguine suo redemit nos*), nor is the cup of the eucharist the communion of His blood (*communicatio sanguinis ejus*), nor the bread which we break the communion of His body (*communicatio corporis ejus*) (AH v, ii, 2).

¹⁷⁶ Cf. The insightful article of Jacques Fantino (1996), in which he recognizes that Irenaeus' approach to the *creatio ex nihilo* places it within the economy of Christ's salvific work. Fantino (1996, p. 592) writes, "Irénee conçoit la création *ex nihilo* dans la perspective de l'économie comme établissant le premier mode d'existence des créatures qui doit être transformé en un nouveau mode, celui de la création nouvelle inaugurée précisément par l'incarnation et le don de l'Esprit."

In communion with the Word, human flesh and blood not only receive life, but also become capable of giving life. Thus Irenaeus concludes,

But now by means of communion with himself (*ad se communicationem*), the Lord has reconciled man to God the Father, in reconciling us to himself by the body of his own flesh (*reconcilians nos sibi per corpus carnis suae*) and redeeming us by his own blood (*sanguine suo redimens nos*).... If, therefore, flesh and blood are the things which procure for us life (*Siquidem caro et sanguis sunt quae faciunt nobis vitam*), it has not been declared of flesh and blood, in the literal meaning of the terms, that they cannot inherit the kingdom of God (AH v, 14, 3-4).

For Irenaeus, the recapitulation of human flesh and blood consists in a progression in the human creature's communion with God. In creation, humanity enjoys fellowship with the divine will and possesses the capability of an intimate participation in the divine life. Through Christ's recapitulation of humanity, the fleshly creature is made a real and authentic participant in God's own life even as God willingly participates in the weakness of humanity. Finally, the Word's incarnation makes the substance of flesh and blood the means by which God's own life is communicated to the world.

B. Recapitulation and the Human Will

Irenaeus uses the recapitulation doctrine to express the intimate communion of God and man in Christ. Through Christ's recapitulating work, the substantial boundary between the spiritual and the material is overcome. In Christ, a real communication occurs between divinity and humanity. The Creator's ability to communicate his own goodness outside his own substance reaches perfection and fullness in the incarnation of the *Verbum Dei*. God's relationship to creation by his almighty will prepares for his intimate communion with humanity by his personal presence. However, Christ's recapitulating work involves more than merely the communion of the spiritual and material substances. This vertical and substantial communion between the Logos and his humanity is the foundation for the energetic communion of the divine and human wills. In addition to the substance of human flesh and blood, the divine Word gathers the human will into his own person. Thus, in addition to the vertical and substantial communion between God and his formation, Christ's recapitulation of man involves a horizontal and historical communion of divine and human works.

For Irenaeus, the opposition's concern for the spiritual essence leads to a distorted view of salvation. His opponents' soteriology revolves around one's possession of the spiritual substance. The pneumatic disciple's relationship to the spiritual Pleroma is strictly vertical and substantial. In this natural relationship, the historical and temporal elements are excluded. There is no growth in the spiritual disciple's relationship to the Pleroma. Saving gnosis consists merely in the realization of one's own substantial identity with the heavenly aeons. Valentinian salvation consists, not in a perfection or progression of man's relationship to God, but only a restoration. By emphasizing the spiritual substance, such catechists tend to ignore the significance of the human will.¹⁷⁷ At best, the will and works of humanity are secondary; at worst, they are utterly irrelevant. In other words, while Irenaeus' opponents may refer to the actions of the human will as proof of one's spiritual identity, he cannot ascribe to the human will the power to effect or alter one's natural identity.

Toward the end of the second book of his *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus challenges his opponents' soteriology. According to the bishop of Lyons, the opposition's principle that "like will be gathered to like, spiritual things to spiritual" makes the righteous will less significant. While his adversaries refer to the righteous will in connection with the salvation of the psychics, Irenaeus challenges them to define its soteriological role.

For if it is on account of their nature (*propter substantiam*) that all souls attain to the place of enjoyment, and all belong to the intermediate place simply because they are souls, as being thus of the same nature with it (*ejusdem substantiae*), then it follows that faith is altogether superfluous (*superfluum est credere*), as was also the descent of the Savior (*discessio*

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Elaine Pagels (1972b, pp. 241-258). In this article, Pagels considers the character of "Gnostic" anthropology. She (1972b, p. 242) suggests that, "The philosophical question of determinism and free will is not the issue that motivates the development of gnostic anthropology." She claims that Irenaeus and other heresiologists have distorted the "Gnostic" perspective for rhetorical and polemical advantage. According to Pagels' analysis of their interpretation of Romans, the soteriology of Irenaeus' opponents is not meant to be an expression of natural determinism, but a description of divine election. While Pagels' understanding of "Gnostic anthropology" and its connection to the interpretation of Paul's epistles is worth considering, her criticism of Irenaeus seems somewhat polemical and rhetorical itself. For Irenaeus, the Valentinian salvation by nature, not only leads to a denial of free will and a distorted anthropology, but also results in the limitation of God's will. Regardless of how salvation is expressed by Irenaeus' opponents, it always excludes the substance of the flesh and, therefore, the works done in the flesh. For Irenaeus, the exclusion of the flesh from salvation is primarily a limitation of God's creative will. Thus, in his prolonged discussion of man's freedom at the end of book four, Irenaeus concludes, "Those, again, who maintain the opposite to these conclusions, do themselves present the Lord as destitute of power, as if, forsooth, he were unable to accomplish what he willed" (AH iv, 37, 6). A salvation limited to the pneumatic nature means that God is unable to communicate his own goodness outside his own being. Irenaeus' chief concern is not to oppose a natural determinism with the philosophical assertion of man's free will. Rather, his primary interest is the freedom of God's will in relation to his creation. It is this divine freedom that is reflected in the freedom of humanity. Thus, Irenaeus concludes, "For after his great kindness, he graciously conferred good, and made men like to himself in their own power; while at the same time by his prescience he knew the infirmity of human beings, the consequences which would flow from it; but through his love and his power, he shall overcome the substance of created nature" (AH, iv, 38, 4). By placing life and salvation in the divine will and, secondarily, in the human will, Irenaeus makes salvation universal. All humanity is created for participation in the divine life. Yet, salvation is also concrete and particular since the divine and human *synergeia* is realized in the person of Christ.

Salvatoris). If on the other hand, it is on account of their righteousness (*propter justitiam*), then it is no longer because they are souls but because they are righteous. But if souls would have perished unless they had been righteous, then righteousness must have the power to save bodies also (*justitia potens est salvare et corpora*); for why should it not save them, since they, too, participated in righteousness (*participaverunt justitiae*)¹⁷⁸? For if nature and substance are the means of salvation, then all souls shall be saved; but if righteousness and faith, why should these not save those bodies which, equally with the souls, will enter into immortality? For righteousness will appear in matters of this kind, either impotent or unjust (*Aut impotens, aut injusta apparebit*), if indeed it saves some substances through participating in it (*propter suam participationem*), but not others (AH ii, 29, 1).

For Irenaeus, his opponents must choose; either the human will is dependent upon one's substantial identity or one's substantial identity is dependent upon the human will. One cannot exclude human flesh and blood from salvation based upon its substance alone and, then, claim the salvation of human souls based upon their participation in the righteous will. Here Irenaeus' understanding of God's creation of all things *ex nihilo* influences his soteriology. In the same way that the substance of creation exists by participation in the divine will to give life, so the human identity is altered by its participation in the actions of the righteous will.

By exalting one's substance over the will, Valentinian thought distorts salvation.¹⁷⁹

According to Irenaeus, their salvation consists in a deification of substance. This substantial deification is passive and static since it requires no active growth in the accomplishment of righteousness. The spiritual disciple need only passively endure until the consummation when they will enjoy the restoration of their proper place in the spiritual realm. Valentinian deification consists, not in the synergy of God and the hyllic man, but in the separation of the spiritual and material substances. Thus, for Irenaeus, his opponents are claiming deification without incarnation, exaltation without humiliation, and immortality without death. As Irenaeus asks,

How, then, shall he be a God, who has not as yet been made a man? Or how can he be perfect (*perfectus*) who was but lately created (*nuper effectus*)? How, again, can he be immortal, who in his mortal nature did not obey his Maker (*qui in natura mortali non obedivit factori*)? For

¹⁷⁸ For Irenaeus, the opposite of a salvation by substance (*propter substantiam*) is a salvation by participation (*propter participationem*). The idea of participation flows from Irenaeus' energetic view of life. Thus, participation is intimately bound to Irenaeus' concept of the divine will that actively creates all things. Cf. AH ii, 34, 4 where Irenaeus argues that because life exists in the energy of the divine will, souls do not possess life essentially. Instead of possessing life, as if it were a substance, man participates in life. Cf. also Eric Osborn (2001, pp. 141ff). Osborn includes the idea of participation as one of the "key concepts" for understanding Irenaeus' theological perspective.

¹⁷⁹ Concerning the question of the "Gnostic" salvation by nature, cf. L. Schottrof (1969, pp. 65ff). Schottrof asserts that the three natures of men--hyllic, psychic, and pneumatic--consist in three kinds of existence, but not necessarily three predetermined destinies. However, cf. also Roger Berthouzoz (1980). For Berthouzoz, the three natures or modalities of human existence are not attained by the human will, but by external gift. The hyllic man is devoid of a supernatural gift; the psychic receives a higher grace from the Demiurge; and the pneumatic alone receives the perfect grace from the spiritual realm. Thus, Berthouzoz effectively defends the ascription of a natural determinism to "Gnosticism."

it must be that you, at the outset, should hold the rank of man (*ordinem hominis custodire*), and then afterwards partake of the glory of God (*deinde participare gloriae Dei*). For you did not make God, but God you. If, then, you are God's workmanship (*opera Dei*), await the hand of your Maker which creates everything in due time (*manum artificis tui exspecta opportune omnia facientem*)...(AH iv, 39, 2).

According to Irenaeus, his opponents' claims to deity come with a repudiation of their humanity.

Their ascension to the spiritual realm necessitates an escape from the material world.

Against the claim to a deification according to substance, Irenaeus places deification in the synergy of the divine and human wills. Intertwined with the vertical communion of the divine and human substances in Christ is the horizontal and historical progression of the human will in righteousness.¹⁸⁰ For Irenaeus, the proper relationship between will and substance is central to his argument. His adversaries assert that one's participation in spirituality depends upon a possession of the spiritual nature. However, Irenaeus contends that a participation in the divine life does not require a possession of the divine nature, but a share in the divine will. In creation, God is able to communicate his own character outside his substance through the power and freedom of his creative will. This same principle resides at the heart of Irenaeus' understanding of the salvation accomplished in Christ. Thus, Irenaeus employs the power and will of God as a unifying concept. Different substances are able to share in one and the same power. From this perspective, the substance of humanity increases or decreases, grows or declines, lives or dies based upon its participation in the powers of good and evil.

Irenaeus' deification through the will entails two fundamental points. First, in the progression of one's communion with God, the human creature never ceases to be a creature. From beginning to end, from the depths of its bondage to sin and death to the height of its exaltation into the full likeness of God, the human substance remains intact. In no way does Irenaeus' understanding of deification imply the transubstantiation of humanity into divinity. In the fifth book of *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus interprets the miracles of Jesus as testimonies to the continuity of the human nature.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. W. P. Loewe's (1985) article, in which he maintains that Irenaeus' soteriology is integrated into a "noetic soteriology." For Loewe, "noetic soteriology" means that Christ's victory over the devil consists precisely in his obedience. Loewe is certainly right to emphasize the righteous will of Jesus and its fundamental place in Irenaeus' soteriology. However, the term "noetic" seems misleading. For Irenaeus, the will is not merely a mental or gnostic reality, but a substantial movement bound to humanity's ontological identity. Just as the sinful will of Adam becomes a new ground of being for corruptible humanity, so the righteous will of Jesus becomes the new ground of being for the church.

Just as the blind men whom the Lord healed did certainly lose their blindness, but received the substance of their eyes perfect (*perfectam receperunt substantiam oculorum*), and obtained the power of vision in the very same eyes with which they formerly did not see; the darkness being merely driven away by the power of vision (*caligine a visione tantum exterminata*), while the substance of the eyes was retained (*servata substantia oculorum*), in order that, by means of those eyes through which they had not seen, exercising again the visual power they might give thanks (*gratias agerent*) to him who had restored them again to sight (*visum eis redintegravit*). And thus, also, he whose withered hand was healed, and all who were healed generally, did not change those parts of their bodies which had at their birth come forth from the womb (*non ea quae ab initio ex utero edita fuerant membra mutaverunt*), but simply obtained these new in a healthy condition (*eadem ipsa salva recipiebant*) (AH v, 12, 5).

For Irenaeus, humanity is rendered incorruptible and perfect, not through a change of substance, but through the filling of humanity with a new power and will. The miracles reveal Jesus' ability to communicate his own creative power to the substance of human flesh and blood.

However, while the integrity of the human nature is maintained, Irenaeus' soteriology also entails a dynamic perspective of humanity.¹⁸¹ Through its communion with the divine will, the substance of humanity is able to grow, increase, and change.¹⁸² This truth is already evident in his doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo*. The fact that God creates all things out of nothing means that he is always free in relationship to creation. The substance of creation is malleable so that it conforms to the desire of its Creator. However, the freedom of the divine will over created substances is reflected in the freedom of the human will. The growth and increase of humanity is not automatic or monergistic. Rather, the progression and perfection of humanity consists precisely in the righteousness of the human will.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Scholars have often ignored the dynamic and energetic character of Irenaeus' anthropology causing them to see contradictory lines of thought in Irenaeus' writings. For instance, cf. F. R. Tennant (1903, pp. 282ff). Tennant points to the various references in Irenaeus to the image and likeness of God. Like other scholars, Tennant interprets these expressions as evidence of contradictory and irreconcilable teachings. Tennant and others arrive at this conclusion because they consider the "image and likeness of God" as static substances that are either possessed or lost. I believe that, for Irenaeus, the image and likeness are dynamic, energetic properties. Thus, man does not so much possess them as he participates in them. While the image and likeness of God exist in an infantile manner in Adam, they are realized in Christ with their intended perfection. This dynamic and energetic perspective allows Irenaeus to speak of man's relationship to the image and likeness of God in a variety of ways.

¹⁸² Cf. AH ii, 28, 1 where Irenaeus says that the Creator bestowed upon his creatures "the faculty of increase (*in sua creatura donavit incrementum*)."¹⁸² Cf. also Karl Prümm's (1938) article, in which he emphasizes Irenaeus' vocabulary of progression that roots his anthropology in the unfolding of God's plan.

¹⁸³ Cf. Robert F. Brown (1975, pp. 17-25). Like many scholars, Brown sees "mutually incompatible" systems in Irenaeus' teaching. Brown (1975, p. 17) defines these two incompatible systems, when he writes, "First, humanity is restored to its status before the fall of Adam, thereby abolishing sin and its effects. Second, it is elevated or perfected to a higher form of being than that of the originally created human nature." Brown finds incompatibility because he fails to understand the significance Irenaeus attaches to the human will and its real, active role in the salvation of the world. For Brown, salvation consists in God's monergistic interaction with the human nature. From this perspective, man's perfection is either a restoration or an elevation of what man was in the beginning. To assert both possibilities is to ascribe a contradiction to God's monergistic work. For Irenaeus, salvation does not merely consist in the creation and healing of the human nature,

This expression, ‘How often would I have gathered your children together, and you would not,’ set forth the ancient law of human liberty (*veterem legem libertatis hominis manifestavit*), because God made man a free agent from the beginning (*liberum eum Deus fecit ab initio*), possessing his own power (*habentem suam potestatem*), even as he does his own soul, to obey the behests of God voluntarily (*voluntarie*), and not by compulsion of God (*non coactum*). For there is no coercion (*vis*)¹⁸⁴ with God, but a good will (*bona sententia*) is present with him continually (AH iv, 37, 1).

At creation, the substance of humanity is simply the product of God’s almighty power. However, humanity’s progression and growth toward maturity and perfection demands the voluntary obedience of the human will.

For Irenaeus, the power and freedom of the human will is the essence of human creature’s “likeness” to God. While the “image of God” typically refers to the substance of humanity, the divine likeness consists in the inherent and “self-governing” power of the human will.¹⁸⁵ “Because man is possessed of free will from the beginning (*liberae sententiae ab initio*), and God is possessed of free will (*liberae sententiae est Deus*), in whose likeness man was created (*cujus ad similitudinem factus est*), advice (*consilium*) is always given to him to keep fast the good (*continere bonum*), which thing is done by means of obedience to God (*quod perfecitur ex ea quae est ad Deum obaudientia*)” (AH iv, 37, 4). Just as Irenaeus places the divine will at the center of his doctrine of creation, so he places the human will at the center of his doctrine of recapitulation.¹⁸⁶ In the beginning, the divine will is the source of life, but in the end, the progression of the human will is the perfection of life. Thus,

but also in the training of the human will in righteousness. Thus, salvation is both substantive and energetic. Perfection and imperfection are not merely substances that are either possessed or lost, but powers in which one participates, grows, and progresses.

¹⁸⁴ Irenaeus uses *vis* again in AH v, 1, 1. God’s salvation is accomplished by persuasion (*suadentem*) and not violently (*vim*). Some scholars maintain that “persuasion” refers to God’s dealing with the devil. However, Irenaeus’ consistent use of *vis* refers to God’s refusal to force man into obedience.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Jacques Fantino (1986). Fantino demonstrates the subtle differences in Irenaeus’ use of “image” and “likeness.” Cf. also Mary Donovan (1988, pp. 283-297). Donovan agrees with Fantino that the image resides in human flesh and the similitude in the freedom of the human will. She (1988, p. 294) writes, “The image is thus present, and present as our proper form. But this form calls for works appropriate to it. This points to another of our basic human endowments. As to be human is to bear the divine image in our very flesh, so too to be human is to be free. Irenaeus identifies our freedom of choice with the first sense of our likeness of God, the *homoiootes*, which here I am calling ‘similitude.’ Our similitude to the Creator and Father lies in our inalienable liberty of action.”

¹⁸⁶ Cf. H. E. W. Turner (1952, pp. 20). Turner maintains that two different types of the *Christus Victor* theory are evident in patristic thought. He writes, “In the first the humanity of the incarnate Lord is considered as the very element in and through which his vicarious victory was achieved for us men and for our salvation. In the second type of theory, the humanity of our Lord is considered rather as the base of operations against the demonic powers, or at worst as the bait used to catch the devil while the Divine *Logos* played the line.” Turner correctly assigns Irenaeus to the former class. He (1952, p. 67) writes, “What is of special importance for our present purpose is, however, to call attention to the rich positive valuation which is given to the humanity of the incarnate Lord. It is not the Word, but the Word in his humanity, which is the subject of the *recapitulatio*.” For Irenaeus, the humanity of Christ is not merely a passive arena in which salvation is accomplished. Rather, Jesus’ humanity is a real active participant in the recapitulation of all things.

Irenaeus' understanding of humanity's deification consists in two perspectives. Viewed from above, humanity's deification consists in the gracious condescension of God to his fleshly creatures.

By this arrangement (*διὰ τούτης τῆς τάξεως*), therefore, and these harmonies (*τῶν τοιούτων ῥυθμῶν*), and a sequence of this nature, man, a created and organized being (*πεπλασμένος ἄνθρωπος*) is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God (*τοῦ ἀγενήτου Θεοῦ*),---the Father planning everything well and giving his commands (*εὐδοκούντος καὶ κελεύοντος*), the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating (*ὑπουργοῦντος καὶ πλάσσοντος*)¹⁸⁷, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing (*τρέφοντος καὶ αὐξοντος*), but man making progress day by day, and ascending toward the perfect (*ἀνερχομένου πρὸς το τέλειον*), that is, approximating the uncreated One (*πλησίον τουτεῶτι τοῦ ἀγενήτου γινομένου*). For the Uncreated is perfect (*τέλειος ὁ ἀγένητος*), that is, God. Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created (*γενέσθαι*); and having been created, should receive growth (*αὐξήσαντα*); and having received growth, should come to mature manhood (*ἀνδρωθῆναι*)¹⁸⁸; and having been brought to maturity, should abound (*πληθυνθῆναι*); and having abounded, should be strengthened (*ἐνισχύσαι*)¹⁸⁹; and having been strengthened, should be glorified (*δοξασθῆναι*); and being glorified, should see his Lord (*ἰδεῖν τὸν ἑαυτοῦ Δεσπότην*). For God is he who is yet to be seen, and the beholding of God is productive of immortality, but immortality renders one nigh unto God (*ἐγγύς εἶναι ποιεῖ Θεοῦ*) (AH iv, 38, 3).

In this passage, Irenaeus' defines the human progression as the consequence of God's gracious and patient condescension to human weakness.¹⁹⁰ It is the divine plan from the beginning, not only to give Adam life, but to render him perfect and immortal, that is, like unto himself.

This theocentric perspective of humanity's deification is combined with an anthropocentric perspective. Humankind's redemption and perfection consists, not only in God's gracious interaction with his human formation, but also in humanity's free obedience toward God.¹⁹¹ Thus, Irenaeus quotes Psalm 82:6-7 as a testimony to both the gracious gift of God and the weakness of the flesh.

¹⁸⁷ The Greek text has *πράσσοντος* instead of *πλάσσοντος*. Here I am reading the text in agreement with the Latin translation which has *formante*. Cf. *Sources Chretiennes*, vol. 100, pp 954-955.

¹⁸⁸ The Greek *ἀνδρωθῆναι* better expresses Irenaeus' meaning. Its close connection to man's growth (*αὐξήσαι*) indicates that Irenaeus has man's maturity in mind, not merely his "strengthening (*corrobarari*)."

¹⁸⁹ The reference to *ἐνισχύσαι* or *convalescere* has caused some difficulty in translation. Cf. the brief discussion in Robert Brown (1975, pp. 18-20). The translator of Irenaeus in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* uses the word "recover." Thus, Irenaeus may have the recovery from sin and death in mind. However, the typical meaning of the word connotes a more general growing in strength. In this passage, Irenaeus is certainly drawing on themes from Genesis 1:28 and, like St. Paul (cf. Romans 8; Eph 4), is interpreting them in light of Christ's death, resurrection, and glorification. Thus, the strengthening of man is not so much a reference to a specific redemptive event, as it is a reference to what man becomes in Christ. Cf. Luke 3:16 where Christ is the "mighty one (*ἰσχυρός*)." Cf. also Luke 22:43 where Christ is "strengthened (*ἐνισχύω*)" through prayer in preparation for the agony of the crucifixion.

¹⁹⁰ A. D. Alés (1916) draws attention to the non-coercive character of God's salvation in Irenaeus' thought. "...la conversion de l'homme," Alés (1916, p. 205) writes, "sera le triomphe de la patience et de la raison persuasive."

¹⁹¹ Since the work of Friedrich Loofs, there has always been a tendency to ascribe to Irenaeus contradictory lines of thought. Thus, for Bousset (1970, p. 426), Irenaeus ignores the Pauline emphasis on the cross and walks in "the paths of Johannine mysticism." The incarnation trumps the crucifixion so that Irenaeus is concerned mostly with "the arrangement of natures." In a similar way, Lawson (1948, pp. 154ff) sees two sides in Irenaeus' soteriology. The "biblical element" consists in Christ's victory over the powers of evil. However, along side this biblical perspective is Irenaeus' emphasis on the divinization of man, which proceeds from Irenaeus' Hellenistic culture. All such presentations that result in the

For after his great kindness he graciously conferred good (*dedit bonum*), and made men like to himself, in their own power (*similes sibi suae potestatis homines fecit*); while at the same time by his prescience (*providentiam*) he knew the infirmity of human beings (*hominum infirmitatem*), and the consequences which would flow from it; but through his love and his power (*dilectionem et virtutem*), he shall overcome the substance of created nature (*vincet factae naturae substantiam*). For it was necessary, at first, that nature should be exhibited (*primo naturam apparere*); then, after that, that what was mortal should be conquered (*vinci*) and swallowed up (*absorbi*) by immortality, and the corruptible by incorruptibility, and that man should be made after the image and likeness of God, having received the knowledge of good and evil (*agnitione accepta boni et mali*) (AH iv, 38, 4).

For Irenaeus, salvation does not consist in the reorganization of substances,¹⁹² but in the dynamic interaction between the divine and human wills. The freedom of the human will does not threaten the freedom of God; rather, it is the will of God to make Adam like unto himself, and, therefore, a full participant in the immortality and freedom that exist naturally only in God.

The freedom of the human will means that Adam is able to effect and alter his own substantial identity. Through the gift of a self-governing will, humankind is invited to share in the creative will of God. God's freedom in relationship to the material world is reflected in the operation of the human will. One is not forced to will and act according to the spiritual or hylic substances; rather, humankind's will and actions have the power to transform the human essence. This perspective is evident in Irenaeus' interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:50. The opposition interprets Paul's use of "flesh" and "spirit" with reference to an understanding of the spiritual and hylic substances. In contrast, Irenaeus refers them to the spiritual and hylic wills and works. "...When man is grafted in by faith and receives the Spirit of God (*assumens Spiritum Dei*), he certainly does not lose the substance of flesh (*substantiam carnis non amittit*), but changes the quality of the fruit of his works (*qualitatem fructus operum immutat*), and receives another name (*aliud vocabulum*), showing that he has become changed for the better (*in melius est transmutationem*), being now not flesh and blood, but a spiritual man (*homo spiritualis existens*), and is called such" (AH v, 10, 2). The operation of the human will has the power to affect the identity of man. The power of the human will to participate in

fragmentation of Irenaeus' theology fail to consider the complex depth of Irenaeus' Christological vision. For Irenaeus, salvation is not found simply in the events of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, or ascension. Rather, all these events are united in the person of Christ. Salvation is not found in any event of Christ's life, but it is in the person of Christ who accomplished them all. In the same way, God's condescension to interact with humankind and humanity's ascension into the glory of the divine nature are merely two aspects of the same Christ. Christ is the God, who enters his creation to overthrow all the powers of evil; but he is also the man, who is exalted, perfected and deified at the right hand of the Father. Thus, while Irenaeus' Christology is diverse and complex, it remains consistent and unified.

¹⁹² Cf. Wilhelm Bousset (1970, p. 426). Bousset maintains that Irenaeus' chief concern is the "arrangement of natures."

righteousness and wickedness causes humanity to increase or decrease, to grow or degrade, to live or die.

Irenaeus' recapitulation doctrine consists, not only in Christ's assumption of the human essence, but also in his gathering of the human will into his own being. This emphasis is certainly evident in the profound connection between Adam and Christ in Irenaeus' thought.¹⁹³ His teaching of recapitulation emphasizes the relationship between Adam's disobedience and Christ's obedience. Adam and Christ share the same substance; but they fill the human substance with two opposing wills. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 15:49ff, Irenaeus writes,

When, therefore, did we bear (*portavimus*) the image of him who is of the earth? Doubtless it was when those actions spoken of as "works of the flesh" used to be wrought in us (*carnis operationes perficiebantur in nobis*). And then, again, when the image of the heavenly? Doubtless when he says, "Ye have been washed," believing in the name of the Lord, and receiving his Spirit (*accipientes ejus Spiritum*). Now we have washed away, not the substance of our body (*non substantiam corporis*), nor the image of our formation (*neque imaginem plasmatis*), but the former vain conversation (*pristinam vanitatis conversationem*).¹⁹⁴ In these members (*membris*), therefore, in which we were going to destruction by working the works of corruption (*operantes ea quae sunt corruptelae*), in these very members are we made alive (*vivificamur*) by working the works of the Spirit (*operantes ea quae sunt Spiritus*) (AH v, 11, 2).

Adam's disobedient and rebellious will brings death and decay upon the human nature. However, the very same human nature that is filled with death through Adam's disobedience is filled with life through the spiritual works of Christ. Thus, Irenaeus counters the focus on different substances with an emphasis on his concept of the energetic will.

For Irenaeus, the salvation of the human race consists, not merely in the communion of the divine and human substances in Christ, but also in the persuasion of the human will. It is for this reason that Irenaeus' recapitulation doctrine centers in Jesus' cross and passion. The incarnation, in which the divine Word assumes the human nature, sets the stage for the central drama of Christ's

¹⁹³ Concerning the relationship between Adam and Christ in Irenaeus, cf. J. T. Nielsen (1968). Nielsen sees significant differences between the Adam-Christ typologies of Irenaeus and Paul. I believe these differences are more a matter of perspective and polemical need than substantive. Paul uses Adam to emphasize the helplessness of man to save himself from sin. This supports Paul's argument against the so-called Judaizers that the Law of Moses cannot save man from the power of sin. However, Irenaeus uses the Adam-Christ typology against his opponents to emphasize man's intimate relationship to the Creator. Thus, while Paul emphasizes the contrast between the sinful will in Adam and the righteous will in Christ, Irenaeus emphasizes the continuity of substance. Neither perspective is inconsistent with the other.

¹⁹⁴ The reference to the "original vain conversation" certainly indicates that Irenaeus has the original sin of Adam and Eve in mind. The sins of all men are merely participations in that sinful operation that began in Adam's rebellious will.

battle with the devil.¹⁹⁵ “For indeed the enemy would not have been fairly vanquished (*juste victus*), unless it had been a man born of woman who conquered him (*nisi ex muliere homo esset qui vicit eum*)” (AH v, 21, 1). If God had simply destroyed the devil apart from human participation, humankind would remain in a fallen and vanquished condition. Thus, the Word becomes man, not merely to destroy the devil, but especially to perfect humanity. In other words, the chief problem for the human race is not the wrath of God, nor the power of the devil, nor a cursed creation. Rather, the rebellious will that lives in humanity is the source of God’s wrath, the devil’s power, and creation’s curse. Thus, the conflict between Christ and Satan takes place on the battleground of the human will.¹⁹⁶ This conflict is resolved precisely in Jesus’ passion.

Irenaeus highlights the significance of the human will when he expresses the Word’s redemptive work in terms of “persuasion (*suadela*).” Irenaeus introduces the persuasive work of God at the beginning of the fifth book.

And since the apostasy tyrannized over us unjustly, and, though we were by nature (*cum natura essemus*) the property of the omnipotent God, alienated us contrary to nature (*contra naturam*), rendering us its own disciples, the Word of God, powerful in all things (*potens in omnibus*), and not defective with regard to his own justice, did righteously turn against that apostasy, and redeem from it his own property (*ea quae sunt sua redimens ab ea*), not by violent means (*non cum vi*), as the apostasy had obtained dominion over us at the beginning, when it insatiably snatched away (*insatiabiliter rapiens*) what was not its own, but by means of persuasion (*secundum suadela*m) as became a God of persuasion (*Deum suadentem*), who does not use violent means (*vim*) to obtain what he desires; so that neither should justice be infringed upon, nor the ancient handiwork of God go to destruction (AH v, 1, 1).

For Irenaeus, the “persuasion” of the human will has been the objective of both the devil’s temptations and the Word’s good counsel from the beginning. The fall of the first-formed man

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Gustaf Wingren (1959, pp. 113ff). Wingren is at his best when defending Irenaeus from those interpreters, who see in Irenaeus’ work only a “physical” salvation, that is, a salvation that ignores the need for obedience. For Wingren, the incarnation and the crucifixion are inseparably bound together in Irenaeus’ thought. Thus, he (1959, p. 116) rightly notes, “It is in the man Jesus that God’s victory is to be achieved, and his humanity implies a long-drawn-out, gradual conflict.”

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Gustaf Aulen (1931, pp. 36ff). Perhaps more than any other scholar, Aulen has brought renewed interest to the idea of Christ’s cross as victory over the devil and his powers. He (1931, p. 37) writes, “The Divine victory accomplished in Christ stands in the center of Irenaeus’ thought, and forms the central element in the *recapitulatio*, the restoring and perfecting of the creation, which is his most comprehensive theological idea.” While Aulen mistakenly understands Irenaeus as one asserting that Jesus’ pays a ransom to the devil, he rightly points out that, for Irenaeus, Jesus’ victory consists precisely in his obedience. He (1931, pp. 45-46) writes, “Irenaeus is altogether free from the tendency, which has shown itself at times in later theology, to emphasize the death of Christ in such a way as to leave almost out of sight the rest of his earthly life. It is remarkable what great weight he attaches to the obedience of Christ throughout his life on earth. He shows how the disobedience of the one man, which inaugurated the reign of sin, is answered by the obedience of the one man who brought life. By his obedience Christ ‘recapitulated’ and annulled the disobedience. The obedience is the means of his triumph.” It is worth adding that, for Irenaeus, obedience is not merely the means of his victory over the devil, but also the means by which he perfects humanity in the image and likeness of God.

consists precisely in his voluntary submission to the devil's persuasive lies.¹⁹⁷ Thus, the Word's recapitulating work entails his assumption of the human nature in order to enter the battle with the devil's temptations. "He (the Lord) has therefore, in his work of recapitulation, summed up all things (*omnia ergo recapitulans, recapitulatus est*), both waging war (*bellum provocans*) against our enemy, and crushing (*elidens*) him who had at the beginning led us away captives in Adam (*in Adam captives duxerat nos*)..." (AH v, 21, 1).

The battle between Christ and the devil naturally leads Irenaeus to consider Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Throughout his interpretation of Jesus' temptation, Irenaeus claims that the devil's "persuasive" power is overcome by the power of God's word as contained in the ancient Law and the voluntary obedience of Jesus. The obedience of Christ consists in his willingness to be weak, that is, to freely subject himself to the will of the Creator.¹⁹⁸ This voluntary weakness of Jesus accomplishes victories on two fronts. First, it invites the devil's attack and exposes his wickedness.¹⁹⁹ When he attacks Jesus, the devil's true character is exposed and he is justly bound by God's condemnation of his rebellion. Second, the obedient weakness of Jesus reveals humanity's proper relationship to God. Thus, Irenaeus concludes his interpretation of Jesus' temptation, saying, "that men might learn by actual proof that he receives incorruptibility not of himself, but by the free gift of God (*non a semetipso sed ex donatione Dei accipit incorruptelam*)" (AH v, 21, 3). The human creature's victory over the devil necessitates both his experience of human weakness and his participation in God's creative power.

The communion of God's life-giving power and humankind's voluntary weakness is manifested fully in the cross. For Irenaeus, the cross is not primarily about the propitiation of God's

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Gustaf Aulen (1931, pp. 32ff); and Hastings Rashdall (1919, pp. 241-248). Both Aulen and Rashdall interpret Irenaeus in line with later patristic theories that understand the cross in terms of a transaction between God and the devil. Aulen interprets the language of "persuasion" as a reference to a ransom paid to the devil (Cf. also Sydney Cave (1937, pp. 104f), who agrees with Aulen's interpretation). Aulen (1931, p. 44) writes, "Behind the somewhat obscure language about 'persuasion' (*secundum suadelem*) lies the thought that Christ gave himself as a ransom paid to the devil for man's deliverance." Both Aulen and Rashdall tend to read into Irenaeus an atonement theory that focuses more on the devil than on humanity. For Irenaeus, salvation does not consist primarily in a victory over the devil, but in the turning of the human will back toward God. Thus, Irenaeus' references to "persuasion" are not an expression of God's dealing with the devil, but of God's counsel toward mankind through his Word. The disobedient will of Adam is redeemed through the obedient will of Jesus. Cf. AH v, 21, 2ff. Here Irenaeus uses "persuasion (*suasit*)" to describe the devil's manipulation of mankind through his temptations. Cf. also AH iv, 37, 1 where *vis* is used of the coercion of man's will.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. AH v, 21, 2 where Irenaeus ascribes victory to the fact that Jesus "confessed his own humanity (*eum hominis confessione*)."

¹⁹⁹ Cf. AH v, 21, 2. Irenaeus says that Jesus fasts so that the devil "might have an opportunity of attacking him (*ut haberet adversarius ubi congregaretur*)."

wrath or the destruction of the devil's power. Rather, the cross consists primarily in human obedience.²⁰⁰ "For doing away (*dissolvens*) with that disobedience of man which had taken place at the beginning by the occasion of a tree (*ab initio in ligno facta fuerat hominis inobaudientiam*), 'He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; healing (*sanans; ἰώμενος*)²⁰¹ that disobedience which had occurred by reason of a tree, through that obedience which was upon the tree" (AH v, 16, 3). On the cross, humanity is filled with a new will. The disobedient will of Adam is recapitulated by Christ and made subject to the Creator.

For by recapitulating in himself the whole human race from the beginning to the end (*recapitulans enim universum hominem in se ab initio usque ad finem*), he has also recapitulated its death (*recapitulates est et mortem ejus*). From thus it is clear that the Lord suffered death, in obedience to his Father (*obaudiens Patri*), upon that day (*in illa die*) on which Adam died while he disobeyed God. Now he died on the same day in which he did eat. For God said, "In that day on which you shall eat of it, you shall die by death." The Lord, therefore, recapitulating in himself this day (*Hunc itaque diem recapitulans in semetipsum*), underwent his sufferings upon the day preceding the Sabbath (*pridie ante sabbatum*), that is, the sixth day of creation (*sexta conditionis dies*), on which day man was created; thus granting (*donans*) him a second creation (*secundam plasmationem*) by means of his passion, which is that creation out of death (*quae est a morte*) (AH v, 23, 2).

In this passage, Irenaeus' concept of recapitulation entails, not only the idea of repetition or perfection, but also the idea of transformation.²⁰² Jesus' recapitulation of Adam's death on the sixth day transforms its significance. Adam's death is the consequence of his disobedience, but Jesus' death is the perfect subjection to his Father's will. Through Jesus' recapitulating work, the sixth day is no longer the day of condemnation, but the day of a "second creation (*secundum plasmationem*)."

²⁰⁰ Cf. Andrew Bandstra (1970, pp. 43-63). Bandstra is somewhat typical of how scholars interpret Irenaeus' understanding of the atonement. He (1970, p. 47) writes, "There appear to be three distinguishable but related motifs in Irenaeus' doctrine of the atonement: (1) victory over sin, death, and Satan; (2) renewal unto life and immortality; and (3) a propitiatory and vicarious sacrifice for sin." Unfortunately, Bandstra treats these three "motifs" separately and independently. It is my argument that, for Irenaeus, these different aspects of Christ's redemption are merely different perspectives of the same reality. Irenaeus' understanding of Christ's redemption centers in the restoration and perfection of humanity through his incarnation, obedient death, resurrection and ascension. In relationship to the devil, Jesus' humanity is victorious; in relationship to the Father, Jesus' humanity is the acceptable sacrifice; in relationship to creation, Jesus' humanity is the restoration and perfection of the Creator's will. All three aspects arise from the perfection of humanity through Jesus' obedience. On the cross, Jesus is the true man.

²⁰¹ The translator of Irenaeus in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* shows his bias when he translates the word, "*sanans; ἰώμενος*," with "rectifying." The legalistic rectification of man's disobedience is not Irenaeus' point. Rather, Jesus' obedience heals or cures (*sanans*) Adam's disobedient humanity. The perfection of humanity in Jesus is Irenaeus' prevailing emphasis.

²⁰² Cf. Christopher Smith (1994, pp. 313-331). In this interesting article, Smith points out that Irenaeus' recapitulation doctrine moves, not only from beginning to end, but also from end to beginning. He (1994, p. 323) writes, "The point of recapitulation is thus not so much that salvation is the reestablishment of originally existing conditions, but rather the harmony of salvation, understood as a continuous work whose end, far from being merely patterned on the beginning, may rather reveal previously unspecified features which one may then deduce to have been present at the start." For Irenaeus, the recapitulation doctrine is not merely a repetition or even perfection of the beginning, but also an illumination of the beginning. Indeed, Christ's work in the end actually transforms the meaning of what took place in the beginning. In Adam, death is the consequence of sin; but through Christ's cross and resurrection, death is the beginning of a new creation.

In other words, Jesus' death and resurrection unite the power of God's creative will with humanity's voluntary and obedient weakness. This communion of the divine and human wills in Christ transforms humanity filling it with a righteous will and the divine power of immortality.

For Irenaeus, Christ's recapitulation of man overcomes both the substantial boundary as he unites the spiritual and hyllic substances and the energetic boundary as he unites the life-giving power of the divine will and the obedient weakness of the human will. In this way, Irenaeus' perspective of the human creature's deification is neither theocentric nor anthropocentric. Rather, the almighty power of the Creator and the voluntary obedience of man are simply aspects of one and the same Christ. Jesus is the Creator whose life-giving power and righteous will are manifested in creation and throughout the scriptures. Furthermore, Jesus is also the perfect man whose obedience fills humanity with a new will. Thus, Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation expresses his multidimensional Christology. In Christ, there is the vertical union of the divine and human substances and the horizontal union of the beginning and the end. The Creator's will that creates all things *ex nihilo* in the beginning is united with the perfect obedience and voluntary weakness of the human will in the end. This Christological synergy overcomes sin, death, and the power of the devil and reorders God's relationship with the cosmos through the mediation of a flesh and blood man.

C. Recapitulation and Human Authority

Irenaeus uses the doctrine of recapitulation to express his Christology and to describe the multifaceted meaning of Jesus' person and work. From the theological perspective, recapitulation consists in God's real incarnation in which he graciously condescends to interact with his creature. From the anthropological perspective, recapitulation describes a real deification in which humanity truly participates in the divine life and character. However, Irenaeus' recapitulation doctrine entails another dimension that is often ignored—the cosmological.²⁰³ God's recapitulation in himself of his

²⁰³ Cf. A. Harnack (1961, pp. 262ff). Harnack places Irenaeus' Christology between the apologists, who are primarily concerned with the Logos' place in the cosmos, and the Valentinians and Marcionites, who are only concerned with the soteriological function of gnosis. He (1961, p. 263) writes, "In a certain sense then the Christology of Irenaeus occupies a middle position between the Christology of the Valentinians and Marcion on the one hand and the Logos doctrine of the Apologists on the other. The Apologists have a cosmological interest, Marcion only a soteriological, whereas Irenaeus has both; the Apologists base their speculations on the Old Testament, Marcion on a New Testament, Irenaeus on both Old and New." Many scholars being so focused with Irenaeus' anthropology miss the cosmology essential to his doctrine of

human formation, not only restores and perfects humanity, but also reorders God's relationship to the world. In this regard, recapitulation, not only bears an ontological aspect referring to the Logos' work of gathering humanity into himself, but also a hierarchical aspect describing Christ as the "head (*caput; κεφαλή*)" of all things.²⁰⁴ As Irenaeus writes,

... The Word being made man, thus summing up all things in himself (*universa in semetipsum recapitulans*), so that as in super-celestial, spiritual, and invisible things, the Word of God is supreme (*princeps est Verbum Dei*), so also in things visible and corporeal, he might possess the supremacy (*principatum habeat*), and taking to himself the pre-eminence (*primatum assumens*), as well as constituting himself head of the church (*caput Ecclesiae*), he might draw all things to himself at the proper time (AH iii, 16, 6).

The ontological union between God and man in Christ has cosmological consequences. The Logos' recapitulation of all things makes him "head" of the church and "pre-eminent" over all things. For Irenaeus, God does not merely seek the redemption of humanity, but also the restoration and perfection of the universe.

For Irenaeus, Christ's recapitulating work consists in the restoration of humankind's place in the divine governance of the world. Jesus is the "mediator,"²⁰⁵ through whom God's relationship to the cosmos is ordered. However, Irenaeus' understanding of Jesus' mediation between God and the world is quite different from the mediation described by his opponents or the apologists. In the Valentinian system, the connection between the spiritual and physical worlds is mediated by a succession of aeons. This succession of aeons accomplishes two important purposes. It allows some connection between the spiritual and hylic worlds; yet, it also preserves the purity and integrity of the spiritual essence at its source in the supreme Father. Thus, the relationship between the spiritual and hylic realms is mediated by lesser gods, who function as buffers protecting the purity of the divine substance. The Valentinian concern to protect the integrity of the divine essence is also present to a lesser degree in some of the apologists. The Logos is defined as the mediator between God and the

recapitulation. For Irenaeus, God is not merely concerned with the salvation of humankind; rather, the salvation of man consists in the restoration of man's place in the divine governance of creation.

²⁰⁴ Cf. L. S. Thornton (1950, pp. 134ff). Thornton insightfully recognizes this hierarchical aspect of Irenaeus' recapitulation doctrine. He (1950, p. 138) writes, "'Recapitulation' is a word which seems capable of several shades of meaning according to the precise context of thought in which it is used. Fundamentally it means that in the divine plan creation is to be 'summed up' representatively in Christ its true head, so that its whole wealth of significance is brought to fulfillment in him. In this function of headship our Lord fulfills the part assigned to Adam in the story of Genesis. That is to say, as the redeemer Christ fulfills that universal high-priestly ministry, towards and on behalf of the world of creatures, which is the proper function of our human nature."

²⁰⁵ Cf. AH iii, 18, 7. Here Irenaeus gives Christ the title of "τὸν μεσίτην (*Mediatorem*)."

world. However, the apologists' philosophical concern to protect the integrity of the divine nature leads them to speak in ways that tend to compromise the Logos' full divinity. Thus, Justin Martyr describes the Logos as a "second god" or as one "numerically distinct."²⁰⁶ The apologists want both to maintain God's real and authentic revelation upon the earth and to protect the philosophical integrity of the divine nature.²⁰⁷ The apologists' balance is sacrificed by Valentinus and his followers whose anti-cosmic perspective leads to the establishment of an absolute and eternal boundary between the spiritual and material worlds.

For Irenaeus, what is a theological weakness in the apologists has become heresy in his opponents. Both the apologists and the Valentinians maintain that the mediation between God and the world proceeds from the divine side. The Logos of the apologists is subordinate to the Father, if not according to essence, then certainly according to function. Similarly, the aeons of the Pleroma are lesser gods who make the connection between the spiritual and hylic substances less repulsive. For Irenaeus, the mediation between God and the world is not accomplished strictly from the divine world, but primarily in the created world. God intends the human creature to be the head of creation and the one through whom his governance of the world commences. God creates humanity as the union of body and soul to be capable of both a material and a spiritual life. Thus, for Irenaeus, it is not the Logos, as strictly a divine being, who is the mediator between God and the world. Rather, the incarnate Logos, who unites the fullness of God and the fullness of man in his own being, accomplishes and perfects the mediation between God and the world.

Irenaeus' concern, contrary to his opponents and the apologists, is not to protect the philosophical integrity of the divine essence, but to establish the most intimate communication

²⁰⁶ Cf. for instance, Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 128-129.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Maurice Wiles (1966, pp. 24ff). Wiles maintains that the "Logos" terminology was very attractive to the apologists because it allowed them to protect the philosophical integrity of the divine nature and to assert God's real interaction with the world. Since the word, "Logos," could be used to refer both to God's internal reason and to his external word, this terminology seemed especially suited to the apologetic task. Wiles (1966, pp. 27-28) writes, "When one speaks, as one does have to speak, of God and his Logos as distinct from one another, one should remember that it is of God and his expressed Logos, his outgoing word, that one is speaking. And that Logos is also the inherent Logos, the internal Reason of God. They are not two different Logoi; the only difference is a difference of condition. God was never without his Reason and so the inherent Logos has always been with God and can be no more separated from him than a man's reason can be separated from man himself. When the Logos goes out from God for the work of creation and revelation, there is no question of a new being coming into existence; it is the same Logos in a new guise."

between God and his creation.²⁰⁸ This concern is certainly evident in Irenaeus' consistent assertion that God needs no mediators between himself and the material world. In contrast to "needy human beings (*hominibus inopibus*)," who require instruments to accomplish their will, "God stands in need of nothing (*nullius indigens omnium Deus*)" (AH ii, 2, 4). The Logos is not a subordinate instrument external to the Father that protects the Father from a weak, changeable, and transitory world. Rather, Irenaeus describes the Logos' agency in creation, saying, "God himself in himself (*ipse in semetipso*), after a fashion which we can neither describe or conceive, predestinating all things, formed them as he pleased (*fecit quemadmodum voluit*)..." (AH ii, 2, 4). The Word's creation of all things *ex nihilo* testifies to the immediate connection between God and his creation and establishes the foundation for his intimate interaction with the world unto the end.²⁰⁹

Irenaeus appeals to the Creator's immediate relationship to creation in the fourth book of his *Adversus Haereses*. Against the opposition's assertion of a substantial barrier separating the spiritual and hylic worlds, Irenaeus confesses the God who "contains all things." In the course of his argument, Irenaeus reasserts the immediate relationship between God and his creatures.

It was not angels, therefore, who made us, nor who formed us, neither had angels power (*poterant*) to make an image of God, nor any one else, except the Word of the Lord, nor any power remotely distant from the Father of all things (*neque virtus longe absistens a Patre universorum*). For God did not stand in need (*indigebat*) of these beings, in order to the accomplishing of what he had himself determined with himself beforehand should be done, as if he did not possess his own hands (*quasi ipse suas non haberet manus*). For with him were always present (*adest ei semper*) the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom (*per quos et in quibus*), freely and spontaneously (*libere et sponte*), he made all things, to whom also he speaks, saying, "Let us make man after our own image and likeness;" he taking from himself the substance of the creatures formed (*ipse a semetipso substantiam creaturarum*), and the pattern (*exemplum*) of things made, and the type (*figuram*) of all the adornments in the world (AH iv, 20, 1).

²⁰⁸ Cf. Gustaf Aulen (1931, p. 37). Aulen writes, "Naturally, therefore, we find him (Irenaeus) avoiding every such form of expression as would tend to make a separation between the Father and the Son, by treating Christ as some sort of intermediary being. So for instance, the Apologists sometimes speak of him as *δευτερος Θεός*, a second God; and a tendency to use such phrases creeps in wherever the doctrine of the Logos is interpreted in the light of contemporary Greek philosophy. But the attitude of Irenaeus—who here represents the main line of patristic thought—expresses a determined opposition to this philosophical influence, just because the point of crucial importance with him is that it is God himself, and not any intermediary, who in Christ accomplishes the work of redemption, and overcomes sin, death, and the devil. When he uses the term Logos, it is in the Johannine sense: 'The Word is God himself'; he never interprets the Logos as a being separate from God...."

²⁰⁹ Cf. J. N. D. Kelly (1959, pp. 145ff). Kelly notes the different Logos doctrines of Justin and Irenaeus. He (1959, p. 148) writes, "The difference between them is that, while Justin accentuates the distinction between the Logos and the Father, even calling the former a 'second God', for Irenaeus (here he is akin to Ignatius) he is the form in which the Godhead manifests itself." Justin's desire to protect God's transcendent character stands in contrast to Irenaeus' desire to assert the real, immediate interaction between God and his creation.

Following his assertion of God's intimate and immediate relationship to creation, Irenaeus appeals to the incarnate Logos and his mediating work. Irenaeus writes,

...even as the Word of God had the sovereignty in the heavens (*in caelis principatum habuit*), so also might he have the sovereignty in earth (*sic et in terra haberet principatum*), inasmuch as he was a righteous man (*homo justus*)²¹⁰ And that he might have the preeminence over those things which are under the earth (*principatum habeat eorum quae sunt sub terra*), he himself being made 'the first-begotten of the dead;' and that all things, as I have already said, might behold their King (*Regem*); and that the paternal light might meet with and rest upon the flesh of our Lord, and come to us from his resplendent flesh (*a carne ejus rutila veniat in nos*), and that thus man might attain to immortality, having been invested (*circumdatus*) with the paternal light (AH iv, 20, 2).

God's intimate communion with the world is fulfilled and perfected in the incarnate Logos. For Irenaeus, Christ is not a mediator, who is external to God and creation and acts as a boundary preserving their independent existences.²¹¹ Rather, the incarnation means that Christ relates internally to both God and man so that within his own person the intimate and immediate relationship between the Creator and his creature is perfected. The energetic immediacy of God's relationship to the world already present in creation is fulfilled in the personal communion present in Jesus.

Irenaeus refuses to ascribe the mediation between God and the world either to lesser gods or to greater created beings, who act as external boundaries protecting the integrity of the divine nature from weak and changeable creatures. Christ is the mediator through whom the relationship between God and his creation is ordered; and his mediation consists precisely in the real and essential communion between divinity and humanity in his person. In the incarnate Logos, nothing stands between God and his formation.²¹² For Irenaeus, Christ's humanity is just as essential to his mediating work as his divinity. The Logos is not a lesser god; nor is Jesus a supernatural man. Rather, the incarnate Logos brings the fullness of the Divine being into an immediate and intimate

²¹⁰ It is significant that Christ's reign on the earth is ascribed precisely to his humanity. Cf. AH iii, 16, 6.

²¹¹ Cf. Nathanael Bonwetsch (1925, pp. 57ff). Bonwetsch considers how Irenaeus relates the Logos to the Father. He (1925, p. 60) concludes that Irenaeus refuses to treat the Logos as a "selbständiges Mittelwesen."

²¹² Cf. R. A. Norris (1966, p. 88). Norris demonstrates that Irenaeus' understanding of the Logos moves beyond the apologists' precisely in relating the Logos to creation. He writes, "Although he uses the language of the Logos theology as he had inherited it, Irenaeus attempts to overcome certain of the weaknesses which his opposition to Gnosticism compelled him to see in it. He tries to make of the Logos not a buffer between the ingenerate God and the generate world, but the presence with the world of the Godhead itself." However, Irenaeus' consideration of the Logos relationship to creation is not the result of a philosophical choice, but a consequence of his Christology. For Irenaeus, the Logos is, first of all, the incarnate Son. The incarnation requires a perspective in which the God's relationship to creation is more intimate and genuine.

interaction with the fullness of the human nature. Thus, in Christ, the status of humanity within the structure of God's governance of the cosmos is restored.

The human creature's authoritative place in the economy of God's relationship to the world is the focus of Jesus' conflict with the devil. Through the devil's "persuasion" and the rebellion of the human will, Adam and his offspring become the devil's mediators upon the earth.²¹³ For Irenaeus, sin consists, not merely in the legal transgression of the law, but in the creation of a new world. Adam's sin allows a foreign hierarchy to establish itself within God's creation.²¹⁴ Adam and his offspring voluntarily become the instrument through whom the devil's will is performed upon the earth.²¹⁵ This perspective is evident in Irenaeus' repeated references to the heretics as "agents of Satan (*organa Satanae*)."²¹⁶ It is also evident in his description of the antichrist.

For he (antichrist) being endued with all the power of the devil (*diaboli virtutem*), shall come, not as a righteous king, nor as a legitimate king, one in subjection to God, but as an impious, unjust, and lawless one; as an apostate, iniquitous and murderous; as a robber, recapitulating in himself the satanic apostasy (*diabolicam apostasiam in se recapitulans*), and setting aside idols to persuade (*suadendum*) men that he himself is God, raising up himself as the only idol (*unum idolum*), having in himself the multifarious errors of the other idols (*habens in semetipso reliquorum idolorum varium errorem*). This he does, in order that they, who worship the devil (*adorant diabolum*) by means of many abominations (*per multas abominaciones*), may serve him by this one idol (*per hoc unum idolum serviant ipsi*)... (AH v, 25, 1).

In this passage, Irenaeus uses the recapitulation language to describe the mediating work of the antichrist. In him, the devil's power is gathered and presented with full force before the world. The

²¹³ Cf. D. R. Schultz (1978, pp. 161-190). Schultz presents an interesting comparison of Irenaeus and some Jewish pseudepigraphical literature. He shows numerous linguistic connections that suggest Irenaeus' knowledge of these literary works. However, Schultz makes too much of the difference in Irenaeus between passages that ascribe sin to Adam and other passages that ascribe the origin of sin to the devil. For Irenaeus, man is the mediator between the spiritual and the material. Thus, it is no problem for him to ascribe the origin of sin to the devil and, likewise, maintain that man remains responsible for sin's presence upon the earth. Therefore, Irenaeus' view of sin is not dictated by his sources, but by his anthropology and, especially, his Christology. Christ's place as mediator between God and creation shapes Irenaeus' interpretation of Adam's place in the cosmos and the significance of his sin.

²¹⁴ Most scholars maintain that, for Irenaeus, the fall of man was not especially tragic or disastrous. Cf. Norman Powell Williams (1917, pp. 195). Williams points out that "Irenaeus does not attach a very high degree of guilt or culpability to the 'Fall'. Williams goes so far as to suggest that Irenaeus' understanding of man's fall into sin could be called a "Fall upwards." It is true that, for Irenaeus, the disaster of the fall does not consist in the seriousness of the original transgression as an act in itself; nor does it consist in an eternal guilt that must be assuaged by an eternal restitution. For Irenaeus, the tragedy of the fall is not strictly anthropological, but cosmological. The sin of Adam is disastrous because it allows Satan to establish a kingdom upon the earth. Cf. AH iii, 23; v, 21 where man's sin is not defined primarily as guilt before God, but as a captivity to the power of the devil. Thus, Christ's victory liberates man and restores man's position of authority. In Christ, the devil is forced to submit to the power of man.

²¹⁵ Cf. AH iii, 8, 2. Interpreting Matthew 12:29, Irenaeus writes, "Now we were the vessels (*vasa ejus*) and the house of this same strong man when we were in a state of apostasy (*in apostasia*); for he put us to whatever use he pleased (*utebatur nobis quemadmodum volebat*), and the unclean spirit dwelt within us."

²¹⁶ Cf. for instance AH v, 26, 2; iii, 16, 1

antichrist is the “one idol (*unum idolum*)” that unites all idols and, in this way, establishes himself as the mediator through whom the worship of the devil is ordered.

Thus, Jesus’ work of recapitulation consists, not merely in the redemption and perfection of human nature, but also in the restoration of humanity’s place in God’s governance of the world. The Logos becomes flesh for the purpose of joining humankind’s conflict with the devil and his antichrist. If humanity’s place in the cosmos is to be restored, then he must voluntarily reject the evil and choose the good. It is precisely Jesus’ voluntary obedience that overcomes the devil and reorders the economy of God’s relation to the world through his own flesh and blood.

Just as if any one, being an apostate, and seizing in a hostile manner (*hostiliter capiens*) another man’s territory, should harass the inhabitants of it, in order that he might claim for himself the glory of a king (*Regis gloriam sibi*) among those ignorant of his apostasy and robbery; so likewise also the devil, being one among those angels who are placed over the spirit of the air, as the Apostle Paul has declared in his epistle to the Ephesians, becoming envious of man (*invidens homini*), was rendered an apostate from the divine Law (*a divina factus est lege*): for envy is a thing foreign to God. And as his apostasy was exposed by man (*per hominem traducta est*²¹⁷ *apostasia ejus*), and man became the means of searching out his thoughts (*examinatio sententiae ejus homo factus est*), he has set himself to this with greater and greater determination, in opposition to man (*contrarium homini*), envying his life (*invidens vitae ejus*), and wishing to involve him in his own apostate power (*in sua potestate apostatica volens concludere eum*). The Word of God, however, the Maker of all things, conquering him by means of human nature (*per hominem vincens eum*), and showing him to be an apostate, has, on the contrary, put him under the power of man (*subjecit eum homini*). For he says, “Behold, I confer upon you the power of treading upon serpents and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy,” in order that, as he obtained dominion (*dominatus*) over man by apostasy, so again his apostasy might be deprived of power (*evacuetur*) by means of man turning back again to God (*per hominem recurrentem ad Deum*) (AH v, 24, 4).

In Christ, the intended order of the universe is restored and perfected as the devil is forced to submit, not merely to the power of God, but to the authority of a man. Here the fullness of Irenaeus’ doctrine of recapitulation is perceived. His doctrine of recapitulation is not merely a matter of theology or anthropology, but also a matter of cosmology. In Christ, humanity ceases to be a slave and takes its rightful place as “head (*caput*)” of all creation.

IV. Recapitulation and the Church

A. Christ as the Head of Humanity

²¹⁷ Irenaeus places special importance on evil’s “exposure (*traduco*).” Cf. AH v, 21, 2-3 where, in the account of Jesus’ temptation, he gains the victory by exposing the devil’s hidden Lawlessness. In addition, cf. AH iii, 23, 4; iv, 18, 3 where Cain’s wicked heart is manifested through his sinful actions. For Irenaeus, this exposure of evil is a strategy he seeks to use against his adversaries (cf. AH i, praef; iii, praef.).

For Irenaeus, Christ's status as mediator between God and the world involves more than the essential communion of the divine and human natures. Perhaps more importantly, Christ's mediation involves the profound interaction of the divine and human wills. Both the divine power that creates all things *ex nihilo* and the human will that voluntarily submits to God reside in the person of Jesus. The perfect synergism between the almighty power of the Creator and the voluntary weakness of his human creature conquers the devil, places humanity in proper relationship to God, and makes him head over all things. Irenaeus' emphasis on the freedom of the human will and its place in the salvation accomplished in Christ makes it tempting to ascribe to Irenaeus the perspective of Pelagius. However, such a characterization fails to consider the depth of Irenaeus' Christological perspective. Pelagius' theological perspective proceeds from the origin of all things in God's creative will. This viewpoint leads Pelagius to consider the human will as it exists in the individual apart from Christ. Thus, he emphasizes that the full capacity of human nature to refrain from sin already resides in Adam and of necessity in all his offspring. This perspective allows Pelagius to distinguish between the gift of a free will, which comes from God and is inherent in the very nature of humanity, and the use or execution of that will, which is strictly personal.²¹⁸ In this way, sin affects the individual person, but not the universal nature.

Contrary to Pelagius, Irenaeus' emphasis on the importance of the human will does not arise from a philosophical anthropology, but from his Christology. For Irenaeus, the righteousness and perfection of the human will are not to be ascribed to Adam, but to Christ.²¹⁹ At its origin in Adam, humanity resides in an infantile condition.

If, however, any one say, "What then? Could not God have exhibited man as perfect (*perfectum; τέλειον*) from the beginning?" Let him know that, inasmuch as God is indeed always the same and unbegotten (*τῷ μὲν Θεῷ ἀεὶ κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ ὄντι καὶ ἀγενήτῳ ὑπάρχοντι*) as respects himself, all things are possible to him (*πάντα δυνατά*). But created things must be inferior to him who created them, from the very fact of their later origin; for it was not possible for things recently created to have been uncreated. But inasmuch as they are not uncreated, for this very reason do they come short of the perfect (*ὑστερεῖται τοῦ τελείου*).

²¹⁸ Cf. Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* 53ff.

²¹⁹ Cf. John Behr (2000, p. 57). Behr perceptively sums up Irenaeus' anthropology, saying, "Thus, the truth of man is eschatological, not protological..." Later, Behr (2000, pp. 62-63) expresses the same truth. He writes, "Jesus Christ, not Adam, is the first manifestation in history of the true, fully human being; thus, whereas man in Adam was inexperienced, weak, and so from the beginning, easily led into apostasy, the man Christ, being strong, conquered the enemy by remaining obedient." Cf. also M. Steenberg (2009, p. 16-54).

Because, as these things are of later date, so are they infantile (*νήπια*); so are they unaccustomed to (*ἀσυνήθη*), and unexercised in (*ἀγύμναστα*), perfect discipline (*τὴν τελειαν ἀγωγὴν*) (AH iv, 38, 1).

Adam's infancy is not a comment on his physical appearance, but a description of his spiritual status.

While the human race possesses a free will from the beginning, the human will, along with the human essence, is malleable and in need of growth. In the beginning, Adam possesses a childlike innocence, but he is not, thereby, fully righteous. Righteousness requires the knowledge of good and evil and the strength to choose the good and reject the evil. Thus, Irenaeus concludes his discussion of humankind's infantile condition with a reference to the human will and the need for a growth in knowledge.

For after his great kindness he graciously conferred good upon us (*dedit bonum*), and made men like to himself in their own power (*suae potestatis*); while at the same time by his prescience (*providentiam*) he knew the infirmity of human beings (*hominum infirmitatem*), and the consequences which would flow from it (*quae ventura essent ex ea*); but through his love and his power (*secundum dilectionem et virtutem*), he shall overcome the substance of created nature (*vincet factae naturae substantiam*). For it was necessary, at first, that nature should be exhibited (*apparere*); then, after that, that what was mortal should be conquered and swallowed up (*vinci et absorbi*) by immortality, and the corruptible by incorruptibility, and that man should be made after the image and likeness of God, having received the knowledge of good and evil (*agnitione accepta boni et mali*) (AH iv, 38, 4).

For the bishop of Lyons, true righteousness awaits the maturity of humanity, which is realized perfectly in Jesus.²²⁰ It is the power of Jesus' human will and its role in the salvation of the world that leads Irenaeus to assert its infantile presence in Adam and his offspring.

In addition, while Pelagius' perspective allows him to ascribe sin and its effects merely to the individual person,²²¹ Irenaeus sees both the presence and use of the human will as belonging to human

²²⁰ Cf. Robert Brown (1975, pp. 17-25). Brown interprets Irenaeus' comments on the infantile condition of Adam as an interesting alternative to the "Pauline-Augustinian" anthropology. For Brown, Irenaeus begins with the "necessary imperfection" of Adam in the beginning to explain sin and provide the philosophical foundation for his theory of salvation. Brown's article distorts Irenaeus' perspective in two ways. First, Adam's infantile condition is not a result of philosophical speculation, but a consequence of his Christology. Irenaeus begins with the end and, from this eschatological perspective, interprets the beginning. For Irenaeus, perfection is strictly a Christological reality. Thus, Adam's lack of perfection is not a comment of his protological ontology as much as it is an observation based on the comparison of Adam to Christ. Adam was created in the image of God, but Christ is the image of God in which Adam has his beginning. Second, Irenaeus does not ascribe imperfection to an "ontological deficiency." Brown fails to see the central importance of the human will in Irenaeus' thought. The perfection of man is not accomplished by adding or completing his human substance, but by a growth in the righteous will. Thus, Brown does not consider that in AH iv, 38 Irenaeus defines Adam's infantile condition as being "unexercised in perfect discipline."

²²¹ The Pelagian emphasis on the free will arises from a desire to protect the integrity man's nature. This desire is expressed in the propositions of Coelestius as recorded by Augustine. In one Coelestius asks "whether sin comes from will, or from necessity?" In another, he questions whether sin is "natural or accidental?" In yet another, he asks whether sin is "an act or a thing?" Cf. Augustine, *On Man's Perfection in Righteousness 2*. By establishing sin as accidental to the nature of man and as an act of the will, the Pelagian teachers hope to make sin a personal reality instead of a plague that afflicts all humanity. For Irenaeus, the will of man is inseparable from his essence; indeed, the will of man has the power to alter man's

nature as a whole. Pelagius asserts the freedom of the will to liberate the individual from the sin of Adam and the need for divine grace. In contrast, Irenaeus' emphasis on the human will must be interpreted in connection with the corporate character of his anthropology and Christology. Irenaeus does not conceive of the human nature as an abstract idea that transcends the concrete existence of flesh and blood persons. Rather, the whole of humanity is present personally in Adam and in Christ. Thus, an individual's humanity does not derive independently from a transcendent idea of what is human; instead, one's humanity springs from the concrete humanity present in Adam's own person.²²² The whole human race is considered as a single body whose head is the first-formed man.

Irenaeus' corporate anthropology is already evident in the third book of his *Adversus Haereses*. Beginning with chapter 16, Irenaeus presents his doctrine of Christ with an emphasis on Jesus' recapitulating work. In the course of his argument, Irenaeus certainly highlights the Logos' essential union with humanity. "God recapitulated in himself the ancient formation of man (*hominis antiquam plasmationem*)..." (AH iii, 18, 7). However, with this language, Irenaeus does not simply mean that the Logos assumed a human nature, that is, an individual example of the human species. Rather, he means that the Logos assumed the whole of humanity from beginning to end. This is implied in his reference to God's recapitulation of the "ancient formation of man." The Logos did not merely assume a human body, but precisely that "ancient (*antiquam*)" humanity formed in the beginning by the hands of God from which all have descended. Irenaeus writes, "Wherefore Luke points out that the pedigree (*genealogiam*) which traces the generation of our Lord back to Adam contains seventy-two generations, connecting the end with the beginning (*finem conjunges initio*) and implying that it is he who has summed up in himself all nations dispersed from Adam downwards (*omnes gentes exinde ab Adam dispersas*), and all languages and generations of men (*universas linguas et generationem hominum*), together with Adam himself" (AH iii, 22, 3). For Irenaeus, Christ is not merely an individual of the human race who saved a single human body in his person; rather,

substance. Thus, while sin is certainly ascribed to the will of Adam, nevertheless that sin affects and alters the universal nature of man.

²²² Cf. J. N. D. Kelly (1959, p. 172). Kelly describes Irenaeus' corporate anthropology as a "mystical solidarity, or rather identity, between the father of the race and all his descendents." Cf. also Emile Mersch (1938, p. 232). The corporate character of Irenaeus' Christology leads Mersch to suggest that the doctrine of the "mystical body...constitutes the center of the theology of St. Irenaeus." A corporate anthropology certainly is essential to Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation. However, the word, "mystical," may not do justice to the realism present in Irenaeus' thought.

Christ recapitulates the whole of humanity in his own person establishing himself as the head of a redeemed humanity.

For Irenaeus, Adam and Christ are not two independent individuals of the human race; they are essentially united so that the very same humanity created in Adam is recapitulated in Christ. Thus, in Christ, Adam's own humanity is redeemed and, with him, the whole human race.²²³ It is for this reason that those who deny Adam's salvation become the objects of Irenaeus' scorn. "All therefore speak falsely who disallow Adam's salvation (*qui contradicunt ejus saluti*), shutting themselves out from life forever (*semper seipsos excludentes a vita*), in that they do not believe that the sheep which had perished has been found. For if it has not been found, the whole human race (*omnis hominis generatio*) is still held in a state of perdition." (AH iii, 23, 8). Adam is the head of the human race possessing the whole of humanity in his own person. It is precisely the universality of the human nature concretely present in Adam that Christ finds in the midst of death and raises to new life.

Irenaeus' corporate anthropology is the context in which his understanding of the human will must be interpreted.²²⁴ Pelagius asserts the freedom of the will in order to liberate individuals from the effects of Adam's sin. Thus, for Pelagius, the human will is strictly personal. Each individual possesses his or her own independent will, in which resides the power of wickedness or righteousness regardless of one's substantial connection to Adam or to Christ. For Irenaeus, the human will is not primarily personal, but essential.²²⁵ In the same way that all derive their humanity from Adam's

²²³ Scholars often define Irenaeus' theology in terms of the "representative character of Christ's work." Cf. Rober S. Paul (1960, pp. 47ff). Cf. also L. W. Grensted (1929, pp. 177ff). However, the language of "representation" does not seem to do justice to Irenaeus' organic, even physical, conception of Christ's relationship to Adam. L. S. Thornton (1950, p. 138) sees Irenaeus' understanding of Christ's connection to Adam as arising from a "Hebrew way of thinking." He writes, "In the Hebrew way of thinking, moreover, Adam actually includes all his descendants within himself. For this reason, St. Irenaeus insists that 'recapitulation' is effected through the salvation of Adam." Cf. also Robin Scroggs (1966, pp. 113f).

²²⁴ Cf. Rolf Noormann (1994, p. 479f). Noormann rightly points out that man's freedom is realized only in Christ. He writes, "...der Zustand der adamitischen Menschheit wird als Gefangenschaft unter Sunde, Tod und Teufel beschrieben, aus welcher der Mensch sich aus eigener Kraft nicht befreien konnte, aber durch Christus befreit worden ist. In diesem doppelten Sinne war die Menschheit vor Christus unfrei und ist ihre Freiheit erst und allein durch Christus wiederhergestellt worden." For Irenaeus, the freedom of the will does not liberate an individual from their essential connection to Adam or Christ.

²²⁵ Cf. Wheeler Robinson (1911, p. 167f). Robinson sees two "lines of thought" in Irenaeus' understanding of man's fall into sin. First, man's nature is incomplete in the beginning so that his fall into sin is merely "an incident rather than a decisive factor in man's history." Second, Irenaeus considers the fall of man in connection with his understanding of the relationship between Adam and Christ. Robinson (1911, p. 168) calls this solidarity between Adam, Christ, and the whole of humanity "symbolic realism." He writes, "the important element here is that of the unity of the race, *in some sense*, in Adam; but there is no conception of an inheritance of corruption." Robinson interprets Irenaeus as merely a representative of that Eastern theology that reduces original sin to a weakness of nature. For Irenaeus, the solidarity between Adam and his descendants is not limited to the human nature, but includes the human will. The consequences of Adam's fall consists in both a dying nature and in a sinful power that lives in Adam's children and manifests itself in their transgressions. In the fall, humanity is rooted in a new ground of being—the rebellious will of Adam.

essence, so their individual wills derive from his will. Thus, Irenaeus seems to speak as if all share one and the same will even as they share one and the same humanity. This perspective is most clearly expressed in the fifth book of *Adversus Haereses*. Here, Irenaeus again asserts that salvation depends upon the Logos' essential union with the whole man—body and soul.

For it is not one thing which dies and another which is quickened, as neither is it one thing which is lost and another which is found, but the Lord came seeking for that same sheep which had been lost (*sed illam quae perierat ovem venit Dominus exquirens*). What was it, then, which was dead? Undoubtedly it was the substance of the flesh (*carnis substantia*); the same, too, which had lost the breath of life (*amiserat afflatum vitae*), and had become breathless and dead. This same, therefore, was what the Lord came to quicken (*Hanc Dominus venit vivificaturus*), that as in Adam, we do all die, as being of an animal nature (*in Adam omnes morimur quoniam animales*), in Christ we may all live, as being spiritual (*in Christo vivamus quoniam spiritales*), not laying aside God's handiwork (*deponentes non plasma Dei*), but the lusts of the flesh (*concupiscentias carnis; τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τῆς σαρκός*), and receiving the Holy Spirit (AH v, 12, 3).

The consequences of Adam's sin are not limited to his individual person, but affects the whole of humanity present in him. It is "we" who die in Adam even as it is "we" who live in Christ. Thus, salvation is not strictly a personal or individual affair, but a corporate reality originating in the head and being distributed throughout the body.

However, our participation in Adam does not involve merely the human essence, but also includes the human will. Irenaeus writes,

For doing away (*Dissolvens; Ἐκλύων*) with that disobedience of man, which had taken place at the beginning by the occasion of a tree, "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;" healing (*sanans; ἰώμενος*) that disobedience which had occurred by reason of a tree, through the obedience, which was upon the tree. Now he would not have come to do away (*exsolvere; ἐκλύων*), by means of the same, the disobedience, which had been incurred toward our Maker if he proclaimed another Father (*alterum annuntiabat Patrem; ἄλλον κατήγγελλε Πατέρα*). But inasmuch as it was by these things that we disobeyed God (*non obedivimus Deo; παρηκούσαμεν Θεοῦ*), and did not give credit to his Word (*non credidimus ejus verbo; ἠπειθήσαμεν αὐτοῦ τῷ λόγῳ*), so was it also by these same that he brought in (*introduxit; εἰσηγήσατο*) obedience and consent as respects his Word; by which things he clearly shows forth God himself, whom indeed we had offended in the first Adam (*in primo quidem Adam offendimus; ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ Ἀδάμ προσεκόψαμεν*), when he did not perform his commandment. In the second Adam, however, we are reconciled (*reconciliati sumus; ἀποκατηλλάγημεν*), being made obedient even unto death. For we were debtors (*eramus debitores; ἦμεν ὀφειλέται*) to none other but to him whose commandment we had transgressed at the beginning (*transgressi fueramus ab initio; παρέβημεν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς*) (AH v, 16, 3).

In this passage, Irenaeus is not speculating about an individual's relationship to Adam's original sin.

His emphasis is not to move from the son to the father in order to assert the son's share in the guilt of

the father's sin.²²⁶ Rather, Irenaeus moves from father to son. Just as with the corruption of Adam's nature, so Adam's rebellious will lives in all his children. Irenaeus does not consider the philosophical possibility of an individual's righteousness. Instead, he is seeking to describe the reality of sin's universal domain. All are born of Adam's dying flesh and have their ground of being in his rebellious will.²²⁷ Adam's sin begins the devil's reign over the whole of humanity. Since he is head of humankind, Adam's humanity and his disobedient will live in all his offspring. Thus, while Pelagius attributes the freedom of the will to the individual person, Irenaeus ascribes it to the corporate humanity present in Adam. The freedom of the human will is enacted by the head of humanity for the sake of the whole body.

B. Christ as Head of the Church

Irenaeus' corporate anthropology comes to fulfillment in his corporate Christology.²²⁸

Salvation consists, not merely in the Logos' essential union with the ancient formation of man, but

²²⁶ Cf. J. N. D. Kelly (1959, p. 172). Kelly connects Irenaeus' corporate anthropology to the doctrine of original sin. He writes, "He (Irenaeus) clearly presupposes some kind of mystical solidarity, or rather identity, between the father of the race and all his descendants. At the time of the Fall they somehow already existed in him, just as the author of *Hebrews* conceives of Levi as having existed seminally in Abraham, and the subsequent multiplication of the race can be viewed as the subdivision of the original Adam into myriads of individuals who were thus at one responsible for the ancient act of transgression and the victims of its fatal consequences." Kelly is certainly correct in his description of the profound nature of Irenaeus' corporate anthropology and its connection to the reality of sin. However, I think Kelly may go too far when he ascribes to Irenaeus the view that Adam's descendants are "responsible for the ancient act of transgression." It must be remembered that Irenaeus' interest in the original sin of Adam is not to speculate about an individual's legal responsibility for the original transgression, but to explain the reality of sin's universal reign over mankind. In other words, Irenaeus' concern is not to say that Adam's descendants are guilty for Adam's transgression, but to say that Adam's sin is the origin of a power that continues to live in all Adam's children. For Irenaeus, sin is not defined as a legal predicament consisting in guilt and the need for restitution; rather, sin is a real power that governs humanity and all creation. Thus, the solution for sin is not a restitution of the Law, but the defeat of Satan and the restoration of humanity in the person of Christ.

²²⁷ The fact that Adam's will is passed on to his children seems to be a prominent factor in Irenaeus' emphasis on the virgin birth. Cf. AH iii, 21, 5ff. Considering the promise to David, Irenaeus writes, "In this promise, therefore, the Scripture excluded all virile influence (*circumscripsit genitalia viri*), yet it certainly is not mentioned that he who was born was not from the will of man (*non ex voluntate viri erat*)." For Irenaeus the exclusion of man's will from Jesus' birth is established by Daniel 2:34. Daniel's vision of a stone cut without hands means that Jesus' coming is "not by the operation of human hands (*non operantibus humanis minibus*)." Thus, Irenaeus concludes that Jesus' birth excludes Joseph the carpenter so that "Mary alone cooperates (*sola Maria cooperante*)." Irenaeus summarizes his understanding of the virgin birth with the words of John 1:13, "we understand that his advent in human nature was not by the will of man, but by the will of God (*non ex voluntate viri, sed ex voluntate Dei*)." Concerning Irenaeus' emphasis on John 1:13, cf. AH iii, 16, 2; iii, 19, 2; v, 1, 3. For Irenaeus, the virgin birth seems to entail the idea that, while Christ shares in Adam's substance, he is able to fill it with a new will.

²²⁸ Some readers of Irenaeus misunderstand the profound nature of his corporate anthropology because they fail to connect his anthropology to his Christology. Cf. F. R. Tennant (1903, pp. 290). Tennant notes the solidarity of the human race in Adam but denies its realistic character. He writes, "The Fall then, with Irenaeus, is the collective deed of the race; provided that such a statement is not interpreted literally or realistically, but is understood to leave the mode in which Adam and his posterity are actually connected together in the first sin entirely undefined, and to express the relation by means of figure than by means of theory or concrete fact." Here, I think Tennant should have interpreted the nature of Adam's connection to humanity in light of Christ's recapitulation of man. For Irenaeus, Christ's relationship to humanity is real and physical as is evident in Irenaeus' understanding of the sacramental life of the church. From this Christological point of view, the realistic connection between Adam and the human race seems evident.

also in the fact that he fills the human essence with a new will of voluntary obedience. In his obedience at the tree of the cross, Jesus becomes the head of a new humanity.

For as we lost it by means of a tree (*διὰ ξύλου ἀπεβάλομεν αὐτόν*), by means of a tree again was it made manifest to all (*διὰ ξύλου πάλιν φάνερὸν τοῖς πᾶσιν ἐγένετο*), showing (*ἐπιδεικνύων*) the height, the length, the breadth, and the depth in itself; and, as a certain man among our predecessors observed, ‘Through the extension of the hands (*διὰ τῆς ἐκτάσεως τῶν χειρῶν*), gathering together the two peoples to one God (*τοὺς δύο λαοὺς εἰς ἓνα Θεὸν συνάγων*). For these were two hands, because there were two peoples scattered to the ends of the earth (*διεσπαρμένοι εἰς τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς*); but there was one head in the middle (*μία μέση κεφαλὴ*), as there is but one God, who is above all, and through all, and in us all (AH v, 17, 4).

For Irenaeus, Christ’s recapitulating work centers in the cross in which both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of salvation are revealed. Horizontally, Christ is the head of all humanity uniting Jews and Gentiles into one family. Vertically, Christ is the mediator that brings humanity into perfect communion with God who is above all and through all and in all.

1. Church’s Participation in Christ’s Essence

Christ’s recapitulating work establishes him as head of the church. Irenaeus understands this expression with a literal emphasis. The church is the body of Christ, not simply in the sense that it is an ordered whole like unto a human body, but in the sense that it is essentially and even physically united to Jesus. The church’s union with Jesus is not primarily a matter of supernatural gnosis, righteous will, or pious spirituality; it is, above all else, a matter of the flesh. While pneumatic disciples claim a relationship to God that excludes the body and transcends the material universe, Irenaeus proclaims a relationship that includes the whole human nature—body and soul—as well as the entirety of creation. Because of its essential union with Christ, the church shares fully in the intimate and immediate interaction between divinity and humanity present in Jesus. Christ’s recapitulating work, which removes all barriers between God and his formation, is realized in the faithful through the sacramental life of the church.

The church’s essential union with Jesus forms the core of Irenaeus’ sacramentology. The immediate relationship between the divine and human natures present in Christ also involves the faithful through the sacramental life of the church. The intimate communion between the spiritual

and material worlds is challenged from two sides. The Valentinians assert Christ's spirituality, but deny his full participation in human flesh. On the other hand, the Ebionites accept Jesus' humanity, but deny his essential union with the heavenly Father. For Irenaeus, this debate does not merely concern the doctrine of Christ's person, but also involves the church's teaching and practice of the sacraments. For the bishop of Lyons, the practice of baptism and the eucharist testifies to the real interaction of God with his creatures.

In the fifth book of *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus challenges the teaching of the Ebionites. His argument reveals the profound connection between his Christology and ecclesiology. His understanding of Christ's recapitulating work establishes the foundation for his understanding of the church's sacramental practice. Irenaeus expresses the intimate relationship between Christology and ecclesiology by connecting the virgin birth to the baptismal and eucharistic life of the church.

Vain also are the Ebionites, who do not receive by faith into their soul the union of God and man (*unionem Dei et hominis per fidem non recipientes in suam animam*), but who remain in the old leaven of birth (*in veteri generationis perseverantes fermento*), and who do not choose to understand that the Holy Ghost came upon Mary, and the power of the Most High did overshadow her: wherefore also what was generated is a holy thing, and the Son of the Most High God the Father of all, who effected the incarnation of this being (*qui operatus est incarnationem ejus*), and showed forth a new generation (*novam ostendit generationem*); that as by the former generation we inherited death, so by this new generation we might inherit life. Therefore do these men reject the commixture (*commixtionem*) of the heavenly wine, and wish it to be water of the world only, not receiving God so as to have a union with him (*ad commixtionem suam*)²²⁹, but they remain in that Adam who had been conquered and was expelled from Paradise; not considering that as, at the beginning of our formation in Adam (*ab initio plasmationis nostrae in Adam*), that breath of life which proceeded from God, having been united to what had been fashioned (*aspiratio vitae unita plasmati*), animated the man, and manifested him as a being endowed with reason (*rationabile*); so also, in the end, the Word of the Father and the Spirit of God, having become united with the ancient substance of Adam's formation (*adunitus antiquae substantiae plasmationis Adae*), rendered man living and perfect (*viventem et perfectum effecit hominem*), receptive of the perfect Father, in order that as in the natural we all were dead (*in animali omnes mortui sumus*), so in the spiritual we may all be made alive (*in spiritali omnes vivificemur*). For never at any time did Adam escape (*effugit*) the hands of God, to whom the Father speaking, said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." And for this reason in the last times, not by the will of the flesh (*non ex voluntate carnis*), nor by the will of man (*neque ex voluntate viri*), but by the good pleasure of the Father, his hands formed a living man (*ejus vivum perfecerunt hominem*), in order that Adam might be created (*fiat*) after the image and likeness of God (AH v, 1, 3).

²²⁹ It is certainly significant that Irenaeus uses *commixtionem* as a reference to both the eucharistic cup and the union of God with his people. Irenaeus uses it of the eucharistic cup again in AH v, 2, 3; he uses it also in AH iv, 31, 2 in reference to the Spirit's union with the church. Cf. also AH iv, 20, 4 where Irenaeus describes the incarnation as the "blending and communion of God and man (*commixtio et communio Dei et hominis*)."²²⁹ With this language, Irenaeus wants to connect the incarnation, the eucharist, and the Spirit's indwelling of the faithful in the strongest way.

For Irenaeus, the virgin birth testifies to the union of divinity and humanity in Christ. He is of one substance with God the Father and of one substance with the Virgin Mary. However, the virgin birth is not merely an event in the history of Jesus' life, but also a reality that continues in the church's baptism.²³⁰ Natural birth proceeds from the substance and will of Adam making all his offspring slaves of Adam's sin and heirs of Adam's death. Through baptism, the faithful are born of Christ's humanity and made partakers of his divinity through the work of the Spirit.²³¹ The Creator's will comes to perfection as fleshly creatures receive a new generation, not from the human will or the desires of the flesh, but from the power of God's creative hands.

In the following chapter (AH v, 2), Irenaeus attributes the essential communion of Christ and his church to the eucharist. Against the Valentinians and Marcionites, who deny Christ's connection to the Creator, Irenaeus appeals to the eucharist as a testimony to Christ's redemption of the flesh.

But vain in every respect are they who despise the entire dispensation of God (*universam dispositionem Dei*), and disallow the salvation of the flesh (*carnis salutem negant*), and treat with contempt its regeneration (*regenerationem ejus spernunt*), maintaining that it is not capable of incorruption (*non eam capacem esse incorruptibilitatis*). But if this indeed do 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 (*communicatio sanguinis ejus*), nor the bread which we break the communion of his body (*communicatio corporis ejus*). For blood can only come from veins and flesh, and whatsoever else makes up the substance of man (*hominem substantia*), such as the Word of God was actually made. By his own blood he redeemed us, as also his apostle declares, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the remission of sins." And as we are his members (*membra ejus sumus*), we are also nourished by means of the creation (*per creaturam nutrimur*) (and he himself grants the creation to us, for he causes the sun to rise and sends rain when he will). He has acknowledged (*confessus est*) the cup (which is part of the creation) as his own blood, from which he bedews (*auget*) our blood; and the bread (also part of the creation) he has established as his own body, from which he gives increase to our bodies (*ex quo nostra auget corpora*) (AH v, 2, 2).

In this passage, Irenaeus begins with the reality of the eucharist and proceeds to the reality of the incarnation. If Christ truly redeems us with his own body and blood in the sacrament, then the Logos must have assumed the fullness of the human nature. However, for Irenaeus, this Christological point becomes of great soteriological importance. Irenaeus continues,

²³⁰ Concerning the relationship between the Ebionites, the virgin birth and baptism, cf. AH iii, 21 and iv, 33, 11. In AH iv, 33, 11, Irenaeus speaks of Mary's womb as "that pure womb which regenerates men unto God (*vulvam eam quae regenerat homines in Deum*)."

²³¹ Cf. Hans-Jochen Jaschke (1976, pp. 216ff). Here Jaschke shows the intimate connection between the virgin birth and the new birth in the church. When the Ebionites reject the virgin birth, they are rejecting not merely an historical event in the life of Jesus, but also the baptismal life of the church. For Jaschke, Irenaeus makes this connection by ascribing both works to the Spirit.

When, therefore, the mingled cup (*mixtus calix*; τὸ κεκραμένον ποτήριον) and the manufactured bread receive the Word of God (*percipit verbum Dei*; ἐπιδέχεται τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ), and the eucharist of the blood and the body of Christ is made (*fit*; γίνεται), from which things the substance of our flesh is increased and supported (*ex quibus augetur et consistit carnis nostrae substantia*; ἐκ τούτων τε αὔξει καὶ συνέστηκεν ἡ τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν ὑπόστασις), how can they affirm that the flesh is incapable of receiving the gift of God (*donationis Dei*; τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ Θεοῦ), which is life eternal, which is nourished (*nutritur*; τρεφομένην) from the body and blood of the Lord, and is a member (*membrum*; μέλος) of Him? Even as the blessed Paul declares in his Epistle to the Ephesians, that “we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” He does not speak these words of some spiritual and invisible man (*spirituali et invisibili homine*; πνευματικοῦ τινος καὶ ἀοράτου ἀνθρώπου), for a spirit has not bones nor flesh; but he refers to that dispensation of an actual man (*dispositione, quae est secundum verum hominem*; τῆς κατὰ τὸν ἀληθινὸν ἄνθρωπον οἰκονομίας), consisting of flesh, and nerves, and bones,—that which is nourished by the cup which is his blood, and receives increase (*augetur*; αὔξεται) from the bread which is his body. And just as a cutting from the vine planted in the ground fructifies in its season, or as a corn of wheat falling into the earth and becoming decomposed, rises with manifold increase by the Spirit of God (*multiplex surgit per Spiritum Dei*; πολλαστὸς ἠγέρθη διὰ τοῦ Πνεύματος τοῦ Θεοῦ), who contains all things, and then, through the wisdom of God serves for the use of men, and having received the Word of God (*percipientia verbum Dei*; προσλαμβανόμενα ὃν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ), becomes the eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ; so also our bodies, being nourished by it, and deposited in the earth, and suffering decomposition (*resoluta*; διαλυθέντα) there, shall rise at their appointed time (*resurgent in suo tempore*; ἀναστήσεται ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ καιρῷ), the Word of God granting them resurrection to the glory of God, even the Father, who freely gives (*gratuito donat*) to this mortal immortality, and to this corruptible incorruption, because the strength of God is make perfect in weakness... (AH v, 2, 3).

In this passage, the eucharist is the center point that connects Christology to ecclesiology.²³² The eucharist proves the real incarnation of the Logos and accomplishes the real fleshly redemption of the church. The intimate interaction between the Creator and his creation, which is perfected in the person of Jesus, continues to be accomplished through the church’s eucharist.²³³ The church does not consist of those “spiritually” connected to the aeons of the spiritual Pleroma, but of those physically

²³² For Irenaeus, the eucharist transforms Christology into ecclesiology. Irenaeus’ definition of the church as the body of Christ is not a metaphorical construction, but a eucharistic reality. In this regard, cf. AH iv, 33, 8 where Irenaeus asserts that true gnosis is found in the concrete reality of the church. In this passage, he speaks of the church as that which has been “handed over (*tradiderunt*)” in every place. This language suggests that Irenaeus considers the church to be a eucharistic reality.

²³³ Cf. Wolfgang Schmidt (1934, pp. 140). Schmidt demonstrates that Irenaeus employs his Logos-theology to connect the eucharist to creation. He writes, “Der Logosgedanke kommt ihm hier zu Hilfe. Durch das Verbum hat Gott ja alles geschaffen, auch die eucharistischen Elemente sind demnach *schon als solche* sein Leib und sein Körper.... Mit diesem Gedanken verbindet er nun aber wieder den vorhergehenden und zeigt, dass das Wort dazukommen muss, bevor die Elemente als solche zur Eucharistie werden, *προσλαμβανόμενα τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ* (AH v, 2, 3), erst dann kann man eigentlich von Eucharistie reden.” Both the creation of the sacramental elements and the making of the eucharist are works of the Logos. However, for Irenaeus, these two works are not merely theologically analogous. Rather, Irenaeus sees the eucharist as the eschatological goal of the Creator in which the Logos brings to fulfillment what he created in the beginning. From the beginning, the wheat and grape are intended for the eucharist; and man is intended for participation in the body of Jesus

and essentially connected to Jesus. Thus, the church is the true Pleroma of Christ, in which Christ's recapitulating work comes to fullness.²³⁴

2. Church's Participation in Christ's Divine and Human Wills

For Irenaeus, the church is of one and the same humanity with Christ, flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones. Irenaeus' ecclesiology is simply the corporate expression of his Christology.²³⁵ By natural birth, all share in Adam's humanity and bear the corrupting power of his sin. However, through baptism and the eucharist, the church is rooted in Jesus' humanity and enjoys the consequences of his obedience. The church's essential relationship to Jesus makes it a participant in the synergism of the divine and human wills present in Christ. The church's sacramental life consists in both Jesus' divine will that creates all things *ex nihilo* and his human will that voluntarily obeys the commands of his Father. The communion of divine power and human weakness fulfilled and perfected in Christ as the head is realized also in the church as his body. Thus, the church's life is both divine and human; it consists in the intimate interaction of the divine and human wills. This Christological synergism makes the church a participant in Jesus' mediation through whom God's relationship to the world is ordered.

First, the church's life consists in the power of God's creative will. In book two of *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus argues that all creation proceeds from the power of God's creative will. "For to attribute the substance (*substantiam*) of created things to the power and will of him who is God of all (*virtuti et voluntati ejus qui est omnium Deus*), is worthy both of credit and acceptance" (AH ii, 10, 4). Irenaeus consistently uses the word, "power (*virtus, potestas*)," to refer to the freedom and might of God's creative will to give life to all things. "He (the Creator) made all things freely, and by his own power (*fecit libere et ex sua potestate*), and arranged and finished them, and his will is the substance of all things (*est substantia omnium voluntas ejus*)" (AH ii, 30, 9). However, this word, "power,"

²³⁴ Irenaeus often uses various forms of *πληρόω* to imply that the church is the true fullness or Pleroma. Cf. AH iv, 34, 2 where Christ is said to "fulfill all things (*omnia adimplevit*)" and to "fill up in the church the new covenant (*implevit in Ecclesia novum Testamentum*)." Through the eucharist, which is the new covenant, Christ makes the church his fullness or Pleroma, that is, the church participates in the fullness of Christ's life. This language may also arise from Genesis 1:28 where man is called to "fill (LXX: *πληρώσατε*)" the earth.

²³⁵ Cf. Roch Kereszty (1984, pp. 202-218). Kereszty investigates how Irenaeus expresses the unity of the church. Ecclesial unity does not merely reside in an order of governance, but in the mystery of God's own nature. Thus, Irenaeus refers to the church in the singular, as one subject of the same action.

which refers to the execution of God's creative will, returns to prominence in the fifth book of *Adversus Haereses*. The same divine power that gives life in the beginning can also raise the dead in the end.

Those men, therefore, set aside the power of God (*refutant potentiam Dei*), and do not consider what the word declares, when they dwell upon the infirmity of the flesh (*infirmi-tatem intuentur carnis*), but do not take into consideration the power (*virtutem*) of him who raises it up from the dead (*suscitat eam a mortuis*). For if he does not vivify what is mortal, and does not bring back (*revocat*) the corruptible to incorruption, he is not a God of power (*potens*). But that he is powerful in all these respects (*potens est in omnibus*), we ought to perceive from our origin (*initio nostro*), inasmuch as God, taking dust from the earth, formed man (AH v, 3, 2).

This divine power to create life and regenerate the dead is precisely the power manifested in Christ. Jesus demonstrates that he possesses the power of the Creator, not merely when he heals the sick, but also when he forgives sins. Irenaeus' contemplation of the word, "power," leads him to consider the healing of the paralytic in Matthew, chapter nine. Irenaeus notes that the miracle is performed to show that Jesus has the "power to forgive sins (*potestatem remissionis peccatorum*)."

For Irenaeus, only the one who gave the commands has the right to forgive the transgression of those commands. Irenaeus' concludes, "Therefore, by remitting sins (*peccata remittens*), he did indeed heal man (*hominem curavit*), while he also manifested himself who he was. For if no one can forgive sins but God alone (*nemo potest remittere peccata nisi solus Deus*), while the Lord remitted them and healed men, it is plain that he was himself the Word of God made the Son of man, receiving from the Father the power of remission of sins (*a Patre potestatem remissionis peccatorum accipiens*)" (AH v, 17, 3). The incarnate ministry of Jesus means that the power of the Creator is being executed for the sake of his creatures through the mediation of flesh and blood.

This divine power present in the incarnate Logos continues to interact with creation through the church's sacramental life. Irenaeus employs the "power" terminology, not only in reference to the Creator's will and Jesus' redemptive work, but also in reference to the church's ministry.

Commenting on the catholicity of the church's preaching in contrast to the disharmony of "heretical" opinions, Irenaeus writes, "For, although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the power of the tradition is one and the same (*ἡ δύναμις τῆς παραδόσεως μία καὶ ἡ αὐτῆ*)" (AH I, 10, 2). The very power, by which the Logos created and redeemed all things, continues to be present in the

church's preaching and confession of the gospel. Irenaeus uses this same language to refer to the authority of the apostles to found the church through baptism. The opinion that the heavenly Christ or the superior Savior descended upon Jesus at his baptism offers Irenaeus the opportunity to comment on the descent of the Holy Spirit. "And, again, giving to the disciples the power of regeneration into God (*potestatem regenerationis in Deum*), he said to them, 'Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' For God promised, that in the last times he would pour him (the Spirit) upon his servants and handmaids, that they might prophesy..." (AH iii, 17, 1).

Irenaeus understands this "power of regeneration into God" as the power given to the church on Pentecost. He concludes,

This Spirit did David ask for the human race (*humano generi*), saying, "and establish me with your all-governing Spirit;" who also, as Luke says, descended after the Lord's ascension, having power to admit all nations to the entrance of life (*habentem potestatem omnium gentium ad introitum vitae*), and to the opening of the new covenant (*ad apertionem novi Testamenti*); from whence also, with one accord in all languages, they uttered praise to God, the Spirit bringing distant tribes to unity, and offering to the Father the first-fruits of all nations (*primitias omnium gentium offerente Patri*). Wherefore also the Lord promised to send the Comforter, who should join us to God (*nos aptaret Deo*). For as a compacted lump of dough cannot be formed of dry wheat without fluid matter (*non potest sine humore*), nor can a loaf possess unity, so, in like manner, neither could we, being many, be made one in Christ Jesus without the water from heaven (*sine aqua quae de coelo est*). And as dry earth does not bring forth unless it receives moisture, in like manner, we also, being originally a dry tree (*lignum aridum existentes primum*), could never have brought forth fruit unto life without the voluntary rain from above (*superna voluntaria pluvia*). For our bodies have received unity among themselves by means of that laver which leads to incorruption (*per lavacrum illam, quae est ad incorruptionem*); but our souls, by means of the Spirit (*per Spiritum*). Wherefore, both are necessary (*necessaria*), since both contribute toward the life of God (*proficiunt in vitam Dei*)...(AH iii, 17, 2).

For Irenaeus, the church participates in the divine power that gives life to all creation through the apostolic practice of baptism. Through the water, hyllic creatures are incorporated into the body of Christ and share in his incorruptibility; and through the Spirit, the soul communes with the life of God. For the bishop of Lyons, baptism testifies to the immediate communion of the spiritual and the physical substances and to the interaction of God with his creation.

In addition to the divine power that gives life to all things, the church also participates in Jesus' human will that voluntarily obeys the will of the Father. Thus, Irenaeus writes, "He (Christ) clearly shows forth God himself, whom indeed we had offended in the first Adam (*in primo Adam*

offendimus; ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ Ἀδὰμ προσεκόψαμεν), when he did not perform his commandment. In the second Adam, however, we are reconciled (*reconciliati sumus; ἀποκατηλλάγημεν*), being made obedient even unto death” (AH v, 16, 3). Just as Adam’s disobedience lives in those of his flesh, so Jesus’ obedience lives in all who share in his humanity.²³⁶ For Irenaeus’ the obedience of the faithful is always Jesus’ obedience, that is, the righteousness that flows from his voluntary sacrifice. As the head of a new humanity, Christ turns the human will away from the devil and his deceptions toward his Father, who created all things. Thus, instead of attributing obedience to the individual believer, Irenaeus defines it as a Christological reality in which the church shares by means of its corporate participation in his humanity.²³⁷ Thus, Irenaeus asserts that, in Christ the second Adam, it is “we” who were “made obedient unto death” (AH v, 16, 3).²³⁸

For Irenaeus, the voluntary obedience of the human will is as essential to salvation as the divine power that creates all things out of nothing. God refuses to use coercion to bring humankind into the glory for which he is intended. The perfection of humanity consists in Jesus’ voluntary conformity to the will of his Father. Therefore, Irenaeus characterizes the cross as primarily a tree of obedience.²³⁹ The cross propitiates the Father and triumphs over the devil precisely because it consists in the free obedience and voluntary offering of Jesus. For the bishop of Lyons, the Logos assumes human flesh in order to fill humanity with a new obedient will. This obedient will of Christ manifests itself in those who partake of his humanity. Irenaeus emphasizes the church’s participation

²³⁶ Cf. AH iii, 21, 1ff. In this passage, Irenaeus considers the significance of the virgin birth against the Ebionites. By denying the virgin birth, the Ebionites are, in Irenaeus’ words, “destroying the dispensation of God (*dispositionem Dei dissolventes*).” However, for Irenaeus, the significance of the virgin birth is not merely a Christological matter. Rather, the virgin birth is a new generation that, not only unites God and man in Christ, but also continues to regenerate all humanity into communion with God through the baptismal life of the church. Thus, it is Irenaeus’ main concern to emphasize that Jesus’ humanity is not derived from the will of Adam. “In this promise (2 Samuel 7), therefore, the scripture excluded all virile influence (*Circumscripsit igitur genitalia viri in promissione Scriptura*)” (AH iv, 21, 5). Later Irenaeus asserts, “His (Jesus) coming into this world was not by the operation of human hands (*quod non operantibus humanis manibus*)...” (AH iv, 21, 6). Again Irenaeus concludes, “So, then, we understand that his advent in human nature was not by the will of a man, but by the will of God (*non ex voluntate viri, sed ex voluntate Dei*).” For Irenaeus, the virgin birth means that Christ’s humanity, like Adam’s, originates directly from the will of God. Thus, the virgin birth establishes Christ as the head of a new redeemed humanity, which is filled with a new, righteous will. While in natural birth humanity is derived from Adam’s sinful will, in baptism humanity shares in that new birth of Christ, which comes from the Father in the power of the Spirit.

²³⁷ Cf. R. M. Grant (1990, p. 99ff). Grant maintains the Irenaeus corrects the views of Theophilus of Antioch. One example of this correction is evident in Irenaeus’ interpretation of Romans 5 and the relationship between Adam and Christ. Grant (1990, p. 103) writes, “Irenaeus was not content simply to use Theophilus’ thoughts. Sometimes he provides severe criticism, though without naming a fellow bishop. For example, the two authors disagree over the interpretation of Romans 5:10 and 19, for Theophilus treats Christ’s work as exemplary while Irenaeus considers it efficacious.” For Irenaeus, Jesus’ obedience is not merely the obedience of an individual, but the obedience of him who is head of the new humanity. Jesus’ obedience lives in those who participate in his body.

²³⁸ Cf. Daniel Wanke (2000, pp. 219ff). In his discussion of AH v, 16, 3, Wanke rightly notes, “Wie der Ungehorsam Adams die ganze Menschheit betraf, so wirkt sich auch der Gehorsam Christi auf alle Menschen aus.”

²³⁹ Cf. Daniel Wanke (2000, pp. 205ff).

in Jesus' voluntary obedience in connection with the eucharist. From the divine perspective, the eucharist certainly contains the power of the Creator's will. Like the seed that bears fruit after decomposing in the earth, so those who partake of Christ's body and blood will "rise at the appointed time (*ἀναστήσεται ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ καιρῷ*)" (AH v, 2, 3). For Irenaeus, the eucharist shows that "the power (*δύναμις*) of God is made perfect in weakness (*ἀσθενεία*)." However, from the human perspective, the eucharist is the new oblation that fulfills the sacrifices of the old covenant.²⁴⁰

In book four of *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus seeks to demonstrate both the essential continuity between the two covenants and the progression from the old to the new. While the continuity of the old and new covenants resides in the unchangeable character of God, the progression of the covenants resides in the growth of humanity. One and the same God condescends to interact with his creatures; however, through his fellowship, humanity grows toward maturity becoming more in the end than what he was in the beginning. Thus, the Law of Moses is a true revelation of God, but is also an adaptation to the servile condition of fallen humanity. From this perspective the laws of the old covenant are not important for their own sake. Rather, they serve the greater purpose of counseling human beings toward perfection. The laws of the old covenant are adapted to the sons of Adam, who are in bondage to the power of sin. These laws call slaves of sin and death to subject themselves to the will of God by outward actions. However, in the "new covenant of liberty (*novo libertatis testamento*)," God has "increased and widened those laws (*auxit et dilatavit*)" (AH iv, 16, 5). The outward obedience of those in bondage to sin must become the true inward obedience of those who are free. As Irenaeus concludes, "...that we may know that we shall give account to God not of deeds only (*non solum factorum*), as slaves (*ut servi*), but even of words and thoughts (*sermonum et cogitationum*), as those who have truly received the power of liberty (*libertatis*

²⁴⁰ Cf. L. S. Thornton (1950, pp. 118ff). Thornton points out that Irenaeus consistently interprets the eucharist as the offering of "first-fruits" (AH iv, 17ff.). This connection allows him to refer to the eucharist in two ways. Against the Valentiniens, the eucharist testifies to God interaction with the material world. Against Marcion, the eucharist demonstrates the continuity between the covenants. Thornton (1950, pp. 119-120) explains, "Two points are to be noticed in this teaching. Irenaeus connects the central act of Christian worship with the order of creation and its processes. But secondly, he connects the eucharistic offering of created things with the religious cultus of the Old Testament. It is clear that, whereas the heretics must logically spurn all 'natural' religion as gross and materialistic, the tradition of the church, for which Irenaeus stood, was consciously in line with the religion of Israel at the point where that religion took into itself the whole world of creaturely things. All this, however, is part of a much wider argument about the relation of Christ to the order of creation." Cf. also Godehard Joppich (1965, pp. 73ff).

potestatem acceperimus) in which a man is more severely tested (*magis probatur*), whether he will reverence, and fear, and love the Lord” (AH iv, 16, 5).

Irenaeus demonstrates the progression of the covenants in his explanation of God’s ancient demand for the offering of sacrifices. God requires the outward observance of material sacrifices, not due to his own need for them, but for the growth and development of his creatures. “He thus teaches them,” Irenaeus writes, “that God desires obedience (*obauditionem vult Deus*), which renders them secure, rather than sacrifices and holocausts, which avail them nothing toward righteousness (*quae nihil eis prosunt ad justitiam*); and he prophesies the new covenant at the same time (*novum simul prophetans Testamentum*)” (AH iv, 17, 1). In other words, the true sacrifice that God seeks from humankind is not the offering of animals and material possessions, but one’s offering of himself entirely and completely. “From all these it is evident that God did not seek sacrifices and holocausts from them, but faith and obedience and righteousness (*fidem et obaudientiam et justitiam*), because of their salvation (*propter illorum salutem*)” (AH iv, 17, 4). It is in this context that Irenaeus believes all the old covenant sacrifices to be fulfilled and perfected in the church’s eucharist.

Again giving directions (*dans consilium*) to his disciples to offer to God the first-fruits (*primitias*)²⁴¹ of his own created things...he took that created thing, bread (*eum qui ex creatura est panis accepit*), and gave thanks (*gratias egit*), and said, “This is my body.” And the cup likewise, which is part of that creation to which we belong (*qui est ex ea creatura quae est secundum nos*), he confessed (*confessus est*) to be his blood, and taught the new oblation of the new covenant (*novi Testamenti novam docuit oblationem*); which the church receiving from the apostles (*ab Apostolis accipiens*), offers to God throughout all the world (*in universo mundo offert Deo*), to him who gives (*praestat*) us as the means of our subsistence the first-fruits of his own gifts (*primitias suorum munerum*) in the new testament, concerning which Malachi among the twelve prophets, thus spoke beforehand: “I have no pleasure in you (*Non est mihi voluntas in vobis*), saith the Lord omnipotent, and I will not accept sacrifice at your hands. For from the rising of the sun, unto the going down thereof, my name is glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure sacrifice; for great is my name among the Gentiles, says the Lord omnipotent.” He indicates in the plainest manner, by these words, that the former people shall indeed cease to make offerings to God (*prior populus cessabit offerre Deo*), but that in every place sacrifice shall be offered to him (*omni loco sacrificum offeretur ei*), and that a pure one (*purum*); and his name is glorified among the Gentiles (AH iv, 17, 5).

²⁴¹ Irenaeus uses the concept of “first-fruits (*primitias*)” in reference to Christ (cf. AH iii, 19, 3), the eucharist (cf. AH iv, 17, 5), and the church (cf. AH iii, 17, 2). For Irenaeus, the eucharist connects Christology to ecclesiology. Through the eucharist, Christ’s offering of his own humanity unto the Father includes the church, which is his body. The church is the new humanity, “the first-fruits of all nations,” that is offered by Christ in communion with the Spirit to the Father.

In the eucharist, the essence of the true and perfect sacrifice that God seeks is revealed.²⁴² In the eucharist, Jesus offers his own humanity with the bread and wine as the pure and acceptable sacrifice unto the Father. The eucharist is the pure sacrifice because it is offered by the one who is pure and who voluntarily surrenders all that he is unto the Father. Jesus is like Abel whose suffering and martyrdom makes public before the world what was already true in his mind and heart. Irenaeus concludes, “Sacrifices, therefore, do not sanctify a man (*non sacrificium sanctificant hominem*), for God stands in no need of sacrifice (*non indiget sacrificio*); but it is the conscience (*conscientia*) of the offerer that sanctifies the sacrifice when it is pure (*pura existens*), and thus moves God to accept the offering as from a friend (*praestat acceptare Deum quasi ab amico*)” (AH iv, 18, 3).

For Irenaeus, Christ establishes the eucharist so that the church might share in his voluntary offering of his own humanity unto the Father. The faithful do not so much offer Christ in the eucharist as they offer themselves, body and soul. This voluntary sacrifice is a “pure oblation to the Creator (*ablationem puram offert Fabricatori*)” because it is offered “through the Logos (*Verbum per quod offertur Deo*)” (AH iv, 18, 4). In the eucharist, Christ accomplishes his work of gathering humanity into himself and “presenting” it to the Father.²⁴³ For Irenaeus, the eucharist does not consist merely in the condescension of God to human frailty in order to fill him with the gift of immortality, but also in the ascension of humanity into the presence of God. In other words, in the eucharist, the faithful grow into the head, even Christ, and are incorporated into his voluntary sacrifice. In this way,

²⁴² Scholars typically ascribe to Irenaeus two different ideas of the eucharist. On the one hand, the eucharist is a communion in which humanity shares in God’s gift of immortality. On the other hand, the eucharist is a sacrifice in which humanity offers to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Unfortunately, these two lines of thought are treated as independent theologies. Cf. Wolfgang Schmidt (1934, pp. 141ff). Schmidt sees these two different conceptions of the eucharist as arising from two different polemical purposes. The communion aspect demonstrates the ability of human flesh to share in salvation; and the sacrificial aspect shows the continuity of the eucharist with the old covenant. Cf. also Gustaf Wingren (1959, pp. 165). Wingren seems eager to assert the dominance of the communion idea of the eucharist over the sacrificial idea. He writes, “In the Eucharist man receives the body of Christ and the Christian community is thereby built up as the body of Christ. The main emphasis in Irenaeus is laid on man’s participation in Christ, and his nourishment by the bread and wine, and not on the offering.” For Irenaeus, these two aspects of the eucharist are not in conflict, nor do they arise from disparate polemical purposes. The eucharist entails both the divine creative will that works immortality in humanity and the obedient will of humanity that offers itself freely unto the Father. Thus, the communion and sacrificial ideas proceed from a single Christology in which God condescends to interact with man and man offers himself to his Creator. For Irenaeus, the synergism of God and man in Christ is present in the eucharist.

²⁴³ Irenaeus consistently speaks of Jesus’ mediatorial work in terms of “presentation (*παραστήσαι; praestans*).” Cf. AH iii, 18, 7; v, 14, 2. Here Jesus’ presentation of man to God brings man into “friendship” with God. Cf. also AH iii, 19, 3 where Irenaeus interprets Jesus’ salvific work as the “offering and commending (*offerentem et commendantem*) to his Father that man (*hominem*) which had been found, making in his own person the first-fruits (*primitias*) of the resurrection of man...” For Irenaeus, the eucharist consists in Christ offering his own body, the church, to his Father. This offering of humanity is acceptable because Christ, the pure one, is the priest.

the true incarnation of God and the full deification of man present in the person of Christ continue to be realized in the church through its baptismal and eucharistic life.

3. *Church's Participation in Christ's Authority*

The church's communion with Christ makes it a full participant in Jesus mediation that reorders God's relationship to the world. Irenaeus' ecclesiology entails a cosmological dimension. This perspective challenges his opponents' worldviews. For the Valentinians, spiritual gnosis liberates the inner being from the body and, therefore, from the material universe. The Valentinian fellowship is anti-cosmic. The spiritual power of gnosis is not intended for the benefit of the world, but is used in service of oneself and the spiritual fellowship of the elite. Irenaeus recognizes the anti-cosmic perspective of his opponents at the end of his five books *Adversus Haereses*. Irenaeus' cosmological discussion, as the conclusion to his fifth book, means that he ends his work precisely where he began it. The division between the spiritual Pleroma and the material universe recounted in the first book is challenged in the fifth book by Irenaeus' vision of a unified cosmology inherent in God's creation and recapitulation of all things.

Irenaeus' argument with his opponents is not only about the person of Christ, but also about the world. In addition to redeeming humanity, Christ's recapitulating work establishes a new governing economy through which God and the world are reunited. Christ's victory over the devil through his own obedience unto death has subjected the devil to "the power of man (*subjecit eum homini*)" (AH v, 24, 4). Jesus is the man who possesses all power and authority through his death, resurrection and ascension; however, his power is executed for the sake of the world through the church. In chapter 31, Irenaeus recognizes that the denial of the real bodily resurrection has Christological and cosmological consequences. "For they do not choose to understand, that if these things are as they say, the Lord himself, in whom they profess to believe (*in quem dicunt se credere*), did not rise again upon the third day (*non in tertia die fecisset resurrectionem*); but immediately upon his expiring on the cross undoubtedly departed on high, leaving his body to the earth (*relinquens corpus terrae*)" (AH v, 31, 1). Yet, for Irenaeus, his adversaries' view of Christ also affects their view of the world. Thus, he notes that his opponents' interpretation of the resurrection means that "their inner man (*interiorem*

hominem), leaving the body here (*derelinquentem hic corpus*), ascends into the super-celestial place (*in supercaelestem ascendere locum*)” (AH v, 31, 2).

The cosmological consequences of Jesus’ recapitulating work and the church’s sacramental life bring Irenaeus’ work to a conclusion. “Inasmuch, therefore, as the opinions of certain persons are derived from heretical discourses (*ab haereticis sermonibus*), they are both ignorant of God’s dispensations (*dipositiones Dei*), and of the mystery of the resurrection of the just, and of the kingdom which is the commencement of incorruption (*principium incorruptelae*), by means of which kingdom those who shall be worthy are accustomed gradually to partake of the divine nature (*paulatim assuescunt capere Deum*)” (AH v, 32, 1). Irenaeus refers to the kingdom as the “commencement of incorruption (*principium incorruptelae*).” The victory of Jesus over sin and death passes into the church, and through the church, to the whole of creation.

For it is just that in that very creation (*conditione*) in which they toiled or were afflicted (*laboraverunt sive afflicti sunt*), being proved in every way by suffering (*probati per sufferentiam*), they should receive the fruit of their suffering (*fructus²⁴⁴ sufferentiae*); and that in the creation in which they were slain because of their love to God (*propter Dei dilectionem*), in that they should be revived again (*vivificari*); and that in the creation in which they endured servitude (*servitutem sustinuerunt*), in that they should reign (*regnare*). For God is rich in all things, and all things are his. It is fitting, therefore, that the creation itself (*ipsam conditionem*), being restored to its primeval condition (*redintegratam ad pristinum*), should without restraint be under the dominion of the righteous (*sine prohibitionem servire justis*) (AH v, 32, 1).

Irenaeus’ teaching of a renewed earth has often been used to support various speculations concerning a millennial kingdom.²⁴⁵ In this context, it is important to recognize that for Irenaeus the earthly kingdom does not consist in the conversion of the Jewish race or in the inauguration of a new covenant. Rather, for Irenaeus, the kingdom consists in the full cosmological manifestation of Christ’s victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil.²⁴⁶ From beginning to end, God is the

²⁴⁴ In the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, this phrase is translated as the “reward of their suffering.” I believe “fruit of their suffering” is a better rendering. For Irenaeus, the eschatological kingdom is not simply a matter of justice or retribution; it is a matter of perfection. All things have come to their intended harvest.

²⁴⁵ Cf. Christopher R. Smith (1994, pp. 313-331). Smith shows that Irenaeus is not a millennialist in the traditional meaning of the term. First, Irenaeus refuses to assert a thousand-year duration to the coming kingdom. Second, the earthly paradise is not merely a time of reward for the faithful, but primarily a time of preparation for a full communion with God. Third, the “millennium” is not an intermediate kingdom. Rather, there is an “essential continuity between the restored paradise and the subsequent new creation.” Cf. also the discussion in M. Steenberg (2008, p. 49-60).

²⁴⁶ In this regard, Smith (1994, p. 320) writes, “Ireneus, then, is simply not a chiliast or millennialist in the traditional sense. Rather, he is a consistent creationist. Creation, in fact, is so much a part of the deliberate plan of God for him that not only must the righteous receive their rewards in the present heavens and earth, but creation itself can never pass away, ‘for faithful and true is he who established it.’ When the theology of Ireneus is understood in this light, it may be seen that his restored earthly paradise, far from being gratuitous or anomalous, is an indispensable component of his *Heilsgeschichte*.”

Creator, who never ceases to interact with his creatures and to care for his universe. Just as all creation suffers due to Adam's sin, so all creation shares in the exaltation of Christ and his church.

For Irenaeus, Christ and the church are the center of a cosmological chiasm. The ancient schism between God and the world due to Adam's willing participation in the devil's power is knit together again through the union of Christ with his church. In the church's sacramental life, God's will is being done upon the earth and creation is being offered as an acceptable sacrifice unto the Father. In this interaction, humanity receives its proper place as head of a fruitful creation, which is used to worship God and to serve the neighbor. As Irenaeus writes,

For since there are real men (*veri homines*), so must there also be a real plantation (*plantationem*), that they vanish not away among non-existent things (*non excedere in ea quae non sunt*), but progress among those which have an actual existence. For neither is the substance nor the essence (*substantia neque materia conditionis*) of the creation annihilated (for faithful and true is he who has established it), but "the fashion (*figura; σχῆμα*) of the world passes away," that is, those things among which transgression has occurred, since man has grown old (*veteratus est homo*) in them. And therefore this fashion (*figura; σχῆμα*) has been formed temporary (*temporalis*), God foreknowing all things; as I have pointed out in the preceding book, and have also shown, as far as was possible, the cause of the creation of this world of temporal things (*causam temporalis mundi fabricationis*). But when this fashion (*figura*) passes away, and man has been renewed (*renovato homine*), and flourishes (*vigente*) in an incorruptible state, so as to preclude the possibility of becoming old, there shall be the new heaven and the new earth, in which the new man shall remain (*novus perseverabit homo; εἰ τοῖς καινοῖς ἀναμενεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος*), always holding fresh converse with God (*semper nove confabulans Deo; ἀεὶ καινῶς προσομιλῶν τῷ Θεῷ*) (AH v, 36, 1).

For Irenaeus, one and the same God reveals himself from beginning to end; likewise, one and the same creation progresses toward its intended perfection. Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation means that God is not the transcendent spiritual mystery characteristic of Valentinian thought, nor is this world a hopelessly infirm and transitory realm. Rather, God is interpreted in connection with creation as the one who creates life and condescends to interact with his creatures; and creation is interpreted in connection with its Creator as the gift of God manifesting his eternal goodness and generosity. In the fellowship of the church, Christ's restores humanity to its proper place as priest, through whom God's goodness is bestowed upon the earth and creation is offered to God as an acceptable sacrifice.

More significantly, it will also be recognized that traditional chiliasm cannot serve his purposes. Preparation for glory is an organic process, not the product of following a regimen for a fixed length of time; it requires, moreover, continuity between the present creation and the eternal state."

“Joining the End to the Beginning”
Divine Providence and the Interpretation of Scripture in the Teaching
of St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons

Chapter 3: Themes of Divine Providence in Irenaeus’ Interpretation of Scripture

From its beginning, Christianity has been inextricably bound to the scriptures. The four canonical gospels and the Pauline epistles testify to this truth. The interpretation of Moses and the ancient prophets is the center around which Christian identity turns. Perhaps it is even true to say that Christianity consists precisely in a hermeneutical movement. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus’ ministry begins with the reading of Isaiah. Jesus’ interpretation inspires amazement, but also leads to rejection. According to the four evangelists, Jesus’ interpretation of the Sabbath, marriage, temple, and the Law reveals the distinctive hermeneutic that becomes the source of Christianity’s unique identity and its conflict. “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40). The proper way to relate Jesus to the ancient scriptures is a central question for the early Christian community.

The Pauline epistles testify to the centrality of this hermeneutical question. In the *Acts of the Apostles*, chapter 11, Barnabas seeks for Paul in order to handle what was to become a most difficult challenge for the fledgling church. In Antioch, the new church, begun after the persecution of Stephen, includes both Jews and Gentiles. Paul’s yearlong catechesis is summed up with the fact that “in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians” (Acts 11:26). Instead of being Jew or Gentile, the disciples are given a new identity. The name, “Christian,” whatever its actual origins, signifies a new family, a new race, a new and distinctive fellowship.²⁴⁷ This newness, which perhaps established a unifying foundation for Antioch, brings strong opposition. The newness and distinctiveness of

²⁴⁷ The significance of the name, “Christian,” is evident in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (*IRom* 3:2; *IMag* 10:1) as well as in various martyrdom accounts. In the *Mart. Lyons*, reference is made to Sanctus, a deacon, who answers every question about his identity with the simple confession, “I am a Christian.” Cf. *Mart. Lyons* 20, which can be found in Musurillo (1972, pp. 62ff). Likewise the account of Sts. Perpetua and Felicitas begins with an exchange between Perpetua and her father. Cf. *Passio* 3. When her father attempts to dissuade her from Christianity, Perpetua refers to a clay vase. She maintains that just as a clay vase cannot be called by any other name than what it is, so she cannot be called by any other name than what she is—a Christian. These sources indicate that the name Christian described more than merely an association by choice or will. Rather, the name Christian denoted a more essential relationship. The baptized are Christians because God has made them Christian through an act of creation.

Paul's gospel seems to undermine the Mosaic Law. For Paul's opponents, Jesus' ministry consists in the restoration of the Torah, not its elimination. Here again, the hermeneutical question of Christianity's relation to the Law and the prophets persists. How can Christianity be new and distinctive as well as in continuity with Judaism?

This question persists into the second century. Clement of Rome's letter to the Corinthians simply assumes that the Christian church is a participant in the biblical narrative. Peter and Paul both insisted that the ancient scriptures were written for the Christian church (1 Cor 10:11; 1 Pet 1:10-12). This apostolic catechesis forms the foundation upon which Clement builds. This strong narrative continuity is balanced by an emphasis on Christological newness evident in Ignatius of Antioch and Justin Martyr. The claim of some in the church, that they will not believe it in the gospel unless it can be shown in the ancient scriptures, brings Ignatius' critique.²⁴⁸ For Ignatius, Jesus Christ and his passion are the true scriptures. In place of the Mosaic Law, Christ himself is the light by which the scriptures are to be read. This Christological hermeneutic is also prominent in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*. The newness of Christ and his gospel renders the Law and the prophets old.

In conflict with "Judaizing" opponents, teachers of the church tended to emphasize the newness and distinctiveness of the Christian gospel. While a narrative continuity with the ancient prophets was maintained and employed especially for rhetorical purposes, the ancient scriptures were relegated to secondary status. The newness of Christ rendered them old; the light of Christ turned them into prophetic shadows; and the reality of Christ made them misunderstood figures. A journey down this path brings the danger that what is old will be rendered irrelevant and non-essential. This danger becomes a significant conflict for the church with the advent of Marcion, Valentinus, and their followers. The newness of the covenant established by Christ and expounded by Paul is magnified sevenfold by Marcion and Valentinus. The Christian gospel is not merely new, but independent and autonomous. Instead of a difference in covenantal relationship, the gospel comes from a different god and reveals a different world. This radically alien and new gospel relegates most of the ancient scriptures to a lower world and an inferior god.

²⁴⁸ Cf. *I Phil* 8:2.

In this context, Irenaeus of Lyons begins to argue in a new manner. Instead of being content to express the newness of the Christian gospel in relation to the ancient scriptures, Irenaeus must define the nature of Christianity's continuity with Judaism—its patriarchs, Law, and prophets.²⁴⁹ Thus, in Irenaeus' use of scripture one sees an honest struggle to express both the gospel's distinctiveness and its affinity with the ancient scriptures.²⁵⁰ His exposition of scripture is built upon two sturdy pillars that have already been examined—the creation of all things *ex nihilo* and the recapitulation of all things in Christ. The ancient scriptures unite these two doctrines into one narrative, “joining,” as Irenaeus likes to say, “the end to the beginning.” Sandwiched between the two bookends of creation and recapitulation, the prophetic scriptures and the apostolic gospel constitute one harmonious narrative—God intimately forming his creatures and guiding them toward their destiny in Christ.

I. The Catholicity of the Scriptures

Irenaeus writes, not as an academic scholar arguing in the realm of abstract theological speculation, but as a pastor concerned for the concrete life of the church. From the pastoral perspective, Irenaeus' opponents are not merely teachers of false ideas, but pose a real, concrete threat to the faithful. Thus, Irenaeus deems it necessary both to refute their doctrine and to expose their deceptive practice. For this reason, Irenaeus' argument emphasizes the use and interpretation of scripture as much as the oneness of God. Indeed, for Irenaeus, the doctrine of God and the use of

²⁴⁹ Cf. Jean Daniélou (1960, pp. 30ff). For Daniélou, both “difference” and “similarity” are characteristic of Irenaeus' typological vision of the scriptures. He writes that in Irenaeus' understanding of recapitulation there is a twofold aspect that “both restores the broken harmony (here we have the idea of reparation of sin) and surpasses the original work (the aspect of accomplishment). The Adamic typology has then the special feature of offering at one and the same time difference and similarity. Irenaeus notes most carefully these two aspects. The similarities, which are the very basis of typology, are intended to bring into relief the unity of the divine plan, a fundamental theme of St. Irenaeus in his contest with Gnosticism which considered the Gospel as having no relation to the past.” However, while Irenaeus certainly notes these two aspects of scripture, the distinctiveness of his hermeneutic consists in his reconciliation of these two aspects in a unified vision that maintains the scriptures' catholicity or wholeness. It is my argument that Irenaeus accomplishes this reconciliation through his doctrine of recapitulation. There is both real identity and real growth in the scriptures because there is a real, substantive communication between the old and the new in Christ.

²⁵⁰ Cf. James L. Kugel & Rowan Greer (1986, pp. 109ff). Here, Rowan Greer considers the “rise of the Christian Bible” and attributes this rise to the church's conflict with Judaizing Christians on the one hand and the Marcionites and Valentinians on the other. He (1986, p. 124) writes, “Nevertheless, the content of the apostolic faith insists upon the paradox already mentioned that the church stands in continuity and discontinuity with Israel. Continuity centers upon the claim that the creator God of the Hebrew Scriptures is the same as the God of Jesus Christ. Discontinuity derives from belief that both creation and the Hebrew Scriptures point beyond themselves to Christ.” I believe this “continuity” and “discontinuity” are certainly evident in Irenaeus' interpretation of the prophetic scriptures.

scripture are coordinate teachings.²⁵¹ The scriptures do not merely contain texts that witness to the doctrine of the true God; rather, the scriptures as a whole are a manifestation of God's own character and providential care. Therefore, Irenaeus' treatment of individual texts begins with their place and function within the whole narrative of scripture. In the same way that the significance of a man's arm cannot be understood without recognizing its function in the whole body, so individual texts are to be read according to how they operate within the catholicity of God's interaction with humanity.

A. Scripture as Words of the Word

For the Valentinians, the scriptures are a mixed bag. In his letter to Flora, Ptolemaeus relegates the sacred Law to secondary status. The true nature of the Law is only known from "the words of the Savior." On the basis of selected texts from Matthew's gospel, Ptolemaeus divides the Law of Moses into three categories. The first part is attributed to the just God, the second part to Moses himself, and the third part to the Jewish elders. Ptolemaeus claims that this threefold division "has brought to light what is true in it." The parts of the Law attributed to Moses and the elders are irrelevant. Ptolemaeus focuses on the Law that comes from God. This divine Law is also divided into three subsections. The Decalogue is "pure but imperfect." This part of the Law the Savior comes to complete. Besides the Decalogue, there is Law that is "interwoven with injustice." This part the Savior destroys. Finally, there is an exemplary part of the Law, which is made "in the image of spiritual and transcendent matters." These laws—sacrifices, circumcision, Sabbath and Passover—the Savior gives a "spiritual meaning."

For Ptolemaeus, the ancient Law is a complex amalgam of words that cannot be understood without a teacher who knows the correct code.²⁵² The words of the Law proceed from different

²⁵¹ Cf. Denis Farkasfalvy (1968, pp. 319-333). Among the many insightful points in this article, Farkasfalvy shows that Irenaeus' emphasis on the oneness of God is essentially bound to his understanding of the scriptures. Farkasfalvy (1968, p. 321) writes, "Thus, Christian monotheism as understood by Irenaeus, implies a history of revelation starting with creation and continuing thereafter without interruption in spite of the sin of Adam." Farkasfalvy refers to AH iv, 10, 1; iv, 11, 1 where Irenaeus reads the scriptures as testimonies of "one and the same God (*unus et idem Deus*)."

²⁵² Cf. F. Young (1997, pp. 57ff). Young (1997, p. 61) writes, "The crucial thing for the Gnostic was the insight which had actually been received from elsewhere. Gnostic doctrine is revelatory rather than traditional, textual or rational." Thus, "Gnosticism" represents not merely a fragmentation of the scriptures themselves, but a radical division between textual tradition and the newness of preaching. For Irenaeus' opponents, scriptural texts are reduced to tools used for the rhetorical purpose of their own preaching. Pneumatic preaching supplies the new *hypothesis* around which the textual tradition is rearranged.

authors and, therefore, lack harmony and agreement. Indeed, the punch line of Ptolemaeus' letter to Flora is that none of the words come from the "perfect God."

It remains for us to say who this God is who ordained the Law; but I think this too has been shown you in what we have already said, if you have listened to it attentively. For if the Law was not ordained by the perfect God himself (as we have already taught you), nor by the devil (a statement one cannot possibly make), the legislator must be someone other than these two. In fact, he is the demiurge and maker of this universe and everything in it; and because he is essentially different from these two and is between them, he is rightly given the name 'Intermediate.'²⁵³

For Ptolemaeus, the ancient Law does not appear to be essential to true Christian gnosis. The important truth to be learned from the Pentateuch is its inferior and secondary status. The Law of Moses ultimately has nothing to say to the pneumatic disciple; it is no longer useful for shaping one's spiritual identity. Ptolemaeus seems to recognize the potential impact of his teaching and anticipates Flora's perplexity. He encourages Flora to "not let this trouble you for the present in your desire to learn..." Ptolemaeus' teaching could certainly inspire a sense of helplessness in Flora. Where is true gnosis to be found if not in the scriptures?

Ptolemaeus' theological dualism leads to a hagiographical fragmentation. Scriptural texts must be divided according to their author.²⁵⁴ This fragmentation allows Valentinian catechists to loose words, phrases, and texts from the whole and give them a more individualistic and independent meaning. While such a perspective tends to exalt the power of the catechist, it does so at a price. Instead of being clear and public proclamations of God's relationship to his people, the scriptures are defined as enigmatic puzzles accessible only to the elite. The simple narrative of the whole is a barrier that hides the supreme god from the unenlightened reader. On the one hand, this fleshly narrative can be removed in the manner of Marcion by editing and rejecting certain texts. On the other hand, with less violence, the narrative can simply be transcended. The latter seems to be the preferred course of most Valentinians. Here allegory is no longer merely an exegetical method or a rhetorical tool, but a theological necessity. The literal reading of the text is a mask to be removed.

²⁵³ Translation of Ptolemaeus', *Letter to Flora* taken from Robert M. Grant (1961, pp. 184-190).

²⁵⁴ Cf. AH i, 7, 3. Here Irenaeus connects the cosmological and Christological fragmentation of Valentinus and Ptolemaeus to a fragmentation of scripture. "...They divide the prophecies (*τέμνουσι τὰς προφητείας*), maintaining that one portion was uttered by the mother, a second by her seed, and a third by the Demiurge. In like manner, they hold that Jesus uttered some things under the influence of the Savior, others under that of the mother, and others still under that of the Demiurge..." While the opposition's interpretation consists in dividing texts according to their authors, Irenaeus' task is to unite the scriptures and integrate them into the one mosaic of Christ, who is the "body of truth" (Cf. AH i, 9, 4 – i, 10, 2).

For Irenaeus, the secret, hidden character of the Valentinian god is perhaps the greatest weakness in their argument. He exploits this weakness rhetorically to accuse his opponents of arrogance. Secret gnosis impugns the Creator and his scriptures in order to exalt the pneumatic teacher.²⁵⁵ Thus, Irenaeus ridicules their claim to secret knowledge, saying, “For these men are not more to be depended on than the scriptures; nor ought we to give up the declarations of the Lord (*nec relinquentes nos eloquia Domini*), Moses, and the rest of the prophets, who have proclaimed the truth (*qui veritatem praeconaverunt*), and give credit to them, who do indeed utter nothing of a sensible nature (*sanum*), but rave about untenable opinions (*instabilim delirantibus*)” (AH ii, 30, 6). For Irenaeus, the proper order of knowledge ought to be maintained. Humankind, spiritual or otherwise, is not the teacher of him, who created all that exists. “...God should forever teach (*ἀεὶ μὲμ ὁ Θεὸς διδάσκη*), and man should forever learn (*μανθάνη*) the things taught him by God” (AH ii, 28, 3).

However, while Irenaeus certainly exploits the claim to hidden knowledge for rhetorical purposes, he also offers a more theologically substantive critique. Secret gnosis not only suggests an arrogant elitism on the part of his opponents, but also reveals a weakness in the supreme god of the Pleroma. The high and transcendent god of Irenaeus’ opponents is evidently unable or unwilling to communicate himself clearly to the fleshly world.²⁵⁶ Thus, Irenaeus seeks to contrast the enigmatic, self-contemplating god of his adversaries with the perspicuous, self-communicating God of the catholic faith.²⁵⁷ The true understanding of God does not consist in the static attributes that God possesses in himself, but in the gifts that he actively communicates to his creation. What good is a knowledge that is possessed but not revealed? What good is a physician who possesses a cure, but

²⁵⁵ Thus, for Irenaeus, his opponents claim to be “wiser than the apostles (*peritiores Apostolis*)” (AH iv, 6, 1; cf also AH iii, 2, 2).

²⁵⁶ Cf. Torrance (1995, pp. 25ff). Here Torrance shows how “Gnostic” systems presupposed the fundamental *χωρισμός* between the *κόσμος αἰσθητός* and the *κόσμος νοητός*. This fundamental division leads to a “progressive mythologisation” in which the pneumatic’s access to the spiritual world must be mystical rather than rational.

²⁵⁷ Cf. AH iv, 6, 1-7. Here Irenaeus comments on his opponents’ interpretation of Matthew 11:27 or Luke 10:22. If the supreme God of the Pleroma is not known until the time of Christ then his “carelessness and neglect (*incuriae et negligentiae*)” should be investigated. This rhetorical attack gives way to a more substantive critique that centers on God’s ability to communicate with flesh and blood humanity. He writes, “But the Lord did not say that both the Father and the Son could not be known at all (*in totum*), for in that case his advent would have been superfluous. For why did he come here (*huc veniebat*)? Was it that he should say to us, ‘Never mind seeking after God; for he is unknown (*incognitus est*), and you shall not find him;’ as also the disciples of Valentinus falsely declare that Christ said to their aeons? But this is indeed vain. For the Lord taught us that no man is capable of knowing God, unless he be taught of God (*nisi Deo docente*); that is, that God cannot be known without God (*ἄνευ Θεοῦ μὴ γινώσκεισθαι τὸν Θεόν*); but that this is the express will of the Father (*θέλημα τοῦ Πατρὸς*), that God should be known. For they shall know him to whomsoever the Son has revealed him (*οἷς ἂν ἀποκαλύψῃ ὁ Υἱός*).”

does not use it to heal the sick? What good is a god who possesses life, light, wisdom, and knowledge in his own nature, but cannot actively communicate them to those in need?

Instead of a static, introverted intellect or mind, Irenaeus' God is most fundamentally a preacher. In the preface to book four, Irenaeus promises to "add weight by means of the words of the Lord (*per Domini sermones*) to what I have already advanced." For his Valentinian opponents, the words of the Savior are limited to the gospel sayings. Their dualism separates the gospel of Jesus' parables and sayings from the ancient narrative of Moses, the prophets, and Israel. For Irenaeus, the words of the Lord encompass the whole of scripture. Irenaeus coordinates prophetic and apostolic texts to show their harmony and agreement. This agreement in content is evidence of a deeper ontological unity. "But since the writings of Moses are the words of Christ (*Moysi litterae verba sunt Christi*), he does himself declare to the Jews, as John recorded in the gospel, 'If you had believed Moses, you would have believed me; for he wrote of me. But if you believe not his writings, neither will you believe my words' (John 5:46-47). He thus indicates in the clearest manner (*manifestissime significans*) that the writings of Moses are his words (*Moysi litteras suos esse sermones*)" (AH iv, 2, 3). This line of argument leads Irenaeus to conclude, "...He shows that all are from one essence, that is, Abraham, and Moses, and the prophets, and also the Lord himself, who rose from the dead, in whom many believe who are of the circumcision, who do also hear Moses and the prophets announcing the coming of the Son of God (*audiunt praedicantes adventum Filii Dei*)" (AH iv, 2, 4). The prophetic and apostolic witnesses not only agree in theological content, but also originate from one and the same author.

Therefore, the scriptures are not a loose collection of texts each originating from different times and authors; rather, the scriptures are to be read as a whole. This catholicity of the scriptures, however, does not arise out of mere agreement in thought or expression; nor does it proceed from an authoritative church hierarchy. For Irenaeus, this catholicity of the sacred texts arises out of the very being of God. "For the Lord, revealing himself (*ostendens semetipsum*) to his disciples, that he himself is the Word, who imparts knowledge of the Father (*qui agnitionem Patris fecit*), and reproving the Jews, who imagined that they had God, while they nevertheless rejected his Word, through whom God is made known (*per quem cognoscitur Deus*), declared, 'No man knows the Son,

but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whom the Son has willed to reveal' (AH iv, 6, 1). For Irenaeus, this text (Matt 11:27; Lk 10:22) does not simply refer to the revelation that came through Jesus' incarnate ministry. Rather, it is a statement that applies throughout all times, covenants, and dispensations. From beginning to end, the Word has made the Father known; and he reveals him as the only true God who wills to communicate himself to the world.

From this perspective, every work of God in relation to the created world proceeds through the same economy. From the beginning, the Father has related to creation through his Word.²⁵⁸ The same Word is the creative Word forming all things from the beginning, the prophetic Word preparing Israel for his advent, and the Incarnate Word recapitulating all things in himself.

For by means of the creation itself, the Word reveals God the Creator (*revelat Verbum conditorem Deum*); and by means of the world, the Lord the Maker (*fabricatorem*) of the world; and by means of the formation, the Artificer who formed him (*eum qui plasmaverit artificem*); and by the Son that Father who begot the Son (*Patrem qui generaverit Filium*): and these things do indeed address all men (*omnes colloquuntur*) in the same manner, but all do not in the same way believe them. But by the Law and the prophets did the Word preach both himself and the Father alike (*per Legem et prophetas similiter Verbum et semetipsum et Patrem praedicabat*); and all the people heard him alike (*audivit universus populus similiter*), but all did not alike believe. And through the Word himself who had been made visible and palpable (*visibilem et palpabilem factum*), was the Father shown forth, although all did not equally believe in him; but all saw the Father in the Son: for the Father is the invisible of the Son, but the Son the visible of the Father (AH iv, 6, 6).

In this text, creation, the prophetic scriptures, and the incarnation are not merely united in a horizontal and chronological narrative, but in a vertical and divine economy. At his very essence, God is one who actively proclaims, reveals, and communicates himself to his creatures.

The Father fervently desires his own Word, in which he delights within his own nature, to be present in humanity. Thus, Irenaeus speaks of the Law and the prophets as the "preaching (*praedicabat*)" of the Word. The scriptures are not static texts that passively await an interpretation; rather, they stand in the active and dynamic economy through which the Word preaches his life-giving words shaping and molding his creatures.²⁵⁹ Creation, the scriptures, and the apostolic

²⁵⁸ Cf. Juan Ochagavia (1964, p. 59). Ochagavia rightly maintains that for Irenaeus God's revelations throughout history are all fundamentally "logophanies," that is, manifestations in and through the Son.

²⁵⁹ The scriptures conceived as an active proclamation to the church is a dimension almost wholly absent from discussions of patristic exegesis. In academic examinations, the early Christian fathers are pictured as modern exegetes investigating the passive text or the dead letter of the scriptures. Thus, Irenaeus' exegesis is often reduced to a set of rules or authoritative principles that should govern the proper reading of the text. For example, Grant (1954, p. 59) complains that in Irenaeus

preaching of the church are aspects of one whole or catholic revelation. “For the Son, being present with His own handiwork from the beginning, reveals the Father to all (*Ab initio enim assistens Filius suo plasmati, revelat omnibus*); to whom he wills, and when he wills, and as the Father wills.

Wherefore, then, in all things, and through all things, there is one God, the Father, and one Word, and one Son, and one Spirit, and one salvation to all who believe in him” (AH iv, 6, 7). The scriptures, therefore, are not merely sources of revelation in which spiritual disciples can discover and fabricate their own truth; rather, they are active revelations in which the Word continues to communicate himself and his Father to humanity.²⁶⁰ For the bishop of Lyons, to read the text is always and at every moment a personal encounter with Christ.

Because they stand within the vertical economy of God’s self-proclamation, the scriptures are not merely material letters, words, and phrases; rather, they inherently bear a certain divine ontology. The words of scriptures are themselves icons of the Word.²⁶¹ The words of scripture not only stand within a grammatical and textual relation to the horizontal narrative, but also manifest the very being of the Father and the Son.²⁶² In this regard, Irenaeus is quick to accuse his opponents of treating the

“the authority of the church has been exalted, but the liberty of the human spirit has tended to vanish.” For Irenaeus, the scriptures are not an objectified and passive text about the past; they are the living word preached by the Creator to give life to the world. Thus, Irenaeus does not interpret the scriptures as one who employs scientific rules or approved principles of investigation. Rather, he interprets them as a preacher who speaks by an inspiration of the Spirit that arises out of a meditation on the text. Therefore, his exegesis cannot be reduced to certain systematic principles or rules.

²⁶⁰ For Irenaeus, the preaching of the prophets, the apostles, and the church are perichoretic realities, that is, they all have a place in the economy of God’s self-revelation through his Son. In this way, Irenaeus resists any rupture between the prophetic scriptures, the apostolic witness, and the kerygmatic tradition of the church. In this regard, see AH iii, 1-3. For Irenaeus, the opposition trusts that tradition that has come *per vivam vocem*, which allows him to transcend the scriptures and “preach himself (*praedicare semetipsum*)” (AH iii, 2, 1). Against this exaltation of preaching over scripture, Irenaeus does not simply exalt scripture over the church’s preaching. Rather, he maintains their ontological unity in the Spirit. Thus, I must disagree somewhat with N. Brox (1998, p. 37) who believes that, for Irenaeus, scripture and the *regula veritatis* are both “Selbständigkeit.” While scripture and the rule of truth can be distinguished, Irenaeus maintains that the preaching of the church and the scriptures share a common ground of being. Both are rooted in the divine Logos. The scriptures are of one essence with the preaching of the church. It is for this reason that Irenaeus does not direct his hearers simply to scriptural texts, but to the church. “It is within the power of all, therefore, in every church (*in omni Ecclesia*), who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly (*perspicere*) the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world (*in toto mundo manifestatam*)” (AH iii, 3, 1). From the context it is evident that the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the world is the church itself.

²⁶¹ Cf. AH iv, 21, 3 where Irenaeus interprets various Old Testament stories figuratively. Irenaeus concludes, “For with God there is nothing without purpose or due significance (*nihil enim vacuum, neque sine signo apud Deum*).” The use of the word “empty (*vacuum*)” may refer to his opponents’ characterization of the fleshly world and letter of the scriptures. The use of the word, “sign (*signo*)” may, then, indicate that Irenaeus sees the fleshly world and the historical narrative of the scriptures as “sacramental” signs that communicate, not merely ideas, but a personal presence. Cf. also AH iv, 20, 5 where the “signifying (*significabanti*)” work of the prophets is connected to the “seeing” of God which communicates life. Concerning such texts, cf. R. Tremblay (1978).

²⁶² Cf. A Benoit’s (1979) short essay on the theme of vision in Irenaeus’ theology. Benoit (1979, p. 384) maintains that the vision of God not only affects Irenaeus’ Christology, but also his ecclesiology. He writes, “Et c’est ainsi que par l’Esprit qui rend Dieu visible dans l’Ecriture et l’eucharistie, le Chrétien est peu à peu accoutumé à voir Dieu et à grandir dans cette vision jusqu’au jour où, dans le Royaume, il verra enfin Dieu face à face dans une vision totale et définitive.”

scriptures as if they are merely a collection of disconnected and autonomous words that can be rearranged at will.

In doing so, however, they disregard the order and connection of the scriptures, and so far as in them lies, dismember and destroy the truth (*λύοντες τὰ μέλη τῆς ἀληθείας*). By transferring passages and dressing them up anew, and making one thing out of another, they succeed in deluding many through their wicked art in adapting the oracles of the Lord (*κυριακῶν λογίων*) to their own opinions. Their manner of acting is just as if one, when a beautiful image of a king has been constructed (*τις βασιλέως εἰκόνος καλῆς κατασκευασμένης*) by some skilful artist (*σοφοῦ τεχνίτου*) out of precious jewels, should then take this likeness of the man all to pieces, should rearrange the gems, and so fit them together as to make them into the form of a dog or of a fox, and even that but poorly executed (*φάυλως κατασκευασμένην*); and should then maintain and declare that this was the beautiful image of the king which the skilful artist constructed, pointing to the jewels which had been admirably fitted together by the first artist to form the image of the king, but have been with bad effect transferred by the latter one to the shape of a dog..." (AH i, 8, 1).

In this text, Irenaeus likens the scriptures not only to the image of iconography, but also to the creation of the human body.²⁶³ His opponents destroy the "members (*τὰ μέλη*)" of the truth when they disconnect the words and phrases of scripture from the whole.²⁶⁴ However, for Irenaeus, the practice of his adversaries does not merely destroy the grammatical or textual integrity of scripture; nor does it merely undermine the historical narrative of the Bible. Rather, it destroys the iconic character of the scriptures.²⁶⁵ Instead of the manifestation of the King, the scriptures are used to portray a dog or fox. For Irenaeus, the scriptures' testimony to the advent of the incarnate Word is not limited to its content,

²⁶³ Cf. AH i, 9, 4 where Irenaeus speaks of the "immoveable canon of truth (*τὸν κανόνα τῆς ἀληθείας*)" received in baptism. It is the canon of truth that allows the baptized to restore the scriptures to their wholeness fitting them to "the body of truth (*τῷ τῆς ἀληθείας σωματίῳ*)."²⁶³ Margerie (1993, pp. 52-57) is certainly not alone when he interprets this imagery of the "body of truth" as a reference to a set of doctrines received from the apostles. I do not think this interpretation does justice to the incarnational character inherent in Irenaeus' understanding of truth. In the context, the "canon of truth" and the "body of truth" consist in the refusal of the baptized to receive "the fox instead of the icon of the king (*τὴν ἀλώπεκα ἀντὶ τῆς βασιλικῆς εἰκόνος*)."²⁶³ Thus, the "body of truth" cannot be limited to a set of truths, but is identified with the body of Christ himself. The rule of truth includes the fleshly narrative of Christ in the four gospels and the ongoing presence of Christ in his church through the Eucharist. Irenaeus is most likely referring to the catechumenate in which the teaching of the scriptures, baptism, and the eucharist constitute one ecclesial reality. Having been baptized, the catechumen does not merely receive a set of truths, but literally receives the "body of Christ" in the sacrament and is, therefore, incorporated into the Christological narrative of scripture. Cf. also *Epid.* 1.

²⁶⁴ Cf. AH iv, 33, 10. In this passage, Irenaeus refers to the prophets themselves as "members of Christ (*membra Christi*)."²⁶⁴ For Irenaeus, the "members of the truth" bears an incarnational, sacramental, and ecclesial connotation. The scriptures are joined to Christ himself in the same way that the faithful of both the old and new covenants are incorporated into him.

²⁶⁵ AH i, 8, 1; i, 9, 4 are often used to demonstrate Irenaeus' concept of *hypothesis*. Cf. Fances Young (1997, pp. 18-21). Cf. also John O'Keefe & R. R. Reno (2005, pp. 34-36). Young as well as O'Keefe and Reno expertly demonstrate the way *hypothesis* functions literarily to unite the two testaments into one narrative. However, for Irenaeus, there is, I believe, another dimension. The *hypothesis* is not only the plot that unites the two testaments, but also that which unites the Bible and the preaching of the church. The face of the fox is not just an exegetical tool used to read the Bible, it represents the preaching of his opponents. The *hypothesis* of their preaching is not in harmony with the plot of scripture and leads to the fragmentation and rearrangement of scriptural texts. For Irenaeus, the true *hypothesis* allows the whole Bible and the preaching of the church to proceed as one harmonious living Word from God to his church. It is for this reason that in AH i, 9, 4-5, Irenaeus moves directly from his discussion of the "rule of truth" that unites the scriptures to "the immoveable truth preached by the church." For Irenaeus, the preaching of the church stands within the *hypothesis* or plot of the scriptures.

that is, certain prophetic utterances hidden in this or that location. Instead, the scriptures as a whole testify by their very existence to the God who seeks to communicate with humanity.

B. Scripture as One Narrative

The scriptures stand within the vertical economy by which God relates to the world through his Word. Thus, the scriptures are not merely historical records testifying to an ancient past. Rather, the scriptures are God's own preaching through which the hearer is incorporated into the narrative of the Creator's interaction with his creation. God's relationship to his creatures is inherently rhetorical.²⁶⁶ The truth that God creates all things through his *Λογος* means more than that each creature originates in God's will and is an expression of his desire. It also means that all creation fits into the rhetorical purpose of God's self-revelation. As a good rhetorician, the *Verbum Dei* has planned his sermon and ordered it toward a perfect end. Scripture is the Word's long, rhetorical argument that proves his loving providence in relation to his people and prepares for the perfect recapitulation or conclusion. This recapitulation, which incorporates and perfects the whole of God's revelation, is the incarnation, death, resurrection, and second coming of Christ. The prophetic and apostolic scriptures constitute one, catholic narrative that joins the creation of all things through the Word in the beginning to Christ's recapitulation of all things in the end.

The horizontal, historical continuity of the scriptures in one, catholic narrative establishes the catechetical character of the scriptures. The Valentinians certainly agree with Irenaeus that the scriptures are essentially catechetical. "He (the Savior) became a guide, at peace and occupied with classrooms. He came forward and uttered the word as a teacher. The self-appointed wise people came up to him, testing him, but he refuted them, for they were empty; and they despised him, for they were not truly intelligent" (*Gos. Tr.* 19:18ff.). However, for the Valentinians, the catechesis of the gospel begins with the repudiation of the fleshly narrative, which hides the true meaning of sacred

²⁶⁶ Concerning Irenaeus' knowledge of rhetoric cf. William Schoedel (1959, pp. 22-32). Schoedel (1959, p. 31) concludes that Irenaeus "reflects some knowledge of Hellenistic rhetoric." Cf also PHEME PERKINS (1976, pp. 193-200). After surveying the first book of Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*, Perkins (1976, p. 197) concludes, "These brief observations are sufficient to show that Irenaeus has conceived his work along well-known rhetorical lines." However, I would like to add a further dimension to the place of rhetoric in Irenaeus' work. The significance of rhetoric for Irenaeus is not merely a matter of argumentative style; rather, it defines the very way in which God relates to his creatures. In this way, rhetoric is the framework for the whole of his theological perspective.

texts.²⁶⁷ The pneumatic teacher does not seek to incorporate the catechumen into the narrative of creation. Instead, he wants the catechumen to see the fleshly story of the scriptures as alien to his true identity.²⁶⁸ He turns the catechetical path inward.²⁶⁹ The Valentinian teacher uses gospel sayings to lead his disciple into an awareness of his own inner identity.

The self-contemplating god of the Pleroma leads to the self-contemplation of his spiritual disciples. The catechumen journeys from an external creation toward the internal Pleroma; he moves from one who requires mediators to one who possesses an independent and immediate relation to the spiritual world.²⁷⁰ In this context, the objective, fleshly, and apparent narrative of sacred texts is irrelevant history. When the disciples speak of the prophets of Israel, Jesus in the *Gospel of Thomas* tells them that they “have spoken of those who are dead” (*Gospel of Thomas* 52). Valentinian catechumens are invited to use texts to aid their internal journey toward self-awareness. Thus, Jesus says, according to the *Gospel of Thomas*, “If those who lead you say to you, ‘See, the kingdom is in heaven,’ then the birds of heaven will precede you. If they say to you, ‘It is in the sea,’ then the fish will precede you. But the kingdom is inside of you. And it is outside of you. When you become acquainted with yourselves, then you will be recognized. And you will understand that it is you who are the children of the living father. But if you do not become acquainted with yourselves, then you are in poverty, and it is you who are the poverty” (*Gospel of Thomas* 3). Within this catechetical

²⁶⁷ Cf. Pagels (1973, pp. 66ff). Here, Pagels contrasts the use of the literal level of the scriptures in the exegetical perspectives of Origen and Heracleon. While the literal level is the essential foundation for Origen’s spiritual interpretation, it is a barrier to be overcome and transcended for Heracleon. Pagels (1973, pp. 66-67) writes, “Origen, however, insists that the ‘literal meaning’ must be accepted and sustained in this process—that it forms, in fact, the primary foundation for the higher levels of exegesis. Heracleon, on the other hand, understands his exegesis as a method of systematically translating somatic ‘images’ into spiritual truth. Unlike Origen, he regards the ‘literal’ as relevant to exegesis only insofar as it is understood metaphorically. ‘In itself’—in its own terms—the literal remains for the pneumatic an obstacle, potentially a source of error and ignorance.”

²⁶⁸ Cf. R. A. Markus (1954, pp. 214ff). Markus contrasts the Valentinian understanding of education with Irenaeus’. He notes that Valentinian education “consists precisely in a loosening of the bond between the spiritual seed and the historical reality with which it is, for the time being, involved.”

²⁶⁹ Cf. Elaine Pagels (1973, p. 52). According to Pagels, Heracleon’s exegesis consists in recognizing three levels of perception in the text. “Visible, historical events perceived through the senses occur at the hylic level; the ethical interpretation of these events is perceived as the psychic level; and true insight (*gnosis*) into them is perceived only at the pneumatic level. Whoever understands the text pneumatically, then, transcends the mere historical level, and transcends as well its ethical meaning. He comes to interpret the whole symbolically.” Thus, it seems that Valentinian exegesis consists in a process of perception, which moves from external appearances toward the internal truth.

²⁷⁰ Cf. Pagels (1973, pp. 51-113). According to Pagels, Heracleon critiques the baptism of the church as merely consisting in a somatic washing of the body and a psychic forgiveness of sins. The pneumatics enjoy a higher baptism. Pagels (1973, p. 64) writes, “The spiritual baptism of the elect, which is *apolytroisis*, on the other hand, releases the recipient from the psychic components of his cosmic existence, redeeming him altogether from the jurisdiction of the demiurge, and restoring him into unity with his Pleroma, that is, with the ‘Mother’ and ‘Father’ beyond.” While the somatic washing signifies a bodily, external relationship to the demiurge and psychic baptism consists in an ethical salvation, *apolytroisis* (the sacrament of the bridal chamber) signifies an internal and immediate relationship to the spiritual Pleroma. The pneumatic disciple is not merely a son by adoption or will, but a son by natural generation. Cf. also Elaine Pagels (1972a, pp. 153-169).

purpose, the scriptures are internalized and psychologized.²⁷¹ The ambiguities, puzzles, and parables of scripture are especially attractive. The search for a spiritual meaning below the surface of the text corresponds to the search for an inner, spiritual identity.

Because they turn the catechetical path inward, Valentinian teachers train their disciples to transcend the fleshly narrative of scripture. The Law and the prophets are largely irrelevant and the gospel is reduced to Jesus' proverbial sayings and puzzling parables. This internalization of scripture leads to a high degree of subjectivity in Valentinian exegesis. After recounting a variety of "heretical" interpretations of different passages, Irenaeus ridicules their disharmony.

Such are the variations existing among them (*inter eos diversitates*) with regard to one, holding discordant opinions (*sententias*) as to the same scriptures; and when the same identical passage is read out (*sermone lecto*), they all begin to purse up their eyebrows, and to shake their heads, and they say that they might indeed utter a discourse transcendently lofty (*altissime se habere sermonem dicunt*), but that all cannot comprehend the greatness of that thought (*magnitudinem ejus intellectus*) which is implied in it; and that, therefore, among the wise the chief thing is silence. For that Silence, which is above must be typified by that silence which they preserve. Thus, do they, as many as they are, all depart, holding so many opinions as to one thing, and bearing about their clever notions in secret within themselves (*in abscondito ferentes secum sua acumina*) (AH iv, 35, 4).

For Irenaeus' opponents, the scriptures are not limited to one God, one world, one narrative, or one reader. Pneumatic disciples read the scriptures for themselves adapting them to their own internal, psychological narrative. This inner, personal narrative consists in a changed perception, in which spiritual disciples realize their connection to the transcendent realm of the Pleroma.

For Irenaeus, the catechetical character of the scriptures is significantly different. Instead of an inward path, the scriptures lead the reader into the person of Christ. While Valentinian catechists use scripture to increase knowledge of their own spiritual essence, Irenaeus uses scripture to incorporate his hearers into their proper relation to Jesus. Here again, Irenaeus' focus on one's participation in Christ stands in stark contrast to the opposition's emphasis on one's internal, independent possession of the spiritual essence. For the bishop of Lyons, the narrative of scripture consists precisely in the continuity and growth of this relationship between God and his human

²⁷¹ Cf. also *Gos. Tr.* 22:2-19: "So that whoever has acquaintance is from Above: and if called, hears, replies, and turns to the one who is calling; and goes to him. And he knows how that one is called. Having acquaintance, that person does the will of the one who has called; wishes to please him; and gains repose. One's name becomes one's own. Those who gain acquaintance in this way know whence they have come and whither they will go: they know in the manner of a man who, after having been intoxicated, has recovered from his intoxication: having returned into himself, he has caused his own to stand at rest."

creatures in Christ. Thus, the narrative of scripture is built upon a foundation that is both theological and anthropological.²⁷² It narrates the account of the self-proclaiming God giving himself to humanity and of plastic humanity changing, growing, and maturing according to the Creator's will.

After demonstrating the Christological harmony and consistency between the prophetic and apostolic scriptures in book four of *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus turns his concern to the character of the one, who reads the scriptures. "A spiritual disciple of this sort truly receiving the Spirit of God, who was from the beginning (*ab initio*), in all the dispensations of God (*in universis dispositionibus Dei*), present with mankind, and announced things future (*futura annuntiavit*), revealed things present (*praesentia ostendit*), and narrated things past (*praeterita enarrat*), does indeed 'judge all men, but is himself judged by no man'" (AH iv, 33, 1). For Irenaeus, the scriptures not only proceed from one God, but also are intended for one reader, the church.²⁷³ Irenaeus explains how the spiritual disciple should read the scriptures.

And all those other points which I have shown the prophets to have uttered by means of so long a series of scriptures (*per tantam seriem scripturae*), he who is truly spiritual will interpret by pointing out, in regard to every one of the things which have been spoken, to what special point in the dispensation of the Lord (*in quem characterem dispositionis Domini*) is referred, and showing the entire body of the work of the Son of God (*integrum corpus operas Filii Dei*), knowing always the same God (*eunden Deum*), and always acknowledging the same Word of God (*eundem Verbum Dei*), although he has now been manifested to us (*nunc nobis manifestatus est*); acknowledging also at all times the same Spirit of God (*eundem Spiritum Dei*), although he has been poured out upon us after a new fashion (*nove effusus est*) in these last times (*in novissimis temporibus*), even from the creation of the world to its end upon the human race simply as such, from whom those who believe God (*qui credunt Deo*) and follow his Word (*sequuntur Verbum ejus*) receive that salvation which flows from him (AH iv, 33, 15).

²⁷² For Irenaeus, the language of recapitulation is meant to describe this two-way catechetical emphasis. While Valentinian systems typically emphasize the revelatory movement from divinity to the spiritual elect, Irenaeus wants to emphasize the fleshly incorporation or ascension into the divine life. For Irenaeus' opponents, divine gnosis can be received in the fleshly state; however, the flesh has no part in the ascension of the pneumatic into the spiritual realm. It is precisely the real incorporation of fleshly humanity into the divine life of the Son that gives Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation its distinctive and polemical character. Cf. AH iii, 16, 6 – iii, 19, 3. In this section, Irenaeus introduces his teaching of recapitulation in direct contrast to his opponents' Christology. The Valentinian teacher maintains the descent of the spiritual Christ upon the man Jesus at his baptism and the same Christ's ascent before the crucifixion. In contrast to this spiritual descent and ascent, Irenaeus presents his teaching of recapitulation. The Word of the Father did not merely "become flesh," but "took up man into himself (*hominem in semetipsum recapitulans*)."²⁷³ Thus, the movement of the gospel is not merely revelatory, but sacrificial as the Son of God ascends "offering and commending to his Father that human nature which had been found (*offerente et commendantem Patri eum hominem qui fuerat inventus*)..." (AH iii, 19, 3). The descending and ascending movements essential to his doctrine of recapitulation certainly color Irenaeus' understanding of the scriptures' catechetical purpose.

²⁷³ Cf. AH iii, 15, 2 where the Valentinians are said to refer to the church of the multitudes as "*communes et Ecclesiasticos*." The term *communes* may be the Latin translation for "*καθολικός*." Cf. Harvey (1857). The elitism of the Valentinians grew out of their assumption that the revelation of divine gnosis is intended for the spiritual, not the carnal. For Irenaeus, the revelation of God is truly catholic, that is, it is the word of that God who created the flesh. Thus, the scriptures are a catholic word intended for all who live in the flesh.

Here, Irenaeus speaks of the dispensation of the Lord as a single narrative in which each text of scripture is to be fixed. Indeed, he refers to this dispensation of the Lord as “the whole body (*integrum corpus*)” of the Son’s work. For Irenaeus, the narrative of scripture is an anthropological narrative recounting the dispensation of that humanity that is incorporated into Christ.²⁷⁴ In other words, the spiritual disciple’s Christological reading of scripture is by no means an objective reading.²⁷⁵ Rather, the spiritual disciple reads the scriptures as a narrative about his or her own humanity. The Christian reads the scriptures as one who has received the Spirit “after a new fashion,” who “believes God,” “follows his Word,” and “receives the salvation which flows from him.”

Like Christ himself, the scriptures entail both divine and human dimensions. In the divine, vertical dimension, the prophetic and apostolic scriptures are the preaching of the one, unchangeable God who, from beginning to end, condescends out of love for humanity. However, in the human, horizontal dimension, the prophetic and apostolic narrative testifies to the growth and perfection of humanity.²⁷⁶ While vertically God relates to his creatures through his Word and Spirit, horizontally humanity progresses from a good beginning to a God-ordained end. Thus, for Irenaeus, the scriptures

²⁷⁴ Much has been written on the patristic character of typology. Cf. Leonhard Goppelt (1982); David Baker (1976, pp. 137-157); Jean Daniélou (1960). However, these discussions generally define typology as textual or historical connections perceived by interpreters of the scriptures. From this perspective, the types employed by Irenaeus and others seem to be “foolish fancies.” Cf. Frederic Farrar (1961, pp. 162ff). If we are to understand Irenaeus’ reading of scripture, then we must first recognize that for him the correspondence between the old and new testaments is not merely textual or historical. Rather, the connection is truly ontological. Adam is a type of Christ precisely because they share the same flesh and blood. This ontological foundation encourages Irenaeus to interpret the narratives of Adam, Abraham, Hosea, Jonah, etc as Christological narratives. Abel’s correspondence with Christ is not merely a similarity of pattern—historical or textual. Rather, for Irenaeus, the very same flesh martyred in Abel is assumed by Christ and raised from the dead. Therefore, Irenaeus’ typology is not a matter of secret gnosis present in the mind of the reader, but is simply a necessary consequence of the incarnation.

²⁷⁵ A characteristic of many academic appraisals of patristic exegesis is the focus on exegetical methods. However, such exegetical methods invariably assume that the interpreter sees himself in an external relationship to the scriptures. Outside the biblical narrative, the objective interpreter must employ methods to access the text. This assumption is evident, for example, in Karlfried Froehlich (1984, pp. 13-14), who categorizes Irenaeus as an example of “authoritative exegesis.” In a similar way, Simonetti (1994, p. 23) finds Irenaeus lacking because he is “unable to find a valid hermeneutical principle to oppose the allegorical interpretation of his adversaries, chiefly because he does not really concern himself with determining, even approximately, the relationship between allegorical and literal interpretation.” Irenaeus is not focused on exegetical methods because he does not interpret scripture as one standing outside the text. For the bishop of Lyons, the church stands within the biblical narrative. The church reads the bible, not as an external authority governing the validity of exegetical procedures, but as an internal participant who has been incorporated into the narrative of Christ. Thus, Irenaeus does not read the scriptures with the insecurity of the academic exegete, but with the boldness of a preacher. He proclaims the meaning of the scriptures with the same confidence that one recounts his own family history. In other words, he speaks not so much as a legal authority over the text, but as the natural heir of the text.

²⁷⁶ The presence of these two dimensions in Irenaeus’ interpretation of scripture prevents scholars from categorizing his exegesis in any precise way. In this regard, cf. Simonetti (1994, pp. 21f). He describes Irenaeus as using “typology,” “typological allegory,” and “vertical allegory.” Irenaeus’ typology cannot be reduced to a similarity in narrative patterns between historical events or persons. Rather, his typology entails a vertical thickness. It is precisely in the historical and narrative correspondence between the old and new testaments that the very character of God is revealed and his providential presence manifested. Thus, the scriptures do not merely record a past history, but truly preach to the church in the present moment. Both of these dimensions seem to be entailed in his references to various scriptures as “signs (*signum*)”, “types (*typos*)”, and “images (*imago*).” Cf AH iv, 19-20.

are not catechetical because they merely communicate true gnosis or rational doctrines that stand against heretical ideas. Rather, the scriptures are catechetical because through them the divine Word effects a real, ontological change in humanity.²⁷⁷ For Irenaeus' opponents, the scriptures communicate hidden gnosis for those able to receive it. This gnosis does not change reality, but only one's perception of reality. For Irenaeus, the scriptures are the very words of the Creator and, therefore, are able to make things new.

At the beginning of book three, Irenaeus criticizes his opponents' use of scripture. Against scripture, Irenaeus' opponents argue tradition; against tradition, they argue their own gnosis. According to Irenaeus, these "heretical" teachers present a hopelessly complex scripture. Irenaeus' opponents maintain that "the apostles intermingled the things of the Law with the words of the Savior (*admiscuisse ea quae sunt legalia Salvatoris verbis*); and that not the apostles alone, but even the Lord himself, spoke as at one time from the Demiurge, at another from the intermediate place, and yet again from the Pleroma..." (AH iii, 2, 2). The Valentinians maintain that scripture's complex amalgamation is meant to hide true gnosis from the unworthy. The apostles presented "blind things for the blind, according to their blindness; for the dull according to their dullness; for those in error according to their error. And to those who imagined that the Demiurge alone was God, they preached him (*hunc annuntiassent*); but to those who are capable of comprehending the unnameable Father (*qui innominabilem Patrem capiunt*), they did declare the unspeakable mystery (*inearrabile mysterium*) through parables and enigmas" (AH iii, 5, 1).

For Irenaeus, this explanation reveals the weakness of his opponents' views of scripture. His adversaries seem to imply that the apostolic preaching is unable to effect any real change in the ignorant. While Christ and the apostles may have possessed transcendent gnosis, neither is able to communicate it to all humanity. For Irenaeus, the true catechetical nature of the scriptures consists in their ability to communicate real knowledge and effect a real change in sinners.

²⁷⁷ Cf. Eric Osborn (2001, pp. 162-192). Osborn maintains that Irenaeus, like Justin Martyr, understands the prophetic visions in terms of Platonic forms. The prophets truly depict the mind and will of God. "Irenaeus, like Justin," Osborn (2001, p. 167) writes, "sees the prophetic vision of the divine economies as a noetic apprehension of the divine mind." I do not think such a "noetic apprehension" communicates Irenaeus' profound incarnational perspective. The mind of God reveals itself from beginning to end in the creative formation of human flesh. Thus, the continuity of the scriptures does not merely consist in its connection to the divine realm, but in the flesh of Adam that is handed over through the patriarchs and prophets until it reaches its perfection in Christ's death and resurrection. All knowledge of the divine mind is rooted ontologically in the flesh and blood humanity of Christ.

For the apostles, who were commissioned to find out the wanderers, and to be for sight to those who saw not, and medicine to the weak, certainly did not address them in accordance with their opinion at the time (*non secundum praesentem opinionem*), but according to revealed truth (*secundum veritatis manifestationem*). For no persons of any kind would act properly, if they should advise blind men, just about to fall over a precipice, to continue their most dangerous path, as if it were the right one, and as if they might go on in safety. Or what medical man, anxious to heal a sick person, would prescribe in accordance with the patient's whims, and not according to the requisite medicine? But that the Lord came as the physician of the sick, He does himself declare, saying, 'They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' How then shall the sick be strengthened, or how shall sinners come to repentance? Is it by persevering in the very same courses? Or, on the contrary, is it by undergoing a great change (*magnam commutationem*) and reversal of their former mode of living (*transgressionem prioris conversationis accipientes*), by which they have brought upon themselves no slight amount of sickness, and many sins? But ignorance, the mother of all these, is driven out (*evacuatur*) by knowledge (AH iii, 5, 2).

For the second century bishop, the words of the Lord—both prophetic and apostolic—are effective, truly communicating his own regenerating power.

This anthropological change is not on the level of essence, but of relation.²⁷⁸ As a members of that humanity, which the Son of God assumed into himself, Christian disciples read the scriptures not as an external narrative, but as if it is their own. Incorporated into Christ, disciples see themselves as one flesh with Adam and the patriarchs, with Abraham, Moses, David and the prophets, and with Peter, Paul, and the apostolic church. From this perspective, Irenaeus' polemic against his opponents is clearer. Such teachers are not merely advocating illegitimate interpretations of scriptural texts; nor are they merely denying various doctrines of the authoritative church catholic. Rather, the pneumatic disciples are excluding themselves from the saving narrative of God's interaction with his creatures. For Irenaeus, they are denying their own humanity and, therefore, they are "outside the dispensation (*extra dispositionem*)" (AH iii, 16, 8). Irenaeus' interpretation of scripture is not primarily doctrinal or rational, but kerygmatic and salvific. From beginning to end, God preaches his Word through the prophets, apostles and evangelists in order to incorporate humanity into his own regenerating life.

C. Scriptures Old and New

²⁷⁸ The nature of humanity's progress or growth becomes clearer in AH iv, 3ff. For Irenaeus, this change is certainly a narrative change described as a change of "*figura*." However, it is also clear that for Irenaeus this narrative or covenantal change in humanity consists in the incorporation of the whole of humanity in the Son. The language of "slave and son" indicates that the change in humanity is not merely a change in legal covenant, but one of real relation.

For Irenaeus, the catholicity or wholeness of the scriptures proceeds from two ontological foundations. The prophetic and apostolic scriptures are the preaching of the one, true God who created the heavens and the earth. Thus, both testaments are rooted in the very being of God and testify to his desire to communicate himself to his creatures. This dimension of the scriptures seems to suggest a fundamental equality between the prophetic and apostolic witnesses. However, for the bishop of Lyons, there is another indispensable dimension to the scriptures. The prophetic and apostolic preaching, not only proceeds from the Creator, but also is intended for humanity. This anthropological dimension roots the scriptures in the dynamic and mutable character of the flesh. Thus, the prophetic and apostolic writings do not testify to a strictly monergistic revelation from God to his creation, but to a synergistic communion between God and humankind. From beginning to end, God adapts his self-proclamation to the weakness of humanity. In this context, the scriptures give witness to the catechetical growth of humankind toward its divine destiny.

Irenaeus recognizes that the heart of the opposition's challenge consists, not only in the relation between the spiritual and material substances, but also in the relation between the old and the new in God's revelation.²⁷⁹ For Irenaeus' adversaries, the gospel of spiritual gnosis is utterly independent and autonomous. The Mosaic Law and the ancient prophets speak on behalf of the Demiurge and, therefore, are essentially irrelevant for the positive formation of one's spiritual identity. The significance of the Law and the prophets is severely limited. At most, they help to distinguish one's own spiritual identity from the lower psychic world of the Demiurge. The prophets can tell the pneumatic disciple what he is not, but they cannot tell him what he is. This relegation of the prophetic scriptures to inferior status leaves the Valentinian gospel without preparation or precedence. The Valentinian gospel is new, not merely in form, but in essence. It is no longer the conclusion of a long narrative, but a peculiar and inimitable revelation of a hidden god. In other words, the pneumatic gospel is a divine, monergistic, and radically vertical revelation that proceeds

²⁷⁹ Cf. Philippe Bacq (1978). With great insight, Bacq demonstrates the significance of the covenantal continuity in Irenaeus' argument. He (1978, p. 63) writes, "En separant le Dieu Createur et Auteur de la Loi du Pere annonce par le Seigneur, les gnostiques brisaient la revelation en deux morceaux independants l'un de l'autre. Le Dieu qu'adorait Moise etait different du Pere du Seigneur, qui fut seulement revele lors de la venue du Fils." Bacq's work shows that Irenaeus challenges the independence of the covenants by coordinating old and new testament texts. For Irenaeus, this coordination testifies to a profound harmony in God's revelation. It is my argument that this harmony is not merely textual and linguistic, but ontological; it is rooted in the very being of God and the humanity he has created for himself.

from the transcendent god and is intended, not for fleshly humans, but for spiritual disciples. The pneumatic gospel is utterly independent of any fleshly dimension and, consequently, of any change.

The dualistic perspective challenges Irenaeus to consider in a more profound way the relationship between the old and new in God's interaction with creation. Adam and Christ, Israel and the church, the prophets and the apostles, can no longer merely be set in comparison or opposition to one another. Irenaeus must demonstrate their compatibility and essential continuity within the one, catholic narrative of God's relation to his creatures. Irenaeus' reading of the scriptures seems almost obsessed with the demonstration of both the essential continuity of the covenants and their formal distinctiveness.²⁸⁰ Rather, than grapple with his opponents over the meaning of individual words and phrases (which Irenaeus does do at times), the bishop of Lyons is clearly more comfortable proclaiming a wider, more catholic vision of scripture.²⁸¹ Irenaeus is most effective when he shows that individual texts are best interpreted as members of the greater whole of God's creation and recapitulation of all things in Christ.

Irenaeus' concern for the relationship between the old and new in God's self-revelation is evident in his discussion of the four gospels and their place within the larger canon of the scriptures. Irenaeus is well known for his assertion that there are neither more nor less than four gospels.²⁸² However, Irenaeus' chief concern is not merely to set a numerical boundary for gospel authenticity against his adversaries. Rather, he seeks to establish the four canonical gospels as the center around which the prophetic scriptures and the apostolic epistles revolve. The four gospels are the anchor that holds the prophetic and apostolic witnesses in one, catholic canon.

It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world (*τέσσαρα κλίματα τοῦ κόσμου*) in which we live, and four catholic winds (*τέσσαρα καθολικὰ πνεύματα*), while the church is scattered throughout all

²⁸⁰ Cf. Irenaeus' explicit statement in AH iii, 12, 12: "And in the course of this work I shall touch upon the cause of the difference of the covenants (*differentiae testamentorum*) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, of their unity and harmony (*unitatem et consonantiam*)."

²⁸¹ Cf. A. Benoit (1960, p. 89) criticizes Irenaeus' knowledge of the Old Testament claiming that the Bishop of Lyons "does not make direct us of the Old Testament." Later, he (1960, p. 102) concludes that "Irenaeus knows the Old Testament very little and very badly." It must be remembered that Irenaeus' focus is not primarily the exegesis of specific texts; rather, his full attention is given to the demonstration of the agreement, continuity, and complete integration of the Old and New Testaments in one catholic narrative. He reads the Old Testament through the apostolic preaching; and he understands the apostolic gospel in light of its Old Testament foundation. Thus, it seems possible that Irenaeus' method may not merely be a sign of his limited knowledge of the Old Testament, but a consequence of his rhetorical and theological purpose.

²⁸² Cf. Eric Osborn (2001, pp. 175ff); J. Hoh (1919, pp. 5-36); P. Ferlay (1984, pp. 222-234); Graham Stanton (1997, pp. 317-346).

the world (*κατέσπαρται δὲ ἡ ἐκκλησία ἐπὶ πάσης τῆς γῆς*), and the “pillar and ground” of the church is the gospel and the Spirit of life (*τὸ εὐαγγέλιον καὶ πνεῦμα ζωῆς*); it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side (*πανταζόθεν πνέοντας τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν*), and vivifying men afresh (*ἀναζωοπυροῦντας τοὺς ἀνθρώπους*). From which fact, it is evident that the Word, the artificer of all (*τῶν ἀπάντων τεχνίτης Λόγος*), he that sits upon the cherubim, and contains all things (*συνέχων τὰ πάντα*), he who was manifested to men, has given us the gospel under four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit (*ἔδωκεν ἡμῖν τετράμορφον τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν ἐνὶ δὲ πνεύματι συνεχόμενον*) (AH iii, 11, 8).

This text is not merely a rhetorical attempt to justify the limitation of the authentic canon to four gospels. Rather, the four evangelical accounts are merely expressions of a single gospel narrative. While formally distinct, the four gospels are essentially bound together in the narrative of Jesus’ incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father.²⁸³ It is the underlying reality of the crucified and risen Christ that is preached by the four evangelists, “breathing out immortality everywhere and vivifying men afresh.”

Irenaeus connects the fourfold form of the gospel to the four regions of the world and the four “catholic” winds²⁸⁴ in order to rhetorically testify to the truly catholic character of the gospel.²⁸⁵ The gospel of Christ’s incarnation, death and resurrection is the recapitulation or summary of the whole revelation of God to the world. It is precisely in the fourfold gospel that the prophetic and apostolic scriptures are united into one canon. This perspective aids Irenaeus’ refutation of his opponents on two significant fronts. First, it allows him to argue that the prophetic scriptures are, not only helpful, but even essential to the apostolic preaching and the identity of the Christian church. Second, it establishes a catholic hermeneutic for interpreting the Pauline epistles. Neither the prophetic scriptures, nor the apostolic preaching should be read independently of the fourfold gospel. The single narrative of Christ’s recapitulation of all things in himself is the *hypothesis* or “canon of truth”

²⁸³ Cf. Stanton (1997, pp. 321). Stanton suggests that, for Irenaeus, the gospel in the singular refers to the “particular words of Jesus” which have a “higher authority than the individual writings of the evangelists.” Stanton’s view unnecessarily limits the gospel to the words of Jesus separated out from their narrative context in the gospels. For Irenaeus, the gospel consists in Jesus’ incarnation, death, and resurrection. It is this fleshly narrative that is the single hypothesis that unites the four gospels. In regard to the relation of the Gospel to Jesus’ death and resurrection cf. John Behr (1999, pp. 223-248).

²⁸⁴ The reference to the “four catholic winds (*τέσσαρα καθολικά πνεύματα*)” may arise from Ezekiel 37:9 where the Lord commands the prophet to prophesy to the spirit (*τὸ πνεῦμα*). Ezekiel is commanded to say, “Come from the four winds, and breathe upon these dead, and let them live (*ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων πνευμάτων ἔλθε καὶ ἐμφύσησον εἰς τοὺς νεκροὺς τούτους καὶ ζήσάτωσαν*).” The account of the dry bones is explicitly quoted in AH v, 15, 1.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Stanton (1997, p. 320). Stanton shows the powerful character of Irenaeus’ rhetoric. Irenaeus makes “four arguments, within each of which the number four plays a central role...” According to Stanton, the four arguments are the following: 1) the four winds, 2) the four faced cherubim in Ezekiel 1, 3) the four living creatures in Rev 4, and 4) the four covenants with mankind. Stanton also refers to the Tetrapylon of Aphrodisias completed at the time of Irenaeus. The Tetrapylon was a gateway with four columns, each adorned with a face. Thus while Irenaeus’ justification for the fourfold gospel seems to be an exegetical stretch to modern scholars, it may have been a powerful rhetorical strategy none the less.

that establishes the four gospels as the canon of catholicity that, in turn, brings harmony to the canon of the prophetic and apostolic scriptures.

Irenaeus' discussion of the four gospels shows great interest in establishing the fourfold gospel's essential communion with the prophetic scriptures. In the first two books of *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus exposes the hidden doctrines of various "heretical" teachers and presents a critique on the basis of certain rational principles. Beginning with the third book, Irenaeus seeks to refute his opponents on the basis of scripture.

...I have sent unto you books, of which the first comprises the opinions (*sententias*) of all these men, and exhibits their customs, and the character of their behavior (*consuetudines et characteres ostendit conversationis eorum*). In the second, again, their perverse teachings are cast down and overthrown (*destructa et eversa sunt*), and, such as they really are, laid bare and open to view. But in this third book, I shall adduce proofs from the scriptures (*ex Scripturis inferemus ostensiones*), so that I may come behind in nothing of what you have enjoined... (AH iii, Praef.).

Irenaeus promises to "bring forth a display (*ostensiones*) from the scriptures." The language suggests that Irenaeus does not merely want to contradict his opponents' doctrines with individual proof texts. Rather, he hopes to employ the scriptures in order to present a unified witness that excludes their cosmological vision. Irenaeus' polemic does not merely contradict the Valentinian use of certain texts; it maintains that they have excluded themselves from the catholic narrative that unites sacred texts into one scripture.

For the bishop of Lyons, this "display from the scriptures" begins with the apostolic gospel. "For the Lord of all gave to his apostles the power of the gospel (*Dominus omnium dedit Apostolis suis potestatem Evangelii*),²⁸⁶ through whom also we have known the truth, that is, the doctrine of the Son of God (*per quos et veritatem, hoc est Dei Filii doctrinam, cognovimus*); to whom also did the Lord declare, 'He that hears you, hears me; and he that despises you, despises me, and him that sent me'" (AH iii, Praef.). For Irenaeus, the gospel is, above all else, the preaching of the apostles. Rather than a passive text, the apostolic gospel is the active, powerful, life-giving proclamation of the "Lord of all."

²⁸⁶ Irenaeus often uses the term, "power (*potestatem*)," with reference to the divine authority of the apostolic office. Cf. AH ii, 30, 9 where the Creator brings forth all things "by his own power (*ex sua potestate*)." Cf. AH iii, 17, 1 where Irenaeus says that Christ's institution of baptism (Mt 28) gives to the disciples the "power of regeneration into God (*potestatem regenerationis in Deum*)." Finally, cf. AH v, 17, 3 where Jesus' healing of the paralytic (Mt 9) shows that he "has received from the Father the power of remission of sins (*a Patre potestatem remissionis peccatorum accipiens*)."

We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation (*dispositionem salutis nostrae*), than from those through whom the gospel has come down to us (*per quos Evangelium pervenit ad nos*), which they did at one time proclaim in public (*praeconaverunt*), and, at a later period, by the will of God (*per Dei voluntatem*), handed down to us in the scriptures (*in Scripturis nobis tradiderunt*), to be the ground and pillar of our faith (*fundamentum et columnam fidei nostrae futurum*).²⁸⁷ For it is unlawful to assert that they preached before they possessed “perfect knowledge,” as some do even venture to say, boasting themselves as improvers of the apostles. For after our Lord rose from the dead, they were invested with power from on high (*virtutem ex alto*) when the Holy Spirit came down, were filled from all his gifts (*de omnibus adimpleti sunt*), and had perfect knowledge: they departed to the ends of the earth, preaching the glad tidings of the good things from God to us (*a Deo nobis bona sunt evangelizantes*), and proclaiming (*annuntiantes*) the peace of heaven to men, who indeed do all equally and individually possess the gospel of God (*omnes pariter et singuli eorum habentes Evangelium Dei*) (AH iii, 1, 1).

On Pentecost, the apostles were filled with the “power” of the gospel, that is, the power to preach.

This apostolic preaching of the one gospel was later written in “scriptures” and “handed over (*tradiderunt*)” to the church. From the context it is clear that the “scriptures,” which Irenaeus has in mind, are the four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

By defining the four gospel accounts as essentially preaching, Irenaeus not only places them in the vertical economy through which God communicates himself to his hearers. In addition, he places the gospel accounts in an essential continuity with the prophetic scriptures and the ongoing proclamation of the church. The gospels are not passive texts that are closed, static, independent and autonomous. Rather, the gospels are opened up to the ancient account of creation and the prophetic narrative of Israel. In the same way that Irenaeus maintains a real, substantial communication between God and humankind in Christ, so also he sees a real, narrative communion between the four gospels and the prophetic scriptures. For Irenaeus, this narrative communion is not the passive coordination of old and new realities where each remains self-enclosed, independent, and external to the other. Instead, the apostolic gospels and the prophetic scriptures relate in an active, open, dynamic communication that operates both from the old to the new and from the new to the old. In the same way that God brings humanity into an internal relationship with his Son, so the prophetic scriptures and the apostolic gospels interpenetrate each other.

²⁸⁷ The language “ground and pillar” comes from 1 Timothy 3:15 where Paul calls the church (*ἐκκλησία*) “the ground and pillar of the truth (*στυλος καὶ ἐδραίωμα τῆς ἀληθείας*).” In AH iii, 11, 8, Irenaeus uses the language in reference to “the gospel and the Spirit of life (*τὸ εὐαγγέλιον καὶ πνεῦμα ζωῆς*).” The four gospels are the four pillars (*στυλοὺς*), all of which “breath forth immortality (*πανταξόθεν πνέοντας τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν*).” The reference to the Spirit as the unifying “ground” of the four gospels illumines Irenaeus’ rhetorical reference to the “four catholic winds (*τέσσαρα καθολικὰ πνεύματα*).” The very same Spirit who animates man in the beginning is present in the gospels to breathe forth eternal life and create a new humanity in the end.

The perichoretic communion between the old and the new in Irenaeus' thought is seen in his consideration of the four gospels' connection to the four-faced cherubim. For Irenaeus, each of the four gospels incorporates an aspect of the old covenant within its narrative of Christ. Just as each cherub possesses four faces, so the one gospel of Christ is presented under four forms.²⁸⁸ Each form suggests a relation between Christ and the ancient scriptures. Irenaeus begins with Matthew whose gospel commences with a genealogy that moves from Abraham to Christ. Thus, Matthew's gospel incorporates Abraham, the patriarchs, and the promise of the seed into his gospel. The generation of Jesus' humanity leads Irenaeus to ascribe the sign of the cherubim's human face to Matthew's gospel. In contrast to Matthew, Irenaeus notes that Luke begins his gospel with reference to Zachariah executing his priestly duties in the temple. Luke's gospel especially incorporates the Mosaic Law into his gospel. Therefore, Irenaeus sees the face of the ox as a representation of Luke's gospel. Mark begins his gospel with a quote from the ancient prophets showing that the apostolic gospel also incorporates the prophetic spirit of the old covenant. This emphasis leads Irenaeus to ascribe the face of the eagle, which he interprets as a representation of the prophetic Spirit, to Mark's gospel. Finally, John commences his gospel with the *Λόγος* through whom all things were made. John's gospel, as the recapitulation of all the gospels, incorporates all creation into his narrative of Christ. The power of the creative Word leads Irenaeus to see the face of the lion as representative of John's gospel.

However, for Irenaeus, the communication is not only from the old to the new. The ancient scriptures are not only incorporated into the apostolic gospels, but the gospel of Christ also communicates itself to the old covenant regenerating and renovating the patriarchs, the Mosaic Law, and the prophets.

For this reason were four catholic covenants (*καθολικαὶ διαθήκαι*) given to the human race: one, prior to the deluge under Adam; the second, that after the deluge, under Noah; the third, the giving of the Law, under Moses; the fourth, that which renovates man (*renovat hominem*), and recapitulates all things in itself by means of the gospel (*recapitulat in se omnia, quod est per Evangelium*), raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom (*elevans et pennigerans homines in coeleste regnum*) (AH iii, 11, 8).²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ Cf. J. Hoh (1919, pp. 18-21). J. Hoh shows that, for Irenaeus, the four faces of the cherubim are connected to the various beginnings of the four gospels. Hoh (1919, p. 21) suggests that this stems from Jewish influence. "Die Juden haben die Bucher des AT nach den anfangsworten benannt."

²⁸⁹The Latin version of this passage differs from the preserved Greek version in certain details. The Greek lists the four covenants in connection with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, while the Latin lists them in connection with Adam, Noah, Moses, and the gospel. The absence in the Latin text of Abraham and the covenant of circumcision is difficult to reconcile with AH iii, 12, 11, in which the covenants with Abraham and Moses are specifically mentioned. The idea that Irenaeus

In contrast to the hidden, self-enclosed, and independent gnosis of his opponents, Irenaeus presents the apostolic gospel as the open, active, self-proclamation of the living God.²⁹⁰ By describing the gospel as the recapitulation of all the covenants, Irenaeus establishes an essential continuity between the prophetic and apostolic scriptures. Here Irenaeus' rhetorical education influences his reading of the scriptures. A well-constructed speech not only moves from the body of the speech toward the summary or recapitulation, but also from the recapitulation to the body of the speech. In other words, the body of the argument is not only summed up in the recapitulation but also enlightened and perfected by it. What may have seemed to be insignificant and irrelevant details in the body of the argument can receive greater meaning and importance in the recapitulation. Thus, the best summaries or recapitulations contain an element of surprise or a moment of enlightenment that reverberates and even renews the whole argument. For Irenaeus, the gospel of Christ is the perfect recapitulation of God's relationship to his creation. Therefore, the apostolic gospel not only recalls or summarizes the ancient scriptures, but also perfects and regenerates them.

II. Examination of Exegetical Themes in Irenaeus' Teaching

Against his opponents' tendency to divide scriptural texts according to author and audience, Irenaeus argues for the catholicity of the scriptures. Each text is rightly interpreted, not as autonomous, independent sayings, but as a member of the whole scriptural narrative. For Irenaeus, this wholeness or catholicity does not merely consist in a unified doctrinal content. Rather, the catholicity of the scriptures proceeds from God's own being. From the beginning, the Father relates to his creation through his Word and Spirit. Thus, the prophetic and apostolic scriptures are

would not include Abraham as one of the principal covenants seems highly unlikely. The Greek version is more symmetrical and harmonious referring to the "signs" associated with each covenant—the rainbow, circumcision, and the Law. On the other hand, the Latin text refers the gospel to the work of the Spirit, rather than to Jesus. According to the Latin version, the fourth covenant comes through the gospel "bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom (*elevans et pennigerans homines in coeleste regnum*)." This language recalls Irenaeus' earlier reference to the prophetic character of Mark's gospel, which begins with the "prophetic Spirit (*ἀπό τοῦ προφητικοῦ πνεύματος*)" and shows forth the "winged icon of the gospel (*τὴν περωτικὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου*)." This emphasis on the Spirit leads Irenaeus to a critique of the Montanists in the following paragraph (AH iii, 11, 9). Needless to say, deciding which version is closer to Irenaeus' original is perhaps impossible to determine.

²⁹⁰ The active character of the fourth covenant is emphasized in the Latin version with the verbs "*renovari*" and "*recapitulat*." Irenaeus seems to equate the fourth covenant with the very person of Jesus and the activity of the Spirit. Thus, for Irenaeus, the evangelical covenant is not primarily a passive text, but consists in the saving activity of Christ and his Spirit, which "elevates humanity into the heavenly kingdom."

essentially God's own preaching in and through which He communicates his own life to humankind. However, while God remains always the same relating to creatures through his own Logos, his self-revelation is intended for a fleshly and changeable humanity. The vertical dimension, in which God condescends to interact with humanity, is balanced by a horizontal dimension, in which "plastic" humanity grows toward a divine destiny. The theological and anthropological dimensions are the ontological pillars that bind the scriptures—old and new—into one narrative. This catholic narrative is, therefore, inherently christological. The union and communion of divinity and humanity in one Christ not only contradicts the ontological dualism between the spiritual and physical substances, but also challenges the fragmentation of sacred texts. In the same way that Christ unites God and humanity into one life, so the four gospels unite the prophetic and apostolic writings into one canon, Israel and the church into one kingdom, and creation and the eschatological world into one cosmos. Irenaeus' catholic vision of the scriptures is not articulated in theoretical propositions, but demonstrated in his concrete use of the prophetic and apostolic witness. In the following section of this paper, examples of Irenaeus' reading of the scriptures are examined in order that his underlying vision might become visible in actual practice.

A. The Virgin Birth

In the first fifteen chapters of book 3, Irenaeus establishes the primacy of the four apostolic gospels. For the second century bishop, the four gospels bind the prophetic scriptures and the apostolic witness into one "rule of truth." By incorporating the Mosaic Law and the ancient prophets into its narrative of Christ, the four gospels testify that the old covenant is useful and even essential to an authentic Christian kerygma. However, Irenaeus is equally concerned to establish the four gospels as the foundation for understanding other apostolic writings. Marcionites and Valentinians both used Pauline writings to support their respective theological systems.²⁹¹ Before entering the fray on the

²⁹¹ Cf. Elaine Pagels (1975). In her monograph, Pagels offers interesting examples of how "Gnostics" read the Pauline epistles. However, she leaves the impression that the difference between the so-called "Gnostics" and the Orthodox consisted merely in different interpretive options in the quest to understand Paul's writings. Pagels (1975, p. 5) writes, "When we compare the heresiological accounts with the newly available evidence, we can trace how two antithetical traditions of Pauline exegesis have emerged from the late first century through the second. Each claims to be authentic, Christian, and Pauline: but one reads Paul *antignostically*, the other *gnostically*." This perspective is misleading especially with regard to Irenaeus' perspective. For Irenaeus, the conflict cannot be reduced to the specific interpretations of individual

level of individual texts and phrases that his opponents find favorable, Irenaeus argues for a catholic reading of the Pauline epistles.²⁹² After emphasizing the book of *Acts* and the unified witness of Peter, Philip, and Stephen, Irenaeus considers Paul's testimony.

With regard to those who allege that Paul alone knew the truth (*solumm Paulum veritatem cognovisse*), and that to him the mystery was manifested by revelation (*per revelationem*), let Paul himself convict them, when he says, that one and the same God (*unum et ipsum Deum*) wrought in Peter for the apostolate of the circumcision, and in himself for the Gentiles. Peter, therefore, was an apostle of that very God whose was also Paul; and him whom Peter preached (*annuntiabat*) as God among those of the circumcision, and likewise the Son of God, did Paul declare among the Gentiles. For our Lord never came to save Paul alone (*solum Paulum salvaret*), nor is God so limited in means (*nec sic pauper Deus*), that he should have but one apostle (*unum solum haberet Apostolum*) who knew the dispensation of his Son (AH iii, 13, 1).

If the Pauline writings are to be rightly interpreted, they must be read in agreement with the four gospels.²⁹³ The Christ preached by Paul is the same Christ, whose life is narrated by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. This catholic reading of Paul is presupposed by Irenaeus, not merely as a personal strategy against his opponents, but also because Paul himself wanted his writings to be read in this fashion. Irenaeus notes that Paul both commends Peter's preaching to the Jews and authorizes Luke's narration of the gospel.

Having anchored the catholicity of the prophetic and apostolic writings in the fourfold gospel, Irenaeus proceeds to the heart of his argument against his opponents. For Irenaeus, the whole controversy revolves around the confession of Jesus Christ. However, for the bishop of Lyons, this christological controversy is by no means simply a systematic debate; rather, it is inherently scriptural. "...There are those who say that Jesus was merely a receptacle of Christ (*Jesum quidem receptaculum Christi fuisse*), upon whom the Christ, as a dove, descended from above (*in quem de*

Pauline texts; rather, the question concerns Paul's relationship to the four gospels and the whole apostolic witness. Irenaeus does not read Paul "antignostically." His reading of Paul is catholic. While his opponents certainly want to separate Paul from the four gospels and the prophetic scriptures, Irenaeus begins with the presupposition that Paul's epistles agree with the incarnate narrative of Jesus as preached in the four gospels. It is on the battleground of the four Gospels that Irenaeus takes his stand.

²⁹² For an introductory survey of Irenaeus' attitude toward the Pauline writings cf. David Balas (1992, pp. 27-39). For a more thorough and detailed analysis cf. Rolf Noormann (1994).

²⁹³ Cf. Rolf Noormann (1994, p. 529f). Noormann's detailed study of Irenaeus' use of Paul concludes, "Das Fundament, auf dem die irenaische Theologie grundet, ist der Kanon der Wahrheit, genauer: der Glaube an den einen Gott, der zugleich Schopfer, Gott Israels und Vater Jesu Christi ist, und an den einen Jesus Christus, der um der Menschen willen Fleisch geworden ist." However, the "rule of truth," for Irenaeus, is not an independent creed that governs his reading of the scriptures. Rather, the "rule of truth" consists concretely in the narrative of the four Gospels and especially in the Gospel of John as that account that recapitulates the gospel tradition. In this way, the fourfold Gospel anchors his reading of Paul, other apostolic writings, and the old testament prophets. Cf. AH iii, 11, 1 where the Gospel of John is virtually equated with the *regulam veritatis*.

super quasi columbam descendisse Christum) and that when he had declared the unnameable Father he entered into the Pleroma in an incomprehensible and invisible manner...” (AH iii, 16, 1). Here Irenaeus does not refer to his opponents’ fragmentation of Christ’s person in some kind of abstract, systematic way. Instead, Irenaeus refers to a specific interpretation of Jesus’ baptism by some Valentinian teachers. He follows this introduction of their reading of Jesus’ baptism by mentioning the Valentinian perspective of Jesus’ generation from Mary. “The Valentinians, again, maintain that the dispensational Jesus (*Jesum quidem qui sit ex dispositione*) was the same who passed through Mary (*per Mariam transierit*), upon whom that Savior from the more exalted region descended (*in quem illum de superiori Salvatorem descendisse*), who was also termed Pan (*Totum*), because he possessed the name of all those who had produced him (*omnium qui emisissent eum*)...” (AH iii, 16, 1). In these passages, Irenaeus introduces the specific preaching of his opponents concerning the baptism and generation of Jesus. In this way, Irenaeus refuses to confront his adversaries on the stage of any abstract, systematic assertions. Irenaeus is well aware that his opponents are happy to confess “in tongue one Christ Jesus (*lingua quidem unum Christum Jesum confitentes*).” Instead, Irenaeus wants to make the scriptural narrative and the concrete catechesis of his opponents the battleground on which they must defend themselves.²⁹⁴ It is easy to say that Christ is one; but what kind of oneness is manifested when Christ and the Savior are substantially separated from the birth and baptism of the dispensational Jesus?

On the battleground of the scriptures, “heretical” teachers must confront, not merely contemporary church authorities, but especially the apostolic witness. Irenaeus believes that his opponents use scriptural words and phrases to cloak their heretical teaching.²⁹⁵ To be in agreement

²⁹⁴ Exposing his opponents’ reading of specific scriptural texts is a primary element in Irenaeus’ strategy (cf. AH i, 8, 1 – i, 9, 5; ii, 20, 1 – ii, 27, 3).

²⁹⁵ For Irenaeus, the Valentinian heresies represent an exaltation of preaching over the scriptures. Instead of the church’s preaching existing in an essential continuity with the prophetic and apostolic kerygma, the pneumatic catechist exalts his own preaching above the sacred texts so that his preaching stands in an external relationship to the tradition. This external relationship allows the opposition to relegate the scriptures to a subordinate tool to be used in the service of his own catechesis. For Irenaeus’ opponents, scriptural texts cease to preach, that is, they are no longer the living Word of God; rather, they are passive texts in need of the pneumatic preacher to give them life. For this reason, Irenaeus maintains that his adversaries are claiming the power to “create their own formation (*τό πλάσμα*).” In this regard, cf. AH i, 9, 4, where Irenaeus uses the language of creation to criticize the catechesis of his opponents. “Heretical” teachers have “injured the scriptures while reshaping their own hypothesis (*κατατρέχουσιν τῶν γραφῶν ἰδίαν ὑπόθεσιν ἀναπλασάμενοι*).”

with the apostles, one must not merely use apostolic terminology, but also teach in agreement with what Irenaeus calls the “universal mind of the Apostles.”

I judge it necessary, therefore, to take into account the entire mind of the apostles regarding our Lord Jesus Christ (*universam Apostolorum de Domino nostro Jesu Christo sententiam*), and to show that not only did they never hold any such opinions (*sensisse*) regarding him; but, still further, that they announced through the Holy Spirit (*significasse per Spiritum sanctum*), that those who should teach such doctrines were agents of Satan (*submissi a Satana*), sent forth for the purpose of overturning the faith of some (*fidem everterent*), and drawing them away from life (*abstraherent eos a vita*) (AH iii, 16, 1).

What Irenaeus means by the “universal mind of the Apostles” is demonstrated in the argument that follows.²⁹⁶ Irenaeus begins with the agreement between John and Matthew concerning the generation of Christ. The virgin birth establishes both Christ’s divine generation from the Father and his human generation from Mary. Matthew’s gospel is especially helpful since Jesus’ birth from Mary is interpreted as the fulfillment of ancient promises to Abraham and David. Irenaeus claims that Matthew’s account of Christ’s birth signifies “that both the promise made to the fathers had been accomplished (*promissionem quae fuerat ad patres adimpletam*), that the Son of God was born of a virgin (*ex virgine natum Filium Dei*), and that he himself was Christ the Savior (*hunc ipsum esse Salvatorem Christum*) whom the prophets had foretold...” (AH iii, 16, 2).

Irenaeus’ reading of the virgin birth establishes an essential agreement between the gospels and the prophetic scriptures. However, the witness to the virgin birth not only extends backward to the old covenant, but also includes Paul as is evident from quotations of his letters to the Romans and Galatians. The virgin birth also receives testimony from the gospels of Mark and Luke. Throughout Irenaeus’ exposition, the prophetic scriptures and the apostolic witness are interconnected in order to show a catholic harmony. The virgin birth binds the patriarchs, psalms, and prophets of the old covenant and the apostles and evangelists of the new covenant into one christological narrative.

Therefore, for Irenaeus, the virgin birth is more than an historical fact to be proven and accepted; it is more than merely an exegetical point to be confessed. Rather, the virgin birth is essential to the narrative identity of Jesus as the Son of God. Irenaeus’ constant emphasis is that the

²⁹⁶ The *universam sententiam Apostolorum* flows out of Irenaeus’ argument against the Marcionite and Ebionite uses of Paul’s epistles. Both factions separate Paul from the rest of the apostles. Marcion claims that Paul is the only apostle who knew the truth (AH iii, 13, 1). The Ebionites, on the other hand, refused to recognize Paul’s authority (AH iii, 15, 1). For Irenaeus, Paul must be interpreted in harmony with the whole apostolic witness.

oneness of Jesus Christ consists precisely in a real ontological oneness that is manifested in a oneness of action. The dispensational Jesus and the spiritual Savior are “one and the same.”²⁹⁷ This oneness means that every activity recorded in the gospel narrative is accomplished by one and the same actor. From this perspective, the virgin birth encapsulates two complementary and inseparable truths. First, against the Valentinians, it means that God has condescended to be born of human flesh and blood. “The Gospel, therefore, knew no other son of man but him who was of Mary (*Non ergo alterum Filium Hominis novit Evangelium, nisi hunc qui ex Maria*), who also suffered (*passus est*); and no Christ who flew away from Jesus before the passion; but him who was born (*hunc qui natus*) it knew as Jesus Christ the Son of God, and that this same suffered and rose again (*eundem hunc passum resurrexisse*)...” (AH iii, 16, 5). In spite of the various apostolic witnesses, the gospel is essentially one because it refers to one actor, Jesus Christ, who is born of Mary, suffers the cross, and rises again.²⁹⁸

Irenaeus’ argument that the divine Logos is the one actor, to whom is ascribed every work of the gospel narrative, is the foundation for his creedal statement. Irenaeus’ rule of truth directly challenges the Valentinian distinction between the spiritual Christ and the dispensational Jesus implied in their interpretation of Jesus’ birth and baptism.

... They thus wander from the truth (*errantes a veritate*), because their doctrine departs from him who is truly God, being ignorant that His only-begotten Word, who is always present with the human race (*qui semper humano generi adest*), united to and mingled with His own creation (*unitus et conspersus suo plasmati*), according to the Father’s pleasure, and who became flesh (*caro factus*), is himself Jesus Christ our Lord (*ipse est Jesus Christus Dominus noster*), who did also suffer for us (*qui et passus est pro nobis*), and rose again (*surrexit*) on our behalf, and who will come again (*rursus venturus*) in the glory of the Father, to raise up all flesh (*resuscitandam universam carnem*), and for the manifestation of salvation (*ad ostensionem salutis*), and to apply the rule of just judgment to all who were made by him. There is therefore, as I have pointed out, one God the Father, and one Christ Jesus, who came by means of the universal dispensation (*veniens per universam dispositionem*)²⁹⁹, and recapitulated (*recapitulans*) all things in himself (AH iii, 16, 6).

²⁹⁷ *Unum et eundem* is a favorite expression of Irenaeus used to emphasize that there is one actor throughout the narrative of scripture. Irenaeus maintains that Matthew calls Jesus “Emmanuel” so that “we should not imagine that Jesus was one (*alium*), and Christ another (*alterum*), but should know them to be one and the same (*unum et eundem*)” (AH iii, 16, 2). The oneness consists in both an ontological and a narrative or energetic oneness in Jesus.

²⁹⁸ Cf also AH iii, 11, 8 where the fourfold character of the gospel corresponds to “the course followed by the Son of God (*ἡ πραγματεία τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ; dispositio Filii Dei*).” All four Gospels manifest the one narrative or course accomplished by Jesus.

²⁹⁹ This phrase, “*per universam dispositionem*,” is better translated in the singular. Christ Jesus came through the “universal dispensation” or perhaps, the “catholic economy.” The narrative of Christ sums up the whole interaction between God and man from the beginning.

From Irenaeus' perspective, when the Valentinians exclude the spiritual Christ or Savior from Jesus' fleshly birth of Mary they destroy the saving narrative of the gospel. Yet, perhaps more importantly, they are excluding themselves from the same salvific dispensation. "All are outside of the dispensation (*omnes extra dispositionem sunt*), who, under pretext of knowledge, understand that Jesus was one, and Christ another, and the Only-begotten another, from whom again is the Word, and that the Savior is another, whom these disciples of error allege to be a production (*emissionem*) of those who were made Aeons in a state of degeneracy" (AH iii, 16, 8).

The virgin birth's place in the narrative of Jesus Christ leads Irenaeus to emphasize a second truth. The virgin birth not only manifests God's real condescension to be born of woman, but also shows forth a new generation, in which flesh and blood humanity is truly born of God. The first truth, Irenaeus argues against the Valentinians; the second truth, he argues against the Ebionites.

But again, those who assert that he (Jesus) was simply a mere man (*nude hominem*), begotten by Joseph (*ex Joseph generatum*), remaining in the bondage of the old disobedience (*pristinæ inobedientiae*), are in a state of death; having been not as yet joined to the Word of God the Father (*nondum commixti*³⁰⁰ *Verbo Dei Patris*).... But, being ignorant of him who from the virgin (*ex Virgine*) is Emmanuel, they are deprived of his gift (*privantur munere ejus*), which is eternal life (*vita aeterna*); and not receiving the incorruptible Word, they remain in mortal flesh, and are debtors to death (*debitores mortis*), not obtaining the antidote of life (*antidotum vitae*) (AH iii, 19, 1).

For Irenaeus, the virgin birth establishes a two-way communication between God and his fleshly formation. On the one hand, the Son of God assumes humanity's birth, weakness, suffering, and death into his own person. On the other hand, the Son of God truly communicates his own divine generation and eternal life to his own body. To deny the virgin birth, not only undermines the narrative of Christ, but also destroys one's own participation in the theandric communion present in Jesus. Thus, Irenaeus reads Psalm 82:6-7 as a divine sermon against his opponents.

³⁰⁰ Cf. AH v, 1, 3. The word, "*commixti*," has eucharistic connotations. In AH v, 1, 3, Irenaeus refers to the Ebionites with the same eucharistic overtones. He writes, "Vain also are the Ebionites, who do not receive by faith into their soul the union of God and man (*unionem Dei et hominis*), but who remain in the old leaven of birth (*in veteri generationis perseverantes fermento*), and who do not choose to understand that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, and the power of the Most High overshadowed her: wherefore also what was generated is holy and the son of the Most High God the Father of all, who effected the incarnation of this being, and showed forth a new generation (*novam ostendit generationem*); that as by the former generation we inherited death, so by this new generation we might inherit life. Therefore do these men reject the commixture of heavenly wine (*commixtionem vini caelestis*), and wish it to be water of the world only, not receiving God so as to have union with Him (*non recipiens Deum ad commixtionem suam*)...." It seems clear that, for Irenaeus, the word, "*commixti*," expresses christological, eucharistic, and soteriological meaning. Cf. also AH iv, 20, 4.

To whom (the Ebionites) the Word says, mentioning his own gift of grace: “I said, you are the sons of the highest, and gods; but you shall die like men.” He speaks undoubtedly these words to those who have not received the gift of adoption (*μη δεξαμένους τήν δωρεάν τῆς υιοθεσίας*), but who despise the incarnation of the pure generation of the Word of God (*τήν σάρκωσιν τῆς καθαρῶς γεννήσεως τοῦ λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ*), defraud human nature of promotion into God (*τῆς εἰς Θεόν ἀνόδου*), and prove themselves ungrateful (*ἀχαριστοῦντας*) to the Word of God, who became flesh for them. For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and he who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word (*ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸν λόγον χωρήσας*), and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God. For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united (*adunati fuissetus*) to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up (*absorberetur*) by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive the adoption of sons (AH iii, 19, 1)?

For Irenaeus, the virgin birth is clearly more than merely an historical or exegetical detail. Rather, it is a sign (*signum*) that is essential to the narrative identity of both Christ and the Church. The virgin birth shows forth a new kind of generation³⁰¹ in which God is truly born of a flesh and blood woman, and conversely, flesh and blood humanity is truly born of God. To reject either side of this salvific dispensation is to destroy the real interaction between God and humankind and place oneself outside the gospel narrative.

Therefore, Irenaeus reads the virgin birth, not merely as an independent, self-enclosed event of the past, but as a salvific sign, in which the church continues to participate.³⁰² The virgin birth bears an ecclesial dimension as the faithful are incorporated into its reality through the church’s baptism.

He therefore, the Son of God our Lord, being the Word of the Father, and the Son of man, since he had a generation as to his human nature from Mary (*quoniam ex Maria...habuit secundum hominem generationem*),—who was descended from mankind, and who was herself a human being (*quae ex hominibus habebat genus, quae et ipsa erat homo*)—was made the Son of man. Wherefore also the Lord himself gave us a sign (*ipse Dominus dedit nobis signum*), in the depth below, and in the height above, which man did not ask for (*quod non postulavit homo*), because he never expected (*nec speravit*)³⁰³ that a virgin could

³⁰¹ Cf. AH v, 1, 3. Speaking against the Ebionites, Irenaeus connects Jesus’ incarnation with the church’s baptism. According to Irenaeus, Christ’s incarnation “shows forth a new generation (*novam ostendit generationem*).” Thus, by the “first generation (*per priorem generationem*)” humanity inherits death, but through this new generation, “we inherit life (*haereditavimus vitam*).”

³⁰² Cf. AH iv, 33, 11 where the ecclesial dimensions of the virgin birth are made explicit. According to Irenaeus, the virgin birth “exhibited the union of the Word of God with his own workmanship (*adunionem Verbi Dei ad plasma ejus manifestabant*), that the Word should become flesh, and the Son of God the son of man; the pure one opening purely that pure womb (*purus pure puram aperiens vulvam*) which regenerates men unto God (*quae regenerat homines in Deum*), and which he himself made pure (*quam ipse puram fecit*)...”

³⁰³ The virgin birth as that which was “not expected (*nec speravit*)” is a theme that continues in AH iii, 20, 1 where Jonah’s salvation and the resurrection are both “unexpected (*insperabilem*).” Like the sign of Jonah, the virgin birth is a “sign,” that is, an outward, concrete testimony to the saving fellowship between God and humanity accomplished in Christ. Thus, both are prophetic signs of what is accomplished in baptism.

conceive, or that it was possible that one remaining a virgin could bring forth a son, and that what was thus born should be “God with us,” and descend (*descendere*) to those things which are of the earth beneath, seeking (*quaerentem*) the sheep which had perished, which was indeed his own peculiar handiwork (*proprium ipsius plasma*), and ascend (*ascendere*) to the height above, offering and commending (*offerentem et commendantem*) to his Father that man (*hominem*) which had been found, making in his own person the first-fruits of the resurrection of man (*primitias resurrectionis hominis in semetipso faciens*); that, as the head (*caput*) rose from the dead, so also the remaining part of the body (*reliquum corpus*) of every man who is found in life (*qui invenitur in vita*)³⁰⁴—when the time is fulfilled of that condemnation which existed by reason of disobedience, may arise (*resurgat*), blended together and strengthened (*coalescens et confirmatum*) through means of joints and bands by the increase of God (*augmento Dei*), each of the members having its own proper and fit position in the body (*unoquoque membrorum habente propriam et aptam in corpore positionem*) (AH iii, 19, 3).

In this magnificent passage, Irenaeus gives Isaiah 7 not only a Christological, but also an ecclesial dimension. The church consists of those who have been incorporated into Christ’s humanity, which he has raised from the dead and has offered to his Father. Thus, the virgin birth is a sign, given to the church, which manifests both a condescending divinity and an ascending humanity. Clearly, for the second century bishop, the rejection of the virgin birth, not only necessitates a fragmented confession of Christ, but also destroys the meaning of baptism and the narrative identity of the church.

So far, Irenaeus’ interpretation of the virgin birth is in line with expectations. Against a dualistic perspective, the virgin birth becomes an icon of the vertical, ontological communion between the Creator and his humanity. However, in a very interesting way, Irenaeus gives this vertical and ontological reading of the virgin birth a horizontal and narrative dimension. Just as the virgin birth is a sign that is open to the church through the sacrament of baptism, so also it is open to the old covenant enlightening the prophetic scriptures. For Irenaeus, the recapitulation of a speech, not only summarizes or repeats what was said in the body of the argument, but also perfects it. The recapitulation has the power to supply new meaning and importance to the body of the speech. A good narrator may carefully place certain details in his account that seem insignificant and even irrelevant. However, in the recapitulation, these details are filled with a surprising importance that delights the hearer. For Irenaeus, the virgin birth is an unexpected sign that fills the prophetic witness with new importance and manifests the rhetorical prowess of the divine Logos. Thus, the virgin birth is not merely a passive historical fact that stands as a fulfillment of ancient prophecy; rather, it is an

³⁰⁴ The word, “*vita*,” is probably a translation of the Greek, *ζωή*. In the LXX, *ζωή* is the name given to Eve. Thus, Irenaeus seems to use “life” as a name referring to the church as the new Eve. This use of the name *ζωή* may reflect his reading of John 1:4.

active sign (*signum*) that truly renews the prophetic witness, manifesting the profound purpose of God for his creation.

For Irenaeus, Isaiah 7 is crucial to his exposition of the virgin birth. This passage, not only speaks of a virgin giving birth, but also calls this birth a “sign” given to the people of God. “God, then, was made man (*ἄνθρωπος ἐγένετο*), and the Lord himself saved us (*αὐτὸς ὁ Κύριος ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς*), giving the sign of the virgin (*δοῦς τὸ τῆς παρθένου σημεῖον*)” (AH iii, 21, 1). For Irenaeus, when some read Isaiah 7 as merely a birth from a “young woman,” they destroy its character as a salvific sign³⁰⁵ to the people of God and miss the rhetorical plan of God’s Word. Such interpreters set aside “the testimony of the prophets which was worked by God (*frustrantes prophetarum testimonium, quod operatus est Deus*)” (AH iii, 21, 1). In support of his reading of Isaiah 7, Irenaeus argues for the divine inspiration of the Septuagint. He recounts the miraculous events that supposedly accompanied the Greek translation supplied by the Jewish elders. However, his main argument for the Septuagint’s inspiration is apostolic and catholic.

But our faith is steadfast, unfeigned, and the only true one, having clear proof (*manifestam ostensionem*) from these scriptures which were interpreted in the way I have related; and the preaching of the church is without interpolation (*Ecclesiae annuntiatio sine interpolatione*). For the apostles, since they are of more ancient date than all these (heretical interpreters), agree (*consonant*) with the aforesaid translation; and the translation harmonizes (*consonat*) with the tradition of the apostles (*Apostolorum traditioni*). For Peter and John and Matthew and Paul and the rest successively, as well as their followers (*assectatores*), did set forth all prophecies (*prophetica omnia*), just as the interpretations of the elders contains them (AH iii, 21, 3).

Irenaeus’ reading of Isaiah 7 is simply the apostolic reading. Here again, rather than debate the meaning of an individual word, Irenaeus begins with a catholic approach. Isaiah must be read as a member of the whole of scripture and especially in harmony with the apostolic gospels.

However, the apostolic preaching concerning the virgin birth, not only incorporates Isaiah’s prophecy, but also reverberates through the old covenant illuminating prophetic details that were

³⁰⁵ Irenaeus often refers to different “signs” in the old covenant. Cf. *Epid.* 17-34, where Irenaeus’ catechesis focuses on old testament signs that prophesy the reality of the new testament. The signs of Abel’s martyrdom, Noah’s rainbow, Abraham’s circumcision, Israel’s tabernacle, and Adam’s tree all manifest the salvation that comes in Christ’s cross. The cross is the fulfillment of these signs transforming them into the reality communicated in the church’s sacramental life. According to Irenaeus, the Son was “imprinted in the form of a cross on the universe; for he had necessarily, in becoming visible, to bring to light the universality of his cross, in order to show openly through his visible form that activity of his; that it is he who makes bright the height, that is, what is in heaven, and holds the deep, which is in the bowels of the earth and stretches forth and extends the length from East to West...calling in all the dispersed from all sides to the knowledge of the Father” (*Epid.*, 34). Thus, signs are not merely intellectual ideas to be perceived by the mind of the reader; they are concrete displays that truly communicate the spiritual reality that is fully present in Christ and his church.

previously ignored.³⁰⁶ While Isaiah's prophecy is fairly clear and explicitly referenced in the fourfold gospel, Irenaeus refers to a number of other prophetic utterances that are subtle, hidden, and seemingly insignificant. By referring to these passages, Irenaeus certainly wants to show the essential continuity and harmony between the prophetic scriptures and the apostolic kerygma. However, he also reveals how the virgin birth actually renews the old covenant. For in the virgin birth, the subtle rhetorical plan present in the prophetic scriptures through the inspiration of the Spirit is made clear and filled with new importance. For the bishop of Lyons, the virgin birth provides a delightful and even surprising twist to God's rhetorical relationship to his creation. The virgin birth is an "unhopedfor"³⁰⁷ salvation that compels Irenaeus to reconsider the whole narrative of God's self-revelation.

First, Irenaeus refers to David. Irenaeus notes that Isaiah 7 is a prophecy announced to the "house of David." It is also worth noting that Irenaeus had previously emphasized David's prominent place in the gospels. Matthew demonstrates in his genealogy of Christ that Jesus is the Son of Abraham and the Son of David. For Irenaeus, the virgin birth establishes not merely a narrative or textual connection between Jesus and David, but a real, ontological connection.

And when he says, "Hear, O house of David," he performed the part of one indicating that he whom God promised David that he would raise up (*suscitaturum*) from the fruit of his womb (*de fructu ventris ejus*) an eternal King, is the same who was born of the virgin (*ex Virgine generatus est*), herself of the lineage of David (*de genere David*). For on this account also, he promised that the King should be "of the fruit of his womb (*ventris*)," which was the appropriate term for a virgin conceiving (*quod erat proprium virginis praegnantis*), and not "of the fruit of his loins (*de fructu lumborum*)," nor "of the fruit of his reins (*renum*)," which expression is appropriate to a generating man (*quod est proprium viri generantis*), and a woman conceiving by a man (*mulieris ex viro conceptionem facientis*). In this promise, therefore, the scripture excluded all virile influence (*circumscripsit igitur genitalia viri in promissione Scriptura*); yet it certainly is not mentioned that he who was born was not from the will of man (*non ex voluntate viri erat*).³⁰⁸ But it has fixed and established (*statuit et confirmavit*) "the fruit of the womb," that it might declare (*pronuntiaret*) the generation of him who should be from the virgin, as Elizabeth testified when filled (*impleta*) with the Holy Spirit, saying to Mary, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your

³⁰⁶ Cf. Christopher R. Smith (1994, pp. 313-331). Here Smith demonstrates that, for Irenaeus, the doctrine of recapitulation does not merely move from beginning to end, but also from end to beginning. I believe this characteristic of recapitulation may arise from its place in rhetorical theory.

³⁰⁷ Cf. AH iii, 20, 1. In the context of his discussion of the sign of the virgin, Irenaeus considers the "sign of Jonah." God allows Jonah to be swallowed in order to make his own salvation more wonderful and dramatic. Irenaeus refers to the sign of Jonah as an "unhopedfor salvation (*insperabilem salutem*)." This language is used again in reference to the resurrection. For Irenaeus, this expression does not merely communicate the helplessness of humanity, but also the surprising and unexpected way in which God accomplishes his salvation. This language is connected to the virgin birth in AH iii, 19, 3.

³⁰⁸ Here Irenaeus refers to John 1:13. He quotes this verse often in support of the virgin birth (cf. AH iii, 16, 2; iii, 19, 2; v, 1, 3). Thus, he reads the text in the singular as a reference to Jesus. Tertullian reads John 1:13 in the same way as Irenaeus and claims that heretics altered the original text. Cf. Tertullian, *De Carne Christi*, ch. 19.

womb;” the Holy Spirit pointing out to those willing to hear (*significante Spiritu sancto audire volentibus*), that the promise which God had made, of raising up a King from the fruit of the womb, was fulfilled (*impletam esse*) in the birth from the virgin, that is, from Mary (AH iii, 21, 5).

For Irenaeus, the virgin birth, as recorded in the gospels, illuminates a subtle aspect of the ancient promise made to David. What is merely implied in the word “womb (*ventris*)” is made explicit in the gospel narrative of Christ. Thus, Irenaeus speaks of the ancient promise in the passive voice “being filled up” by the virgin birth. For Irenaeus, the fourfold gospel is not merely a “new” testament, but a “renewing” testament that actively fills up and makes explicit the meaning of the prophetic scriptures.

In addition, Irenaeus refers to a number of other subtle details that are filled with new meaning by the virgin birth. Daniel’s reference to a stone cut “without hands (*sine manibus*),”³⁰⁹ Irenaeus refers to Joseph, the carpenter (*τέκτων*), who is excluded from Christ’s generation. Mary is the one, who “alone cooperates with the dispensation (*sola cooperante dispositioni*)” (AH iii, 21, 7). Moses’ rod and a prophecy concerning Joachim and Jechoniah also exclude Joseph’s participation in Jesus’ generation. Finally, Adam’s own formation from “untilled and as yet virgin soil (*rudi terra et de adhuc virgine*)” is a subtle detail that rhetorically fits the virgin birth of Christ (AH iii, 21 10). For Irenaeus, the apostolic gospel of Christ is not an independent, self-enclosed narrative that renders the prophetic scriptures superfluous. Indeed, Irenaeus does not even seem satisfied with the idea that the gospel of Christ renders the ancient scriptures old. Rather, the fourfold gospel actually makes the prophetic scriptures new again. Instead of merely being prophetic, the scriptures of the old covenant are descriptive of the saving dispensation of Jesus Christ.

The power of the gospel to renew the old is demonstrated in Irenaeus’ reading of Luke’s genealogy. While Matthew records a traditional genealogy beginning with Abraham, proceeding from father to son, and ending with Jesus, Luke reverses the order.

Wherefore Luke points out that the pedigree (*genealogiam*) which moves from the generation of our Lord even to Adam (*quae est a generatione Domini nostri usque ad Adam*) contains seventy-two generations, connecting the end with the beginning (*finem conjungens initio*) and implying that it is he who has recapitulated in himself (*in semetipso recapitulatus est*) all nations dispersed from Adam downwards (*omnes gentes exinde ab Adam dispersas*), and all languages and generations of men, together with Adam himself. Hence also was Adam himself termed by Paul “the figure of him that was to come (*typus futuri*),” because the Word, the Maker of all things, had formed beforehand for himself the future dispensation of the

³⁰⁹ Cf. Dan 2:34. Irenaeus treats this text again in AH v, 26, 1-2.

human race (*futuram humani generis dispositionem*), connected with the Son of God; God having predestined that the first man should be of an animal nature (*primum animale hominem*), with this view, that he might be saved by the spiritual one (*a spiritali salvaretur*) (AH iii, 22, 3).

Irenaeus reads Luke's genealogy, which proceeds from son to father, that is, from end to beginning, as a sign of Christ's recapitulating work. Christ sums up in himself the whole of humanity including the first-formed man. However, Jesus not only incorporates the whole of humanity into himself, but also regenerates them.

For this reason did the Lord declare that the first should in truth be last, and the last first (*primos quidem novissimos futuros et novissimos primos*). And the prophet, too, indicates the same, saying, "Instead of fathers, children have been born unto you" (Ps 45:17). For the Lord, having been born (*natus*) "the first-begotten of the dead," and receiving into his bosom the ancient fathers (*in sinum suum recipiens pristinos patres*), has regenerated them into the life of God (*regeneravit eos in vitam Dei*), he having been made himself the beginning of those that live (*initium viventium*), as Adam became the beginning of those who die (*initium morientium*). Wherefore also Luke, commencing the genealogy with the Lord, carried it back to Adam (*initium generationis a Domino inchoans in Adam retulit*), indicating that it was he who regenerated them into the gospel of life (*in Evangelium vitae regeneravit*), and not they him (AH iii, 22, 4).

For Irenaeus, Luke's reversed genealogy rhetorically reveals the power of the gospel to regenerate the ancients.³¹⁰ Irenaeus' reading of the virgin birth demonstrates that the prophetic scriptures and the apostolic gospels are not independent of one another, relating in an external way. Instead of a gospel that is self-enclosed and limited by its spiritual essence, Irenaeus presents a gospel that consists in God's ability to communicate himself to his creatures. Thus, the gospel of Christ both incorporates the old covenant within its narrative and regenerates the prophetic utterances, making them descriptions of Christ's salvific dispensation.

³¹⁰ The balance between the beginning and the end as well as the movement backwards from the salvation of Christ to the fall of humanity expresses the heart of Irenaeus' teaching of recapitulation. He not only connects Adam and Christ in this way, but also Eve and Mary. Mary's virginity within a state of betrothal "signifies a recirculation (*recirculationem significans*)" of Eve (AH iii, 22, 4). Then, Irenaeus comments that "what is joined together could not otherwise be put asunder than by turning backwards the bonds of union (*nisi ipsae compagine alligationis reflectantur retrorsus*); so that the former ties be cancelled by the latter (*primae conjunctiones solvantur per secundas*), that the latter may set the former again at liberty (*secundae rursus liberent primas*)."³¹⁰ The precise meaning of these statements is difficult to determine. However, I think such a conception arises out of his rhetorical theology that envisions the beginning and the end as one catholic revelation. The beginning establishes the foundation for the end; and the end illuminates the beginning. However, this correspondence is not merely textual or rational, but ontological. Christ and Adam, Mary and Eve bear the very same flesh. What is accomplished in one must of necessity affect the other.

B. The New Fulfilling the Old

In book three of *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus establishes the apostolic gospels as the center of the scriptural canon. The prophetic scriptures and the apostolic epistles are read in harmony with the fourfold gospel of Christ. For Irenaeus, this harmony consists precisely in the one God's self-revelation to his people. "These (Matthew, Peter, Paul, Mark, Luke, and John) have all handed over to us (*tradiderunt nobis*) that there is one God (*unum Deum*), Creator of heaven and earth, announced by the Law and the prophets; and one Christ (*unum Christum*), the Son of God" (AH iii, 1, 2). The scriptures, as a catholic whole, are the preaching of the one God, and, therefore, apply the name of God to no one "except God the Father ruling over all (*qui dominatur omnium Deum Patrem*) and his Son who has received dominion (*qui dominium accepit*) from his Father over all creation..." (AH iii, 6, 1).

However, while the Father and the Son are termed God in an absolute and natural way, Irenaeus maintains that the name of God is extended beyond the Father and the Son to include the church.

For the Spirit designates both by the name of God (*Dei appellatione signavit Spiritus*)—both him who is anointed as Son (*ungitur Filium*), and him who does anoint (*ungit*), that is, the Father. And again, "God stood in the congregation of the gods (*synagoga Deorum*), he judges among the gods" (Ps 82:1). He here refers to the Father and the Son, and those who have received the adoption (*qui adoptionem perceperunt*); but these are the church. For she is the synagogue of God (*synagoga Dei*), which God—that is, the Son himself—has gathered by himself (*Filius ipse per semetipsum collegit*) (AH iii, 6, 1).

For Irenaeus, more important than the Father and Son's possession of the divine name is their communication of that name to humankind. The Son's communication of the divine name to his humanity is the saving dispensation that binds the prophetic and apostolic witnesses into one narrative. The virgin birth, which Irenaeus emphasizes throughout most of the third book of *Adversus Haereses*, is the sign of this salvific dispensation. Not only is the divine Son truly born of woman, but also flesh and blood humanity is truly born of God. Thus, Irenaeus' third book reads like an exposition of a three-article creed that incorporates the Father, the Son, and the church into one gospel narrative.

While the Son's recapitulation of all things in himself takes center stage in book three, Irenaeus focuses on the church in book four. However, Irenaeus refuses to speak of the church in static or limited terms. For his opponents, the church is radically new so that it is alien and external to creation and, consequently to the life of ancient Israel. In contrast, Irenaeus sees the church as rooted in the dynamic growth of humanity from beginning to end. The new covenant does not constitute the beginning of the church anymore than it constitutes the beginning of human existence. Rather, the new covenant consists in a consummation or a kind of maturation of God's relationship to his creatures. The newness of the new covenant is not a newness of substance, but a newness of relation.³¹¹ The very same humanity, created in the beginning by the will of God, is recapitulated in the end by the Son of God. Thus, Irenaeus' reading of the scriptures demonstrates both the essential continuity between the two testaments and humanity's growth from the old to the new.

1. The Patriarchs: The Joy of Abraham

Irenaeus' understanding of the relationship between the two covenants is illustrated in his reading of Abraham. At the beginning of book four, Irenaeus argues that the Law of Moses and the words of Christ agree with one another. This agreement, however, does not merely consist in a rational or textual agreement; rather, Abraham, Moses, the prophets, and the Lord himself are "from one essence (*ex una substantia*)" (AH iv, 2, 4). For the bishop of Lyons, this essential unity means that the Son of God does not merely speak in the new covenant, but has been revealing the Father from the beginning. Irenaeus is aware that this essential oneness of the covenants leaves him vulnerable. If the old covenant is truly from the same God as the new, then why does it pass away? His opponents could confront him with passages that speak of creation perishing and could simply point to Jerusalem's destruction. In response, Irenaeus maintains that it is the "form (*figura*)" of this world that passes away, not its essence.

³¹¹ Irenaeus, of course, does not use the language of *hypostasis* as it will be defined by later ecumenical councils. However, I think one can see in Irenaeus' writings the seeds of such a teaching. Here I certainly resonate with M. Steenberg (2009, p. 34). For Irenaeus, salvation cannot be on the level of substance, nor can it be limited to an external relation of will. In Christ, humanity relates to God in a fresh and truly new way. Cf. Ysabel de Andia (1986, pp. 149ff). De Andia sees this newness of relation is the idea of participation and in the work of the Spirit. She (1986, p. 71) writes, "L'Esprit est le principe actif d'assimilation de l'homme a Dieu, c'est pourquoi il doit etre present dans la creation de l'homme par le Verbe precisement pour rendre l'homme plus ressemblant au Verbe a l'image de qui il a ete fait."

For Irenaeus, this distinction between the form and substance of creation is not merely a clever rhetorical strategy that proves useful against his opponents. This distinction seems to proceed from his understanding of God's creation and resurrection of humanity. The doctrine of God's *creatio ex nihilo* means that God is free to shape and form his creation according to his will. In the hands of God, humanity is able to change becoming more in the end than what it is in the beginning. Thus, while the form of humanity may be altered, its essential being remains and persists. It is not some other body that is healed and raised from death; rather, the very same body is raised in Christ as had suffered death in Adam.³¹² Yet, as Irenaeus sees it, what is true of creation and the human body is also true for the covenants. The new covenant is not an essentially different covenant, independent of the old. The new covenant is truly the renewal, or perhaps better termed, the "renovation" of the old. For Irenaeus, Abraham is an icon of this renovation.

Irenaeus begins his discussion of Abraham with the assertion that God is "one and the same (*unus et idem*) who rolls up the heavens as a book, and renovates (*renovat*) the face of the earth" (AH iv, 5, 1). The power of God to "renovate" his creation leads Irenaeus to Jesus' dispute with the Sadducees concerning the resurrection (Mt 22). Perhaps predictably, Irenaeus emphasizes Jesus' reference to the patriarchs. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God of the living. Irenaeus continues,

By these arguments he (Jesus) unquestionably made it clear (*manifestum fecit*), that he who spoke to Moses out of the bush (*qui de rubo locutus est Moysi*), and declared himself to be the God of the fathers (*patrum Deum*), he is the God of the living (*viventium Deus*).... He, then, who was adored by the prophets as the living God (*a prophetis adorabatur Deus vivus*), he is the God of the living (*vivorum Deus*); and his Word is he who also spoke to Moses (*locutus est Moysi*), who also put the Sadducees to silence (*Sadducaeos redarguit*), who also bestowed the gift of resurrection (*resurrectionem donavit*), thus revealing both truths to those who are blind, that is, the resurrection and God (*resurrectionem et Deum*) (AH iv, 5, 2).

In this passage, Irenaeus wants to highlight a profound harmony between the gospel of Christ and the prophetic witness. Jesus himself testifies to the God of the ancient patriarchs. However, within this harmony, Irenaeus suggests a subtle development between the two covenants. He, whom the prophets knew as the "living God (*vivus Deus*)," Jesus manifests as the "God of the living (*vivorum Deus*)."

³¹² Cf. AH v, 12-13 where Irenaeus considers the newness of man in Christ. The miracles demonstrate that this newness is not on the level of substance, but on the level of participation. The very same humanity that dies is the same substance that is brought into communion with the perfecting and regenerating salvation of Jesus.

What the prophets preached as a divine attribute is made explicit in the living flesh of Christ and his saints.

Thus, for Irenaeus, it is not enough to say that God possesses the attribute of life in himself. Rather, the essence of the gospel is God's communication of his own divine life to his people through his incarnate Son. Jesus' reference to the God of the patriarchs as the God of the living expresses both a theological truth about God's nature and an ecclesiological truth about humanity.

For if he be not the God of the dead, but of the living (*vivorum*), yet was called the God of the fathers who were sleeping (*dormientium patrum Deus*), they do indubitably live to God (*vivunt Deo*), and have not passed out of existence (*non perierunt*), since they are children of the resurrection (*fili resurrectionis*). But our Lord is himself the resurrection, as he does himself declare, "I am the resurrection and the life." But the fathers are his children (*Patres autem ejus filii*); for it is said by the prophet: "Instead of your fathers, your children have been made to you." Christ himself, therefore, together with the Father, is the God of the living (*vivorum Deus*), who spoke to Moses, and who was also manifested to the fathers (AH iv, 5, 2).

For Irenaeus, the gospel of Christ does not stand in an external, static relationship to the old covenant patriarchs and prophets. The apostolic gospel does not annul or destroy the old covenant, nor does it simply supersede it rendering it old and of secondary status. Instead, the gospel of Christ truly regenerates and renovates the ancient fathers so that the patriarchs are truly "children of the resurrection" along with the baptized.³¹³

After establishing that the ancient patriarchs are regenerated children of the resurrection, Irenaeus narrows his focus to Abraham and his place in the scriptural narrative. As is typical for the bishop of Lyons, Irenaeus' consideration of Abraham begins with the gospels. He quotes John 8:56, which introduces the theme of Abraham's joy. "Your father Abraham rejoiced (*exsultavit*) that he should see my day (*ut videret diem meum*); and he saw it (*vidit*), and was glad (*gavisus est*)." For Irenaeus, Jesus' words concerning Abraham are an expression of Abraham's faith in Christ. Abraham, the father of the Jewish covenant, believes in Christ and, therefore, is a Christian. "Righteously (*δικαίως*), therefore, having left his earthly kindred (*καταλιπὼν τὴν ἐπίγειον συγγένειαν*), he followed the Word of God (*ἠκολούθησε τῷ Λόγῳ αὐτοῦ*), walking as a pilgrim with the Word, that he might have his abode with the Word (*ξεμιτεύων ἵνα σὺν τῷ Λόγῳ πολιτευθῆ*)" (AH

³¹³ Cf. Thornton (1950, p. 127). Thornton comments on the "fresh and interesting way" in which Irenaeus "extends the doctrine of the mystical body retrospectively to the old covenant." Thornton refers especially to AH iv, 33, 9-10.

iv, 5, 3). Irenaeus describes Abraham in apostolic terms. Like Abraham, the apostles “left the boat and their father (*καταλιπόντες τὸ πλοῖον καὶ τὸν πατέρα*), and followed the Word (*ἠκολούθουν τῷ Λόγῳ*)” (AH iv, 5, 4).³¹⁴

So far, Irenaeus’ reading of Abraham is typical of early Christians. Paul himself asserts Abraham’s Christian character in his epistles. Abraham’s faith shows that “the gospel was preached beforehand to Abraham (*προεσηγγείσατο τῷ Ἀβραάμ*)” (Gal 3:8). However, Abraham’s Christian character is often asserted in a way that excludes or at least transcends his place in the old covenant narrative.³¹⁵ According to the flesh, Abraham may have been a patriarch of Israel; but according to the spirit, he is an icon of the Christian faith. This implied division in the Christian reading of Abraham is exploited by some interpreters with Marcionite or Valentinian sympathies. The Christianization of Abraham tends to loose him from his historical place in the fleshly narrative of the scriptures.

Irenaeus seems to recognize this danger. He certainly asserts Abraham’s common participation with the church in one and the same faith. However, he attempts to accomplish this task without losing him from his place in the scriptural narrative and without liberating him from his fleshly association with his Jewish descendents. First, Irenaeus emphasizes Abraham’s prophetic character.

For in Abraham man had learned beforehand (*praedidicerat*), and had been accustomed to follow the Word of God (*assuetus fuerat homo sequi Verbum Dei*). For Abraham, according to his faith, followed the command of the Word of God, and with a ready mind (*prono animo*) delivered up, as a sacrifice to God (*concessit sacrificium Deo*), his only-begotten and beloved son (*unigenitum et dilectum filium*), in order that God also might be pleased to offer up for all his seed (*pro universo semine ejus*) his own beloved and only-begotten Son, as a sacrifice for our redemption. Since, therefore, Abraham was a prophet (*propheta*), and saw in the Spirit the day of the Lord’s coming (*videret in Spiritu diem adventus Domini*) and the dispensation of his suffering (*passionis dispositionem*) through whom both he himself and all who, following the example of his faith (*per quem ipse quoque et omnes qui similiter ut ipse credidit*), trust in God, should be saved, he rejoiced exceedingly (*exsultavit vehementer*). The Lord, therefore, was not unknown (*incognitus*) to Abraham, whose day he desired to see; nor again, was the Lord’s Father, for he had learned from the Word of the Lord (*didicerat a Verbo*

³¹⁴ Cf. Bacq (1978, 63ff). Bacq maintains that, for the bishop of Lyons, Abraham’s obedience makes him the “initiator of the faith of the Apostles and the church (*l’initiateur de la foi des apôtres et de l’Eglise*).”

³¹⁵ Early Christians tended to emphasize the contrast between the new covenant in Christ and the old covenant of the Law. This contrast at times led to an interpretation of the old covenant in which the new covenant “abrogates” the old Law (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 11). In such a framework, the Christian character of old testament patriarchs tends to exclude their Jewish identity (Cf. *The Epistle of Barnabas*, chs. 9, 13). Irenaeus may be consciously correcting Justin and other early Christian teachers when in AH iv, 16, 4ff. he explicitly denies the ancient Law’s “abrogation (*dissolutionem*).”

Deum), and believed him; wherefore it was accounted to him by the Lord for righteousness (AH iv, 5, 4-5).

By emphasizing Abraham's prophetic character, Irenaeus opens the scriptural narrative of the patriarch to the gospel narrative of Christ. Thus, Abraham does not merely desire to see the future day of Christ's passion, but actually experiences it in the offering of his own son, Isaac.³¹⁶ Irenaeus seems to suggest that Isaac himself is a concrete sign or an incarnate manifestation of Christ's advent and passion for the redemption of "all Abraham's seed (*τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτοῦ πάντος*)," that is, the church.³¹⁷

For Irenaeus, Abraham does not have to wait for a future revelation of the Logos in order to know the true God. Instead, Abraham converses with the *Verbum Dei* in his own day and even experiences the joy of the salvation accomplished in Christ's passion. The narrative of Abraham is both prophetic and catechetical. Abraham represents a stage in the catechetical growth of humanity in which humankind becomes "accustomed to follow the Word of God." The account of Abraham is also prophetic opening humanity toward its perfection and maturation realized in the advent and passion of Christ. However, not only is the narrative of Abraham open to the dispensation of Christ, but also the new covenant reverberates backward to the old, regenerating and renovating the ancient patriarchs.

Therefore Abraham also, knowing the Father through the Word (*a Verbo cognoscens Patrem*), who made heaven and earth, confessed him to be God (*hunc Deum confitebatur*); and having learned (*doctus*), by an announcement (*repraesentatione*) that the Son of God would be a man among men, by whose advent his seed should be as the stars of heaven, he desired to see that day, so that he might himself also embrace Christ (*ipse complecteretur Christum*); and seeing it through the Spirit of prophecy (*per Spiritum propheticum*), he rejoiced

³¹⁶ Cf. Bacq (1978, pp. 67ff). Bacq writes, "Et dans l'acte meme qui conduit a sa perfection la foi du patriarche, au moment ou <<il cede aec emprissement son fils unique et bien aime>> en sacrifice a Dieu, s'accomplit aussi sa vision de prophete: il voit, dans sa proper offrande, une figure du sacrifice que son sentira Dies en faveur de sa posterite; il voit, par l'Esprit, le jour de la venue du Seigneur et l'economie de la Passioin qui procurera le salut a tous ceux qui croiront comme lui." Bacq rightly sees that for Irenaeus there is a profound connection between Abraham's sacrifice and the economy of Christ's passion. However, I do not think the connection is merely one of "figure" or pattern. Rather, for Irenaeus, the connection is grounded first of all in the very flesh of Isaac. The very same flesh that Abraham is ready to offer is assumed and recapitulated in the Son of God. From this perspective, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is a real completion or perfection of Abraham's offering. The same flesh that began to be sacrificed in Isaac is perfectly sacrificed in Christ. Thus, the prophetic character of the old testament is not merely a matter of figurative similarity, but also rooted in the substance of the flesh. It is for this reason that the joy and life of Jesus' resurrection are truly and actually experienced by Abraham. Concerning Irenaeus' use of Isaac in connection to Rom 8:2, cf. B. D. Chilton (1982, pp. 643-647).

³¹⁷ In AH iv, 5, 4-5, Irenaeus' emphasis is that Abraham and the church share the same faith and the same righteousness. This identity between Abraham and the church consists in the act of "offering" or "sacrifice." Thus, for Irenaeus, the Father's perfect offering of his Son upon the cross is an action that is truly present in Abraham's offering of Isaac and in the church's offering of itself both in the Eucharist and in martyrdom. Concerning the theme of sacrifice cf. AH iv, 17ff.

(*exsultavit*). Wherefore Simeon also, one of his descendents (*ex semine ejus*),³¹⁸ filled up the rejoicing of the patriarch (*reimplebat gratulationem patriarchae*), and said: “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace. For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people: a light for revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of the people Israel.” And the angels, in like manner, announced tidings of great joy (*gratulationem magnam*) to the shepherds who were keeping watch by night. Moreover, Mary said, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced (*exsultavit*) in God my salvation;”—the rejoicing of Abraham descending upon those who sprang from him (*desendente quidem exsultatione Abrahae in eos qui erant ex semine ejus*),—those, namely, who were watching (*vigilantes*), and who beheld Christ (*videntes Christum*), and believed in him (*credentes ei*); while, on the other hand, there was a reciprocal rejoicing which passed backwards (*reciproca autem rursus et regrediente exsultatione*) from the children to Abraham (*a filiis in Abraham*) who did also desire to see the day of Christ’s coming. Rightly, then, did our Lord bear witness to him saying, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad” (AH iv, 7, 1).

In a truly intriguing way, this passage reveals the dynamic relationship between the old and the new in Irenaeus thought.³¹⁹ Instead of loosing Abraham from his place in the scriptural narrative or repudiating his fleshly identity, Irenaeus emphasizes them. For Irenaeus, Abraham is both a patriarch whose prophetic narrative bears fruit in those descended from his own body, and a newborn child whose flesh is recapitulated in Christ and regenerated into the joy of the resurrection. Irenaeus refuses to place the new next to the old in a static, external association. The old is not only prophetic of the new; but the new also extends backward to regenerate the old.

2. Fulfilling the Law

Abraham’s joy reveals the dynamic and perichoretic relationship between the two testaments. His joy is prophetic inspiring his descendents with a firm hope in the advent of Christ and a fervent desire to see his day. However, the joy he foretells is the very same joy that he truly experiences in seedling form through the birth and sacrifice of Isaac. Irenaeus offers a close reading of John 8:56.

³¹⁸ Against Marcion, Irenaeus gives the “seed (*semen*)” of Abraham an ecclesial interpretation. Cf. AH iv, 8, 1. In the course of his discussion, Irenaeus indicates that the connection between Abraham and the church is not simply spiritual, but substantive. He concludes, “For as in the first we were prefigured (*praefigurabamur*), so, on the other hand, are they represented in us (*sic rursus in nobis illi deformantur*), that is, in the church, and receive the recompense for those things which they accomplished (*laboraverunt*)” (AH iv, 22, 2). For Irenaeus, the church is already in some sense present in Abraham and the patriarchs; and the patriarchs are truly present in the church. His perspective is a consequence of his understanding of the Son’s recapitulation of humanity in himself. Together with the patriarchs, we are all members of the one body of Christ. Cf. Roch Kereszty (1984, pp. 202-218).

³¹⁹ Cf. AH iv, 34, 1ff. In opposition to Marcion, Irenaeus writes, “But if a thought of this kind should then suggest itself to you, to say, What then did the Lord bring to us by his advent?—know that he brought all novelty (*omnem novitatem*), by bringing himself who had been announced. For this very thing was proclaimed beforehand, that a novelty should come to renew and quicken mankind (*quoniam novitas veniet innovatura et vivificatura hominem*)” (AH iv, 34, 1). In this text, Irenaeus presents an active newness, that is, the resurrection of Christ actively regenerates and renovates the ancient scriptures and the ancient formation of Adam.

For Irenaeus, this passage, not only refers to Abraham's desire to see Jesus' day, but also plainly states that the patriarch "saw it and was glad." The old not only predicts the new, but also the new regenerates and renovates the old. Irenaeus gives the new covenant an active character. Rather than defining the gospel as a new substance limited to the spiritual world, Irenaeus confesses a gospel that truly communicates its newness to the old covenant and the fleshly narrative of Israel. This same dynamic relationship between the testaments is evident again in Irenaeus' interpretation of the Mosaic Law.

Irenaeus' reading of the ancient Law begins in book four, chapter nine. In the first eight chapters, Irenaeus demonstrates that Moses and Abraham both conversed with the same divine Word, who has become flesh in the last days and suffered for the salvation of his people. "All things therefore are of one and same substance (*unius et ejusdem substantiae*), that is, from one and the same God (*ab uno et eodem Deo*)..." (AH iv, 9, 1). In support of this assertion, Irenaeus brings forward the parable of the householder who brings forth from his treasure the new and the old (Mt 13:52).

Irenaeus argues,

He (Jesus) did not teach that he who brought forth the old was one (*non alterum quidem vetera*), and he that brought forth the new, another (*alterum vero proferentem nova*); but that they were one and the same (*unum et eundem*). For the Lord is the good man of the house (*paterfamilias*), who rules the entire house of his Father (*qui universae domui paternae dominatur*); and who delivers a law suited (*condignam tradens legem*) both for slaves (*servis*) and those who are as yet undisciplined (*indisciplinatis*); and gives fitting precepts (*congruentia dans praecepta*) to those that are free (*liberis*), and have been justified by faith (*fide iustificatis*), as well as throws his own inheritance open to those that are sons (*filiiis adaperiens suam hereditatem*) (AH iv, 9, 1).

For Irenaeus, both covenants are clearly rooted in the changeless being of the one God. However, like a skilled rhetorician, God adapts his words to the condition of his hearers. The covenants must be interpreted, not only according to their origin in the Creator's will, but also according to their purpose in humankind. To the theological reading of the Law, Irenaeus adds an anthropological dimension. While Marcion may ascribe the change in covenants to a change in divinity, Irenaeus ascribes it to the catechetical growth of humanity.

In Irenaeus' catechetical perspective, the two covenants are not static, self-enclosed legislations that stand in an external relationship to one another. Irenaeus constantly emphasizes the essential unity of the old and the new in the one God. "Now without contradiction, he (Jesus) means

by those things which are brought forth from the treasure new and old, the two covenants (*duo testamenta*); the old, that giving of the Law which took place formerly (*quae ante fuerat legisdatio*); and he points out as the new, that conversing which is according to the gospel (*quae secundum Evangelium est conversatio*)..." (AH iv, 9, 1). For Irenaeus, this theological unity of the old and new covenants is absolute. Both testaments truly reveal one and the same God.

However, Irenaeus is well aware that he cannot merely make this assertion without also explaining the very real differences between the old and the new testaments. His explanation begins with a return to a distinction between nature and form.

He (Jesus) declares: "For in this place is one greater (*plus*) than the temple" (Mt 12:6). But "greater (*plus*)" and "less (*minus*)" are not applied to those things which have no communion between themselves (*inter se communionem non habent*), and are of an opposite nature (*contrariae naturae*), and mutually repugnant (*pugnant adversum se*); but are used in the case of those of the same substance (*eiusdem substantiae*), and which communicate with each other (*communicant secum*), but merely differ (*solum differunt*) in number and size; such as water from water, and light from light, and grace from grace. Greater, therefore, is that legislation which has been given in order to liberty (*legisdatio quae in libertatem*) than that given in order to bondage (*quam quae data est in servitutem*); and therefore it has also been diffused, not throughout one nation only (*unam gentem*), but over the whole world (*totum mundum*). For one and the same Lord, who is greater than the temple, greater than Solomon, and greater than Jonah, confers gifts upon men (*donat hominibus*), that is, his own presence (*suam praesentiam*), and the resurrection from the dead (*resurrectionem a mortuis*); but he does not change God (*non Deum immutans*), nor proclaim another Father (*alium praedicans Patrem*), but that very same one, who always has more to measure out to those of his household (*qui semper habet plura metiri domesticis*) (AH iv, 9, 2).

While his opponents tend to define the nature of God on the basis of the attributes he possesses within himself, Irenaeus speaks of God in terms of the gifts that he bestows. Instead of ascribing covenantal differences to the divine essence, Irenaeus ascribes them to God's relation to humanity. From this perspective, Irenaeus admits that a real difference exists between the covenants. God gives greater gifts in the new covenant than in the old. However, in spite of this formal difference, both covenants testify to the God who condescends to confer his benefits on the human race. To put it in Irenaeus' words, both the Law and the gospel show forth the one God "who always has more to measure out to those of his household."

For Irenaeus, the greater gifts of the gospel consist in the gifts of "his own presence" and the "resurrection from the dead." With these two gifts, Irenaeus certainly intends to express Jesus' evangelical narrative, which begins with his advent in the flesh and ends with the victory of the

resurrection. However, besides this horizontal, narrative emphasis, these two gifts also express the vertical, ontological meaning of the gospel. Jesus' birth from the virgin consists, not merely in an historical event, but also in an ontological interaction between God and his formation. From the theological perspective, the advent of Christ reveals the full condescension of God, who communicates "his own presence" to humanity. From the anthropological perspective, the "resurrection from the dead" entails the full ascension of humanity into the divine life. While the substances of divinity and humanity persist, the relationship between God and humankind changes, matures, and grows ever more intimate.

And as their (humankind's) love toward God increases (*proficiente eorum eum dilectione*), he bestows more and greater gifts (*plura et majora donans*); as also the Lord said to his disciples: "You shall see greater things than these" (Jn 1:50). And Paul declares: "Not that I have already attained, or that I am justified, or already have been made perfect. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect has come, the things which are in part shall be done away" (Phil 3:12; 1 Cor 4:4; 13:9-10). As, therefore, when that which is perfect has come (*adveniente perfecto*), we shall not see another Father (*non alterum Patrem videbimus*), but him whom we now desire to see (*nunc videre concupimus*) (for "blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God"); neither shall we look (*expectabimus*) for another Christ and Son of God, but him who was of the Virgin Mary, who also suffered, in whom too we trust (*credimus*), and whom we love (*diligimus*)...neither do we receive (*percipiemus*) another Holy Spirit, besides him who is with us (*nobiscum*), and cries out, "Abba, Father;" and we shall make increase (*augmentum*) in the very same things, and shall make progress (*proficiemus*), so that no longer through a glass (*per speculum*), or by means of enigmas (*per aenigmata*), but face to face (*facie ad faciem*), we shall enjoy the gifts of God (AH iv, 9, 2).

For Irenaeus, the gospel consists in the dynamic interaction between God and humanity, in which God's condescension correlates with humankind's ascension unto perfect salvation. All the successive covenants entail this divine communion with his creatures. However, in the incarnate Son, this interaction between God and humanity reaches perfection. For in Christ, God and his formation no longer commune in an external relationship. God condescends to dwell within humanity and humanity ascends to dwell within God. Irenaeus expresses the intimacy of the new covenant in terms of the "love" that brings humanity "face to face" with God.³²⁰

³²⁰ Cf. AH iv, 20 where Irenaeus connects the relationship of love between God and humanity to a relationship of sight. In the old covenant, the prophets "did not openly behold the actual face of God (*manifeste ipsam faciem Dei videbant prophetae*), but they saw the dispensations and the mysteries (*dispositiones et mysteria*) through which man should begin to see God (*per quae inciperet homo videre Deum*)" (AH iv, 20, 10). In the new covenant, a deep intimacy is conferred upon humanity so that it is given to humankind to see God. Irenaeus writes, "...For the Father is incomprehensible (*incapabilis*); but in regard to his love, and kindness, and as to his infinite power, even this he grants to those who love him (*etiam hoc concedit iis qui se diligunt*), that is, to see God (*videre Deum*), which thing the prophets did also predict" (AH iv, 20, 5). Réal Tremblay's (1978, p. 175) study of such texts leads him to conclude that seeing God is "une activité d'ordre intérieur,

Irenaeus reads the ancient Law and its relationship to the gospel within the context of God's dynamic communion with his creation. Similar to his treatment of Abraham, Irenaeus begins his exposition of the ancient Law, not with Moses, but with Jesus. Irenaeus notes that, according to the gospels, love is the greatest of the commandments.

But that this (the commandment to love God) is the first and greatest commandment (*primum et maximum praeceptum*), and that the next (*sequens*) has respect to love toward our neighbor, the Lord has taught, when he says that the entire Law and the prophets (*totam legem et prophetas*) hang upon these two commandments. Moreover, he did not himself bring down any other commandment greater than this one, but renewed this very same one (*ipsum renovavit*) to his disciples, when he enjoined them to love God (*jubens Deum diligere*) with all their heart, and others as themselves (AH iv, 12, 2).

Jesus' "renewing (*renovavit*)" of the Law is in harmony with Paul who declares, "Love is the fulfilling of the Law (*adimpletio legis dilectio*)" (Rom 13:10). Both Jesus and Paul incorporate the ancient command to love God and neighbor into their teaching. From this agreement, Irenaeus asserts the obvious conclusion that "the author of the Law and the gospel (*Legis et Evangelii conditor*) is shown to be one and the same (*unus et idem ostenditur*)" (AH iv, 12, 3).

However, for the bishop of Lyons, Jesus' and Paul's use of the ancient Law does not merely confirm the essential agreement between the old and new covenants; it also establishes the foundation for their dynamic and active communication with one another. Jesus does not merely refer to the ancient law of love, but actively "fulfills (*adimpletio*)" it.³²¹ Irenaeus uses these verbs with an emphasis on their active character. More than expressing a conceptual agreement between the testaments, these verbs portray the energetic communication between them.³²² Thus, Irenaeus interprets the Law in two ways. He reads it according to its origin in God; but he also reads it according to its ultimate purpose in humanity. While the Law and the gospel both originate in God,

spiritual, par laquelle l'homme—entendons, l'homme integral—accède, participe, communique au mystère de Dieu." Cf. also D. E. Lanne (1960) who considers the knowledge of God "selon sa grandeur" and that knowledge "selon son amour." Concerning Irenaeus' references to love in his polemic against his opponents, cf. D. Jeffrey Bingham (2001, pp. 184-199).³²¹ Concerning Irenaeus' use of the language of "fulfillment," cf. R. A. Markus (1954, pp. 193-224). Markus shows that Irenaeus' use of this "fulfillment" language shows some originality when read in relation to the concept of the spiritual Pleroma.

³²² Cf. AH iv, 34, 2ff. Irenaeus writes, "Wherefore he said, 'Think not that I have come to destroy the Law and the prophets; I came not to destroy, but to fulfill (*adimplere*). For verily I say unto you, until heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall not pass from the Law and the prophets till all come to pass.' For by his advent he himself fulfilled all things (*Omnia enim ipse adimplevit veniens*), and does still fulfill in the church the new covenant (*implet in Ecclesia... novum Testamentum*) foretold by the Law, onwards to the consummation." In this passage, Irenaeus speaks of Jesus as one who actively fulfills both the old and new covenants. Thus, in Irenaeus' understanding, the two covenants receive a dynamic unity in the work of Christ.

they represent different stages in the accomplishment of God's purpose for his creatures. The full purpose of the ancient Law is not known until the advent of Christ and his gospel.

Having established the substantive harmony of the old and new testaments, Irenaeus proceeds to show the nature of the progression from the old to the new. In Matthew 19, a man of wealth asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. For Irenaeus, the order of the commandments as listed by Christ is significant. Irenaeus writes, "Again the Lord replies, 'Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself,'—setting as an ascending series (*velut gradus*) before those who wished to follow him, the precepts of the Law (*praecepta legis*), as the entrance into life (*introitus in vitam*)" (AH iv, 12, 5). The fact that Jesus ends his list with the command to love suggests to Irenaeus that Jesus proceeds from the lesser commandments to the greater. However, the "ascending series" of commandments does not end with the charge to love one's neighbor. If the man would be "perfect (*τέλειος*)," he must give to the poor all that he has and, finally, follow Christ. Irenaeus concludes, "He (Jesus) taught that they should obey the commandments which God enjoined from the beginning (*facerent praecepta quae ab initio praecepit Deus*), and do away with their former covetousness by good works (*veterem cupiditatem per operas bonas solverent*), and follow after Christ (*sequerentur Christum*)" (AH iv, 12, 5). For Irenaeus, this passage is a pedagogical map that leads the disciple from the Law to the gospel. The ancient Law is not repudiated, but is incorporated into the teaching of Christ and perfected in the call to follow him. In this way, Irenaeus shows that "the Law taught man beforehand (*lex praedocuit hominem*) the necessity of following Christ (*sequi oportere Christum*)" (AH iv, 12, 5).

For Irenaeus, Jesus' catechetical interaction with the rich man (Mt 19) harmonizes with Paul's statement that "Christ is the end (*τέλος*) of the Law" (Rom 10:4). While some teachers may interpret Paul's words to the effect that Christ annuls the Law and renders it irrelevant, Irenaeus reads this Pauline statement with reference to Christ's perfection of the Law. Paul's use of "end (*τέλος*)" is interpreted in light of Jesus' catechesis of the rich man. If this man is to be "perfect (*τέλειος*)," he must give his possessions to the poor and follow Christ. However, for the bishop of Lyons, Christ is

the “end” of the Law not merely in the sense that he brings it to a temporal or narrative conclusion. Irenaeus writes, “And how is Christ the end of the Law (*finis legis*), if he be not also the final cause of it (*initium ejus*)? For he who has brought in the end (*finem intulit*) has himself also wrought the beginning (*initium operatus est*)...” (AH iv 12, 4). Irenaeus rejects the notion that Christ comes from outside the Law in order to destroy it. Rather, from beginning to end the Law is in Christ and Christ is in the Law. The same divine Logos, who is implicit throughout the old covenant, becomes explicit in the new covenant. In this way, Christ’s relation to the Law is active and creative. He comes in the end to actively perfect the Law even as he actively “worked out its beginning (*initium operatus est*).”

Therefore, for the second century bishop, Christ comes neither to destroy the Law as is taught by Marcion, nor to restore or preserve the ancient form of the Law as taught by certain Judaizing Christians. Rather, Christ comes to actively perfect the Law, which means that the Law’s essence persists but its relation to humanity truly changes.

And that the Lord did not abrogate the natural precepts of the Law (*naturalia legis...non dissolvit*), by which man is justified, which also those who were justified by faith, and who pleased God, did observe previous to the giving of the Law (*ante legis dationem custodiebant*), but that he extended and fulfilled them (*extendit et implevit*), is shown from his words (*ex sermonibus ejus ostenditur*) (AH iv, 13, 1).

For Irenaeus, when Christ “fulfills (*implevit*)” the Law, the Law cannot remain the same. In some sense, the ancient Law is “renovated,” that is, it is adapted to a new situation. It is for this reason that Irenaeus connects Christ’s “fulfilling” of the Law with his “extending” the Law.³²³ Referring to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5), Irenaeus writes,

For all these (Jesus’ teaching in Mt 5) do not contain or imply an opposition to and an overturning of past things (*contrarietatem et dissolutionem praeteritorum*), as Marcion’s followers do strenuously maintain; but a fulfilling and an extension of them (*plenitudinem et extensionem*), as he does himself declare: “Unless your righteousness shall exceed (*abundaverit plus*) that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:20). For what does excess (*plus*) refer to? In the first place, we must believe not only in the Father, but also in his Son now revealed (*in Filium ejus jam manifestatum*); for he it is who leads man into fellowship and unity with God (*qui in communionem et unitatem Dei hominem ducit*). In the next place, we must not only say (*non solum dicere*), but we must do (*facere*); for they said, but did not. And we must not only

³²³ Irenaeus makes the connection between Jesus’ “fulfillment” and “extension” of the Law in the context of his interpretation of Matthew’s Gospel. It is suggestive that Irenaeus’ use of “fulfill” reflects Matthew’s use of the same verb in his Gospel. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus alone “fulfills” Old Testament prophecy. When the prophets are quoted with reference to John the Baptist, Matthew does not say that John “fulfills” the prophetic word. Thus, “fulfill” in Matthew and Irenaeus carries a uniquely Christological character. It is not the ancient prophecies that authenticate Jesus’ ministry, but Christ’s incarnate work that actively “fills” the prophetic words with their intended meaning. The life, death, and resurrection of Christ renovate and regenerate the ancient scriptures. Cf. also AH iv, 24, 2.

abstain from evil deeds (*a malis operibus*), but even from the desires after them (*a concupiscentiis eorum*). Now he did not teach us these things as being opposed to the Law (*contraria legi*), but as fulfilling the Law (*adimplens legem*), and implanting in us the varied righteousness of the Law (*infigens justificationes legis in nobis*) (AH iv, 13, 1).

Irenaeus' reading of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is perhaps obvious. He certainly notes Jesus' emphasis on righteous deeds rather than mere words; and his demand for righteous desires, which exceeds a mere abstention from evil works. However, it is worth noting that, for Irenaeus, the change inherent in Christ's fulfillment and extension of the Law is not a change in the content or purpose of the Law. Rather, it is a change in the humanity for which the Law is intended. Christ "fulfills" the Law by "implanting" the fullness of its righteousness in his fleshly creatures.

Thus, for Irenaeus, it is not the ancient, pristine Law that is adapted for the new covenant; rather, it is the new testament gospel that was adapted for Moses, ancient Israel, and the servile condition of humankind.

For the Law, since it was laid down for those in bondage (*servis posita*), used to instruct the soul by means of those corporeal objects which were of an external nature (*per ea quae foris erant corporalia animam erudiebat*), drawing it (*attrahens*), as by a bond (*per vinculum*), to obey its commandments (*ad abaudientiam praeceptorum*), that man might learn to serve God (*disceret homo assentire Deo*). But the Word set free the soul (*liberans animam*), and taught that through it the body should be willingly purified (*per ipsam corpus voluntarie emundari*). Which having been accomplished, it followed as of course, that the bonds of slavery should be removed, to which man had now become accustomed, and that he should follow God without fetters (*sine vinculis sequi Deum*): moreover, that the laws of liberty (*decreta libertatis*) should be extended (*superextendi*), and subjection to the king increased (*augeri subjectionem*), so that no one who is converted should appear unworthy to him who set him free, but that the piety and obedience due to the Master of the household should be equally rendered both by servants and children (*servis et liberis*); while the children possess greater confidence (*majorem fiduciam habere liberos*), inasmuch as the working of liberty (*operatio libertatis*) is greater and more glorious than that obedience which is rendered in slavery (AH iv, 13, 2).

This passage indicates that God adapts his relationship to humanity to fit its servile condition. As a slave, humanity relates to God merely according to the divine will. The ancient Law is conformed to humanity's external relationship to God. The Mosaic Law instructs the soul "through things of a corporeal and external nature (*per ea quae foris erant corporalia*)." However, in the new covenant, humanity enjoys the divine fellowship God has intended from the beginning. The incarnate Logos

liberates humanity from within so that external bonds are loosed in favor of the internal bond of love.³²⁴

The servant obeys out of external necessity, but the son obeys freely out of an internal fellowship with his father.³²⁵ This internal, intimate fellowship is the new relationship between God and his human creatures accomplished in Christ. This new relationship renews the Law revealing its true essence and the fullness of its catechetical purpose.

Now all these precepts, as I have already observed, were not those of one doing away with the Law (*non dissolventis erant legem*), but of one fulfilling, extending, and widening it among us (*adimplentis et extendentis et dilatantis in nobis*); just as if one should say, that the more extensive operation of liberty (*majorem libertatis operationem*) implies that a fullness of subjection and affection (*plenio rem subjectionem et affectionem*) toward our Liberator had been implanted within us (*infixam nobis*). For He did not set us free for this purpose, that we should depart from him (no one, indeed, while placed out of reach of the Lord's benefits (*extra dominica*), has power to procure for himself the means of salvation), but that the more we receive his grace (*plus gratiam ejus adepti*), the more we should love him (*plus eum diligamus*). Now the more we have loved him, the more glory shall we receive from him, when we are continually in the presence of the Father (*semper in conspectus Patris*). In as much, then, as all natural precepts are common to us and to them (*naturalia omnia praecepta communia sunt nobis et illis*), they had in them indeed the beginning and origin (*initium et ortum*); but in us they have received growth and fullness (*augmentum et adimpletionem*) (AH iv, 13, 3-4).

For Irenaeus, God's intimate ontological fellowship with humanity present in Christ was adapted in the old covenant to the servile condition of humanity present in Adam.³²⁶ Circumcision, the temple and its sacrifices bound the offspring of Abraham to God in an external relationship and a legal

³²⁴ Concerning the significance of love cf. E. Osborn (2001, pp. 245ff). Osborn emphasizes that Irenaeus brings "ontological perfection and ethical perfection" together in Christ and especially his passion. Cf. also Daniel Wanke (2000, pp. 205ff). Wanke rightly emphasizes the cross of Christ both in relation to man's perfection in the image and likeness of God and to man's perfection in obedience. He (2000, p. 191) writes, "Inkarnation und Gehorsam Christi am Kreuz bilden somit einen unlosbaren Zusammenhang; sie sind die beiden konstitutiven Elemente des Christus geschehens." For Irenaeus, ontology and ethics are indeed inseparable. Death is not an external punishment of sinful acts; rather, the sinful will bears the ontology of death within it. In the same way, Jesus' righteousness is not merely ethical or legal, but is itself life-giving. Cf. AH v, 10-11 where Irenaeus speaks of "spiritual actions which vivify man (*spiritalis actus intulit vivificantes hominem*)." Life is not an external reward given due to man's spiritual actions; rather, man's incorporation into the activity of the Spirit is itself regeneration.

³²⁵ Cf. AH iv, 18, 1ff. While sacrifices are present in both covenants, the sacrifice of the new covenant is made "by freemen, not by slaves (*non a servis, sed a liberis*)." The voluntary sacrifice is the new sacrifice established in Jesus' cross, offered in the eucharist, and continually bearing fruit in the church's martyrs. In this way, the new internal relationship between God and humanity is not merely a hidden, inner connection, but concretely and vividly displayed before the world.

³²⁶ On the one hand, Irenaeus ascribes man's bondage to Satan (AH iii, 23; v, 21). On the other hand, he says that God ordained for humanity "that bondage...through the Law" (AH iv, 13, 4). For Irenaeus, man is created out of nothing by the will of God. Thus, humanity begins his existence in an external relationship to God, that is, a relation of will or power. It is this external relationship that allows humanity's subjection to Satan through his own rebellion. God's answer to humanity's captivity to the devil consists in two parts. First, God gives his Law which brings humanity into subjection to his righteous will. However, this servile relation inaugurated in the Law of Moses is perfected in the freedom of sonship established when humanity is incorporated into the Son. Thus, the movement from the old to the new is a movement from an external relationship to an internal one. Cf. also the discussion in G. Wingren (1959, pp. 63ff).

covenant. These external bonds surrender to the more intimate bond of love realized in Christ and constituted in the sacramental life of the church.

Irenaeus reads the old and new covenants in conscious opposition to his opponents. Marcionite and Valentinian teachers place the covenants in static opposition to one another proceeding from different gods and intended for different hearers. The words of the inferior demiurge may hold value for psychic Christians, but cannot define one's pneumatic identity. In contrast, Irenaeus emphasizes the unity of the old and new in God's relationship to his creatures. However, this unity does not consist primarily in a rational harmony or a textual agreement. Rather, the unity of the two covenants proceeds from both their divine origin and their anthropological purpose. Irenaeus' perspective allows him to maintain the essential harmony of the covenants as well as explain their real differences. The Law and the gospel are not independent, autonomous revelations that are mutually exclusive. Rather, the Law and the gospel are open to one another in the same way that God opens himself to humankind. This dynamic communion between the Law and the gospel moves in both directions. On the one hand, the Law is always prophesying the advent of Christ and catechizing humanity toward the fullness of his salvation. On the other hand, the gospel is always fulfilling, renewing, and perfecting the ancient Law. Instead of a new covenant that renders the prophetic scriptures old and irrelevant, Irenaeus presents a gospel that has the power to communicate its own newness to the ancients regenerating them into the life of God. In this way, the Law and the prophets are not only helpful, but also absolutely essential to the gospel and the church's identity. To be baptized into Christ and to partake of his flesh and blood is to be incorporated into the narrative of God's interaction with humanity from the beginning to the end.

C. God's Power Made Perfect in Weakness: The Man Born Blind

For Irenaeus, Valentinian systems divide and order reality by employing firm, substantial boundaries. Even within the spiritual Pleroma, lower aeons are only privy to a partial knowledge of their incomprehensible origin. Divine emanations consist in a substantial production that entails

degeneration. In order to preserve the “stability”³²⁷ of the spiritual world, Valentinian teachers use substantial boundaries to exclude the changeability and passion of the physical realm. Thus, Irenaeus seems to recognize that dualism is not the first principle of the opposition’s systems; rather, such a substantial dualism is a consequence of the desire to exclude the changeable, unstable, and unfulfilled passions of the flesh from one’s true identity. Valentinian dualism proceeds from an anticosmic bias. In Valentinian teaching, the catechumen identifies himself with the spiritual realm and, therefore, excludes the weakness of the flesh from his own identity. Ignorance, weakness, passion, sin and evil are mingled into one lump and cast out of the spiritual world to which the pneumatic disciple belongs.

In response to dualistic cosmologies, Irenaeus does not attempt to remove the substantial boundaries between the spiritual and the physical and to advocate a divine monism. He does not focus simply on God’s unity or oneness in order to defeat his opponents’ dualism.³²⁸ Instead, he considers God’s ability and desire to relate outside his own divine essence and actively communicate with the fleshly world. This shift in focus from substance to relation, from what God possesses within himself to what he bestows outside himself, gives Irenaeus’ vision of the gospel its distinctive character. God’s interaction with his creatures binds into one continuous and harmonious narrative the formation of all things by his will alone and the recapitulation of all things by his Son. The horizontal and narrative dimensions of God’s communication with humanity are evident in the dynamic way Irenaeus relates the old and new covenants throughout the fourth book of *Adversus Haereses*.

However, his emphasis on God’s real and authentic communication with humanity forces Irenaeus to confront a difficult challenge. The bishop of Lyons must consider God’s relationship to the mortality, the weakness, the changeability, and the passion inherent in human flesh. For Irenaeus’ opponents, such attributes are the sources and origins of all sin and evil and, therefore, must be excluded from one’s spiritual identity. In response, Irenaeus could have argued that mortal weakness is not an attribute inherent in human flesh, but rather an external characteristic that adheres to human

³²⁷ Concerning the theme of stability, cf. Michael A. Williams (1981, pp. 819-829).

³²⁸ Cf. Elaine Pagels (1974, pp. 35-53). In this article, Elaine Pagels claims that Irenaeus offers a caricature of Valentinian theology. One of her criticisms is that Irenaeus wrongly claims that Valentinian theology denies the oneness of God. For Irenaeus, it is not merely the substantial oneness of God that must be maintained, but a oneness that does not exclude the material world. While Valentinian thought holds to a substantial monism confined within the Pleroma, Irenaeus speaks of a divine oneness that is truly communicated through Christ and his Spirit to the church.

nature as a consequence of the fall into sin. From this perspective, Irenaeus could have agreed with his adversaries that weakness, changeability and passion are foreign to one's true identity. Once sin and death are overcome, suffering and weakness will be destroyed and forgotten as humanity becomes what it was created to be. Yet, perhaps surprisingly, Irenaeus foregoes this line of argument in favor of another that becomes evident in his reading of scripture at the beginning of his fifth book.

In his preface to the fifth book, Irenaeus claims that the purpose of his work is catechetical.³²⁹ He is not writing directly to his opponents; nor does he intend his argument to be heard by the world. Rather, he writes for the sake of the church and those being instructed in the faith.

...I shall endeavor, in this fifth book of the entire work (*universi operis*)...to exhibit proofs from the rest of the Lord's doctrine (*ex reliquis doctrinae Domini nostri*) and apostolic epistles (*ex apostolicis epistolis*): complying with your demand, as you requested of me (since indeed I have been assigned a place in the ministry of the word); and, laboring by every means in my power (*omni modo elaborantibus secundum nostram virtutem*) to furnish you with large assistance against the contradictions of the heretics (*adversus contradictiones haereticorum*), as also to reclaim the wanderers (*errantes retrahere*) and convert them to the Church of God (*convertere ad Ecclesiam Dei*), to confirm at the same time the minds (*sensum confirmare*) of the neophytes (*neophytorum*), that they may preserve steadfast (*stabilem custodiant*) the faith which they have received, guarded by the church in its integrity (*bene custoditam ab Ecclesia*), in order that they be in no way perverted (*nullo modo transvertantur*) by those who endeavor to teach (*docere*) them false doctrines, and lead (*abducere*) them away from the truth (AH v, Praef.).

For Irenaeus, catechesis is not merely a practical function of the church or a duty of the ministerial office. Rather, catechesis is inherent to the gospel, that is, it is the essence of God's relation to humanity. Irenaeus catechizes, not to impose the church's authority upon his hearers, but to incorporate them into a relationship with God so that "following the only true and steadfast teacher (*firmum et verum magistrum; τῷ μόνῳ βεβαίῳ καὶ ἀληθεὶ διδασκάλῳ*), the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who through his transcendent love (*propter immensam suam dilectionem; διὰ τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν αὐτοῦ ἀγάπην*) became what we are (*factus est quod sumus nos; γεγονότι τοῦτο ὅπερ ἐσμὲν*), that he might bring us to be even what he is himself (*uti nos perficeret esse quod est ipse; ἵνα ἡμᾶς εἶναι καταρτίσῃ ἐκεῖνο ὅπερ ἐστὶν αὐτός*)" (AH v, Praef.).³³⁰

³²⁹ Cf. Mary Ann Donovan (1997, pp. 143ff). Donovan notes the prominence of the catechetical theme at the beginning of *Adversus Haereses*, book five. However, it is my argument that, for Irenaeus, catechesis defines the whole of God's relationship to creation through his Word. Thus, Irenaeus' famous statement that "the Word of God...became what we are, that he might bring us to be even what he is himself" occurs, not merely as a Christological or soteriological confession, but as an expression of God's catechetical relationship to humanity.

³³⁰ Concerning this famous ending to his preface of book five, cf. Orbe (1988, pp. 50-51). This phrase certainly influences Athanasius (cf. *De Incarnatione*, 54; *Contra Arianos*, II, 59) and others. However, for Irenaeus, this statement

Irenaeus sees his own work as a participation in God's catechetical relationship with his creatures. Through the preaching of the church, God continues to communicate with his creatures forming them in his own image and after his own likeness. It is precisely God's catechetical communication with flesh and blood humanity that Irenaeus' opponents reject. The Valentinians deny God's condescension to be born of the flesh (AH v, 1, 2); and the Ebionites reject the possibility that a flesh and blood man could be born of God (AH v, 1, 3). From both sides, the real communication between God and humanity is undermined. However, while this Christological line of argument is common for Irenaeus, in the fifth book the bishop of Lyons emphasizes its ecclesial dimension. To deny either the reality of Jesus' divinity or that of his humanity is to destroy, not only Jesus' person and work, but also the church's ministry. Both the Valentinians and the Ebionites "despise the entire dispensation of God (*universam dispositionem Dei contemnunt*) and disallow the salvation of the flesh (*carnis salutem negant*), and treat with contempt its regeneration (*regenerationem ejus spernunt*)..." (AH v, 2, 2) In this way, the theme of catechesis governs the beginning of Irenaeus' fifth book.

For Irenaeus, this catechesis does not merely consist in the enlightenment of the mind, but also in the formation of the flesh. God's relationship to humanity is not limited to the mind or one's inner spiritual identity, but includes the flesh.³³¹ For Irenaeus, this fleshly relationship is proved by the eucharist (AH v, 2, 2). Christ acknowledges the cup and the bread as his own blood and body. "From these (*ἐκ τούτων*)," Irenaeus says, "the substance of our flesh is increased and supported (*αὐξέει καὶ συνέστηκεν ἡ τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν ὑπόστασις*)..." (AH v, 2, 3). Thus, for Irenaeus, God's catechetical relationship with humanity entails both God's real condescension into the flesh and

communicates the catechetical interaction between God and humanity through his Word. Thus, he is not primarily expressing the philosophical capability of humanity's deification, but the purpose of the catechumenate. Through the catechesis of scriptures, baptism, and the eucharist, the faithful are truly incorporated by the Spirit into the Son.

³³¹ Cf. Eric Osborn (2001, pp. 228-229). Osborn notes "five main proofs for the salvation of the flesh" evident at the beginning of Irenaeus' fifth book. "The first proof comes from the almighty power of God (5.3.2). If God cannot raise the dead, then he is not the almighty creator who calls things out of nothing. The second proof is the power of the flesh to participate in life. If flesh can share in the weak and mortal human life, it can share in the stronger eternal life which God gives (5.3.3). Thirdly, the goodness of God proves the divine gift of life; for if God did not give life to the body then he would be either neglectful or hostile (5.4.1,2). The fourth proof comes from the old testament, where the long lives of the patriarchs show that God is able to extend the life of those who are joined to him by love (5.5.1,2). The fifth and final proof comes from the eucharist; for if flesh cannot be saved then our Lord did not redeem us by his blood and we cannot share in his flesh and blood through the eucharist." It is instructive that Irenaeus brings his argument to a climax in the eucharist, which gives his teaching of creation and redemption an ecclesial dimension. The real communication of life from God to humanity animates Irenaeus' theology from beginning to end.

fleshly humanity's real ascension into the divine life. It is precisely at this point that Irenaeus introduces a Pauline verse that occupies his attention for several chapters. The condescension of God and the exaltation of humanity accomplished in the person of Jesus take place "because the strength of God is made perfect in weakness (*δύναμις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελείται*)..." (AH v, 2, 3). Irenaeus interprets this Pauline statement (2 Cor 12:3) as a summary of the gospel narrative.³³² Jesus' death and resurrection incorporates both the "power of God" and the "weakness of man" into one gospel.

For Irenaeus' opponents, divine power and human weakness are mutually exclusive. When Valentinians claim a kinship with the spiritual realm, they exclude the weakness of the flesh from their own identity. It is precisely this exclusion of fleshly weakness that Irenaeus challenges. For the bishop of Lyons, fleshly weakness is not foreign to one's identity; nor is it a defect to be eliminated by divine power; nor is it the self-inflicted consequence of human sin and rebellion. Rather, fleshly weakness is essential to God's own relationship to humanity.³³³ In other words, human weakness receives a place in the gospel establishing the foundation for God's condescension to his creatures.

Irenaeus commences his argument with the assertion that human weakness has a catechetical purpose. While his opponents maintain that hylic weakness is the source of evil, Irenaeus maintains that it is intended to produce humility and guard against a vain arrogance. God perfects his power in weakness "in order that we may never become puffed up (*φυσιωθῶμέν*), as if we had life from ourselves (*ἐξ ἡμῶν*), and exalted against God (*ἐπαρθῶμεν κατὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ*), our minds becoming ungrateful (*ἀχάριστοι*)..." (AH v, 2, 3). In weakness, one learns the truth about his human nature and the truth about God's creative power. From this catechetical perspective, Irenaeus even dares to speculate:

³³² Cf. AH v, 2-16. Irenaeus introduces this Pauline statement in connection with the eucharist. God's "power perfected in weakness" becomes thematic for Irenaeus' description of God's interaction with humanity from the beginning. It describes the formation of Adam, in which the power of the Spirit animates the weakness of human flesh. However, Irenaeus' use of this theme culminates in the description of Jesus' redemption. In Christ, the weakness of human flesh is not only capable of receiving life, but becomes the instrument by which eternal life is communicated to the church.

³³³ Cf. AH iv, 38, 1ff where Irenaeus refers to newly created humanity as "infantile (*νήπια; infantilia*)."³³³ This infancy of humankind is not repudiated by the Son of God. Instead, "...the Word of God, although he was perfect (*τέλειος*), passed through the state of infancy in common with the rest of mankind (*συνενηπίασεν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ*), partaking of it thus not for his own benefit, but for that of the infantile stage of man's existence (*διὰ τὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου νήπιον*), in order that man might be able to receive him" (AH iv, 38, 2). While Christ does not assume man's sin into his own being, he does assume his fleshly weakness. Thus, for Irenaeus, human weakness is not simply bound up with sin, but is consecrated and sanctified by Christ's incarnation and cross.

And might it not be the case, perhaps, as I have already observed that for this purpose God permitted our resolution into the common dust of mortality (*διὰ τοῦτο ἠνέσχετο ὁ Θεός τὴν εἰς τὴν γῆν ἡμῶν ἀνάλυσιν*), that we, being instructed by every mode (*παντοίως παιδευθέντες*), may be accurate in all things for the future (*ἐν πᾶσιν εἰς τὸ μέλλον ὦμεν ἀκριβεῖς*), being ignorant neither of God nor of ourselves (*μήτε Θεὸν μήτε ἑαυτοῦς ἀγνοοῦντες*) (AH v, 2, 3)?

Irenaeus' catechetical perspective provides human weakness with a positive value. For Irenaeus, 2 Corinthians 12:3 demonstrates that God uses suffering and weakness to catechize his people. St. Paul is an icon of the way God instructs the faithful. "The Apostle Paul has, moreover, in the most lucid manner, pointed out that man has been delivered over to his own infirmity (*παρεδόθη τῇ ἑαυτοῦ ἀσθενείᾳ ὁ ἄνθρωπος*), lest, being uplifted, he might fall away from the truth" (AH v, 3, 1). Through suffering, Paul experiences in his own flesh the weakness of Adam³³⁴ and the power of God. The knowledge of one's own weakness produces humility regarding his own nature; and the knowledge of God's power produces thanksgiving for his condescending love. Such instruction renders Paul a "better man (*meliores*) who by means of his infirmity (*per suam infirmitatem*) becomes acquainted with the power of God (*cognoscit virtutem Dei*)" (AH v, 3, 1).

The catechetical purpose of fleshly weakness becomes the foundation for Irenaeus' critique of his opponents. "Those men, therefore, set aside the power of God (*refutant potentiam Dei*), and do not consider what is true (*non contemplantur quod est verum*), when they dwell upon the infirmity of the flesh (*infirmis intuentur carnis*), but do not take into consideration the power of him who raises it up from the dead (*virtutem ejus qui suscitavit eam a mortuis non contemplantur*)" (AH v, 3, 2). Valentinian teachers define the fleshly substance according to its present condition. The only change possible for the hylic substance is a reduction into its component parts. Against his opponents, Irenaeus optimistically suggests that mutable flesh has the potential, not only to degrade and deteriorate, but also to be reformed according to the will of its Creator. The infirmity of the flesh must not be defined according to its present condition, but according to its eschatological purpose realized in Christ's death and resurrection. Fleshly infirmity does not stand in independent opposition

³³⁴ In the text of AH v, 3, 1 it is not generic "humanity" that is handed over to his own infirmity, but "the man (*ὁ ἄνθρωπος*)."
I believe Irenaeus is thinking of Adam himself being handed over to weakness. This handing over to infirmity is experienced by Paul in his own flesh and perfected in Christ's own passion.

to divine power. Rather, the weakness of humanity prepares for divine power and humbly awaits its enactment.

The full import of Irenaeus' catechetical and providential perspective that integrates human infirmity and divine power into one gospel becomes evident in his reading of Jesus' healing of a man blind from birth (John 9).³³⁵ Irenaeus coordinates his reading of John 9 with the account of Ezekiel's prophecy in the valley of dry bones (Ezek 37).³³⁶ Both covenants offer testimony "that he who at the beginning created man (*ab initio condidit hominem*), did promise him a second birth (*promisit ei secundam generationem*) after his dissolution into earth (*post resolutionem ejus in terram*)..." (AH v, 15, 1). However, while Irenaeus simply recounts verbatim the narrative of Ezekiel's encounter with the dry bones, he offers a much more detailed interpretation of Jesus' encounter with the man born blind. It seems that Ezekiel is quoted to prove the basic truth that the one who vivifies humanity in the end is the same as the God who created it in the beginning. However, Irenaeus employs the narrative of Jesus' interaction with the man blind from birth for a different purpose. For Irenaeus, John 9 shows more than the mere fact that resurrection and creation proceed from one and the same God; it also demonstrates the nature of the relationship between creation and redemption in the catechetical and providential plan of God.

Irenaeus begins his exposition of Jesus' healing of the blind man noting its unique and peculiar character. This miracle's peculiarity consists, first of all, in the method of healing employed by Jesus.

And thus also he healed by a word (*curabat sermone*) all the others who were in a weakly condition because of sin (*propter transgressionem eorum eveniebant languores*); to whom also he said, "Behold, you are made whole, sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you:" pointing out by this (*manifestans*), that, because of the sin of disobedience (*propter inobaudientiae*), infirmities have come upon men (*peccatum subsequuti sunt languores hominibus*). To that man, however, who had been blind from his birth (*a nativitate*), he gave sight, not by means of a word (*non per sermonem*), but by an outward action (*per operationem*); doing this not without purpose (*non vane*), or because it so happened, but that he might show forth the hand of God (*ostenderet manum Dei*), that which at the beginning had molded man (*ab initio plasmavit hominem*) (AH v, 15, 2).

³³⁵ Concerning Irenaeus' use of this text cf. L. S. Thornton (1950, pp. 174-182).

³³⁶ Thornton points out that Ezekiel 37 is introduced by the statement, "The hand of the Lord came upon me." Thus, the reference to the "hand of the Lord" ties the two texts together. Thornton (1950, p. 179) writes, "The 'hand' is here understood to be the divine Word, by whom the Father made the worlds, and by whom the dead are now raised to life when Christ, the Word incarnate, calls them forth from the tomb."

For Irenaeus, Jesus' healing of the blind man is not from a distance, that is, with a mere word (*sermone*). Rather, the blind man's healing is a "hands on" affair like the creation of Adam in the beginning.³³⁷ Thus, Jesus' healing is more intimate and more public than other miracles. Irenaeus maintains that the reason for this difference lies in the nature and cause of the blind man's infirmity.

And therefore, when his disciples asked him for what cause the man had been born blind (*qua ex causa caecus natus esset*), whether for his own or his parents fault, he replied, "Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God (*opera Dei*) should be made manifest in him" (John 9:3). Now the work of God is the fashioning of man (*opera Dei plasmatio est hominis*). For, as the scripture says, he created by a kind of process (*per operationem*): "And the Lord took clay from the earth, and formed man" (Gen 2:7). Wherefore also the Lord spit on the ground (*exspuit in terram*) and made clay (*fecit lutum*), and smeared it upon the eyes (*superlinibit illud oculis*), pointing out the original fashioning (*ostendens antiquam plasmationem*), how it was effected, and manifesting the hand of God (*manum Dei manifestans*) to those who can understand by what man was formed out of dust (AH v, 15, 2).

While other miracles restored the flesh from weaknesses caused by sin, Jesus' encounter with the man blind from birth consists explicitly in the healing of a weakness that does not proceed from sin. The unique character of the blind man's malady invites the intimate and public display of Jesus' creative work.

For Irenaeus' opponents, the weakness of the flesh is inseparable from sin and evil. Indeed, for the Valentinians, the hylic world is the product of the unfulfilled passion of the lowest aeon of the Pleroma. Such infirmity that consists precisely in unfulfilled passion is the source of all sin and evil, and, therefore, must be excluded from one's spiritual being. However, in the man born blind, Irenaeus finds an example of fleshly weakness that is neither the cause nor the consequence of sin. Yet, if there is fleshly weakness and infirmity that is independent of sin and evil, then what is its origin and its purpose? Irenaeus explains,

For that which the artificer, the Word (*artifex Verbum*), had omitted to form in the womb (*quod in ventre plasmare praetermisit*), he then fulfilled in a manifest way (*hoc in manifesto adimplevit*) that the works of God might be manifested in him, in order that we might not be seeking out another hand by which man was fashioned (*alteram requireremus manum per quam plasmatus homo*), nor another Father; knowing that this hand of God (*manus Dei*) which formed us at the beginning (*plasmavit nos initio*), and which does form us in the womb (*plasmavit in ventre*), has in the last times (*novissimis temporibus*)³³⁸ sought us out who were

³³⁷ Concerning the image of God's "hands" cf. AH iv, praef, 4; iv, 20, 1; iv, 39, 2; v, 1, 3. Irenaeus' pictures God as a sculptor whose workmanship bears the imprint of his own hands. This image defines, not only his theology and the relation between the Father, Son, and Spirit, but also his anthropology and man's formation in the image and likeness of God.

³³⁸ Concerning the significance of *novissimis temporibus* or *novissimis diebus* cf. Robert L. Wilken (1993, pp. 1-19). Wilken shows that the phrase "*in novissimis diebus*" was a hermeneutical key for early Christian interpreters.

lost, winning back his own (*suam lucrifaciens*) and taking up the lost sheep upon his shoulders, and with joy restoring it to the fold of life (*cum gratulatione in cohortem restituens vitae*) (AH v, 15, 2).

Irenaeus explicitly ascribes the man's blindness to the Word's own creative will. The Creator intentionally left this man without eyes. For Irenaeus' adversaries, this fact would only demonstrate the inferiority and weakness of the Demiurge. However, for Irenaeus, this divine omission has an eschatological and catechetical purpose. What God omitted in the womb, he fulfills (*adimplevit*) in the last times (*novissimis temporibus*) in a manifest and public display (*in manifesto*).³³⁹ For Irenaeus, fleshly infirmity is not the enemy to be destroyed and excluded from one's inner identity, but a gift from God that is truly essential to one's creaturely identity and inherent to one's relationship to his or her Creator.

This blind man is not simply an individual whose circumstances are unique and unprecedented. Rather, for Irenaeus, the similarity between this healing and Adam's formation in the beginning establishes the blind man as an icon of the whole human race.³⁴⁰

As, therefore, we are by the Word formed in the womb (*in ventre a Verbo plasmemur*), this very same Word formed the visual power (*formavit visionem*) in him who had been blind from his birth; showing openly (*in manifesto ostendens*) who it is that fashions us in secret (*in abscondito*), since the Word himself had been made manifest to men (*Verbum manifestum hominibus*): and declaring the original formation of Adam (*antiquam plasmationem Adae*), and the manner in which he was created, and by what hand (*per quam manum*) he was fashioned, indicating the whole from a part (*ex parte totum ostendens*). For the Lord who formed the visual powers is he who made the whole man (*universum hominem*), carrying out the will of the Father. And inasmuch as man, with respect to that formation which was after Adam, having fallen into transgression, needed the laver of regeneration (*indigebat lavacro regenerationis*), said to him, after he has smeared his eyes with clay, "Go to Siloam, and wash;" thus restoring (*restituens*) to him both the formation (*plasmationem*) and that regeneration which takes place by means of the laver (*per lavacrum regenerationem*). And for this reason when he was washed he came seeing (*videns*) that he might both know him who had fashioned him (*plasmatorem*), and that man might learn (*disceret*) of him who has conferred upon him life (*qui donavit ei vitam*) (AH v, 15, 3).³⁴¹

³³⁹ L. S. Thornton (1950, pp. 178ff) points out that, for Irenaeus, God's creative work is a "secret" work. Thus, God begins creation in such a way that he might manifest himself in the end for its completion. For Irenaeus, the healing of the blind man connects creation and redemption in an interesting manner. They are not two different or independent operations, but are united in both the activity of God and the flesh of humanity. The redemptive work of Christ is the very same activity that gave life to all things in the beginning. However, it is also the very same flesh animated in the beginning (or in the womb) that is perfected publicly through Christ's recapitulative work in the end.

³⁴⁰ J. Fantino (1998, pp. 422-423) recognizes the iconic character of the blind man when he writes, "La guérison de l'aveugle est ainsi pour Irénée le symbole du salut comme achèvement de la création, le symbole du passage de la condition première à la condition nouvelle apportée par le Christ Jésus."

³⁴¹ In this passage, Irenaeus interprets this miracle in terms of three stages. First, Christ uses his saliva and dirt to form his eyes. This stage corresponds to God's creative work in the beginning. Second, Jesus tells the man to wash in the pool of Siloam. This washing corresponds to baptism which enlightens the eyes so that they can see. However, the miracle reaches its climactic stage when the blind man comes back and actually "sees" Jesus. I would suggest that Irenaeus interprets this

In this passage, the weakness and infirmity of humanity serves a catechetical and rhetorical purpose. God's creation of humankind in the beginning and in the womb is a secret work. Thus, God leaves humanity in weakness so that he might come "openly" in the end to redeem and perfect his creature. In this way, the infirmity of the flesh is essential to God's providential plan for his creation. Humanity's weakness gives God the opportunity to reveal his own life-giving power and to manifest his love for humankind in the last days.

Thus, Irenaeus understands human infirmity, not according to its origin in Adam whose weakness is exploited by the devil's temptations, but according to its eschatological purpose in Christ and his church. While there are foreign infirmities imposed upon fallen humanity due to sin, there is also a fleshly weakness that is essential to humanity from the beginning and is incorporated into the gospel of Christ. Indeed, it seems that Irenaeus' interpretation of humanity's fleshly weakness proceeds, not from Adam's sin, but from Christ's cross and resurrection. The divine Logos does not interact with human infirmity from a distance, but even incorporates it into his own being. When Christ assumes human flesh into his own divine being, he does not obliterate its essential mortal weakness but employs it in service of his salvific work.³⁴² In the same way that Irenaeus integrates the old and new in one narrative, so he presents a truly dynamic relationship between God and humanity. This dynamic relationship has its center in the mystery of the cross and resurrection which shape his reading of every text. The bishop of Lyons reads the scriptures as one who already knows the end of the story.

miracle within the framework of a catechetical structure. The movement from creation to baptism and from baptism to the eucharist shape his reading of John 9.

³⁴² Cf. AH v, 21, 2 where, according to Irenaeus' reading of the temptation account, Jesus uses his fleshly weakness to expose and conquer the devil.

“Joining the End to the Beginning”
Divine Providence and the Interpretation of Scripture in the Teaching
of St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons

Conclusion

Someone trained properly in the art of rhetoric plans the conclusion of their speech before they even begin. However, this author has received no such rhetorical training and this conclusion has received no such artful plan. One cannot plan the end of a journey without a full knowledge of what will be discovered along the way. This venture into the theological vision of Irenaeus did not proceed in absolute darkness, but it did begin in the dim light of an early morning fog. Such a fog makes the journey unpredictable; however, the first steps are taken in the fervent hope that as the sun rises the cloudy landscape will acquire some clarity. Standing at the end, one is compelled to look back at the path that was traversed. Was the path straight, clear, and predictable? Does the end meet expectations? Were there any surprising turns to the road? Rather than merely recount the details of this examination of Irenaeus’ writing, this conclusion seeks to dwell upon some of the implications of the ancient bishop’s theological vision. Some of these implications are perhaps predictable and expected; but some, at least for this author, are surprising, unexpected, and, therefore, truly enlightening.

I. Implications of Irenaeus’ Debate with His Opponents

It is impossible to enter the patristic world without certain questions and judgments. This reality tempts the reader to reduce the writings of the early Christians to an instrument that serves one’s own agenda. Surrendering to this temptation erects a wall between the modern reader and the ancient patristic mind. Such a wall prevents the student from truly understanding the perspective of the fathers; and, at the same time, insulates one’s own perspective from critique. Reading the fathers requires a certain sympathy that allows patristic sources to speak on their own terms. A sympathetic reading is not one that idolizes the ancient fathers and presupposes a kind of patristic inerrancy; rather, a sympathetic reading is one that invites the Christian fathers to question our modern convictions, to critique our theological formulations, and to stand in judgment of our ecclesial life. In

other words, a sympathetic reading allows a real communication between the Christian tradition and the modern theologian.

One cannot enter Irenaeus' struggle with his opponents without recognizing a striking resemblance with the modern theological landscape. The revival of ancient spiritualities and a fascination with a plethora of "Gnostic" writings suggest a modern context that is surprisingly ancient in orientation. While the modern context is by no means identical with the second century, the resemblance gives Irenaeus' debate with his second century opponents a renewed relevance. From this perspective, it may be objected that providing a sympathetic reading of Irenaeus offers the second century bishop something he refused to offer his opponents.³⁴³ In accord with the times, Irenaeus' polemic comes across to modern ears as harsh, sarcastic, and dismissive. Irenaeus is certainly not an academic scholar trying to give his adversaries a fair hearing. The bishop of Lyons is less interested in a fair exchange of ideas and much more interested in defeating his opponents and protecting his flock.

However, underneath Irenaeus' rhetorical attack, I believe there lies a moderate and balanced mind that has listened rather carefully to his opponents. Writing in the second half of the second century, Irenaeus enters an ecclesial debate that has been ongoing for some time. The apostle Paul may have confronted "proto-Gnostic" teachings as he established churches throughout the Gentile world. The Johannine epistles, likewise, testify to certain teachers who deny the coming of Christ in the flesh at the end of the first century. Thus, interaction with so-called "Gnostic" teachings was common within the church. As a result, emotions and passions that surely accompanied the debate at its beginning may have subsided somewhat by the time of Irenaeus. In the latter half of the second century, the time was perhaps ripe for a more profound examination to commence. Irenaeus' critique of his adversaries and his positive exposition of the common ecclesial tradition manifest a familiarity with the traditions of his opponents.³⁴⁴ Irenaeus' response is not merely a repristination of orthodox

³⁴³ Irenaeus is often criticized for his harsh rhetoric and accused of misrepresenting the thought of his opponents. For example, D. Minns (1994, pp. 26-27) writes, "It should not be too readily supposed that he resorts to cheap misrepresentations of his opponents' views in order to score rhetorical victories. When he does present a distorted picture of his opponents' positions this owes much to his own inability or refusal to achieve any kind of sympathetic insight into their religious outlook."

³⁴⁴ Cf. AH i, Praef., 2. Irenaeus deems it his duty to expose and refute his opponents based upon his own "reading of the *Commentaries*...of the disciples of Valentinus (*cum legerim Commentarios ipsorum...Valentini discipulorum*)" and after

arguments. Rather, his writing seems to proceed from a mind willing to struggle with the fundamental questions posed by his opponents. I believe there are several implications that can be drawn out of Irenaeus' polemical theology that are worth consideration in the contemporary theological context.

A. Tradition: The Truth that is Handed Over

When the term, "tradition," is mentioned, it is often accompanied by images of bondage, rigid boundaries, and thick mud that prevents progress. At least since the Enlightenment, tradition has ceased to be a viable avenue for truth.³⁴⁵ In place of tradition, scholars have put their trust in an objective methodology that ensures a more pure, unadulterated, and egalitarian truth. The scientific method promises a truth that is independent of human hands and quarantined from the perversion of human subjectivity. In the scientific method, the mystical is sacrificed for the rational and the spiritual is surrendered for the physical. Truth is reduced to an objective methodology that manipulates the material world. Thus, the scientific method offers a truth that is utterly public and universally accessible, but devoid of spiritual mystery.

In the second century, various teachers were undermining ecclesial tradition from the opposite point of view. While the scientific method deals with a truth that is material, public, and rational, Valentinian teachers offered a truth that was spiritual, secret, and utterly mystical. Instead of a methodology that gains truth through the manipulation of matter, Valentinian systems attained the truth through a secret communication from an alien and spiritual realm. Although in an opposite way, ancient "Gnostic" systems share a common element with the modern scientific method. Both seek an objective realm for truth. The scientific method tends to reduce truth to the material realm independent of any human spirituality; and the so-called "Gnostic" systems tend to reduce truth to the spiritual realm independent of the material world and the passions of human flesh. Both perspectives tend to reject a truth that is handed over through an act of tradition; such a truth that has been handed

"making himself acquainted with their tenets through personal intercourse with some of them (*quibusdam autem ipsorum et congressus, et apprehendens sententiam ipsorum*)."

³⁴⁵ In regard to the relation between the early Christian notion of tradition and the modern scientific method, cf. the truly enlightening essay by A. Louth (2007).

over from the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit is precisely what Irenaeus feels compelled to defend.

Irenaeus responds to the challenge of his opponents in full awareness that their perspective undermines the tradition received in the common life of the church. However, for the bishop of Lyons, tradition is by no means merely an objective system of rational principles or a body of supernatural data. Tradition is not a static set of doctrines that exists independent of its communication by the church's apostles, bishops, and catechists. Rather, for Irenaeus, the ecclesial tradition is essentially an action or verb, not a noun.³⁴⁶ It is the act in which one person communicates all that he has to another person. Tradition, conceived as a relational activity, always entails an economy of persons and a living fellowship of love.³⁴⁷ It seems evident that such a view of tradition proceeds from within the framework of the church's catechumenate. Irenaeus argues as one who stands within a succession of teachers. The truth he preaches, defends, and practices as the bishop of Lyons is precisely the truth he witnessed being lived out in the lives of Polycarp, Pothinus, and the church's martyrs.

Thus, for Irenaeus, the truth exists only within the intimate relations of the ecclesial community. At its essence, the church is nothing other than the act of tradition in which the bishop and his people are united in the living fellowship of truth. Preaching, catechesis, baptism, liturgy, and eucharist define the relational communion that is the church. However, tradition is not only the act in which the church is manifested; it is also the act that defines the essence of the gospel and the very being of God. The gospel consists precisely in the Father's willingness to enter into a life-giving

³⁴⁶ Cf. AH iv, 33, 8. Irenaeus writes, "True knowledge is the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient constitution of the church throughout all the world (*antiquus Ecclesiae status in universo mundo*), and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the succession of bishops (*character corporis Christi secundum successiones episcoporum*), by which they have handed over that church which exists in every place (*quibus illi eam quae in unoquoque loco est Ecclesiam tradiderunt*)...." In this text, Irenaeus uses Eucharistic language—"handed over (*tradiderunt*)"—in reference to the relation between the bishop and the church. Thus, the church exists and is manifested precisely within the act of the eucharist in which the body of Christ is given.

³⁴⁷ Y. Congar (1967, p. 240) writes, "Tradition, taken here in its broadest meaning, is an example, the chief example, of the quite general Law of man's dependence on, and obligation towards, his fellows." Likewise, A. Louth (2007, p. 84) emphasizes the fact that, for early Christians, tradition is not a collection of objective teachings, but a life of love. He refers to Irenaeus (AH iv, 33, 8) and, then, explains, "Here we have more detail as to how the tradition is passed on throughout the history of the Church. Irenaeus speaks of the character of the Church which is preserved through the succession of bishops: by this he means not just the articles of faith handed down by the apostolic succession of bishops, but the whole character of the Christian community, its rites, its ceremonies, its practices, and its life. The final point he makes about the 'special gift of love' underlines the fact that for Irenaeus the tradition of the Church is not, like the traditions to which the Gnostics appealed, simply some message, truth, or ideology, but a life, something lived."

relation with creation. He hands over his Son in the power of the Spirit to be received by his creatures in true thanksgiving and love. Irenaeus recognizes that when Valentinian teachers undermine the public tradition of the church, they are not merely challenging the gospel's packaging or the method of its communication; rather, they are undermining the very character of God himself, challenging his life-giving fellowship with creation, and destroying the economy of the church's saving fellowship.

Irenaeus' writings, therefore, confront the reader with a profound notion of tradition that is not easily categorized. Indeed, tradition, for the bishop of Lyons, cannot be reduced to either the spiritual or the material realms. Tradition is truly sacramental. In other words, tradition is that active communication or living relation in which the spiritual and the physical, the mystical and the rational, are united in one fellowship, one communion, and one cosmos. Irenaeus' notion of tradition is simply a description of his Christology. In the person of Jesus, God communicates all that he is and has to humanity and humanity offers all to the Father. The truth is neither an objective system nor a mystical gnosis, but the living person of Jesus, in whose flesh the church receives a share in the very life of her Creator and Redeemer.

B. Ontology: A New Ground of Being

The living, active, and public tradition, whereby the Father relates and communicates with the church through his Son and Spirit, is an underlying presupposition that shapes the entirety of Irenaeus' theological vision. The experience of communion with God through Christ in the concrete economy of the church's sacramental life acts like a kind of atmosphere in which Irenaeus lives, breathes, and has his being. However, if the ecclesial tradition is the air that Irenaeus breathes, then the issue of ontology is the ground on which the bishop of Lyons stands. For Irenaeus, the debate with his second century adversaries is neither a conflict between abstract systems nor an argument about the consistency of theological ideas. Rather, Irenaeus is well aware that his conflict concerns the very identity of the church. His debate is not simply a matter of truth versus error, but one of life versus death. What is the ground of being for the Christian? Does the Christian's identity arise out of the flesh and the material world or out of a pneumatic connection to the divine realm?

The issue of ontology—the ground of being for the church’s relation to God—had been an issue for the church since her conception within the womb of Judaism. The ground of being for Judaism was the Law of Moses and the flesh of Abraham. Against Judaizing opponents, Paul claims a new ground of being for the church. While not repudiating the Torah or the Abrahamic lineage, Paul argues for a more profound and universal identity in the crucified and risen Jesus.³⁴⁸ The ontology of the church’s relation to God becomes even more central as the Christian church interacts with the Gentile world. Indeed, the issue of ontology is heightened to critical proportions within the context of martyrdom. The threat of execution simply for bearing the Christian name was intended to bring the obstinate sect to its senses. Martyrdom was a public display of a simple truth--the existence of the church rested in the hands of the Roman Empire. Therefore, its survival demanded submission to the will of the emperor and loyalty to the civic cults.

In response to Rome’s power over the flesh and the material world, the church was tempted either to zealotry or despair. While there were perhaps those who resorted to zealotry and sought to make the kingdom of Christ a reality upon the earth, most recognized the futility of this option. Despair of any fulfillment in the material world was the greater temptation. Thus, the “Gnostic” option was more attractive.³⁴⁹ The Valentinian and Marcionite teachers preached an anti-cosmic message that repudiated the hylic realm and excluded the flesh from the pneumatic disciple’s true identity. For Valentinian teachers, the pneumatic individual’s ground of being was rooted in the spiritual essence. Martyrdom was merely a physical conflict limited to the hylic world of passion and irrelevant to one’s spiritual identity. Irenaeus’ opponents claimed a higher ontology for themselves and their disciples. Their relation to God was spiritual, immediate, and essential. They did not require the church, the bishop, or any material communication in order to realize their fellowship with the spiritual Pleroma. For such second century catechists, the spiritual essence provided an absolutely

³⁴⁸ Cf. 2 Cor 4:7-5:21. Paul expresses the newness of the gospel as a new ontology made a reality in Christ. “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh (*κατὰ σάρκα*)....so that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (*καινή κτίσις*); the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:16-17). Cf. also Eph 2:13-19 where Christ is the “new man (*καινὸν ἄνθρωπον*)” in whom Jew and Gentile are reconciled. Cf. also the interesting point noted in Wingren (1959, pp. 151ff) that Irenaeus never uses the Pauline expression, “new creation.” This is certainly due to the use of such language by Marcion and other teachers. Irenaeus must emphasize the substantial continuity between the old and the new.

³⁴⁹ For this perspective, I am indebted to Grant (2004, pp. 120ff). Grant writes, “In large measure, though not entirely, Gnosticism seems to have originated out of the crisis of apocalyptic eschatology in Judaism and in early Christianity. Once the victories promised in eschatological doctrine proved illusory, one could settle down to work in the world (in the manner of more orthodox Jews and Christians) or else seek for escape from a world in which one felt oneself to be an alien.”

stable and secure ground of being. The pneumatic ontology was unchangeable and impervious to any influence from the passions of the material realm.

Irenaeus' response to his opponents shows an acute sensitivity to the issue of ontology and a real struggle to express the ground of being for the church's relation to God.³⁵⁰ For Irenaeus, the proper response to the reality of martyrdom is neither zealotry nor despair, but patience. On the one hand, the fleshly world with its passion and suffering must not be idolized; the church does not exist to gain political power in this world or to find fulfillment of her desires in material pleasures. On the other hand, the material world is not to be repudiated; and the passions and sufferings of the flesh are not to be excluded from the church's relation to God. For Irenaeus, the opposition's gospel acquires the stability of the spiritual essence by surrendering the flesh to fragmentation, corruption and chaos. Such a view excludes the sufferings of the flesh from one's true identity, empties the cross of Christ of its significance, and shows disdain for the church's martyrs.³⁵¹ Irenaeus claims that the true Gospel manifested in Christ and preached by the apostles is neither the idolization nor the repudiation of the hyllic world, but its redemption. Irenaeus accomplishes this cosmological unity by establishing the will of the almighty Creator as the ground of being for all creation.

For Irenaeus, the *creatio ex nihilo* is not merely an ecclesial doctrine that defines the origin of the cosmos; rather, it establishes the ontological ground of being for all creation. In the martyrological context, God's creation of all things out of nothing is the foundation for the church's claim to the whole world. Rather than fight its persecutors or surrender in despair, the church can love its enemies because they too are creatures brought forth out of the power of God's will. Thus, the creative will of God as the substance of all things is the foundation for a cosmological catholicity and for a robust doctrine of divine providence. Neither the material substance of the flesh, nor the spiritual essence of the divine realm is the ultimate ground of being for the Christian. The creaturely existence of humanity rests precisely in the hands of its Creator, who, through his creative will, is able to make his creature more in the end than what he is in the present.

³⁵⁰ Cf. AH ii, 29-34; v, 3, 3-v, 5, 2. In these passages, Irenaeus considers at length the creature's participation in the will of God. For Irenaeus, this emphasis stands in contrast to the teaching of his opponents that grounds true lasting life in the pneumatic essence.

³⁵¹ Cf. AH iii, 18, 5 and iv, 33, 9. Cf. also the interesting article of Elain Pagels (1980, pp. 262ff).

In response to the threat of martyrdom, Christian teachers were tempted to exclude corruptible flesh from their true identity and find their ground of being in the pneumatic essence. In response to these catechists, Irenaeus refuses to exclude the flesh and roots the ontology of humanity neither in the immortality of the spiritual essence nor in the corruptibility of the body, but in the dynamic power of the divine will. The creative will of God establishes a ground of being for humanity that is not stable or static, but truly dynamic and subject to change. For the bishop of Lyons, the changeable character of humanity is not only a weakness, but also a strength. Its changeable character makes humanity susceptible to degradation and corruption, but it also allows for growth according to the Creator's purpose. Thus, for Irenaeus, the ontology of humanity's relation to God is subject to change according to the Creator's eschatological intent. While in the beginning the human creature is a product of the divine will, the human essence is not necessarily intended to remain perpetually in an external relationship to the Creator.

Irenaeus' writing reveals a real struggle to express a different level of ontology for the church's relation to God.³⁵² His opponents maintain a relation of essence with the spiritual realm. In the first two books of *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus opposes the Valentinian focus on a relation of essence with an emphasis on the divine will. Yet, while all humanity and the whole cosmos exist as products of God's creative power, how is the church's relation to God new and different? Irenaeus finds this new level of ontology in the spiritual humanity of Jesus Christ. The ground of being for the church is not the spiritual essence or merely the creative will. In the incarnate Logos, humanity has been brought into a fundamentally new relation to God. No longer does humanity relate to God externally either by the creative will of God or by the legal covenants governing the human will. Rather, in Jesus Christ, humanity has been recapitulated, that is, assumed into an internal relation to God's Son. However, this internal relation does not compromise the reality of humanity's fleshly

³⁵² Osborn (2001) emphasizes, in an interesting way, Irenaeus' use of the platonic concept of participation. Yet, while this language certainly has platonic roots, I think Irenaeus' use of this language reflects the depth of his biblical Christology. The language of participation is used in a progressive way. First, Irenaeus emphasizes that from the beginning humanity lives by participation in the will of its creator (AH ii, 29-34). However, in book five, Irenaeus moves from the flesh's general participation in God's creative will (AH v, 3-5) to its perfection in communion with the Spirit imparted through the flesh of Jesus. Only the church enjoys this "participation in the Spirit (*participationem Spiritus*)" (AH v, 9, 2). Thus, this progression in the use of participation language reveals Irenaeus' dynamic perspective. Humanity's ground of being originates in the will of God, which seeks its perfection in the spiritual flesh of Christ. This ontological dynamism suggests that Irenaeus employs the platonic language to express an anthropology rooted in the movement of the biblical narrative.

essence. Thus, in baptism and the eucharist, the church receives a new ground of being in the flesh of the divine Logos himself. While Irenaeus does not articulate the later dogmatic notion of hypostasis or person, the seeds of such a teaching are present.³⁵³ The relation between God and humanity in Christ is not on the level of essence or will, but consists in humanity's assumption into God's Son through the sanctification of the Spirit.³⁵⁴

II. Implications for Irenaeus' View of the Bible

For Irenaeus, the church exists within the concrete economy, in which the Father communicates his truth and life through his Son and Spirit to the world. Within this living economy of divine tradition, the church receives a new ground of being for her relation to God. The Christian's identity is not defined simply by the corruptibility and weakness of human flesh; it is not defined by the Roman Empire and its power over the material world; it is not defined by the alien world of the spiritual Pleroma; it is not even defined any longer by the sinful will of Adam or one's paternal lineage. Rather, Christian identity rests in the crucified and risen flesh of Jesus. The church's ground of being is not to be reduced to either the physical or the spiritual, but is truly sacramental. In other words, it consists precisely in the real, living fellowship that binds together divinity and humanity, the spiritual and the physical, the body and the soul in the one life of Christ. Thus, while the Father's communication of his Son in the power of the Spirit is the atmosphere that inspires the church's life and proclamation, Jesus' crucified and risen flesh is the firm soil in which the church is planted, grows, and bears fruit.

Within the context of this theological vision, Irenaeus' reading of the Christian scriptures receives its distinctive character. The anti-cosmic perspective of the various second century systems colors the opposition's treatment of sacred texts. In the same way that Valentinian systems divide

³⁵³ Cf. the important work of John Zizioulas (1985). Zizioulas credits Irenaeus, along with Ignatius of Antioch and Athanasius of Alexandria, with expressing the beginnings of a *personal* approach to the being of God. He (1985, p. 16) writes, "...pastoral theologians such as St. Ignatius of Antioch and above all St. Irenaeus and later St. Athanasius, approached the being of God through the experience of the ecclesial community, of *ecclesial being*. This experience revealed something very important: the being of God could be known only through personal relationships and personal love. Being means life, and life means *communion*."

³⁵⁴ John Behr (2000, pp. 104ff) shows that one way Irenaeus expresses his dynamic anthropology is found in his distinction between the "breath of life" given in creation and the Spirit bestowed in Christ. Commenting on AH v, 12, 2, Behr (2000, p. 106) writes, "In this whole passage, the relationship between the breath of life and the Spirit is characterized by the description of the Spirit as life-creating. Those who have not received the Spirit through adoption possess only the breath of life."

humanity according to the pneumatic, psychic, and hylic substances, so they tend to promote a fragmentation of scriptural texts. The Christian scriptures need editing in order to isolate truly spiritual texts and messages from their hylic or psychic contexts. The reading of the scriptures by Irenaeus' opponents consists in a process of purification, in which the impurities of the material narrative are burned off reducing the sacred writings to their spiritual remnant. Thus, for the Valentinians, the use of the scriptures is inseparable from their cosmological perspective, in which the material world is essentially an unfulfilled desire quarantined from the spiritual realm. Irenaeus seems well aware that his refutation of the Valentinian cosmology involves their interpretation of Christian scriptures.

A. The Bible and the Cosmological Narrative

For Irenaeus, the opposition begins with a cosmological drama and moves to the use and reading of the Christian scriptures. The unity of cosmology and the scriptures means that, for such second century interpreters, the words of the Bible proceed from different essences. Some words and texts proceed from a pneumatic source and must be read as revealing the spiritual reality. Other words and texts proceed from a hylic or psychic reality and must be interpreted accordingly. This perspective compels these teachers to narrow the traditions of the common church in at least two ways. First, the tradition is no longer located in the persons of Jesus, the apostles, and their successors. For the proponents of dualistic cosmologies, the words and actions of Jesus and his apostles must be divided according to the sources from which they spoke. Second, the Bible itself must be edited and purified of non-spiritual impurities. The material and public tradition of the common church must be narrowed down to a purely spiritual revelation.

The so-called "Gnostic" teachers of the second century are commonly presented as advocating a broad and free approach to the scriptures and the Christian tradition. In contrast, the heresiologists are thought to be those in favor of an authoritative approach to the Bible that narrows the way in which scriptures may be legitimately read. However, for Irenaeus, the exact opposite is true. From his perspective, his opponents represent a narrowing of the public tradition of the common

church.³⁵⁵ Marcion eliminates the Mosaic covenant and narrows Christianity to edited versions of Luke's Gospel and Paul's epistles. The Ebionites limit the truth to Matthew's Gospel and exclude Paul's writings. Valentinians prefer bits and pieces of the Mosaic Law, John's Gospel, and the Pauline epistles as well as incorporate other writings not generally acknowledged as part of the common tradition. Irenaeus' constant argument is for the catholicity of the Christian tradition. Paul must not be read in isolation from the four gospels and the other apostles; and the old and new covenants must be read as one narrative uniting the beginning to the end.³⁵⁶ The catholicity of the Christian tradition means that Christian catechists cannot pick and choose what texts they accept according to their own agenda. Catechists of the Christian Bible must adapt their interpretations to fit the whole narrative of the scriptures.

Irenaeus' conflict with his adversaries takes place on the battle ground of the scriptures. However, in spite of their fundamental differences, Irenaeus shares a common presupposition with his opponents. For both, the scriptures are inseparable from cosmology. The fragmented cosmos of various second century systems is the framework within which sacred texts are read and analyzed. In the same way, Irenaeus' cosmological vision is the hypothesis that underlies the scriptures and gives them their unity and catholicity. As is true for his opponents, Irenaeus assumes that the words of scripture are anchored in a real, substantive ontology. Thus, while his opponents offer a narrow reading focusing their attention on individual words and phrases, Irenaeus emphasizes the broad narrative that unites disparate texts into one catholic proclamation. For the bishop of Lyons, scriptural texts can be made to say anything when loosed from the one cosmological narrative that underlies them.

For Irenaeus, the scriptures are built upon the foundation of God's interaction with humanity from creation to the eschatological kingdom. This means, first of all, that every word of scripture proceeds from the same God. From beginning to end, one and the same God has been at work shaping, molding, and perfecting his creation. This unity of subject is the ontological foundation for

³⁵⁵ Cf. AH iii, 11, 7-9 where Irenaeus argues for the catholicity or wholeness of the four gospels against the fragmented approach of his opponents.

³⁵⁶ Bertrand de Margerie enumerates certain rules evident in Irenaeus' reading of scripture. The third rule is the harmony of the scriptures, which leads to Irenaeus' assertion that obscure passages should be read in light of those that are more clear and explicit. Margerie (1993, p. 55f.) points out that Irenaeus often describes the scriptures with the language of symphony (*consonare*). The same point is considered by Farkasvalvy (1968) in his significant article.

the unity and catholicity of the scriptures. In the same way that the ground of being for the entire universe is the will of God, so the whole of scripture expresses God's creative will and his life-giving work. From this perspective, the Christian scriptures cannot be limited or narrowed in any way. The writings of the Mosaic covenant must not be limited in scope to the Jewish race, confined to the distant past, or ascribed to an inferior god. Similarly, the writings of the apostles and evangelists must not become parochial belonging to the spiritual elite. Rather, for Irenaeus, the scriptures are truly universal because they proceed from the one God, whose creative will is the ground of being for the whole cosmos.

However, the scriptures not only proceed from one and the same God, but are also intended for one and the same humanity. The one narrative of the scriptures is the story of God's creation, redemption, and perfection of human flesh and blood. The human body is the expression and revelation of God's life-giving will; it is the object of his love and redemptive work; and it even becomes the vessel, through which he perfects the cosmos. The very flesh that was created out of nothing by the will of God, that became subject to a new ground of being in the lies of the devil and the rebellious will of Adam, is the same flesh that is recapitulated by God's Son. The Christian narrative consists precisely in one and the same God communicating with one and the same humanity bringing it to perfection in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ.³⁵⁷

Irenaeus' focus on the real communication between God and his fleshly creatures is the ontological foundation for Irenaeus' reading of the scriptures. This communication gives his reading not only its catholic character, but also its Christocentric emphasis. Jesus Christ is the perfect culmination to the narrative of God's interaction with humanity. Both the theological and anthropological dimensions of the scriptural narrative are fulfilled in the concrete narrative of Jesus as recorded in the four gospels. The salvific narrative of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is the

³⁵⁷ Cf. the fine explanation of Irenaeus' use of "economy" in connection with his reading of scripture found in the work of J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno (2005, pp. 37ff). They write, "The divine economy is the detailed plan by which all the pieces of the mosaic have been placed by God to bring us to see the image of the handsome king. Therefore, this arrangement of world history, this economy, should guide interpretation of scripture. If we follow the divinely coded sequence, then we can properly assess each piece of the mosaic, each moment of biblical history, according to its role in the good order and arrangement ordained by God." However, it should be noted that for Irenaeus this economy or arrangement of the scriptures is not merely historical, but also Theological and Christological. Irenaeus does not read the scriptures simply as a linear progression, but, to use the interesting analogy of Frances Young (2002, p. 1), as a spider web. Every text radiates out of a common core—the gospel narrative of Christ.

recapitulating core that unites the prophetic witness and the apostolic preaching in one catholic canon. For Irenaeus, the incarnation of the divine Logos not only provides a new ground of being for humanity, but also for the revelation of God in the scriptures. Judaizing Christians rooted God's revelation in the Mosaic Law and the narrative of Israel; Valentinian teachers loosed sacred texts from the life of Israel and the material realm, and replanted them in the drama of the spiritual Pleroma. For the bishop of Lyons, the scriptures and the revelation of God are whole and complete in the person of Jesus and the apostolic accounts of his recapitulating work.

B. The Bible and the Preaching of the Church

By establishing the incarnate Christ as the living foundation for God's revelation, Irenaeus places the prophetic and apostolic scriptures within the economy of God's relation to humanity. In other words, the scriptures are not merely passive texts or objective records of God's past actions. Rather, the scriptures are living and creative oracles that proceed from the Father through his Son and Spirit for the sake of flesh and blood humanity.³⁵⁸ Conceived as divine preaching, the scriptures are not passive, but truly active; they are not limited to the past, but truly effective in the present. From this perspective, the scriptures are read within a catechetical and rhetorical framework. From beginning to end, God is the Catechist instructing, training, and exhorting his catechumens in order to bring them into the image and likeness of his incarnate Son.

Irenaeus seems to have a polemical purpose for his definition of the scriptures as the very preaching of Christ through the inspiration of the Spirit. Because the Christian scriptures are rooted in a narrative of the material realm, pneumatic teachers are compelled to exalt their own preaching. The spiritual gnosis from the divine realm is hidden in the scriptures by a psychic and hylic packaging. Thus, the scriptures themselves do not preach, but need the spiritual catechist to unwrap them. The pneumatic teacher stands outside the fleshly narrative of the scriptures. His preaching purifies the text

³⁵⁸ T. F. Torrance (1995, pp. 56ff) considers the kerygmatic character of Irenaeus' theological vision. Torrance (1995, p. 60) writes, "Regarded in another way, however, the body of truth which constitutes the theological content of the apostolic proclamation, manifests an intrinsic order or structure reflecting the economic design of God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ and the essential pattern of the self-revelation of the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit."

and transfigures it into a spiritual message for pneumatic ears.³⁵⁹ Irenaeus' polemic proceeds from a firm conviction that his opponents' use of the church's scriptures and traditions is a deceptive façade. Valentinian and Marcionite teaching represent a profound rupture between the ancient witness of the scriptures and contemporary preaching. Charismatic teachers may offer intriguing explanations of individual words and phrases from sacred texts, but the catholic narrative that underlies the scriptures is lost. For Irenaeus, the preaching of his opponents offers something new and unprecedented; their catechesis stands in real discontinuity with the prophets, apostles, and Jesus because it proceeds from a different ontological source. While his adversaries may believe this source to be spiritual, for Irenaeus it is demonic.

According to Irenaeus, his opponents submit the common tradition of the Christian scriptures to their own preaching. The opposition's *kerygma* brings a new, external reality that governs sacred texts and makes them useful for catechesis. In response, one might expect Irenaeus to assert the authority of the scriptures over the church's preaching.³⁶⁰ While Irenaeus certainly asserts the inspiration and authority of the prophetic and apostolic writings, he does not do so at the expense of the church's *kerygmatic* life. Instead of reacting to his opponents' exaltation of preaching by belittling its significance, Irenaeus wants to repudiate the underlying schism between the scriptures and the church's preaching. The scriptures and the preaching of the church do not stand in an external relationship to one another. The scriptures are not a closed narrative confined to the past; the church's preaching is not a new and unprecedented stage in God's interaction with humanity. Rather than independent and autonomous realities, the scriptures and the church's preaching are organically connected; they share one and the same ontological foundation in the person of the divine Logos.

³⁵⁹ Cf. the interesting discussion of the Valentinian reading of scripture in Frances Young (2002, pp. 59ff). Valentinian catechists not only read Christian scriptures, but also felt free to create new texts. Cf. also David Dawson (1992, p. 128), who analyzes the Valentinian *Gospel of Truth* and suggests that Valentinus "erases the line between text and commentary, as interpretation becomes new composition." Such a reality illustrates the exaltation of the "living voice" of the Valentinian *kerygma*.

³⁶⁰ Manlio Simonetti (1994) in his important overview of patristic exegesis seems to come to this conclusion. It is interesting that Simonetti (1994, p. 23) expects Irenaeus to employ "a systematic literalist approach" to the scriptures in order to oppose the "arbitrary Gnostic allegorizing." I believe Irenaeus does not fulfill this expectation because he does not understand the church's *kerygmatic* life as existing in an external, independent relation to the scriptures. It is not the allegorical method employed by his opponents that Irenaeus finds troubling. Rather, it is the fact that these teachers employ allegory in support of an alien hypothesis. For Irenaeus, his opponents are importing a foreign cosmology into their reading of the Bible. In contrast, Irenaeus understands his own typology to be legitimate because it is organically connected to the biblical narrative through the very flesh of Jesus. Thus, there is no schism between the scriptures and the church's *kerygma* so that one must become the external authority over the other.

From the beginning, God's relationship to creation has been *kerygmatic* and rhetorical.³⁶¹ The doctrine of God's creation of all things *ex nihilo* means that all things exist precisely within the economy of God's preaching. Indeed, creation itself manifests the living will of its author. Thus, the whole of creation, the prophetic and apostolic witness, and the contemporary preaching of the church share one and the same ground of being in God's self-revelation through his Word by means of the Spirit's inspiration. The material cosmos, the concrete narrative of God's covenant with Israel, and the apostolic tradition of the church reside in an internal and perichoretic fellowship. The Father's proclamation of his Word, which gives life to all things in the beginning, continues to sound forth until the eschatological kingdom and the perfection of all things in the end. Yet, the Father's preaching has been recapitulated or summed up in the incarnate life of Jesus. His flesh is the perfection of the material world, the underlying substance of the prophetic and apostolic scriptures, and the content of the church's sacramental and *kerygmatic* life.

Thus, for Irenaeus, the scriptures and the church's preaching are united both vertically and horizontally. Vertically, both the scriptures and the church's *kerygma* manifest the economy, through which God condescends to communicate with humanity and humanity is incorporated into God's own glory. The scriptures and the ecclesial preaching cannot be reduced to either the material or the spiritual realms. Both are truly sacramental manifesting the evangelical economy, in which God and man, the spiritual and the material, are united in one living fellowship. Horizontally, both the scriptures and the church participate in one and the same narrative. Irenaeus is well aware that the narrative recorded in the Bible has not yet ended. God's interaction with his creatures awaits its final outcome in the resurrection of the dead and Christ's final advent. From this perspective, the church exists as the incorporation of humanity into the narrative of the scriptures. The prophetic and apostolic scriptures have their natural end in the church's preaching; and the church's preaching has its indispensable source in the prophetic and apostolic tradition.³⁶²

³⁶¹ Concerning the rhetorical character of early Christianity, cf. the illuminating work of Averil Cameron (1991).

³⁶² Both of these *kerygmatic* dimensions—vertical and horizontal—are quite evident in Irenaeus' *Epideixis*. After recounting the history of the old covenant and demonstrating its fulfillment in Christ, Irenaeus concludes: "...the Son of God, who received from the Father dominion over our life, and having received it, brought it down to us, to those who are far from him, when he was seen on earth and conversed with men, joining and uniting the Spirit of God the Father with what God had fashioned, so that man became according to the image and likeness of God. This, beloved, is the preaching of the truth, and this is the manner of our salvation, and this is the way of life, announced by the prophets and ratified by Christ and handed

III. Implications for Irenaeus' Reading of Scripture

Irenaeus has often been labeled a biblical theologian.³⁶³ The merit of such a label is evident in Irenaeus' work against his second century opponents, which is permeated with scriptural references. However, this label tends to promote a picture of the second century bishop that is a little misleading. Irenaeus' debate with his opponents is not strictly speaking an exegetical argument nor should this conflict be reduced to contrasting methods of interpretation. It has been this author's conviction from the beginning that Irenaeus does not believe his refutation of his adversaries depends upon correct exegetical principles or legitimate interpretive methods. Rather, Irenaeus' reading of the Bible is quite simply an expression of his own Christian identity. While such a reading cannot be defined by precise principles, it does reveal itself in certain characteristics evident in Irenaeus' work.

A. Preaching the Text

Having spent some time considering Irenaeus' reading of scripture, it seems evident that he is not so much an *interpreter* of sacred texts as a *preacher* of them. This distinction may seem a bit contrived, but perhaps holds some merit. The debate between Irenaeus and his opponents is often characterized as a conflict between alternative interpretations of the Bible. "Gnostic" teachers are presented as allowing considerable exegetical freedom, while Irenaeus and other orthodox apologists are presented as those binding the church to certain authoritative and legitimate interpretations.³⁶⁴ Such a framework may be a natural approach for academic scholars, but leads to a mischaracterization

over by the apostles and handed down by the church in the whole world to her children" (*Epid.* 97-98). In such a passage, the vertical dimension evident in the economy of God's ordering of the cosmos through his Son is combined with the horizontal unfolding of history in one fellowship that consists in the active, living tradition of the church's *kerygmatic* life.

³⁶³ Cf., for instance, Lawson (1948, pp. 23ff)

³⁶⁴ Lawson (1948, p. 292) concludes his study saying, "In conclusion it may be said that S. Irenaeus was a Biblical theologian. He was indeed *homo unius libri*. Driven by lack of scientific and historical knowledge of the Old Testament he was forced to share with his Gnostic adversaries a subjective method of exegesis. In consequence he was compelled to appeal to the '*Living Voice*' of the Church as a means of bearing down heretical cavils by institutional solidarity and weight of numbers. Thus was to be determined the true teaching of Scripture and Tradition. The '*Living Voice*' of the Church was therefore the essential and determinative factor in whatever he actually taught."

of Irenaeus' purpose. For such a framework turns Irenaeus into an interpreter of the scriptures rather than a preacher of them.

An interpreter approaches the scriptures as if they are enigmatic texts with an obscure meaning. If the original meaning of texts were clear and readily available, interpretative methods would become less important. Thus, the interpreter treats sacred texts like an archaeologist treats an ancient artifact from a lost civilization. The meaning of the text is confined to the past and to a foreign culture. Thus, as one who stands outside the text, the interpreter must employ certain methods that allow him to discover its original context and access its ancient meaning. Such discoveries are always tentative, cautious, and subject to constant revision. From this perspective, Irenaeus' opponents were interpreters of sacred texts. Their spiritual identity left them outside the material narrative of scripture. This external relationship compelled such pneumatic teachers to use interpretive methods that would allow them to discover a spiritual and transcendent meaning. Their distinctive cosmology acted as a secret code that allowed these teachers to access a new and unprecedented meaning hidden in the scriptures.

For Irenaeus, the scriptures are not obscure texts containing a secret meaning. Rather, Irenaeus approaches scriptural texts with a conviction that their meaning is public and readily available in the concrete life of orthodox congregations. Irenaeus reads the text as one ontologically united to Christ through the Spirit poured out in baptism. His connection to the scriptures is not, strictly speaking, rational or mystical, but includes his flesh and the whole of his being. Irenaeus has been made a participant in the narrative of scripture; the gospels are descriptions of Christ and that corporate humanity redeemed and glorified in him. Thus, Irenaeus does not seek to uncover a secret or alien meaning hidden in the text; he seeks to preach the meaning of scripture made manifest in Christ and his body, the church.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁵ Frances Young (2002) suggests that the conflict between Irenaeus and the "Gnostics" did not concern exegetical method, but the *hypothesis* of scripture. Young (2002, p.292) writes, "What distinguishes Irenaeus and the Gnostics is not so much allegory in itself, as the task to which allegory is put. Irenaeus recognized a coherent overarching narrative within which the signs and symbols made sense; the Gnostics had no interest in the *hypothesis*, only (at least as Irenaeus saw it) in piecemeal abstraction of hidden enigmas which point to their own alien perspective on God and the world." I believe that, for Irenaeus, the *hypothesis* of the scriptures involves more than merely an historical or narrative connection; it involves an organic connection rooted in the very flesh of Adam formed by the hands of God, assumed and redeemed in Christ, and sanctified by the Spirit. Thus, Irenaeus' defense of the narrative hypothesis that underlies the scriptures arises out of his own baptismal

This organic connection to the scriptural narrative gives Irenaeus' reading of sacred texts a certain confidence. His reading does not depend upon methods of interpretation that allow him to manipulate the text or gain access to a transcendent gnosis. His preaching of the text is an expression of his own identity shaped through catechesis, given birth in the waters of baptism, and sustained by the eucharistic feast. In other words, Irenaeus does not interpret the scriptures as an outsider; he reads the Bible as if it is his own story. His incorporation into Christ's flesh establishes the ground of being for his reading of the scriptures. He is an heir of the scriptural narrative through the gift of the Spirit. His proclamation of the text proceeds from within a tradition; he preaches to the church that faith which he received from his fathers. Thus, his preaching is itself a participation in God's own communication of His Son for the life of the world.

B. Ontological Meaning

The distinction between preaching and interpreting the scriptures is intended to clarify the framework in which Irenaeus reads the Bible. However, it is a bit contrived since even the preacher must connect spiritual meaning to the material text in some way. While methods of interpretation are not the whole issue, they cannot be dismissed and ignored. In this regard, many have noted the apparent contradiction in Irenaeus' writing against his opponents. He criticizes the allegorical approach of Valentinian teachers; yet, he employs a kind of allegorical methodology in his own reading of the Bible. Such a contradiction is real and the critique of Irenaeus on this score is perhaps warranted. However, I do not think that Irenaeus would accept the notion that his allegory is in any sense the same as his opponents. While certain methodological elements may be similar, Irenaeus' reading of the Bible is built upon an entirely different ontological foundation from his opponents.

However, given the fact that Irenaeus is more concerned with ontology than methodology, what elements in his reading of scripture can be discerned? How is his ontological perspective translated into an interpretive method? Without in any way being exhaustive or comprehensive, there is an underlying perspective that seems evident in Irenaeus' reading of the Bible. At its core,

identity. By repudiating this organic connection to the scriptural narrative, Irenaeus' opponents place themselves outside the biblical narrative and read scripture from an alien vantage point.

exegetical method consists in how spiritual meaning is connected to the material text.³⁶⁶ Where an interpreter locates this connection is revealed in his reading of texts and determines the methods he employs. This hermeneutical connection was an issue for early Christians from the beginning. For certain Judaizing Christians, the connection between the eternal truth and temporal texts was located in the Torah itself. God's relation to humanity was fundamentally textual and legal.³⁶⁷ This perspective encourages a trend toward a more literal method of interpretation that focuses on grammatical and literary connections to support a reading that is legally binding. For such interpreters, Paul's preaching of Christ was new, unprecedented, and inconsistent with the eternal nature of the Mosaic Law.

In contrast, Valentinian teachers located the connection between eternal truth and temporal texts in a fundamentally different place. For Irenaeus' adversaries, this hermeneutical connection resided, not in the text itself, but in the mind of the pneumatic reader. Because he possesses a spiritual gnosis, the pneumatic reader is able to read sacred texts in a different way. His connection to the spiritual Pleroma arms him with a secret code that allows him to perceive the eternal reality hidden under the mask of the scriptural narrative. In this framework, allegory is an attractive method enabling the spiritual disciple to explain transcendent truths that he alone can see. While, for many Christian Judaizers, God's communication with humanity tended to be more textual and legal, for Valentinian teachers it was mystical and allegorical.

Contrary to both Judaizing and Valentinian catechists, Irenaeus represents a different perspective on the connection between the one eternal truth and the temporal texts of sacred scripture. For the bishop of Lyons, the hermeneutical connection is not to be located primarily in the text or in the mind of the pneumatic reader; rather, it is to be located most fundamentally in the humanity of Jesus Christ. Thus, the meaning of the scriptures is not, strictly speaking, rational or mystical, but

³⁶⁶ Commenting on early Christian interpretation, Frances Young (2002, p. 120) writes, "So the fundamental question for understanding meaning was discerning the reference.... The 'idea' preceded its chosen mode of expression. Yet, finding the appropriate linguistic dress in which to clothe the intent or aim was vital. Rhetoric was not simply the cultivation of style, yet meaning was mediated through the language, and therefore the appropriate style was a matter of great importance. There was a necessary connection between the *logos* and the idea it expressed, even if the idea in some sense transcended the words in which it was enunciated." Thus, for patristic exegetes, methods of interpretation were used not to create or establish a connection between the temporal words and their eternal referent. Rather, such methods only revealed the connection that was already present by divine inspiration. For this reason, Irenaeus is less concerned about exegetical methods than about the nature or ontology of the connection itself.

³⁶⁷ Cf. the Apostle Paul's contrast between the letter and the Spirit in 2 Cor 3.

ontological. The eternal truth is not a secret enigmatic reality that can only be seen by the elite reader; rather, in Christ, the revelation of the Father has been made public, visible, and readily available. As a reader of scripture, Irenaeus does not seek meaning in the original intent of the human author or merely in the grammatical connections of the text; he seeks meaning in the incarnate life of God's Son, who speaks through the prophets and sends forth the apostles.

For Irenaeus, the humanity of Jesus is not merely one event in a long narrative, but an act of recapitulation in which the whole revelation of God subsists. The flesh of Christ is the hermeneutical soil, in which every scriptural text is rooted and grows to maturity. This perspective produces an exegetical method that is perhaps best termed *organic typology*.³⁶⁸ The word *organic* is used here to emphasize the ontological character of his typological reading. For most scholars, typology is considered a method of connecting scriptural persons and events in an historical and literary fashion.³⁶⁹ Thus, the typological connection between Adam and Christ consists in a similarity of pattern or in their analogous positions in relation to the history of the human race. However, such a literary connection or historical analogy is inadequate to describe Irenaeus' reading of the Bible. For Irenaeus, Adam and Christ are not merely connected textually or historically; they are connected ontologically. Adam and Christ share the same flesh and blood. The very humanity of Adam and his children is recapitulated in the incarnate Logos. This presupposed ontological union between Adam and Christ is the foundation that allows Irenaeus to see it everywhere in the text. The typological relationship between Adam and Christ does not begin with Paul's letters, nor does its legitimacy rest on apostolic authority. Rather, this typological relationship begins with the intimate formation of Adam's flesh in the image of his Creator; it is perfected in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus; and it is sanctified by the pouring out of the Spirit upon the church. The Son's recapitulation of humanity into himself compels Irenaeus to refer every text to its Christological ground of being.

C. Joining the End to the Beginning

³⁶⁸ With this terminology, I am not trying to establish a new category in addition to those presented by F. Young (2002, p. 201) or M. Fishbane (1985). I am simply trying to express the character of Irenaeus' own reading of the scriptures, which does not seem to fit perfectly into any one of the categories described by exegetical scholars.

³⁶⁹ Cf. Leonhard Goppelt's (1982) seminal work on the typological method of interpretation entitled *Typos: the Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*. It is my view that Irenaeus' typological vision cannot be reduced to merely literary, textual, or historical connections. Adam's very flesh is a type of Christ because it bears in its essence the imprint of God's own hands.

Locating the connection between the eternal meaning and temporal texts precisely in the humanity of Jesus is a fundamental presupposition for Irenaeus' reading of the Bible. Irenaeus expresses this connection in iconographic terms.³⁷⁰ Just as an icon is not an end in itself, but has its ground of being in the archetype it portrays, so the scriptures present a narrative icon of the incarnate Christ. Adam, Abel, Isaac, Jonah, and the prophets are images of Jesus and his redemptive work. However, for Irenaeus, the notion of the image or type does not merely bear ontological implications, but also a dynamic, teleological dimension. The archetype, of which the patriarchs and prophets were images, was not manifested until the end. Thus, the meaning of scripture is not merely ontological, but also teleological. Irenaeus does not seek meaning in the original intent of the human author, which is unknowable; nor does he seek meaning merely in the grammatical and literary aspects of the text itself. He seeks meaning in the purpose, goal, or *telos* of the text—the person of Christ.

Since meaning comes at the end, the accounts of the patriarchs, the narrative of Israel, and the proclamations of the ancient prophets remained ambiguous and enigmatic until Christ's advent. This means that Jesus' conception, birth, death, and resurrection are not merely a matter of redemption, but of true enlightenment. The narrative of Christ is the long awaited *telos* that explains the prophetic scriptures and gives significance to the history of Israel. Thus, for Irenaeus, the newness of the gospel is not the newness preached by Marcion or Valentinus, that is, a spontaneous gospel that comes apart from tradition and without precedence. Rather, the newness of Christ's is a *renewing* gospel that unites the prophetic scriptures into a verbal icon of God's Son. What were once disparate and isolated events are joined to their archetype and become harmonious colors masterfully arranged to portray the crucified and risen Jesus.

³⁷⁰ Cf. AH iv, 33, 10. Irenaeus writes, "For the prophets prefigured in themselves (*in semetipsis praefigurabant*) all these things, because of their love to God, and on account of his Word. For since they themselves were members of Christ (*membra essent Christi*), each one of them in his place as a member did, in accordance with this, set forth the prophecy; all of them, although many, prefiguring only one (*multi unum praeformantes*), and proclaiming the things which pertain to one. For just as the working of the whole body (*universi corporis*) is exhibited through means of our members, while the figure of a complete man (*figura totius hominis*) is not displayed by one member, but through means of all taken together, so also did all the prophets prefigure the one (*unum praefigurabant*); while every one of them, in his special place as a member, did, in accordance with this fill up the dispensation (*dispositionem adimplebat*), and shadowed forth beforehand that particular working of Christ which was connected with that member." This passage, which sees the prophets forming an image of Christ, is similar to the iconographic analogy Irenaeus uses in AH i, 8, 1.

The metaphor of iconography expresses both the ontological and teleological character of Irenaeus' reading of scripture. However, the notion of the icon is also fitting for another reason. As one incorporated into Christ, Irenaeus reads the scriptures, not only as a description of Jesus, but also as a depiction of the church, that is, of that humanity recapitulated by God's Son. In the person of Jesus, Irenaeus sees the *telos* of Israel, the church, and the whole of creation. This perspective redeems the prophetic scriptures and makes them essential to the identity of the Christian church. As icons of Jesus, the patriarchs and prophets belong to the church as much as the apostles and evangelists.

Therefore, Irenaeus reads the scriptures as one who already knows the end of the story. He reads the Bible, not only in terms of grammatical and literary connections, but also in terms of visual or iconic connections. The gospel is not so much a message or verbal proclamation to be heard, but primarily a flesh and blood manifestation to be seen. Thus, Irenaeus' reading of the Bible is somewhat playful as he makes appealing connections between images of the two testaments. Only in the cross is the image of the tree understandable; only in Christ's incarnation is Hosea's marriage to a prostitute given meaning; only in the virgin birth does one grasp why the mighty stone of Nebuchadnezzar's dream had to be cut from the mountain without the aid of human hands. Some of these connections seem dubious to modern scientific exegetes; however, for the bishop of Lyons, they are signs of the artistic and rhetorical prowess of the only true God, who, from beginning to end, orders his relationship to creation through his Logos. Through his recapitulating work, the plan to make humanity in the image and likeness of God has been brought to a fitting conclusion that masterfully "joins the end to the beginning."

**“Joining the End to the Beginning”
Divine Providence and the Interpretation of Scripture in the Teaching
of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons**

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