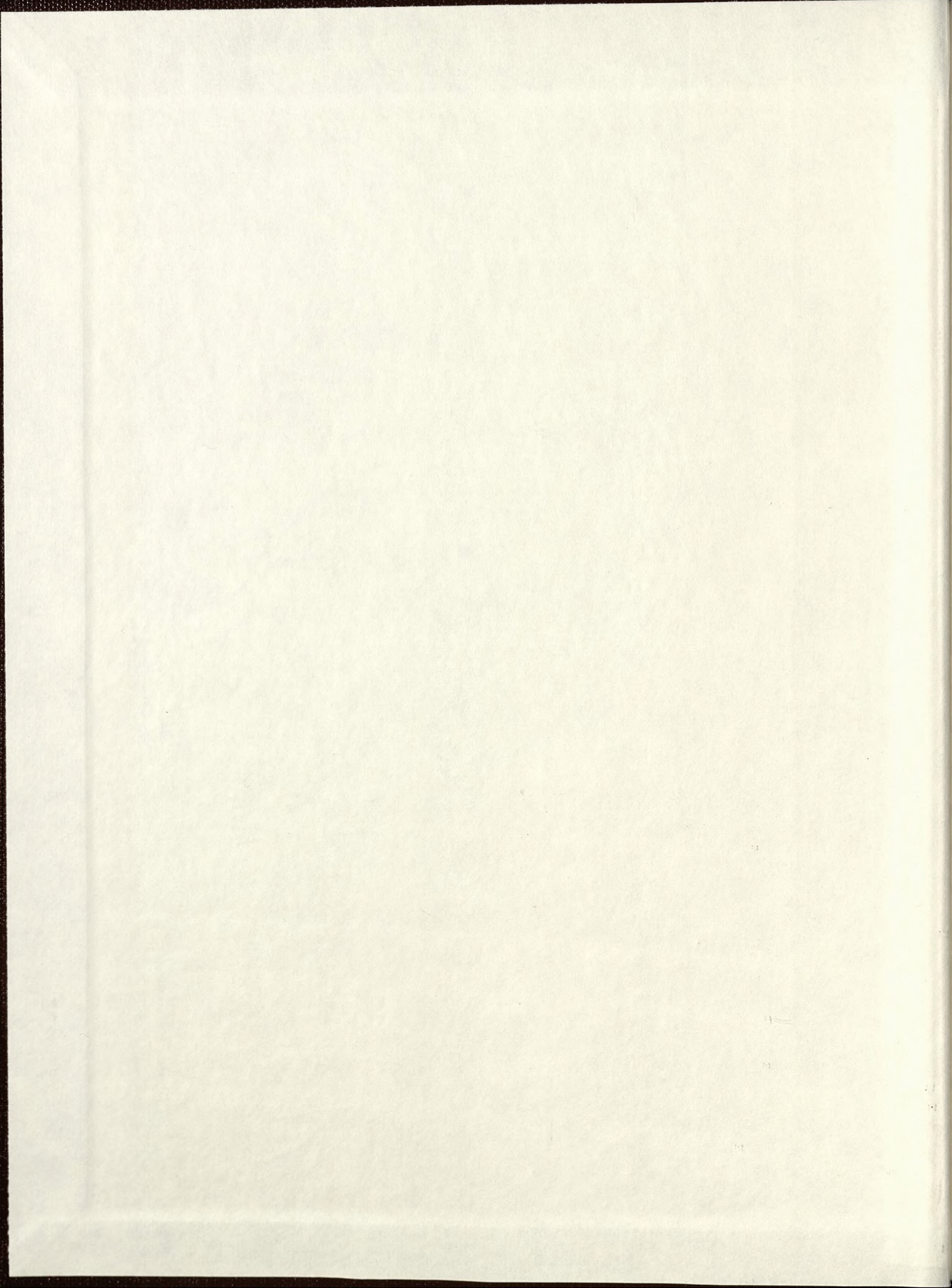


IRENAEUS OF LYONS ON THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

BY

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B.A., M.T.S.



IRENÆUS OF LYONS ON THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

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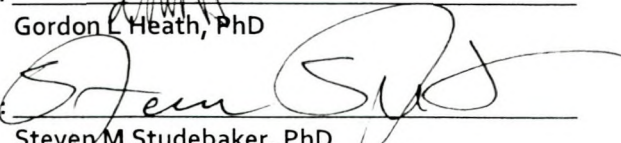
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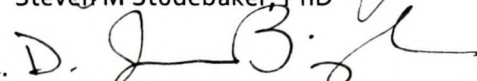
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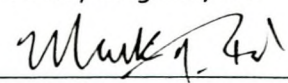
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ABSTRACT

“Irenaeus of Lyons on the Spiritual Life”

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This dissertation examines Irenaeus of Lyons’ teaching on the spiritual life through the perspective of his reflections on Gen 1:26–27 and the *imago Dei*. A work of constructive historical theology and spirituality, the project probes Irenaeus’ understanding of the relationship between God and humanity as expressed through his articulation of humankind’s creation and experience in the divine image and likeness. Chapter 1 introduces the bishop of second-century Lugdunum and surveys the essential elements of his spirituality and his doctrine of the *imago Dei*. Chapter 2 surveys the ways in which the doctrine was interpreted prior to Irenaeus. These include key biblical, philosophical, Gnostic, and patristic sources; together, they illustrate the wide variety of Gen 1:26 interpretations. The final three chapters analyse the key *imago Dei* texts, nearly all of which are found in *Against Heresies* Books 3 through 5. Chapter 3 examines Book 3 and notes that reference to the image of God is utilized in order to establish the key theological foundations of the spiritual life. Chapter 4 identifies the progressive quality of the *imago* texts in *Against Heresies* 4, demonstrating their emphasis on humanity as created beings meant to grow nearer to God. Chapter 5 illustrates how the texts of Book 5 are distinguished by their emphasis on human fulfilment and restoration. The Conclusion highlights the trajectory of the examined

texts, noting how their cumulative witness demonstrates two key points: First, that his use of Gen 1:26 was to function primarily as a motif through which to frame his theological understanding of the spiritual life, and, second, that this life is predicated upon the idea that communion between God and humanity *is* the very foundation of authentic spirituality. Irenaeus' employment of the language of the divine image and likeness functions as the means by which he describes the intimate connection meant to be shared between the Creator and humankind.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1 Clem.		<i>1 Clement</i>
ACW		Ancient Christian Writers
ANF		Ante-Nicene Fathers
BDAG		Bauer, W., et al. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
<i>Autol.</i>	<i>Ad Autolyicum</i>	Theophilus, <i>To Autolyicus</i>
Barn.		<i>The Epistle of Barnabas</i>
Diogn.		<i>The Epistle to Diognetus</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogus cum Tryphone</i>	Justin, <i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>
<i>Det.</i>	<i>Quod deterius potiori insidari solea</i>	Philo, <i>That the Worse Attacks the Better</i>
<i>Epid.</i>	<i>Epideixis tou apostolikou kērygmatos</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching</i>
<i>Haer.</i>	<i>Adversus haereses</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Against Heresies</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>	Eusebius, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Legatio pro Christianis</i>	Athenagoras, <i>Embassy to the Christians</i>
On Res.		<i>On the Resurrection</i> (Pseudo-Justin)
<i>Opif.</i>	<i>De opificio mundi</i>	Philo, <i>On the Creation of the World</i>
<i>Or. Graec.</i>	<i>Oratio ad Graecos</i>	Tatian, <i>Oration Against the Greeks</i>
<i>Praescr.</i>	<i>De praescriptione haereticorum</i>	Tertullian, <i>Prescription Against Heretics</i>
<i>Res.</i>	<i>De resurrectione</i>	Athenagoras, <i>On the Resurrection of the</i>

Dead

SC

Sources chretiennes. Paris: Cerf, 1943–

Val.

Adversus Valentinianos

Tertullian, *Against the Valentinians*

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines Irenaeus of Lyons' theological reflections on the spiritual life through the perspective of his utilization of Gen 1:26–27 and the *imago Dei*: the idea that humanity has, in some way, been created in the image and likeness of God.¹ A proposed work of constructive theology, the project fills a gap in three research fields. First, though patristic scholarship on Irenaeus consistently examines the theological principles foundational to the spiritual life, it has largely neglected his spirituality as a distinct, yet integral component of his theology.² Second, the study of spirituality as an academic discipline has blossomed in recent years and attention has been devoted to the church fathers and mothers.³ Here again, however, Irenaeus' contribution has been largely overlooked. Third, while there has been little research on Irenaeus' spirituality,

¹ "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Gen 1:26–27 NRSV. As Middleton observes, "These biblical verses constitute the *locus classicus* of the doctrine of *imago Dei*, the notion that human beings are made in God's image." Middleton, "Liberating Image?," 8. For the sake of simplicity, future reference to the text will cite only Gen 1:26. This follows Irenaeus' own custom, which was to generally allude only to the central features of v. 26: humanity's creation in the Divine image and likeness. Also for simplicity's sake, reference to "*imago Dei*" and the "image and likeness" will be used synonymously and as an alternative means to cite Irenaeus' allusions to these central features of Gen 1:26.

² By foundational theological principles I refer to themes such as pneumatology, soteriology, and theosis, to name a few. Each of these contributes to the development of one's perspective on spirituality, but the theological studies frequently treat practical matters of the spiritual life with only superficial interest. A working definition of spirituality will be provided below. So too will the ways in which scholars of Irenaeus have previously interacted with elements of his spirituality.

³ See, for example, the many works by Bernard McGinn, including, McGinn, "Future of Past Traditions," 1–18; McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*; McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*; McGinn et al., eds., *Christian Spirituality*. See also, Meredith, "Patristic Spirituality," 536–37; Louth, *Origins of Christian Mystical*; Bright and Kannengiesser, *Early Christian Spirituality*; Bouyer, *Spirituality New Testament*; Bloesch, *Spirituality Old & New*; Lossky, *Mystical Theology*.

there has been significant work dedicated to his teaching on a closely-related topic—his doctrine of the *imago Dei*. Most of this scholarship, however, is dominated by efforts to systematize, to summarize, or to offer a comparative analysis of his insights relative to other ancient writers. As such, this study provides a meaningful contribution to each of these fields of research.

Thesis

Examining the context behind Irenaeus' utilization of the *imago Dei*, this dissertation argues the following: First, references in *Against Heresies* to Gen 1:26 and the divine image and likeness function primarily as the motif through which Irenaeus establishes his theological framework for the spiritual life. Second, Irenaeus departs from the received tradition on the *imago Dei* in order to articulate the nature of the spiritual relationship between God and humanity. This spirituality—presented as it is in the shadow of his polemical concerns—is “spiritual” not in the sense of being anti-material. On the contrary, Irenaeus' concern was to demonstrate humanity's potential to live in communion with God, by his Spirit. As such, his utilization of the Genesis motif was not principally concerned with describing the constitutional nature of the human being, but to portray the intimate connection meant to be shared between the Creator and humankind.

Research Methodology

This dissertation examines Irenaeus' understanding of the spiritual life as expressed through his utilization of the *imago Dei* motif. The scope and hypothesis of this study emerges from the methodology employed to examine Irenaeus' texts. The research

strategy is summarized in three key steps. First, the initial objective was to provide a more comprehensive analysis of those texts of Irenaeus' that reference the *imago Dei*. To achieve this, the dissertation isolates key texts that quote or allude clearly to Gen 1:26 and its emphasis on the divine image and likeness. Whereas most studies attempt to summarize and/or systematize Irenaeus' understanding of the *imago Dei*, this project approaches the texts with a synchronic, rather than diachronic investigation. In so doing, the dissertation is not organized around key themes, but key texts. These selections are large, multi-chapter units from *Against Heresies*, Books 3 through 5 which include a prominent reference to both *imago* (image) and *similitudo* (likeness).⁴ Second, following a careful read of the texts, themes related to the spiritual life were identified as the larger contextual umbrella within which the Gen 1:26 references belonged. As such, the themes of spirituality dictated the parameters of the individual texts under examination. That is to say, the *imago* and *similitudo* statements provide the foundation of each text unit, but the scope and context of each one are determined according to the larger issues of the spiritual life. The third feature of the study's methodology is related to the key terms, *imago* and *similitudo*—the divine image and likeness. Whereas many studies attempt to explain Irenaeus' meaning through a lexical examination of the key terms, this project is not preoccupied with that task. To be sure, the words and their semantic

⁴ There are three reasons I will not be dealing extensively with the texts of the *Demonstration*. First, references to both the divine image and likeness are not common. *Epid.* 33–34 contains the most explicit use of the *imago Dei*, but in neither that pericope, nor the two other passing allusions (*Epid.* 55, 97), is there the depth of theological reflection that is found in the *Against Heresies* texts. Second, a thorough examination of the *imago* texts of *Haer.* 3–5 covers most, if not all the theological ground covered by the *Demonstration*. This includes the three passages listed already, plus three others where either image or likeness is utilized in isolation (*Epid.* 5, 11, 22). Third, the *imago* texts of the *Demonstration* are not part of larger sections dedicated to the spiritual life such as is the case in *Against Heresies*. For these reasons, I have chosen to refer to the *Demonstration* texts only as they clarify or add to the primary texts here under investigation.

range of meaning will prove important throughout the dissertation, but the primary focus is on the larger context within which the terms are meant to be understood.⁵

The main body of the study (Chapters 3 through 5) follows the methodology just described, but for the purposes of context Chapter 2 provides a survey of Irenaeus' influences. Part 1 of the chapter examines the biblical and patristic sources known to the second-century bishop, and Part 2 the Gnostic and heretical. Each section briefly identifies the ways in which Irenaeus' predecessors understood the *imago Dei*. Chapters 3 through 5 correspond to *Against Heresies* Books 3 through 5, with each chapter of the dissertation containing the analysis of the *imago Dei* texts found in the corresponding books.

Contours of Research on Irenaeus

There have been few comprehensive, single-volume works on Irenaeus' life and teachings.⁶ In recent years, a number of important publications have appeared, though most focus on a single topic of the bishop's teaching. The most commonly explored themes explored by contemporary scholars include his interpretation and reception of

⁵ On a related note, as this study is not primarily concerned with issues of anthropology, there will be less focus on two other key terms often discussed in relation to the *imago Dei*, namely, whether Irenaeus presents humankind as a "bipartite" or "tripartite" being. For studies relevant to that issue, see Solignac, "Corps, âme, esprit," 347–71; Jacobsen, "Constitution of Man," 67–94; Steenberg, "Two-Natured Man," 413–94.

⁶ The most notable of these include Osborn, *Irenaeus*; Fantino, *La théologie d'Irénée*; Benoît, *Saint Irénée*; Hitchcock, *Irenaeus of Lugdunum*. More concise, introductory surveys include Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*; Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction*; Donovan, *One Right Reading?*; Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*; Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*; Lawson, *Biblical Theology of Irenaeus*. Antonio Orbe did not produce a one-volume work on the theology of Irenaeus, but over the course of two decades he produced several important works. Combined, these represent the most prodigious treatment of Irenaeus' theology by a single scholar. A few of his most significant monographs include Orbe, *Espiritualidad de San Ireneo*; Orbe, *Parábolas evangélicas en San Ireneo*; Orbe, *Antropología de San Ireneo*.

scripture,⁷ deification (theosis),⁸ recapitulation,⁹ the doctrine of the Trinity,¹⁰ and, as always, his perspective of and defense against heresy.¹¹ Other key theological categories of note include his views on creation,¹² anthropology,¹³ soteriology,¹⁴ and eschatology.¹⁵ All of these topics have been examined at length by scholars, both past and present.¹⁶ As noted, however, a study dedicated to his spirituality has not received sufficient attention.

The study of Irenaeus is very much in vogue these days, but this has not always been the case. Most notably, little evidence exists that any scholars seriously engaged his work for the thousand years prior to Erasmus' publication of *Against Heresies* in 1526.¹⁷ In addition, the *Demonstration* was not only neglected but was, in fact, a "lost"

⁷ Bingham, "Senses of Scripture," 26–55; Bushur, *Irenaeus of Lyons*; Behr, "Scripture and Gospel," 179–94; Westerholm and Westerholm, "Irenaeus," 51–66; Jorgensen, *Treasure Hidden*; Presley, *Intertextual Reception*; Briggman, "Irenaeus and Genesis," 329–32; Steenberg, "Irenaeus on Scripture," 29–66; Reed, "ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ," 11–56; Norris, "Insufficiency of Scripture," 63–79; Bingham, *Irenaeus' Use of Matthew's*.

⁸ Edwards, "Growing like God," 37–51; Blackwell, *Christosis*; Wilson, *Deification and the Rule*; Finch, "Irenaeus on Christological Divinization," 86–103; Andia, *Homo vivens*.

⁹ Sesboué, *Tout récapituler*; Miola, "Mary as Un-tier," 337–61; Dunning, "Virgin Earth," 57–88; Steenberg, "Role of Mary," 117–37; Smith, "Chiliasm and Recapitulation," 313–31; Hochban, "Irenaeus on the Atonement," 525–57; Scharl, *Recapitulatio mundi*; D'alès, "La Doctrine de Récapitulation," 185–211.

¹⁰ Lashier, *Irenaeus on the Trinity*; Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*; Leahy, "Holy Spirit in Trinitarian Rhythm," 11–31; Barnes, "Irenaeus's Trinitarian Theology," 67–106; Lebreton, "La théologie de la Trinité," 89–120.

¹¹ A few recent examples include Ayres, "Irenaeus vs. the Valentinians," 153–87; Litwa, "Wondrous Exchange," 311–41; Jorgensen, *Treasure Hidden*; Chiapparini, "Irenaeus and the Gnostic," 95–119; Artemi, "Heretic Gnostic," 1–14. See also Lewis, *Introduction to "Gnosticism"*; Smith, "Irenaeus, Will of God," 93–123; Brakke, *The Gnostics*; Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*; Olson, *Irenaeus, Valentinians*; Perkins, "Ordering the Cosmos," 221–38.

¹² Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*; Dunning, "Virgin Earth," 57–88; Brown, "Necessary Imperfection," 17–25; Hiestand, "Passing Beyond the Angels"; Blowers, *Drama of Divine Economy*, chapter 4.

¹³ Steenberg, *God and Man*; Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*; Boersma, "Accommodation to What?," 266–93; Reeves, "The Glory of God"; Purves, "Spirit and *Imago Dei*," 99–120.

¹⁴ Litwa, "Wondrous Exchange," 311–41; Blackwell, *Christosis*; Sesboué, *Tout récapituler*; Scherrer, *La gloire de Dieu*; Hochban, "Irenaeus on the Atonement," 525–57.

¹⁵ Smith, "Chiliasm and Recapitulation," 313–31; Norelli, "Il duplice rinnovamento," 89–106; Blowers, *Drama of Divine Economy*, chapter 6.

¹⁶ For summaries of the historiography, see Donovan, "Irenaeus in Recent Scholarship," 219–41; Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 9–12; Unger and Steenberg, eds., *St. Irenaeus of Lyons*, 2–3.

¹⁷ Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction*, ix; Erasmus' edition was published in Latin with no translation provided. Erasmus, ed., *Opus Eruditissimum*.

work until its surprising discovering in the early 20th century. It too had been neglected for a millennium.¹⁸

Erasmus initiated a renaissance of interest in Irenaeus, but another period of neglect came a few hundred years later. The source of this second era of relative silence came not through the loss of manuscripts, but as a consequence of the critique of nineteenth-century German source-critics. The result of their work was a diminished view of Irenaeus' reputation as a theologian and a steep decline in the scholarship that covered him.¹⁹

Among the most vocal critics was Friedrich Loofs. Following on the work of H. H. Wendt,²⁰ in 1930 Loofs published what was perhaps the most damning critique of *Against Heresies* and its author.²¹ At the heart of the argument was the thesis that the treatise was a muddled collection of disparate theologies, and Irenaeus himself was said to be both a poor editor and an unoriginal theologian.²² Following Wendt, but prior to Loofs, Montgomery Hitchcock in 1917 published *Irenaeus of Lugdunum*, a treatise which sought to frame the second-century theologian's work in a more positive light.²³ In these years between Wendt and Loofs (1880 and 1930), however, his positivism represented the perspective of the minority. Nevertheless, Hitchcock would not be

¹⁸ The previously lost document was discovered in 1904 in a church in Erevan, capital city of Armenia. Along with Books 4 and 5 of *Against Heresies*, the discovery of the Armenian texts were an enormous find for Irenaeus-research. Bishop Karapet shares the first-hand details of the discovery in his critical edition of the text. See Ter-Mékérttschian, "Proof of the Apostolic Preaching," 655–57. For a thorough history of the *Demonstration's* text and manuscripts, see Behr, ed., *Irenaeus: Apostolic Preaching*, 27–37.

¹⁹ For details of critique and historiography, see Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 9–12; Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 27–29; Donovan, "Irenaeus in Recent Scholarship," 219–41.

²⁰ Wendt, *Die christliche Lehre*; Other influences included Harnack, "De Presbyter-Prediger," 1–37; Bousset, *Jüdisch-Christlicher*.

²¹ Loofs, *Theophilus*.

²² For a succinct summary, see Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 14–15.

²³ Hitchcock, *Irenaeus of Lugdunum*.

deterred. He answered Loofs' critique with two essays of response.²⁴ In them, he roundly criticized the German high-critic's methodology and conclusions, and, combined with the efforts from an earlier essay by D. Bruno Reynders,²⁵ succeeded in rehabilitating the perceived value in Irenaeus' work. During the 1950s the output of scholarly work resumed with renewed interest, and, as will be outlined in greater detail below, the past few decades have witnessed a veritable explosion of publications.

The Research of Irenaeus' Spirituality

As indicated above, there is not a significant amount of work done on Irenaeus' spirituality.²⁶ To be more precise, few studies are dedicated exclusively to the ancient bishop's views on the potential for life to be lived *in the Spirit*. That is not to say there is no research on important, related themes. Most recently, Anthony Briggman, John Behr, and Irenei Steenberg have touched on many issues relevant to spirituality.²⁷ However, these studies primarily examine issues of pneumatology, soteriology, and anthropology, and do so with a distinctly doctrinal approach. The themes examined are certainly important and closely related, but their studies are generally concerned first with historical and dogmatic issues, rather than the matters of the spiritual life. Nevertheless, their works, as well as those from many others, will prove important for this

²⁴ Hitchcock, "Loofs' Theory of Theophilus," 130–39; Hitchcock, "Loofs' Asiatic Source," 35–60.

²⁵ Reynders, "La Polemique," 5–27.

²⁶ Antonio Orbe's 1989 volume *Espiritualidad de San Ireneo* (the spirituality of Saint Irenaeus) is misleadingly titled. The book is not interacted with in this dissertation because most of the content reproduces material found in his earlier work, *Antropología de San Ireneo*, and because it is clear that Orbe's concern is not for the practical elements of the spiritual life. See Orbe, *Espiritualidad de San Ireneo*. Cf. Minns, "Review of *Espiritualidad Ireneo*," 465.

²⁷ In particular, see Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*; Briggman, "Irenaeus' Christology," 516–55; Briggman, "Holy Spirit as Unction," 171–93; Briggman, "Spirit-Christology in Irenaeus," 1–19; Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*; Behr, "Irenaeus AH 3.23.5," 305–13; Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*; Steenberg, *God and Man*; Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*; Steenberg, "Two-Natured Man," 413–32.

dissertation. The reason for this, as will be noted below, is that for Irenaeus, theology and spirituality are not meant to be divorced from each other. One of the scholars to appreciate this is Mary Ann Donovan.

Mary Ann Donovan

Donovan, a noted Irenaean scholar, has provided one of the few attempts at outlining Irenaeus' teaching on spirituality.²⁸ Her brief 1990 essay explored the topic, with a particular focus on the potential for humankind to share in the life and glory of God. Donovan demonstrated that at the heart of Irenaeus' thought was the assertion that humanity, created in the image and likeness of God, was meant to grow and flourish in that likeness; that is to say, to grow in conformity to and in participation with God himself.

Central to the essay is the argument for the importance of Irenaeus' teaching on the *imago Dei* to his spirituality. The spiritual life involves a journey of gradual progression of God's people drawing nearer to their Creator. Donovan suggests that the nature of the journey is illuminated by noting an Irenaean distinction between image and likeness.²⁹ The former refers to how humanity is like God in the flesh,³⁰ the latter has a

²⁸ Donovan, "Irenaeus: At the Heart," 11–22. Donovan's other important contributions include, Donovan, *One Right Reading?*; Donovan, "Irenaeus in Recent Scholarship," 219–41; Donovan, "Alive to the Glory," 283–97; Donovan, "Irenaeus Unity of God."

²⁹ Briggman notes that Donovan's emphasis on a distinction within Irenaeus' *imago Dei* is an increasingly rare position among scholars. Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 150.

³⁰ Donovan is not clear what exactly is meant that humanity possesses the divine image within the flesh. Moreover, not only does "image" remain undefined, but Donovan seems to refute the scholarly consensus that links the image of God in man to the image of God in the pre-incarnate Christ. Donovan, "Irenaeus: At the Heart," 17. In her subsequent, more expansive work on the subject Donovan adds further commentary. The Son is said to be the true image of God, though there remains no indication whether Adam was patterned after the Incarnate Word. In addition, the issues are further complicated when the only explanation given for what is meant by the divine image within humanity is that: "image is according to nature" and "must exist in matter." These reference to human nature and materiality are not explained further. See Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 133.

two-fold meaning. The first sees the divine likeness (similitude) as the indication that humanity, like God, shares in a personal autonomy of freedom and self-determination. The second meaning references a sense of likeness that is “conferred by the presence of the Spirit . . . The call to greater glory is the call to grow in the likeness of the one who died for us.” Moreover, “In the similitude which is the principle of self-determination and the likeness which involves the call of the Spirit to growth—in these two factors lies the dynamism of the spiritual life.” This thinking is a model of spirituality because “[t]he dynamic of the spiritual life is the dynamic of life in the Spirit. It is the work of the Spirit to model humankind into the likeness of God.”³¹ Donovan briefly outlines the practical elements of Irenaean spirituality as well. The call consisted in “obeying God, keeping the commandments in docility . . . Basic to our life in the Spirit is submission to God; from this ultimately comes incorruptibility, and so glory.”³² Though brief, Donovan’s essay is helpful for two reasons. First, it is one of the few works that takes seriously Irenaeus’ interest in human spirituality. Second, it identifies the teaching on the divine image and likeness as the key theological concept behind the second-century bishop’s vision for the spiritual life.

Rowan Williams

Donovan’s essay expanded upon an earlier, brief reflection on the subject by Rowan Williams.³³ In *Wound of Knowledge*, Williams surveys the topic of patristic spirituality and reflects on Irenaeus’ contribution for six pages. Whereas Donovan focussed on the

³¹ Donovan, “Irenaeus: At the Heart,” 18.

³² Donovan, “Irenaeus: At the Heart,” 19.

³³ Williams, *Wound of Knowledge*.

centrality of humanity's participation in and ascent to God's glory, *Wound of Knowledge* approached the issue from the perspective of spirituality as seeking the vision of God. Like Donovan, Williams also demonstrates the important connection between spirituality and the *imago Dei*. "Humanity is created in God's image, created with the capacity for a relationship to God in obedience: its fulfilment is in this relationship. 'The life of man is the vision of God' (IV.34.7). But the image is potential only, it must be made into a 'likeness' by the exercise of goodness."³⁴ Thus, the two scholars, despite some differences in understanding concerning the meaning and distinction between "image" and "likeness," share a central emphasis on the need for humanity's active and obedient participation to see the *imago Dei* realized. Williams expresses this beautifully, noting that "Men and women live between the two poles of 'image' and 'likeness,' call and response, opportunity and fulfilment: each human life is, therefore, a continuous story, a history, unified by its direction towards the promised communion with God for which it is created."³⁵

The reflections by Donovan and Williams are brief, but both succeed in identifying Irenaeus' dynamic perspective on theology. His concern with the doctrine of the *imago Dei* was not simply to formulate a doctrine of anthropology, but to reflect on the manner in which a follower of Jesus might come to share in the divine life. This is a dynamic that will be evident throughout this study of his teachings.³⁶

³⁴ Williams, *Wound of Knowledge*, 36–37.

³⁵ Williams, *Wound of Knowledge*, 41.

³⁶ Another brief examination comes from a surprising source. In a recent volume that examines spirituality with a scientific methodology, Irenaeus is the only theologian given an entire section of a chapter. The author, Dr. Mark Graves, is not a patristologist, but a researcher exploring the interplay between neuroscience, psychology, and ethics. He has two graduate degrees in theology and a Ph.D. in computer science. Now based out of Fuller Seminary, it is Dr. Graves, an interdisciplinary researcher that

Research of Irenaeus and the *Imago Dei*

General Introduction to Irenaeus Research

Major studies dedicated to Irenaeus and the *imago Dei* are few.³⁷ To date, the most significant work is Jacques Fantino's 1986 volume, *L'homme, image de Dieu chez saint Irénée de Lyon*.³⁸ The book, which is now among the standard works on the subject, is a thematic presentation of the key ideas, controversies, and lexicological issues. It is an excellent introduction to all of the major issues and is particularly strong in at least three ways. First, Fantino provides the most detailed etymological analysis of the key terms, image (εἰκὼν/*imago*) and likeness (ὁμοίωσιν/*similitudo*);³⁹ second, he effectively situates the use of the concepts against the relevant patristic, Gnostic, and philosophical backgrounds;⁴⁰ third, his summaries of Irenaeus' writings and the appendices are a helpful resource in locating the various Irenaeian references to the *imago Dei*.⁴¹

Although the volume effectively situates Irenaeus within his second-century context, his analysis of Gen 1:26 is not similarly focussed within the context of *Against Heresies* itself. Less than ninety pages are dedicated to the *imago* texts from Irenaeus' three books on constructive theology found from *Against Heresies* 3 through 5. Moreover, the ninety pages are divided by theme into two major categories: first, anthropology and salvation, and second, issues pertaining to Christology and the

has contributed one of the few (admittedly brief) studies on Irenaeian spirituality. See Graves, *Mind, Brain and Elusive*, 144–48.

³⁷ Two studies that provide a significant historical overview of the topic include Middleton, *The Liberating Image*; Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*. See also Grenz, *Social God*.

³⁸ Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*.

³⁹ Chapter 4 is particularly important in this regard. Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, 94–144. For a discussion of the translation issues surrounding image and likeness, see Chapter 3 below.

⁴⁰ Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, 4–45.

⁴¹ See the first of the appendices. Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, 182–86.

incarnation. Thematically arranged in this way, the study is therefore limited in its ability to account for the nuances between the individual *imago* texts, or to identify the possibility of development within those texts.⁴² As Denis Minns notes, the treatise is immensely important, but insofar as unique theological analysis is concerned, there is nothing particularly ground-breaking with Fantino's work.⁴³ Nevertheless, the volume is an important introduction and resource for the study of Irenaeus and his utilization of Gen 1:26.

In addition to Fantino's work, several major studies of Irenaeus' theology include significant, though never exhaustive commentary on the *imago Dei*. Three of the most important are works that strongly emphasize the study of anthropology, with particular reference to human ontology and growth. These monographs, Antonio Orbe's *Antropología de San Ireneo*, Ysabel de Andia's "*Homo vivens*": *Incorruptibilité et divinisation de l'homme selon Irénée de Lyon*, and John Behr's *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* are among the most important Irenaeus studies produced in the past half-century.⁴⁴ Though these monographs provide unique conclusions, all emphasize Irenaeus' strong concern for the progressive nature of human growth and fulfilment. Two more studies, Steenberg's *Of God and Man*, and Gustaf Wingren's *Man and the Incarnation* demonstrate the important connection between humanity's creation in the divine image and likeness to God's Trinity.⁴⁵ Along a

⁴² As an example of possible development within Irenaeus' writings, see Briggman, "Dating Irenaeus' Acquisition," 397–402.

⁴³ Minns, "Review of L'Homme," 295.

⁴⁴ Orbe, *Antropología de San Ireneo*; Andia, *Homo vivens*; Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*.

⁴⁵ Steenberg, *Of God and Man*; Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*. In an earlier work, Steenberg summarizes his position in this way: "God is Creator, and he creates as the trinity of Father with Son and Spirit. If the one economy is to be understood properly, especially vis-à-vis the cosmogony and anthropogony, this foundational paradigm, or hypothesis, must be accepted. The creation which shall come into being as the image of God, that is, the human person who shall grow into the glory of God, is

similar vein, Briggman's *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit* also discusses the *imago Dei* in a Trinitarian framework, albeit with a significant pneumatological emphasis.⁴⁶ Lastly, two recent volumes explored Irenaeus and his reception history of the book of Genesis. Both Stephen Presley's *The Intertextual Reception of Genesis 1–3 in Irenaeus of Lyons* and Thomas Holsinger-Friesen's *Irenaeus and Genesis: A Study of Competition in Early Christian Hermeneutics* provided significant commentary on the *imago Dei* from the perspective of Irenaeus and his scriptural exegesis.⁴⁷ In addition to these monographs, there have been a significant number of smaller essays and a few dissertations on the topic.⁴⁸

Scholarship on Irenaeus has flourished in the last half-century and many of the studies have given a prominent place to Gen 1:26 and the *imago* motif. This development is not surprising. As Anthony Briggman notes, there was a specific element of Irenaeus' teaching seized upon by Wendt and Loofs in their criticism of Irenaeus' theology. Briggman observes, "Wendt argued Irenaeus maintained two incompatible strains of thought with regard to the original state of humanity, one that involved the notion of a continual growth and increase toward perfection in which the Fall plays a positive role, and another that involved the notion of an original perfection lost at the Fall."⁴⁹ These points of alleged tension: growth through progression, versus

only intelligible through a proper knowledge of God as triune in this manner, for it is this God with respect to whom all creation is in communion." Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 67.

⁴⁶ Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*.

⁴⁷ Presley, *Intertextual Reception*; Holsinger-Friesen, *Irenaeus and Genesis*.

⁴⁸ Some of the most important essays, arranged here by date, include Solignac, "Corps, âme, esprit," 347–71; Peterson, *Imago Dei as Human Identity*; Edwards, *Image, Word, and God*; Jacobsen, "Importance of Genesis," 299–316; Weinandy, "St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei," 15–34. Dissertations on the topic include Forster, "God and the World"; Reeves, "The Glory of God"; Kim, "Doctrine of Man"; Nielsen, *Adam and Christ*. See also Cartwright, "Image of God," 173–81; Purves, "Spirit and *Imago Dei*," 99–120.

⁴⁹ Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 3–4.

perfection through restoration, are inextricably tied to Irenaeus' use of the *imago Dei* motif. As such, scholars have continued to dedicate much energy to the place of Gen 1:26 in his writings. Some of the most important volumes include those by Hitchcock, Wingren, Behr, Eric Osborn, and Steenberg.

***Imago Dei* Research Relevant to Spirituality**

The following volumes include some of the most relevant discussions between the *imago Dei* and Irenaean spirituality. Hitchcock and Osborn are primarily concerned with Irenaeus' larger theological project, while Wingren, Behr, and Steenberg show more interest with issues of anthropology.

Montgomery Hitchcock

Montgomery Hitchcock's importance in the history of Irenaeus scholarship was noted earlier. In addition to being a lonely voice of optimism in the early twentieth century, his work is also distinguished for the degree to which it interacted with the *imago Dei*. In light of Wendt's charge of irreconcilable contradictions in *Against Heresies*, Hitchcock addressed the source critics complaints by probing more deeply into Irenaeus' use of the key biblical text, Gen 1:26.

As noted, Hitchcock sought to present Irenaeus' theology in a positive light: to demonstrate both the internal unity and coherence of *Against Heresies*. Discussion of the image and likeness of God is not a primary theme of the work, though Hitchcock did argue that Irenaeus' "favourite theme, [is] God's concern for man."⁵⁰ Moreover, the

⁵⁰ Hitchcock, *Irenaeus of Lugdunum*, 53. One of the characteristic features of this work is the copious amount of lengthy Irenaeus citations. It is true, therefore, that he includes numerous texts that mention God's image and likeness; commentary and analysis, however, is rather lacking.

incarnation was the divine initiative to re-establish the “original purpose” for humanity through “the restoration of man to His image and likeness in the Son.”⁵¹ Hitchcock did not explore these issues as robustly as would the scholars who followed him, but he established an important trend: he asked the difficult question of what was meant in referencing both divine image and likeness. Quoting *Haer.* 5.6.1, Hitchcock stated that “The ‘image’ appears to reference the original endowment of human nature, and the ‘likeness’ its future state.”⁵² Later in the analysis, he admits, “Irenaeus gives, however, various answers to the question, ‘Wherein consists this likeness of God?’ In [5.6.1], it seems to consist in the possession of the Spirit . . . in [5.1.3] the receptivity of the Perfect Father . . . in [4.37.4] the likeness consists in the freedom of the will.”⁵³ Despite giving the plurality of options Hitchcock did not attempt to answer the question. It is interesting to note, however, that while he provided very little commentary on the first two options, there are eight pages allotted to explaining the third.

Although Hitchcock provided as many questions as he did answers, his contribution was an important one. By highlighting the challenging concepts of the divine image and likeness, Hitchcock intimated that it was the mysterious scriptural image itself, rather than Irenaeus which was to blame for any confusion. Moreover, his research opened a line of inquiry to be taken up by many scholars after him.

⁵¹ Hitchcock, *Irenaeus of Lugdunum*, 156.

⁵² Hitchcock, *Irenaeus of Lugdunum*, 188.

⁵³ Hitchcock, *Irenaeus of Lugdunum*, 289.

Gustaf Wingren

If Hitchcock's work is no longer cited by a majority of Irenaeus scholars, the same is not true of Gustaf Wingren.⁵⁴ John Behr suggests that the new era of appreciation for Irenaeus truly began with that author's 1947 publication, *Man and the Incarnation*.⁵⁵ Whereas Hitchcock identified God's concern for man as the primary issue, Wingren argued that "for Irenaeus the central problem of theology is *man and the becoming-man*, or *man and the Incarnation*."⁵⁶ As such, the divine image and likeness is discussed at great length throughout the book. One of the unique features of the work is that there is a helpful summary of the different functions and contexts of the image and likeness motif. He points out that the two expressions are often used synonymously, individually, and in a very few instances, image and likeness appear to be used in distinction of each other. He points out that "the majority of interpreters have concentrated [on the latter]," with a failure to recognize the context provided by the vast majority of the other references.⁵⁷ The overarching thesis of *Man and the Incarnation* seeks to clarify what it is that humanity is meant to become.

Throughout the book Wingren seeks to balance two key facts. On the one hand, he admits the restoration to the divine image can be characterized as deification. The perfection of the divine image results in the Spirit who "reigns supreme in man," and thus it would indeed "seem" true that this is deification.⁵⁸ On the other hand, Wingren is

⁵⁴ That Hitchcock's influence has diminished in the century since his treatise was published is supported by his disappearance from many modern bibliographies. Two exceptions are the works of John Behr and Anthony Briggman.

⁵⁵ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 15. Originally published in Swedish, Wingren's work first appeared in English in 1959. Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*.

⁵⁶ Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, ix.

⁵⁷ Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, 15.

⁵⁸ Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, 208.

careful to distinguish between the Creator and the created. This is a distinction that “between them is never abolished.”⁵⁹ The solution, therefore, is to understand the process of divinization as one fixated on the fulfilment of creation. He states that, “when man is created in the *imago* and *similitudo* of God it means that he is created in the likeness of the Son and is destined for Him.”⁶⁰ What Wingren seeks to do is emphasize the spiritual perfection of humanity in a way that stops short of equating the creature with its God.

As for the process of growth into the image, Wingren discusses the importance of participation in both the life of the church and through a life of holiness.⁶¹ The primary emphasis, however, is found in the fulfilment of the divine image through fellowship, or communion with God himself. This is the catalyst, the means by which the likeness is truly attained. “When men rise from the dead and receive eternal life, they are one with Christ, the image of God—they are men. And then the word which God spoke at the beginning is fulfilled: ‘Let us make man in our image.’” In this life, however, “Man, in order to be man, must continually transcend himself and have God within himself. Man’s life is dependent on communion with God, and if this communion is broken, man is lost.”⁶²

⁵⁹ Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, 211.

⁶⁰ Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, 90.

⁶¹ “The ethical life produces a growing likeness to Christ or imitation of Christ. Men’s works do not constitute any basis for likeness to Christ, for the foundation for this likeness is laid in baptism, which is a baptism into a growing together with Christ. Nor do men’s works bring the likeness to Christ which is established at baptism to perfection, for man is baptised into union with the death and resurrection of Christ, and not simply to imitate His ideal life on earth; consequently man’s likeness to Christ is not perfect until he himself has undergone death and resurrection . . . But integral to the likeness which begins in baptism and is fulfilled in eternity is also man’s life of faith and works—man’s growth is achieved now in ‘love, mercy, and gratitude.’ And when this likeness to Christ increases, the believer becomes man.” Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, 178.

⁶² Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, 213.

Image and likeness occupy a central place in Wingren's interpretation of Irenaeus. Unlike Hitchcock, Wingren understood the motif to occupy the center of the second-century theologian's thought. Also unlike his predecessor, he was willing to take a firm position on defining the meaning of the divine image. As such, this work explores many of the key themes proposed for my own dissertation. The difference is that Wingren, like most others, approaches the subject primarily from the perspective of systematic or historical theology. Themes of spirituality are explored, but not in a comprehensive, prioritized way. Nevertheless, Wingren's reflections on the relationship between the image and likeness would have a significant influence on the scholars who followed him. One such scholar was John Behr.

John Behr

Among contemporary scholars of Irenaeus, few have been as active or influential as John Behr. Indeed, the publication of his doctoral dissertation in 2000 continues to have a significant impact on second-century studies.⁶³ Focussing on anthropological themes in Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, Behr shared many of the key convictions brought to light by Wingren. A generation earlier, Wingren wrote of Irenaeus' central concern as man becoming man. Behr expressed it in similar terms, stating that "The work of God is the fashioning of man . . . this is the basic structure of Irenaeus' thought. It determines his theology at all levels."⁶⁴ As with the previous studies, though Behr's work is not strictly a study of spirituality, there are several points of resonance.

⁶³ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*. Other works that deal exclusively or substantially with Irenaeus include; Behr, *Irenaeus: Apostolic Preaching*; Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*; Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*.

⁶⁴ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 116.

There are two especially important insights for spirituality in *Anthropology and Asceticism*. The first relates to the description of Irenaeus pneumatology. Asking the question as to what exactly it means to have lost and regained the divine image, Behr frames the answer in terms of humankind's relationship to the Spirit. He argues that divine likeness lost and regained cannot simply refer to the departure and repossession of the Spirit. The reason being is that Irenaeus frequently asserts the fact that "the Spirit is present with creation throughout the unfolding of the economy."⁶⁵ Rather, "that which Adam lost in the apostasy was the strength of the breath of life." Behr's definition here is important. He argues that possession of the breath corresponded to "man seeing God through the creation, recognizing the fact that he is created and therefore dependent upon his Creator, an attitude of thankfulness and obedience. It is this recognition and disposition that enables man to live, whether animated by the breath of life or vivified directly by the life-creating Spirit."⁶⁶ This theme of a humble, sacrificial posture is important to Behr and it leads to the second, closely related contribution on this topic.

Behr understands death as a key component in humanity's possession and growth in the divine likeness. Just as Christ accomplished his task and brought the fullness of glory to the Father through his death, so is the same true for all followers. Referencing three separate passages from *Against Heresies*,⁶⁷ Behr asserts "it is only through their own death . . . that they are raised and fully receive incorruptibility from the Father, so becoming the image and likeness of God."⁶⁸ Though two interesting points, both seem in need of further reflection. Behr does not answer how exactly

⁶⁵ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 115.

⁶⁶ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 115.

⁶⁷ *Haer.*, 3.17.1; 3.23.6; 5.2.3.

⁶⁸ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 76.

Adam's lack of humility and the loss of the strength of the breath correspond to the relinquishment of the divine image. Likewise, the emphasis on death and sacrificial living inches closer to a discussion of the practicalities of the spiritual life, but do not explore the implications in any great depth. Nevertheless, Behr's work provides important insights useful for the theological foundations of Irenaean spirituality.⁶⁹

Eric Osborn

On the heels of Behr's important work was another significant study, Eric Osborn's *Irenaeus of Lyons*.⁷⁰ Whereas Wingren and Behr approached the subject with a largely anthropological focus, Osborn's purpose was more broad—similar in approach to Hitchcock. What sets this volume apart, however, is the ambitious attempt to find coherent structure and embedded themes. He argues there are two over-riding criteria that shape Irenaeus' thinking—the classical criteria of logic and aesthetics. These criteria draw out four key concepts which “govern all that [Irenaeus] says.” The four themes are humankind's intellect, the divine economy, recapitulation, and participation.⁷¹ The issue of participation is incredibly significant for Osborn, taking up nearly half of his treatise. It is also of considerable interest for this project as it has a great deal to do with Christian spirituality in general, and with the divine image and likeness theme in specific. Concerning the latter, Osborn offers a unique perspective on its meaning.

⁶⁹ Behr is not without his critics. Most notable is Briggman's critique of Behr's interpretation of Irenaeus' pneumatology. See, especially Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, chapter 6.

⁷⁰ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*. Osborn's work completed a remarkable decade of important publications focussed on Irenaeus. In addition to Behr's aforementioned work other significant works include: Dillon and Unger, *Irenaeus*; Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*; Behr, *On the Apostolic Preaching*; MacKenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration*; Balthasar, *Scandal of the Incarnation*.

⁷¹ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 21.

There is an answer to the puzzle to be found in the Platonic relation of participation, assimilation or communion. A particular participates in a form and draws from the form its being and identity. It can never become the form, but can only become like the form . . . In Irenaeus the image of God given in creation is the beginning of the process of growing like God. Because it is part of creation it will remain in all humans; all will have the possibility of participation and assimilation to God. What Adam lost was the likeness to God, which sprang from his participation. The affinity which lay behind this assimilation remained. Participation means that which participates both is and is not the object or form in which it participates. So it is possible for man to participate in God and still fall far short of God. Likeness to God can grow in humans, but never cease to be likeness rather than identity.⁷²

The relationship between the divine image and participatory communion is here expanded on in a way unseen in the previous commentators. Although Wingren and Behr saw a direct connection between communion and humanity's growth in the image, they did not equate them as strong as does Osborn. As such, the treatise is the most significant to offer what could be referred to as a theology of spirituality.

Irenei (M. C.) Steenberg

Among contemporary Irenaeus scholars, Irenei (M. C.) Steenberg continues to be among the most active. Like those works of Behr and Wingren, Steenberg follows a similar trajectory with *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius*.⁷³ Although only a chapter of the book is dedicated to the bishop of Lyons, the continuity with the previously examined studies is important. Like Osborn, Steenberg places significant emphasis on the relationship between divine image and communion. Unique to his study is a greater emphasis on the Trinitarian nature of that

⁷² Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 16–17.

⁷³ Steenberg, *Of God and Man*; see also his earlier work, Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*.

communion. He notes that “It is my increasing conviction that the anthropological confession of the *imago Dei* is advanced in Christian thought in precise correlation to the increasingly nuanced articulation of the divine, and itself forms the context in which divine reality is explained more and more articulately as Father, together with his Son and Spirit, co-existing, co-relating, as Trinity.”⁷⁴

Representative of recent scholarship, Steenberg follows the trend of showing more willingness to identify what Irenaeus meant with his use of the *imago* motif. He argues the purpose was “to reveal the means through which this union is made real in the life of the created person: through a compositional fashioning that joins the creature to the Creator, in a relation that images the Son’s eternal communion with the Father and Spirit.”⁷⁵ Whereas Osborn saw Platonic influence behind Irenaeian communion and participation, Steenberg makes no such statements. On the contrary, the attempt is instead made to identify the image as descriptive of the intended connection between Creator and created. “The image in which humanity is fashioned is not an attempt at ethereal reproduction of the divine, wrought by external agency, but the work of the Father to fashion, through the Son and the Spirit, a creature after the image of his own life in relation to these two hands.”⁷⁶ The unique contribution Steenberg offers is to draw a stronger correlation between the Trinity, humanity, and the potential communion between them—a divine intention rooted in and enacted by the creation and growth in the divine image and likeness.

⁷⁴ Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 11.

⁷⁵ Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 16.

⁷⁶ Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 32.

Conclusion

Scholars have previously noted the connection Irenaeus makes between the spiritual life and his doctrine of the *imago Dei*. That scholarship, however, is limited in scope. The significance of the divine image and likeness is apparent to most, but none yet have situated the *imago* in its proper context. This, I argue, is possible only through a careful analysis of the key texts. Following Chapter One's brief introduction to the second-century Bishop of Lyons' life and spirituality, the remainder of this study will therefore focus on Irenaeus' strategic employment of the *imago Dei* within the context of the larger text-units, namely, the spiritual life.

CHAPTER 1:
IRENÆUS OF LYONS: LIFE, SPIRITUALITY, DOCTRINE OF THE *IMAGO DEI*

Biography and Reception

Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 130–202) was a bishop and writer of the late-second century Church. Details of his life are few, but his impact has been significant.¹ Although he was mentioned by name on only a few occasions in the centuries following his death, the influence of his writings was substantial.² Indeed, he is frequently referenced as the first great or systematic theologian.³ He has also been named the “star witness of the post-sub-apostolic period of early Christianity.”⁴

The undisputed facts of his life are scarce. His episcopal leadership took place in the ancient Roman outpost of Lugdunum in Southern Gaul (modern Lyon, France). A diverse, cosmopolitan city, he was appointed bishop after Pothinus, his predecessor, was martyred (c. 178).⁵ Irenaeus’ teachings survive in two treatises: commonly referred to as *Against Heresies*, and *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*.⁶ The latter is a brief

¹ The most helpful studies of Irenaeus’ life include: Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*; Minns, *Irenaeus*; Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*.

² For an excellent summary of his legacy, see Steenberg, “Irenaeus Legacy,” 199–211.

³ Dennis Minns states that he is often referred to as the “father or founder of Catholic theology.” Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction*, 5; Paul Allen defines him as a systematic theologian in the sense that he is the first to attempt to methodically organize or systematize the various theological themes. Allen, *Theological Method*, 51.

⁴ Parvis and Foster, eds., “Introduction: Irenaeus and His Traditions,” 1.

⁵ A vivid description of this event is provided by Bingham, “Irenaeus of Lyons,” 137–38.

⁶ For a succinct summary of the Irenaeus corpus, including discussion of original manuscripts, fragments, lost works, and translations, see Parvis and Foster, “The Writings of Irenaeus,” xi–xiii.

summary of doctrinal essentials and is the more readable of the two works.⁷ *Against Heresies*, his *magnum opus*, is a remarkable work in the context of second-century Christian literature. It is noted for its cataloging of and systematic polemic against various Gnostic and heretical communities, for a methodically organized summary of the core, “orthodox” teachings, and for theological reflection that is aesthetically pleasing, vividly illustrated, and often, rather amusing.⁸

Apart from his writings, Irenaeus is also well-known for two unique features of his life. First, he claimed to have learned under Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna,⁹ who was said to have been a student of the Apostle John. An apostolic connection such as this, late as this was in the second century, was no doubt unique and thus lent Irenaeus a unique degree of apostolic credibility. This authority and reputation lead to the second point. Despite his leadership being outside the centers of power in early Christian circles, Irenaeus is well-known for his impressive role in the Quartodeciman controversy. Briefly, Bishop Victor of Rome intended to excommunicate the churches of Asia Minor whose celebration of Easter did not align with the Western calendar. Eusebius reports this was a major controversy and the peace of the Church was in grave danger.¹⁰ Irenaeus intervened, writing to Victor that there was apostolic precedent for

⁷ For the most recent translation, see Behr, ed., *Irenaeus: Apostolic Preaching*. Commentary on the entire text is provided by MacKenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration*. Additional translations include Smith, ed., *St. Irenaeus: Proof*; Robinson, ed., *The Demonstration*. The text was discovered and first translated by Ter-Mëkërttschian, “Proof of the Apostolic Preaching,” 653–802.

⁸ That is not to say that Irenaeus is an easy read. Though his theology is described as systematic, the work does not reflect modern works of systematic theology. His ideas are organized around key principles, but the layout of the treatise is often scattered and difficult to follow.

⁹ *Haer.* 3.3.4.

¹⁰ *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.

the churches in Asia Minor and that unity must prevail. In the end, there were no excommunications and Irenaeus' reputation as a peacemaker grew stronger.¹¹

These few facts represent nearly all that is known for certain about the man. Less certain are his origins, though his connection to Polycarp and the themes and tenor of his theology lead most to assume he was from Asia Minor.¹² It is strongly suspected that he made his way to Lugdunum through Rome, perhaps studying under Justin. There is a tradition that he was martyred in 202 or 203, but as Osborn shows, this cannot be traced any earlier than the early-5th century.¹³

These few details offer only a hint of Irenaeus' quality. Nevertheless, these facts and traditions, combined with the general tone and topics of his writings, provide an important glimpse into his concerns as an episcopal leader. His polemical zeal reveals his passion and concern for truth and his voluminous writings—quite unprecedented among Christian writers of that era—indicate his extraordinary commitment.¹⁴ At the heart of this, I argue, are the bishop's pastoral motivations. His *Demonstration* is the earliest extant summary of Christian doctrine and was quite likely intended for the laity.¹⁵ *Against Heresies* is a more difficult read, particularly the first book and its encyclopedic descriptions of the various heresies.¹⁶ Moreover, the five books combined

¹¹ Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 5–7.

¹² Bingham, "Irenaeus of Lyons," 137–53; Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction*; Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 13–72.

¹³ Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 2.

¹⁴ It is possible that Justin's literary output matched Irenaeus', but many of works have been lost. See Parvis, *Justin Martyr*, xiv–xv; Parvis, "Justin Martyr," 60.

¹⁵ For discussion of *Demonstration*, see Behr, *Irenaeus: Apostolic Preaching*; MacKenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration*; Smith, ed., *St. Irenaeus: Proof*; Robinson, *The Demonstration*.

¹⁶ There has been a move away from referring to Irenaeus' opponents as heretics. It has been common for the past number of years to view some of the groups, most notably the Valentinians, as a Christian sect. Recently, Brian Daley goes so far as to refer to the work as *Against the Sects*. Daley, *God Visible*, 65–83.

are lengthy, occasionally disjointed in thought and structure, and are dealing with subject matter that was undoubtedly of passing interest to many Christians.

Nevertheless, Irenaeus' pastoral concern is clear from the opening lines of the treatise. His overarching purpose was not simply to attack those who differed in opinion from himself. Rather, his concern was in the fact that his own people were being misled from the truth and, ultimately, from God himself. It is for this reason—for the sake of his people—that he felt “compelled” to refute the heretics.¹⁷ In view of these motivations, a study of Irenaeus' teaching on the spiritual life is all the more necessary.

Irenaeus as Writer and Critic of Second-Century Spirituality

This project highlights Irenaeus' theological reflections on the spiritual life. One of the challenges of such a task—regardless of the individual or era under examination—is determining what exactly is meant by the term “spirituality” and “the spiritual life.”

Philip Sheldrake, one of the foremost contemporary scholars of this burgeoning academic discipline, notes that the description and employment of the key terms vary considerably today and has undergone “substantial” changes through the centuries.¹⁸ He offers the following definition:

“Spirituality” is a word that, in broad terms, stands for lifestyles and practices that embody a vision of human existence and of how the human spirit is to achieve its full potential. In that sense, ‘spirituality’ embraces an aspirational

¹⁷ *Haer.* 1.pref.

¹⁸ Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 40. Other related works of Sheldrake's include, but are not limited to: Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History*; Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*; Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*. See also Powell, *A Theology of Spirituality*; Dreyer and Burrows, eds., *Minding the Spirit*; Jones et al., eds., *The Study of Spirituality*; Cox, *Handbook of Christian Spirituality*; Bright and Kannengiesser, *Early Christian Spirituality*; Bouyer, *Spirituality New Testament*; Holt, *Thirsty for God*; Holmes, *History of Christian Spirituality*; Grenz, “Christian Spirituality,” 87–105.

approach, whether religious or secular, to the meaning and conduct of human life.¹⁹

Despite its contemporary, non-denominational orientation, Sheldrake's definition resonates with Irenaeus' approach to the subject. Though the backdrop of the bishop's writings is polemical, his theology in general and his teaching on the spiritual life, in particular, are genuinely constructive. Sheldrake's emphases on human potential and an aspirational outlook describe Irenaeus' spirituality well.

Early Christian Spirituality

The fragmentation of theology into a variety of independent sub-disciplines is a phenomenon largely absent from the Church fathers. Sandra Schneiders expressed it this way, noting that much "of what was called theology at that time would today be called biblical theology and/or biblical spirituality, that is, it was exegetically based interpretation of scripture for the purpose of understanding the faith and living the Christian life."²⁰ In other words, patristic writings tend to establish a stronger bond between theological reflection and practical spirituality than the contemporary reader may be accustomed to.²¹ The question remains, however, as to how important issues of the spiritual life were in the larger context of Irenaeus' writings.

It is true that the second-century bishop is widely known as a heresiologist; indeed, his primary work is explicitly directed *against* those whom he identified as

¹⁹ Sheldrake, *Very Short Introduction*, 1; Bernard McGinn ("Letter and Spirit," 26–34) offers a helpful historical overview of the use and definitions of the term "spirituality." He notes that he, "without by any means making an exhaustive search . . . turned up some thirty-five different definitions of spirituality" (29).

²⁰ Schneiders, "Theology and Spirituality," 260.

²¹ Commentary on this issue can be found in Wilken, *Spirit of Early Christian*; McGinn, "Future of Past Traditions," 1–18; Hall, *Learning Theology*.

heretical. It is equally true that the specter of “Gnosticism” looms large over the whole of Irenaeus’ writings. Even when he wrote in a positive and constructive manner the influence of his opponents is never far below the surface. Nevertheless, spiritual concerns are evident from the opening lines of *Against Heresies*. He begins the treatise with the admission that certain individuals were abandoning the truth. Specifically, false teachers were leading believers away from the “divine training that is in faith.” Christians were becoming “captive” to false-truths, being “lead away from God.”²² The concern with the heretics and their doctrines cannot be overstated. This is clear from the treatise’s full title, *The Refutation and Overthrow of Knowledge Falsely So-Called*. As Judith Lieu notes, however, there is little doubt Irenaeus was writing for his fellow believers.²³ Even when his writings are set in the context of a polemical dispute, “he betrays that the issues under debate were far closer to the heart of Christian thought and practice than he could ever acknowledge.”²⁴ Orthodox teachings were, for Irenaeus, not simply a matter of falling in line with the ecclesiastical authorities. It is through the truth that one encounters God. Sound doctrine and the spiritual life are always intimately connected. Therefore, to lead people away from sound teaching was, in itself, an attack against authentic spirituality.

There is another reason spirituality deserves a central place of discussion of *Against Heresies*. Not only was Irenaeus deeply concerned for the spiritual lives of his people, but the heretical teachings against which he wrote were themselves eminently spiritual in their own right—a point which has gained increased appreciation in recent

²² *Haer.* 1.pref.

²³ Lieu, *Marcion*, 28.

²⁴ Lieu, *Marcion*, 29.

years.²⁵ Too often, scholarship has mirrored the sentiments of Tertullian, that acerbic controversialist who followed Irenaeus. He opined that the only thing to be gained by a conversation with a heretic was pain in both the stomach and head. As such, conversation and debate with the enemy was forbidden.²⁶

In the centuries that followed, descriptions of Gnosticism largely followed the example laid down by the early church apologists and heresiologists. Some see in Irenaeus' descriptions a mostly faithful accounting of his opponents. Paul Parvis, for example, argues that a comparison between Irenaeus' writings with the Gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi reveals a fairly accurate portrayal. He suggests that "On the whole, Irenaeus comes rather well out of the comparison . . . [and] has a reasonably clear understanding of *what* the "Gnostics" are saying."²⁷ Lautaro Lanzillotta, meanwhile, sees a biased, "rather distorted interpretation," an interpretation which was "dramatically changed" upon the discoveries at Nag Hammadi.²⁸

Regardless of the opinion on the faithfulness of anti-heretical commentators, it is generally true that the core of the Gnostic worldview has often been presented in an overly generalized, typically negative light. In her essay on Irenaeian spirituality, Donovan provides a representative example. She writes that Valentinian Gnosticism (Irenaeus' primary target):

understood the human situation in terms of a radical dualism. The supreme unknown, unknowable god is totally remote from matter. The Creator of this world is the product of the fall of the least of the "aeons" (emanations of the supreme God). Each of the elect, known as

²⁵ See, for example Lanzillotta, "Spirit, Soul and Body," 15–39; DeConick, *Gnostic New Age*; DeConick, "Crafting Gnosis," 285–305; DeConick, "Gnostic Spirituality," 148–86; Iricinschi et al., eds., *Beyond Gnostic Gospels*; Thomassen, "Valentinian Ideas," 169–86; Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*.

²⁶ *Praescr.* 15, 16. It is true that Tertullian's concern was specifically with debates on scripture, but the tenor of his writings suggest he probably thought it wise counsel as a general principle.

²⁷ Parvis, "Who Was Irenaeus?," 16.

²⁸ Lanzillotta, "A Way of Salvation," 72.

the “pneumatic” or “spiritual,” contains a spark of the heavenly world. Salvation is by knowledge or gnosis of the heavenly world whence came the inner spark, and to which the predestined will return, once free of matter. These teachings were circulated in the form of myths . . . While various ways of life found justification in elements of Gnostic doctrine, all reflect a sharp antipathy to the material cosmos.²⁹

One of the consequences of such representations was the failure to take seriously the attractiveness of Gnostic ideas in general, and issues of spirituality in specific.

Presenting any system of beliefs as mythological, anti-material, and inclusive does little to explain its attraction (both ancient and modern). Moreover, to dull the themes of spirituality among the heretical positions makes it more likely to miss the corresponding spiritual themes of Irenaeus himself.

Key Aspects of Irenaeus Spirituality

Sheldrake indicated above that defining spirituality is a difficult and a complex task.

Summarizing Irenaeus’ basic ideas on the subject, however, is not difficult. Fortunately, he offers a remarkably succinct overview of the spiritual life in a single paragraph from Book 5 of *Against Heresies*.³⁰ Nearly all the major theological elements of his spiritual thinking are referenced in this section.

We now receive a certain portion of His Spirit, tending towards perfection, and preparing us for incorruption, being little by little accustomed to receive and bear God; which also Paul terms “an earnest,” that is, a part of the honour which has been promised us by God . . . This earnest, therefore, dwelling in us, renders us spiritual even now, and the mortal is swallowed up by immortality. “For you,” he declares, “are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwell in you.” This, however, does not take place by a casting away of the flesh, but by the impartation of the Spirit. For those to whom he was writing were not without flesh, but they were those who

²⁹ Donovan, “Irenaeus: At the Heart,” 11–12.

³⁰ *Haer.* 5.8.1–2a. Similar statements do occur elsewhere in Irenaeus’ writings, but this pericope is unique in its concise, yet detailed summarization of the key ideas. If the section is extended another ten paragraphs, to *Haer.* 5.12.1, Irenaeus’ vision for the spiritual life is outlined in even greater detail.

had received the Spirit of God, “by which we cry, Abba, Father.” If therefore, at the present time, having the earnest, we do cry, “Abba, Father,” what shall it be when, on rising again, we behold Him face to face; when all the members shall burst out into a continuous hymn of triumph, glorifying Him who raised them from the dead, and gave the gift of eternal life? For if the earnest, gathering man into itself, does even now cause him to cry, “Abba, Father,” what shall the complete grace of the Spirit effect, which shall be given to men by God? It will render us like unto Him, and accomplish the will of the Father; for it shall make man after the image and likeness of God. Those persons, then, who possess the earnest of the Spirit, and who are not enslaved by the lusts of the flesh, but are subject to the Spirit, and who in all things walk according to the light of reason, does the apostle properly term “spiritual,” because the Spirit of God dwells in them.³¹

From this text, two foundational tenets and six descriptive features can be observed concerning Irenaean spirituality. The first tenet is that his concept of the spiritual life is fundamentally biblical.³² To be more precise, his writings are replete with references to the Hebrew scriptures and to those documents that would come to be known as the New Testament texts. It has elsewhere been argued that as a theologian, Irenaeus is, above all, a biblical theologian.³³ This is evident in his approach to and understanding of spirituality. His definition begins with reference to Eph 1:13–14 and the notion of the Holy Spirit as the pledge for the believer.³⁴ This is a theme referred to several times in the subsequent paragraphs. In addition, Harvey identified in the larger twelve

³¹ *Haer.* 5.8.1–2 (ANF 1:533).

³² For the sake of clarity I will make reference to the Bible and to scripture with both the Old and New Testament texts in view. For discussion of the issues surrounding Irenaeus and scripture, see Graves, “Irenaeus,” 27–41; Bingham, “Senses of Scripture,” 26–55; Bushur, *Irenaeus of Lyons*; Westerholm and Westerholm, “Irenaeus,” 51–66. See also; Behr, “Scripture and Gospel,” 179–94; Steenberg, “Irenaeus on Scripture,” 29–66; Norris, “Insufficiency of Scripture,” 63–79; Kannengiesser, “The Speaking God,” 337–52; Flesseman-Van Leer, *Tradition and Scripture*; Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 170–83. For a recent discussion of the state of the canon in the late second-century, see Gallagher and Meade, *Biblical Canon Lists*.

³³ Lawson, *Biblical Theology of Irenaeus*; Allen, *Theological Method*, 54–56; Osborn, *Irenaeus*, chapter 8.

³⁴ “In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.” Eph 1:13–14.

paragraphs on spirituality thirty-eight other scriptural quotations or allusions.³⁵ Indeed, as the reader progresses through these pages the scriptural influence is clear.

In addition to the citation and allusion to scripture, Irenaeus employed another strategy for grounding his arguments in biblical and apostolic authority. Not only did he cite specific texts, but he frequently drew upon the authority of the authors as well. Twelve times he prefaced a Pauline passage with reference to the teaching of “the apostle;” another twelve mentions were to the Lord and his words. The epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, and Ephesians were also each mentioned by name. The cumulative effect was no doubt intended to leave the reader with the clear conviction that Irenaeus’ spirituality was to be equated with biblical spirituality.

The second foundational tenet emerges from Irenaeus’ emphasis on the Holy Spirit as a “pledge.”³⁶ One of the key ideas is the observation that the pledge of the Spirit signifies the active presence of the Spirit and this presence is what “renders” one spiritual. Or, as it is expressed at the end of the paragraph, one is “spiritual, because the Spirit of God dwells within.”³⁷ These two foundational tenets, therefore, demonstrate that for Irenaeus, true spirituality is thoroughly biblical, and is experienced through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to these two tenets are the six key characteristics for the spiritual life. It is with these points that he provides a thicker description of what the spiritual life

³⁵ In *Haer.* 5.8.1—11.1. Harvey, ed., *Sancti Irenaei*, 2:339–47. Most of them are at least partial quotations and the majority of them are Pauline (or pseudo-Pauline). There are thirteen references to 1 Corinthians and eight are from Romans.

³⁶ No Greek fragments survive of this text; the Latin manuscripts employ *pignus* for ἀρραβών (the term used in the Greek text of Ephesians).

³⁷ *Spiritales vocat, quoniam Spiritus Dei habitat in ipsis. Haer.* 5.8.2 (SC 153:96).

looks like and how it is obtained. These points are gathered by summarizing the key (relevant) themes from each of the sentences of the paragraph from *Haer.* 5.8.³⁸

But we do now receive a certain portion of His Spirit, tending towards perfection, and preparing us for incorruption, being little by little accustomed to receive and bear God; which also the apostle terms “an earnest,” that is, a part of the honour which has been promised . . .

The first point states that the spiritual life is distinguished by its transformative purpose. To receive the Spirit is to begin, or to “tend towards” perfection. Though it occurs only “little by little” the believer is meant to be changed. The process is not simply the natural maturation of the human being, nor is it an achievement gained through moral excellence. One of Irenaeus’ favoured terms to describe the process is “accustomization.”³⁹ This refers both to the movement of God to humanity (Christ was accustomed to humanity in the incarnation) and to the progression of humanity towards God. For Irenaeus, the spiritual life is the movement towards the divine, which is achieved only through the believer becoming accustomed to “receive and bear God.”

This earnest, therefore, thus dwelling in us, renders us spiritual even now, and the mortal is swallowed up by immortality. “For you,” he declares, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.” This, however does not take place by a casting away of the flesh . . .

The second feature of Irenaeian spirituality is the emphasis on the life with God as being a life lived in the present. Another way to describe this is a life of embodied spirituality. The second of the previously stated foundational tenets noted that where the Spirit dwells is where true spirituality resides. This is not a promise limited to the future

³⁸ These summaries of the text are intended to be brief and introductory, with greater reflection to follow later in the study. This chapter will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 5, but these themes will appear in various places throughout the dissertation.

³⁹ For a detailed study of Irenaeus’ meaning and use of accustomization, see Éviex, “Théologie de l’accoutumance,” 5–54. See also; Sesboüé, *Tout récapituler*, 60–77, 102–19.

alone, but Irenaeus' point is to express that this life is experienced "even now." So much so, in fact, that his spirituality can be described as embodied, since life and communion with God is meant to be experienced in the body. Moreover, for Irenaeus, human life *requires* the presence of both flesh and spirit, thus, even in immortality there will not be a "casting away of the flesh." This is a principle requiring considerable elaboration, but for the moment, it serves to illustrate and anticipate the importance of in-the-present spirituality.

If therefore, at the present time, having the pledge, we do cry, "Abba, Father," what shall it be when, on rising again, we behold Him face to face . . .

The third feature of Irenaean spirituality is the emphasis on divine ascent and pilgrimage. Though the above reference has in view the eschaton, these themes are among the most frequently discussed throughout *Against Heresies*. As with embodiment, so here does Irenaeus stress both the present and eschatological. This is observed in the aforementioned "tending towards perfection," as well as referenced later in the chapter to "making steady progress towards Father and Son"⁴⁰ and to being "raised up to the life of God."⁴¹ Indeed, the spiritual life as a journey of ascending pilgrimage is among Irenaeus' most distinctive features. The Spirit brings spirituality, it is intended for the present day, and it is meant to draw individuals to the Father.

We will behold Him face to face and all the members shall burst out into a continuous hymn of triumph, glorifying Him who raised them from the dead and gave the gift of eternal life.

The fourth feature of the spiritual life is, like the previous point, only referenced here in passing. Nevertheless, as will become clear through the study Irenaean

⁴⁰ *Haer.* 5.8.4 (ANF 1:534).

⁴¹ *Haer.* 5.9.2 (ANF 1:535).

spirituality is deeply Christocentric. The centrality of the Word in Irenaeus' thinking is implicit in the previous point on transformation and accustomization—a process possible only because of the descent and salvific work of Christ. Here, the point is again not entirely explicit as the context of the paragraph is primarily directed to the work of God the Father and to the indwelling presence of the Spirit. In this paragraph, Christological issues are not of primary importance. Nevertheless, Irenaeus elsewhere makes abundantly clear the central place of the Son. A few chapters later, for example, he affirms that “the Maker of all things, the Word of God, who did also from the beginning form man, when He found His handiwork impaired by wickedness, performed upon it all kinds of healing. . . . He did once for all restore man sound and whole in all points, preparing him perfect for Himself unto the resurrection.”⁴² Authentic spirituality is thus enlivened by the Spirit, but initiated and achieved through the work of the Son.

If the pledge, gathering man into itself, does even now cause one to cry, “Abba, Father,” what shall the complete grace of the Spirit effect, which shall be given to humanity by God? It will render us like unto Him, and accomplish the will of the Father; for it shall make humankind after the image and likeness of God.

The themes of theosis and of the *imago Dei* mark the fifth characteristic of Irenaeus' spirituality. As before, the ideas are here only in inchoate form and are inextricably tied to the preceding themes. For Irenaeus, the Christ-enabled, embodied, transformative journey of ascent to the divine is the journey of theosis on the one hand, and the consummation of humanity's creation into the divine likeness on the other hand. The Holy Spirit—this Ephesian ‘pledge’ referenced no less than six times in this

⁴² *Haer.* 5.12.6 (ANF 1:539).

paragraph—draws humanity into itself; that is, into the divine. The ability to cry out intimately to Abba Father in the present is profound, but Irenaeus pointed to even greater promises for the future. His will shall be accomplished, and His people “shall become like unto Him.” This process—this journey of the spiritual life—is the fulfilment of humanity’s original design, to be created in His image and likeness.

*Those persons, then, who possess the pledge of the Spirit, and who are not enslaved by the lusts of the flesh, but are subject to the Spirit, and who in all things walk according to the light of reason, does the apostle properly term “spiritual,” because the Spirit of God dwells in them.*⁴³

The sixth and final theme addresses humanity’s participation in the journey of spirituality. It should be noted, however, that Irenaeus is explicit in reaffirming the centrality of the Spirit’s role in authentic spirituality. Thus, the need for the pledge of the Spirit to be present is yet again stated, as is the need to be “subject to” and “indwelt by” the Spirit. Throughout *Against Heresies* there is considerable emphasis on the necessity for personal faith, piety, and good works, but these are never far removed from the insistence on the centrality of the Spirit’s work, always in view of Christ’s redemptive work and the incarnation. For Irenaeus, these themes are meant to co-exist. Those who possess the pledge ought naturally to live lives of obedience. Thus, enslavement to the lusts of the flesh is inconceivable; instead, the believer will “in all things” live in view of the light of truth. This, he argued, is to be truly spiritual.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Haer.* 5.8.2 (ANF 1:534). This statement is the only text not a part of *Haer.* 5.8.1, though it is the first sentence of the next paragraph and clearly carries forward the themes under discussion from the previous paragraph.

⁴⁴ This text is representative of Irenaeus’ thoughts on the spiritual life and it mirrors his practical spiritual concerns insofar as they relate to the *imago Dei*. As will be noted throughout the analyses of the Gen 1:26 references, Irenaeus frequently identifies obedience as the practical and most important action of the spiritual person. Noticeably absent in both this text and nearly all those throughout this study is teaching related to a sacramental piety. Though there are important texts on the Eucharist (*Haer.* 4.17.1—18.6, 5.2.2/3) and baptism (*Haer.* 5.2.2/3, 5.11, 5.15), these are not explicitly linked with the *imago Dei*.

Haer. 5.8.1 offers a helpful overview of Irenaean spirituality. From this one paragraph the following summary definition is observed: Irenaean spirituality is an understanding of the spiritual life predicated upon Christian scripture as its source of authority and on the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as its defining criterion. The key elements to Christian spirituality include a Christocentric salvation, an embodied, transformative, and ascending pilgrimage; a journey marked by a life of faith and piety, culminating in the Spirit-enabled eschatological union with God and consummation of the divine image and likeness in humanity. Throughout *Against Heresies*, this vision of spirituality is consistently contrasted with the Gnostic alternative.

Gnostic Spirituality

There is not space here sufficient to faithfully describe the many varieties of Gnostic doctrine. For the purpose of this study, two limiting factors will be employed. First, issues of spirituality are of primary interest; second, the survey will be limited to Irenaeus' descriptions of his opponents' belief. The latter stance is taken not as an assertion of the infallibility of *Against Heresies* to accurately portray the positions of the various heresies. Rather, it is assumed that Irenaeus' own constructive theological reflections represent a genuine attempt to counter what he *perceived* to be the primary issues at hand.⁴⁵ As Parvis notes, while the bishop may have offered a fair description of

As noted earlier (p. 17 n. 64), Wingren (*Man and the Incarnation*, 178) argues for a connection between baptism and the formation of the divine likeness in humanity. However, as will be demonstrated in the examination of *Haer.* 3.17:1–4 in Chapter 3, such a connection is tenuous.

⁴⁵ The reasons to assume this include the following: the encyclopaedic descriptions of the various systems and the high-degree of correspondence in the Nag Hammadi texts, the familiarity with specific (primarily Valentinian) practices and individuals lend credibility to his claims of having carefully studied both the texts and their leaders (*Haer.* 1.pref.2); and he appeared to show sincere concern for the Gnostics, indicating the need to pray for them (*Haer.* 3.25.7), with the hope that reason might prevail and that they might be restored to the truth (*Haer.* 3.2.3). These considerations, combined with his reputation as a

the heretical beliefs, this does not necessarily mean those beliefs were well-understood by him.⁴⁶ I am therefore not arguing that Irenaeus' account of Gnostic teachings are more accurate than, for example, the Nag Hammadi texts. Rather, in an attempt to understand the bishop's own convictions this study will prioritize his critique and his perceived concerns.

At the heart of Irenaeus' concern, from a theological perspective, was the identity of God as the sole Creator: the ultimate and only divine power and entity above all things, and the relationship of this God to humanity. The latter are created, imperfect beings who find identity and completion in God alone. The Gnostics, however, seemed to Irenaeus to reverse the formula. His opponents spoke of a creator of the elements that was a lesser being and who fashioned individuals of an "animal nature." The enlightened, however, were those secretly implanted with a spiritual seed by the creator's mother.⁴⁷ It was they alone, by virtue of the possession of this seed, who were destined to become the truly spiritual: ones who would "rise above the creator."⁴⁸ As a result, throughout *Against Heresies* there is an exhaustive and repetitive emphasis on the centrality of the need for belief in the One Creator God. Indeed, reference to the Creator appears in nearly every one of *Against Heresies* 171 chapters. He expressed his concern most simply at the opening of Book 2, indicating

It is necessary, then, that we begin with the first and greatest principle,
with the Creator God who made heaven and earth all things in them

peacemaker, lend credibility to the supposition that he faithfully reported on Gnosticism, as he understood it.

⁴⁶ Parvis, "Who Was Irenaeus?," 16.

⁴⁷ This reference to the "seed" brings to mind Justin's teaching on the *spermatokis*: the idea that seeds of truth concerning the Logos have been ever-present throughout world history. For a discussion, see Behr, "The Word of God," 85–107; Barnard, *St Justin Martyr: Apologies*, 196–200; Edwards, "Justin's Logos," 261–80; Holte, "Logos Spermatikos," 109–68. See also Briggman, "Measuring Justin's Approach to the Spirit," 107–37.

⁴⁸ *Haer.* 2.30.1.

. . . and to show that there is nothing either above Him or after Him, and that he was influenced by no one, but, rather, made all things by His own counsel and free will, since He alone is God, and he alone is Lord, and he alone is Creator, and he alone is Father, and he alone contains all things, and he himself gives existence to all things.⁴⁹

This point, though seemingly an issue of dogmatic theology, was at the center of the debate concerning authentic spirituality. Though it concerned protology and the origins of the material realm the issues were not insignificant for matters of faith and piety.

April DeConick helps to highlight the attraction to the heretical systems. She notes,

This new type of spirituality spotlighted the perspective that human beings are more than mortal creatures fashioned by a god to do his bidding. The human being is perceived to be bigger and more powerful than the conventional gods, substantially connected to a divine source that transcends creation. . . . knowledge of this divine source—Gnosis—depends on a direct religious experience between the human and the transcendent God.⁵⁰

Moreover, “‘Gnostics’ thought that they achieved utter ascendancy over the biblical god,”⁵¹ and, “they believed in the power of the free human to transform themselves and their world.”⁵² In DeConick’s view, it was the choice between servitude, subjugation, and inclusivity, on the one hand, compared to pluralism, exploration, and individual empowerment on the other hand. As such, it is clear why two issues, theology proper (the study of God) and anthropology (the study of the human person) took up a central place in Irenaeus’ writings. It is also apparent why these debates became a matter of spirituality. At stake was nothing less than the question of humanity’s place in the world and the means to fulfilment and flourishing.

⁴⁹ *Haer.* 2.1.1 (ACW 65:17).

⁵⁰ DeConick, “Gnostic Spirituality,” 156.

⁵¹ DeConick, “Gnostic Spirituality,” 160.

⁵² DeConick, “Gnostic Spirituality,” 175.

A second Irenaean concern with heretical teachings concerned the status of the material realm. The crucial element of this was the question of human materiality. Lanzillotta argues this is another area where Gnostic beliefs have suffered grievous mischaracterization. The common perception, he observes, has been of an “eminently pessimistic worldview that stubbornly refused to interact with reality and claimed the need to depart from this world as soon as possible.”⁵³ This was the position expressed above by Donovan, who referred to “radical dualism” and the Valentinian emphasis on one’s need to be “free of matter.”⁵⁴ It is this issue that Lanzillotta sees as evidence of bias and anti-heretical distortion of the facts. He admits that the Nag Hammadi texts reveal a “‘Gnostic’ cosmology and anthropology [where] the world and the physical body are conceived of as a prison for the divine spark, which individuals must, by all means, attempt to liberate from its confinement.”⁵⁵ The ancient Gnostic texts show, however, that theological and spiritual reflection did occur among the heterodox insofar as these issues were concerned. Lanzillotta demonstrates that though there was the Platonic anthropology of a mixed nature (the spark of divine and immortal co-existing with the mortal and inferior) there was also an emphasis on transformation. Language used in the Nag Hammadi texts include the possibilities of “‘Becoming one from above,’ ‘becoming spiritual,’ ‘becoming male,’ [and] ‘becoming divine.’”⁵⁶ Such

⁵³ Lanzillotta, “A Way of Salvation,” 72.

⁵⁴ Donovan, “Irenaeus: At the Heart,” 11.

⁵⁵ Lanzillotta, “A Way of Salvation,” 82.

⁵⁶ Lanzillotta, “A Way of Salvation,” 82. Lanzillotta provides the following examples, “*Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1) 53.18–19 affirms “I became divine”; see also 44.18–22.” Lanzillotta, “A Way of Salvation,” 82 n. 50. Also, “*ApJames* (NHC I,2) 6.19–20: ‘Make yourselves like the son of the Holy Spirit;’ 13.13–17: ‘Once more I reprove you, you who are; become like those who are not, that you may be with those who are not;’ 16.20–21: ‘Endeavor earnestly then to make yourselves like them;’ *GosPhil* (NHC II,3) 78.24–79.13: ‘Now you who live together with the Son of God, love not the world, but love the Lord, in order that those you will bring forth may not resemble the world, but may resemble the Lord;’

transformation can occur in the material world through participation in the “astral region.” Though “the divine spark is numbed under the influence of externality . . . the transformation behind the assimilation to god in Nag Hammadi texts implies, first, paying heed to the external (or internal) call that awakens the divine spark, then negating everything that is material and, finally, concentrating on our divine inner nature.”⁵⁷ Lanzillotta offers a compelling argument, clearly demonstrating that it is a misrepresentation to describe the Gnostic worldview as wholly binary and immaterial. Nevertheless, in Irenaeus’ thinking, this issue of materiality is one that needed considerable attention.

Irenaeus on Gnostic Materiality

It is clear that the texts from Nag Hammadi provide important insights into Gnostic teaching. The question remains, however, whether Irenaeus was indeed uninformed or biased, and whether this unduly affects his own teaching on spirituality.

On the question of Gnostic dualism, *Against Heresies* clearly and repeatedly stresses the opinion that all heretics repudiated the goodness of the human body. In reference to the material realm, Irenaeus argues all his opponents “despise the workmanship of God.”⁵⁸ Moreover, he suggests that all of them misinterpreted the Apostle Paul’s statement regarding flesh and blood not inheriting the Kingdom as a means to deny the salvation of the body.⁵⁹ He states there was clear Gnostic disgust with the body and his protestations appear to support Lanzillotta’s charge of undue bias.

ApocAdam (NHC V,5) 64.14–15. See also the text of *TeachSilv* (NHC VII,4) 94.19–29.” Lanzillotta, “A Way of Salvation,” 82 n. 51.

⁵⁷ Lanzillotta, “A Way of Salvation,” 83.

⁵⁸ *Haer.* 1.22.1.

⁵⁹ *Haer.* 5.9.1, with reference to 1 Cor 15:50.

However, though Lanzillotta provided examples of Gnostic emphases on transformation and suggested it provided proof of Irenaeus' neglect, neither this nor the bishop's sweeping accusations prove his thesis true. On the contrary, Irenaeus did outline several nuanced comments about his adversaries. A few examples will suffice.

First, *Haer.* 1.21 offers a glimpse into a few different Gnostic soteriologies and Irenaeus expresses admitted exasperation in trying to understand the complexities of the different groups. He bemoans that there are "as many [schemes] of redemption as there are mystery-teachers" of these doctrines.⁶⁰ These schemes, however, were not devoid of spiritual nor transformative themes. He identifies some as holding the strict and binary view of matter and spirit. He noted that some "reject all these [spiritual and liturgical] practices. They assert that the mystery of the unspeakable and invisible Power ought not to be consecrated by visible and corruptible creatures; nor the mystery of the unthinkable and incorporeal, by the sentient and corporeal."⁶¹ That particular group understood the reception of the true gnosis as complete redemption, but Irenaeus identified others who thought differently. One group seemed to understand regeneration as an ongoing process that followed reception of gnosis,⁶² while others placed greater emphasis on a type of sacramental and mystical spirituality. Some emphasized esoteric rites and incantations,⁶³ while others used oil, water, and invocations in rites that were meant to aid in the process of redemption, a process which continued "up to the point of death."⁶⁴ This one chapter demonstrates that Irenaeus did not characterize Gnostic

⁶⁰ *Haer.* 1.21.1 (ACW 55:77).

⁶¹ *Haer.* 1.21.4 (ACW 55:79).

⁶² *Haer.* 1.21.1.

⁶³ *Haer.* 1.21.3.

⁶⁴ *Haer.* 1.21.5.

soteriologies in one all-encompassing and generalized way. Moreover, like Lanzillotta, he too demonstrated that there were transformative elements of spirituality in some of their teachings.

A second example of Irenaeus' acknowledgment of Gnostic spirituality surrounds the issue of communion with the divine. In the early chapters of *Against Heresies* communion is a subject of discussion concerning the origins of the universe and the relationship between the unknowable Father and the aeons.⁶⁵ The Valentinians, for example, were said to believe that the aeon Sophia suffered because she—unlike other aeons—did not experience communion with the perfect Father. Her longing for this fellowship eventually led to the creation of humanity.⁶⁶ Such discussions were not limited, however, to the divine realm alone. Irenaeus conceded that some were concerned about more than the reception of gnosis. He notes that some—a group of Valentinians are again most likely in view—seemed to be genuinely seeking out a relationship with the divine. Though he abhorred what he saw as their mythological inventions concerning God and the origins of the world, he admitted they “desired to be within Him.”⁶⁷ They searched for the Father, as well as for perfection, stability, purification, and reconciliation. Indeed, they too “desired communion and union with Him.”⁶⁸ These passages provide a small glimpse into Irenaeus' understanding that Gnostic theology included concern for the material realm.

⁶⁵ In brief, the “Pleroma” describes the entirety of the Divine “family.” The unknowable Father is at the highest point (or at the most unknown depths, from another perspective), while the Aeons were divine emanations from the source-being. Though Irenaeus reported a number of differences between the various heretics, the Aeons typically emerged in pairs, possessed biblical names such as Sophia, Wisdom, or Church, and were sequentially emanated. Thus, the first pair was closest in nature and proximity to the Father, while the last pair was furthest removed.

⁶⁶ *Haer.* 1.2.2.

⁶⁷ *Haer.* 2.18.6 (ACW 65:62).

⁶⁸ *Haer.* 2.18.7 (ACW 65:63).

Issues of Gnostic morality provides a third and final example of Irenaeus' discussion of Gnostic materiality. Typically, the heresiologists are quick to lampoon the ethics of their opponents. Tertullian was infamous for this, once suggesting that heretics were influenced by the devil, were friends of magicians, charlatans, and astrologers, and whose way of life and worship were futile, earthly, and undisciplined.⁶⁹ Irenaeus, though occasionally acerbic as well, was generally more restrained than his much younger Carthaginian contemporary.⁷⁰ Irenaeus did not, however, refrain from accusing his opponents of immoral lifestyles.⁷¹ Of greatest importance for this study are those instances when he commented on the relationship between Gnostic ethics and the process of spiritual progression. One notable example concerns the Carpocratians. Similar to Tertullian, Irenaeus accuses this group of sorcery as well as licentious and wicked lifestyles.⁷² What is particularly unique is the claim that the followers of Carpocrates took revelry as an obligation, rather than a liberty. They engage in "every kind of impious and godless deed. For they say that the souls must have experience in every kind of life and in every act by means of transmigration from one body to another."⁷³ The idea being that an individual found freedom from the material only through a comprehensive sampling of everything within it. This was not only a licence to indulge in the carnal but a requirement for the attainment of perfection.

The accusation against Irenaeus was that he either radically misunderstood or deliberately misrepresented Gnostic teachings, particularly as they concerned materiality

⁶⁹ *Praescr.* 7, 41, 43.

⁷⁰ It is generally believed that Tertullian began writing in the last decade of the 2nd century. Thus, as Irenaeus' life was coming to a close, Tertullian's influence was just beginning.

⁷¹ "The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles. They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence." *Haer.* 1.26.3. Cf. *Haer.* 1.6.3.

⁷² *Haer.* 1.25.3.

⁷³ *Haer.* 1.25.4 (ACW 65:88).

and Platonic dualism. I have shown that while *Against Heresies* undoubtedly reveals a strong bias on these matters—identifying all heretics as those who despise the material realm—he does on several occasions qualify these charges. By providing examples of diverse Gnostic soteriologies (some of which included progressive and transformative redemption), examples of heretical desire for divine communion in the material realm, and the transformative and radical materiality of the Carpocratians Irenaeus demonstrated two key things. First, while he characterized his opponents as all being radical dualists, he also provided detailed examples of their teachings related to the material realm. He did not argue that theirs were systems of belief that saw no importance in the present life. On the contrary, the examples above prove otherwise. The second insight is the awareness Irenaeus shows for the relationship between materiality—specifically, the body—and the spiritual life. In the same way, he described the various ways the Gnostics practiced an embodied spirituality, so would this become a critical, albeit completely re-envisioned, aspect of his own spirituality.

Irenaeus and the *Imago Dei*

In the same way that the work of the German source-critics provided a watershed moment in Irenaeus research more than a century ago, a similar dynamic occurred in the second century. The proliferation of alternative Christian sects posed a variety of difficult theological questions for Irenaeus and those of his tradition. There are many distinctions between the various groups, whether they be Gnostic, Valentinian, or any other of the many sects that were in existence at that time.⁷⁴ As far as Irenaeus was

⁷⁴ The ground-breaking study on early Christian diversity remains Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*. Cf. Paget and Lieu, eds., *Christianity in the Second Century*; Ayres, “Continuity and Change,” 106–21;

concerned, among the most important issues raised were those related to anthropology. Indeed, many scholars see this issue as one of the most central theological themes in *Against Heresies*. Wingren observes that, “For Irenaeus, the central problem of theology is man and the becoming-man, or man and the Incarnation.” Further, this is the “analytical framework” used for the entirety of his theology.⁷⁵ Wingren went on to argue that while issues of anthropology are not developed in the New Testament, Irenaeus, because of the doctrinal threats of his day, “was forced to draw up a precise anthropology on the basis of scripture.”⁷⁶

Concerning the *imago Dei* specifically, Cartwright argues that “The image of God is central to Irenaeus’ theology and the extensive scholarship that explores it.”⁷⁷ Charles Kannengiesser, in his essay on Irenaeus’ reception of the book of Genesis, notes the importance of Gen 1:26 for both *Against Heresies* and the *Demonstration*. “With four occurrences, Gen 1:26a is the most often quoted verse of Genesis in [*Against Heresies*].”⁷⁸ In addition, the text is “the only verse quoted once and alluded to twice in [*Demonstration*].”⁷⁹ Kannengiesser highlights the importance of the text to both of the Irenaeus’ treatises, but by referencing only direct quotations he severely understates the degree to which Irenaeus leveraged the Genesis verse. As Fantino demonstrates, there are more than 230 occasions where the key terms of the *imago Dei*: image (*imago*) and

Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*; Behr, “Diversity and Dialogue,” 21–36; Brakke, *The Gnostics*; Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*; Taylor, “Christian Regional Diversity,” 330–43; Frend, “Christianity in the Second Century,” 302–13.

⁷⁵ Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, lx. See also Jacobsen, “Importance of Genesis,” 299.

⁷⁶ Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, xi.

⁷⁷ Cartwright, “Image of God,” 273.

⁷⁸ Kannengiesser, “The Speaking God,” 340.

⁷⁹ Kannengiesser, “The Speaking God,” 348.

likeness (*similitudo*) are used by Irenaeus.⁸⁰ Certainly, not all of the examples have Genesis in view. Nevertheless, Fantino's documentation suggests that this bishop of antiquity had the *imago Dei* in mind more frequently than Kannengiesser's data suggests.

Despite the agreement among scholars as to the central importance of the *imago Dei* for Irenaeus, and despite the high number of citations and allusions to Gen 1:26 throughout his writings, there has never been a consensus on how exactly he understood the divine image and likeness, nor how precisely it served the rest of his theology. Fantino expresses the challenge well, noting that the complexity and artistry of the text requires both a theologian and a poet to unravel the true meaning.⁸¹

It is not only the unique imagery, terminology, and methodology which lead to varieties of interpretation, however. There are apparent inconsistencies in Irenaeus' conclusions and use of the key vocabulary that cause great debate among scholars, as was observed from the brief summaries above. Minns summarizes the tensions, noting that Irenaeus' application of Gen 1:26

fluctuates considerably. For example, at *Haer.* 3.18.1 he says that we receive in Christ what we had lost in Adam, that is, being in the image and likeness of God. Yet, within a few pages, he suggests that it is because Christ has flesh like ours that he preserves the likeness of the human being who was made in his image and likeness (*Haer.* 3.22.1).

⁸⁰ Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, 184–86. Fantino counts 26 instances where Irenaeus repeats the *imago* and likeness combination, as in Gen 1:26. In addition, there are 140 individual uses of *imago*, and 65 of *similitudo*.

⁸¹ “De même, l'oeuvre d'Irénée m'a passionné par ses notes, ses couleurs et ses parfums. Mais je sais également que je n'ai pas su exprimer cela correctement dans l'exposé qui va suivre. Je pense d'ailleurs que cela n'est pas possible, sauf, peut-être, pour un poète. Je ne la suis pas. Pourtant l'image et la ressemblance se prêteraient bien à cet exercice. C'est un grand jeu de cache—cache entre la Dieu qui est Père, Fils et Esprit et l'homme, le premier cherchant le second. Pourquoi ? C'est la tout le noeud de l'histoire qu'Irénée a si bien sentie. Dieu cherche l'homme, parce que ‘la gloire de Dieu c'est l'homme vivant’ (cf. adv 4,20,7) rendu participant de sa vie et vivant auprès de lui. Les hommes sont précieux aux yeux du Père parce que, grâce à l'Esprit, ils ressemblent à son Fils Jésus. Mais cette ressemblance qui existe depuis toujours n'a trouvé sa réalisation pleine, dense, totale que dans la venue du Fils qui a pris chair de la Vierge Marie.” Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, 1.

Again, a distinction is sometimes drawn between image and likeness, but not always the same distinction. Most frequently, the image in which humankind is made refers to the body of Christ, both as mortal and as glorified, the model not only of humankind's first formation but of its final perfection. When the likeness to God is distinguished from the image it can refer to rationality and moral freedom, or to the incorruptibility that will be bestowed on human flesh when the divine economy reaches its fulfilment. Finally, at *Haer.* V.16.2, Irenaeus says that the likeness to God was easily lost in the beginning because the Word, in whose image humankind was made, was as yet not visible.⁸²

Minns effectively summarizes the key features of Irenaeus' contentious teaching on these issues.⁸³ Most of the discrepancies will be dealt with as this study proceeds, but there is one complication that significantly impedes scholars' ability to confidently access Irenaeus' meaning: the issue of problematic manuscripts and translations.

Issues in the Manuscripts

Manuscript and translation issues are a problem for any examination of Irenaeus' theology, but this is especially true with the subject of the *imago Dei*.⁸⁴ As discussed earlier, one of the major problems is that very little of the original Greek has survived for either *Against Heresies* or the *Demonstration*.⁸⁵ Moreover, of the Greek that has been preserved, very little of it includes the key divine image and likeness texts to be examined in this dissertation. This is a significant issue for a subject which is already fraught with issues of translation and etymological uncertainty. At issue is the fact that the topic not only covers rather mystical territory (humanity's relationship with and

⁸² Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction*, 72–73. See also Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 16–17.

⁸³ Whereas the basic contours of Irenaeus' understanding of the spiritual life can be confidently summarized, this brief introduction has demonstrated that the same is not true for his understanding of the *imago Dei*. As such, this study will withhold summarizing commentary until the concluding chapter.

⁸⁴ Parvis and Foster, "The Writings of Irenaeus," xi–xiii; Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 1–7; Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 66–72.

⁸⁵ Minns provides a thorough summary of the manuscript and translation history and issue of the Irenaeian texts, as well as the reception history of those texts. See Minns, "Irenaeus of Lyons," 72–83.

possible ontological connection to the divine), but it attempts to do so utilizing two words that are similar in meaning (regardless of the language in question) and which do not appear frequently in the relevant source materials. In the Latin texts of *Against Heresies*, *imago* and *similitudo* are behind image and likeness, respectively. From the Greek fragments that have survived it seems clear that Irenaeus utilized the terms most frequently employed in the New Testament, namely, εἰκὼν and ὁμοίωσιν (along with their cognates).⁸⁶ The problem arises from the fact that without the original manuscripts it is impossible to be certain that *imago* and *similitudo* are consistently used to translate the Greek antecedents. Fortunately, the majority of scholars have seen in the Latin of *Against Heresies* a literal translation of the Greek.⁸⁷

The issue is further complicated when Irenaeus' source materials are considered. Not only are there varieties of usage in the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament,⁸⁸ but the fact that Irenaeus read from the Greek Septuagint (LXX), rather than the Hebrew of the Masoretic Text, causes further problems.⁸⁹ The tension results from the fact that the LXX inconsistently translated the key Hebrew terms. *Tselem* (image) was generally rendered εἰκὼν, but *demuth* (likeness) received a variety of translations. Gen 1:26 in the LXX uses ὁμοίωσιν, a translation choice also

⁸⁶ Jacobsen, "Importance of Genesis 1-3," 305-6; Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, 5-7; Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 211-16; Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 101-12.

⁸⁷ For a summary of the historiography, see Bingham and Todd, "Irenaeus's Text," 371-72.

⁸⁸ To be discussed in Chapter 2.

⁸⁹ Irenaeus did not see the use of the LXX as a complication, but as a divine blessing. In *Against Heresies* he provides one of the more detailed descriptions of the Septuagint's legendary formation. He affirmed the translation as "truly divine" because seventy elders independently produced a translation, and when compared, all seventy were identical." *Haer.* 3.21.2. See Starratt, "Use of the Septuagint."

used consistently in Ezekiel.⁹⁰ Genesis 5:1, 3, however, confused matters greatly.⁹¹ *Demuth* appears in both v. 1 and 3 in the Hebrew, but the LXX, contrary to how it translated Gen 1:26, does not employ *ὁμοίωσιν* for either verse. Rather, verse one used *εἰκῶν*, while verse three introduced *ἰδέαν*. *Tselem* appears in verse 3 only, and there the precedent of Gen 1:26 is followed, translating the word into *εἰκῶν*. That choice is again utilized in Gen 9:6, *εἰκῶν* being used by the LXX to translate *tselem*. Between Gen 1:26, 5:1, 3, and 9:6 the LXX consistently renders *tselem* as *εἰκῶν*.⁹² *Demuth*, however, is consistently inconsistent, with the three Genesis occurrences being translated by the LXX into three different words.⁹³ These are the difficulties received by Irenaeus and they are important to note, for, as Middleton observes, these are “the only three explicit references to the *imago Dei* notion in the entire Old Testament.”⁹⁴

To summarize: interpretation of the Gen 1:26 motif requires one to probe an infrequently discussed, lexically confused subject matter. Irenaeus not only inherited varieties of both primary and secondary interpretations, but he also inherited a text that added further levels of complication through their translation inconsistencies. In addition, today’s readers cannot be absolutely certain of Irenaeus’ own consistency, as the Greek of both *Against Heresies* and *Demonstration*. are almost entirely lost. As a

⁹⁰ For example, see Ezek 1:26, 28; 8:2.

⁹¹ “When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God. When Adam had lived one hundred thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image . . .” Gen 5:1, 3.

⁹² The only exception to this is Gen 1:27, where the LXX condenses the double “in the image” statement (“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them.”). The Hebrew contains two uses of *Tselem*, not so the LXX.

⁹³ Jacobsen argues that the terms were essentially synonymous in Hebrew, but “the translation into Greek in the Septuagint establishes the basis for the distinction between the two words which becomes a common-place among the Church Fathers.” Jacobsen, “Importance of Genesis 1–3,” 305.

⁹⁴ Middleton, “Liberating Image?,” 8.

result of these issues, any attempt at interpreting Irenaeus' meaning must proceed with great caution. This is especially true where an attempt is made to differentiate between *imago* and *similitudo*. This study will, therefore, prioritize a conceptual, rather than lexical focus. That is to say, the analysis of Irenaeus' meaning will focus primarily on the context surrounding the key pericopes.

Methodological Approach to Irenaeus' *Imago* Texts

The examination of the *imago Dei* prior to Irenaeus privileged those texts which, like Gen 1:26, referenced both the divine image and likeness. This approach will continue with the study of *Haer.* 3–5 and is, therefore, the first criterion for the selection of texts to be examined. The second criterion concerns the pool from which the texts will be chosen. As noted earlier, there is a noticeable trend throughout *Against Heresies* as to the terms and their usage. In Books 1 and 2, where the discussion is almost exclusively focussed upon Gnostic views, *imago/εἰκῶν* is most frequently referenced in isolation. Books 3 through 5, however, generally pair that term with *similitudo/ὁμοίωσιν* wherever anthropology and/or soteriology are in view.⁹⁵ As such, this study will be limited to those books.⁹⁶ The final criterion used to select the texts was to choose those that represent a meaningful contribution to a larger reflection on the spiritual life. Although such a criterion is subjective and potentially restrictive, in this case it has narrowed the selection only minimally. According to Fantino's research, of the twenty-three instances

⁹⁵ Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, 184–87.

⁹⁶ There are four image and likeness texts in the *Demonstration* (*Epid.* 11, 32, 33, 97), but they do not offer significant expansion upon the insights found in the *Against Heresies* texts. Where relevant, the *Demonstration* texts will be included throughout the study. For a study dedicated to the *imago Dei* in the *Demonstration*, see MacKenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration*, chapter 2.

where *imago* and *similitudo* appear together in *Against Heresies*, all but four of them are located in Books 3 through 5. Of those, this dissertation will examine all but three.⁹⁷

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated Irenaeus' pastoral concerns as a bishop of antiquity. These concerns are observed in his emphasis on unity and truth within the Church and in his emphasis on authentic Christian spirituality. Irenaeus' reflections on the *imago Dei* are one of the primary ways he interacted with these concerns. These reflections followed a century of varied approaches to and utilization of Gen 1:26. On the one hand, he moved the discussion forward simply on account of the sheer volume of his writings. If one includes his recounting of Gnostic interpretations on the subject, the Bishop of Lyons wrote more about the divine image and likeness than all that had been written before (extant and combined). On the other hand, *Against Heresies* is famous, as noted above, for offering an apparently inconsistent interpretation of the motif. The next chapter will seek to bring some clarity by identifying the tradition of interpretation of Gen 1:26 prior to the writing of *Against Heresies*.

⁹⁷ *Haer.* 5.21.2, 28.4, 36.3. In addition, one text not included in Fantino's list will be examined. *Haer.* 4.35–37 does not include a combined "image and likeness" construction as do most of the other texts, but both *imago* and *similitudo* appear throughout this section. Moreover, the section as a whole is important for the larger questions concerning Irenaeian spirituality. The three texts not examined repeat themes covered by other texts.

CHAPTER 2:
THE *IMAGO DEI* PRIOR TO IRENAEUS: SOURCES AND INTERPRETATION

An investigation into the quotations and allusions to Gen 1:26 prior to Irenaeus yields a great diversity of results. Part 1 of this chapter briefly examines the occurrences of the *imago Dei* found in the Old and New Testaments, the apostolic fathers, the Christian apologists of the mid-second century, and from Tatian the Assyrian. Part 2 probes the perspectives of Irenaeus' heretical opponents as described early in *Against Heresies*. Throughout this survey it is observed that in addition to a diversity of interpretations, there is also a development of thought that occurs. This development is important for understanding the positions later argued by Irenaeus.

The *Imago Dei* in Scripture and Early Christian Texts

The Biblical Tradition

Irenaeus' interpretation of the *imago Dei* draws on both Old and New Testament texts. The first point of importance for this study is noting the paucity of references to the divine image and likeness throughout the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Indeed, as subsequent paragraphs will demonstrate, these references are both rare and inconsistent in their apparent meaning.

Old Testament Issues

At the heart of any interpretation of the *Imago Dei* is Gen 1:26. It reads, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man (*adam*) in our image (*tselem*), after our likeness (*demuth*)”¹ The passage is notoriously difficult to interpret. The context of the pericope offers little explanation and, as will be observed below, there is little to no reflection on the theme throughout the rest of the Old Testament.

Apart from Gen 1:26 there are only two other texts that clearly have the motif in view; both are in Genesis.¹ The first, Gen 5:1–3, reads, “When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness (*dāmūth*) of God. Male and female he created them . . . [Adam later] became the father of a son in his likeness (*dāmūth*), according to his image (*tselem*)”² The second, Gen 9:6, declares that any who spills another’s blood will also die “for in his own image (*tselem*) God made humankind.” Conceptually, these three verses do not precisely identify what is meant by being made in the divine image. On the contrary, they create confusion whether the heart of the issue concerns human nature, physical resemblance, refers to relationality, rationality, or something else besides. Use of the Hebrew terms throughout the rest of the Old Testament does little to help clarify the situation.³ References to “image” (*tselem*) reveal a wide semantic range, while “likeness” (*demuth*) is often used synonymously.⁴ McDowell has recently argued these texts are sufficient to form an intelligible portrait of an Old Testament theology of

¹ For a helpful summary, see Middleton, “Liberating Image?,” 8.

² Gen 5:1–3.

³ For two in-depth studies, see Middleton, *The Liberating Image*; Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*.

⁴ *Demuth* is most frequently used in prophetic literature and generally describes an appearance of the glory of God.

the divine image.⁵ Nevertheless, the paucity of references, along with the previously noted translation issues within the text received by Irenaeus (the LXX), combine to create a difficult lexical dilemma for the second-century bishop.

New Testament

It has been conclusively demonstrated that Irenaeus had access to the majority of the texts that would comprise the New Testament canon.⁶ Moreover, one of his expressed principles of interpretation included requiring scripture—which he regarded as a unified whole—to interpret scripture.⁷ Unfortunately, the New Testament passages on the divine image and likeness provide little expansion to the basic idea of the *imago* found in the Old Testament. New Testament references can be organized into three general categories. First, there are those passages which mirror Gen 1:26 and the association of humanity with the *imago Dei*. Of these, however, there are only two clear instances. First Corinthians 11 implores a man to leave his head unveiled, since he is the *εἰκὼν* and *doxa* of God. Interestingly, and perhaps with the Gen 5 passage in view, women are said (in the same verse) to be the *doxa* of man.⁸ The second reference is found in Jas 3:9, an admonition against those who would curse another, those “made in the *ὁμοίωσιν* of God.” As before, the texts exhibit a lack of clarification on the one hand and

⁵ McDowell offers a careful examination of the issues, with particular focus on the divine “image” (*tselem*). She notes components of the relational, ritual, royal, and constitutional nature of humanity. See McDowell, *Image of God*. My special thanks to Mark Boda for bringing McDowell’s work to my attention and for sharpening my thinking on the issues.

⁶ “Though he does not clearly define the boundaries of Scripture, the central elements are those of the Christian Bible today.” Westerholm and Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture*, 52. Further, it is noted that reference is made to all the New Testament books, with two exceptions: 3 John and Jude.

⁷ Graves, “Irenaeus,” 28–29; Bushur, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 112; Westerholm and Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture*, 63–64.

⁸ 1 Cor 11:7.

inconsistency of terms on the other hand. In addition, neither of them follows Gen 1:26 by combining εἰκῶν and ὁμοίωσιν.

A second category of texts is those that reference Christ as the image of God. Here, humankind is not in view; it is Christ who is the εἰκῶν of God. There are two such pericopes.⁹ The third category is the most common in the New Testament. These texts have both humanity and Christ in view. Romans 8 refers to the Son sent in the ὁμοιώματι of flesh, and to the elect, those predestined to be conformed to the εἰκόνοσ of the Son.¹⁰ First Corinthians 15 expresses a similar idea, but here the saved will move from being in the εἰκόνα of the man of dust, to become those who will bear the εἰκόνα of the man from heaven.¹¹ Two other passages follow the pattern whereby the transformation is said to be according to the εἰκόνα of the Lord.¹² Philippians 2 follows the precedent set by the Romans 8 passage, using ὁμοιώματι to describe Christ the servant having taken up the “likeness” of men. These three categories of usage, taken together, reveal continued variety and inconsistency of both terminology and concept. The one exception, however, is the consistent Pauline association of ὁμοιώματι to describe Christ’s descent and conformity to humanity, while εἰκόν is used to describe the ascent and transformation of humanity to God.¹³ These texts will be shown to be of greatest importance in Irenaeus’ theology.

⁹ 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15.

¹⁰ Rom 8:3, 29.

¹¹ “The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.” 1 Cor 15:47–49.

¹² 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:5. The Colossians passage has the renewal occur in the image of the creator.

¹³ Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 15–42.

Early Patristic Tradition

The corpus of early Christian literature prior to Irenaeus (excluding the New Testament) is not extensive. To illustrate, the first volume of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* contains the writings of the apostolic fathers, apologists, and Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*—which occupies nearly half of the volume. As such, references to the *imago Dei* are likely to be few strictly on account of the paucity of sources from which to draw. The remainder of this chapter attempts to identify and briefly summarize all significant allusions to the image and likeness of God prior to Irenaeus. Most if not all of these sources were probably known to the bishop of Lyons.¹⁴

Apostolic Fathers

The collection of late-first and second-century texts known as the apostolic fathers are distinguished, if for no other reason, because of their close historical proximity to the New Testament era. They are compiled together and ascribed their unique name because it came to be accepted that “each writing in the collection had come from an early Christian author who knew one or more of the first-century apostles . . . or who at least had received instruction from the disciples of the apostles.”¹⁵ In view of their antiquity, they are the first to be examined for traces of *imago Dei* interpretation.¹⁶

¹⁴ Grant (*Irenaeus of Lyons*) suggests that Irenaeus was “acquainted with the writings of most of the so-called Apostolic Fathers: 1 Clement (not 2 Clement), Ignatius, Polycarp, and Hermas (not the Didache or Barnabas), as well as two of the apologists: Justin and Theophilus, plus Justin’s renegade disciple Tatian” (1).

¹⁵ Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers*, 1. Jefford suggests the “apostolic father” moniker may have begun with the seventeenth-century French scholar J. B. Cotelier. He “used the Latin phrase *patres aevi apostolici* (or in English translation, “fathers of the apostolic period”) as part of the title for his two-volume work on these early Christian writings.” Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers*, 1.

¹⁶ Those books that do not mention or allude to the *imago Dei* will not be discussed.

1 Clement

First Clement (c. AD 80–100) is an epistle from the leaders of the Church at Rome to the Christians in Corinth and is possibly the oldest surviving Christian text outside of the New Testament.¹⁷ As such, its reference to Gen 1:26 is among the earliest patristic witnesses and of great interest to this study. Predictably, *Clement*—following the example of the New Testament texts—does not develop fully a doctrine of the *imago Dei*. Rather, the motif is used to reinforce a concern for zealous piety, a central concern of the epistle. The treatise argues that the Church should “hasten with earnestness and zeal to accomplish every good work. For the Creator and Master of the universe himself rejoices in his works.”¹⁸ He recounts God’s creative activity, which reaches its climax with “the most excellent and by far the greatest work of his intelligence, with his holy and faultless hands he formed humankind as a representation of his own image.”¹⁹ Gen 1:26 is then quoted in full, followed by a reference to the divine blessing given in v. 28 (to lead and subdue creation). He concludes the chapter, stating “We have seen that all the righteous have been adorned with good works. Indeed, the Lord himself, having adorned himself with good works, rejoiced. So, since we have this pattern, let us unhesitatingly conform ourselves to his will; let us with all our strength do the work of righteousness.”²⁰ In summary, Clement’s concern is not with referencing the *imago Dei* in order to reflect on humanity’s nature or relationship to God, but to leverage it for pastoral purposes. It is a call for the Corinthians to pursue zealous piety.

¹⁷ Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 35–36; Jefford, *Apostolic Fathers*, 11–12.

¹⁸ *1 Clem.*, 33:1b, 2 (Holmes, 87).

¹⁹ *1 Clem.*, 33:4 (Holmes, 89).

²⁰ *1 Clem.*, 33:7, 8 (Holmes, 89).

The Epistle of Barnabas

The Epistle of Barnabas (c. AD 80–130) repeats Gen 1:26 on two occasions.²¹ Neither includes interpretation, but both introduce two unique features. First, the references appear to function with the purpose of elevating Christ. Both texts understand God’s plural statement of letting “us” make humanity to refer to the Son. The Father and Son create together. Christology is clearly the primary concern, with no explicit attention given to ideas about human nature. The second unique feature is that both texts include a soteriological emphasis; Christ’s work was one of restoration and renewal for those created in the divine image. He came to “prepare a new people,”²² to create them “anew by His Spirit [and] accomplish a second fashioning.”²³ Although *Barnabas* does not reflect on the meaning of the *imago Dei*, his relating of Gen 1:26 to Christology and soteriology anticipates future developments.

The Epistle to Diognetus

The Epistle to Diognetus is among the earliest of Christian apologetic works. Although the dating of this text varies widely (anywhere between AD 117–320), Holmes and Jefford suggest somewhere between AD 150–225 is “most likely.”²⁴ Eric Osborn, a renowned scholar of second-century Christianity, dated *Diognetus* prior to Irenaeus’ writing of *Against Heresies*.²⁵ It is in Chapter 10 of the epistle where the reference to the *imago Dei* is found. It follows a beautiful reflection on Christ’s saving work and his invitation for his people to know him. Faith, he continued, requires the believer to

²¹ *Barn.*, 5, 6. For an introduction to the text, see Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 370–75.

²² *Barn.*, 5 (Holmes, 393).

²³ *Barn.*, 6 (Holmes, 399).

²⁴ Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 689; Jefford, *Apostolic Fathers*, 23.

²⁵ Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 75.

“acquire full knowledge of the Father.”²⁶ Such knowledge is possible, because God loves humanity and gave them reason, He gave them a mind, and to “them alone he permitted to look up to heaven, to them he created in his own image, to them he sent his one and only Son, to them he promised the kingdom in heaven, which he will give to those who have loved him.”²⁷ The reference to the divine image is, on the one hand, potentially insignificant. There is no explicit explanation of its meaning, situated as it is in a long list of blessings given by God. On the other hand, if the author envisioned a connection between the *imago Dei* and the references to the mind and to rationality, then this would be an important development for the second century.²⁸

Following the *imago* reference, *Diognetus* expressed another concept of interest for this study. The text had been discussing why knowledge of God was possible for humankind. Having received such knowledge, the natural response should be to love Him more. Moreover,

By loving him you will be an imitator of his goodness. And do not be surprised that a person can become an imitator of God; one can, if God is willing . . . [He] who provides to those in need things that one has received from God, and thus becomes a god to those who receive them—this one is an imitator of God.²⁹

The text is interesting because it includes previously identified *imago* themes (piety and personal renewal), as well as those which become more apparent in the later second century (rationality and becoming like God).

²⁶ *Diogn.*, 10:1 (*Holmes*, 711).

²⁷ *Diogn.*, 10:2 (*Holmes*, 713).

²⁸ As will be demonstrated below, this is a development observed in Athenagoras, albeit in much greater detail. This would thus lend support to the dating of *Diognetus* to the era immediately preceding Irenaeus.

²⁹ *Diogn.*, 10:4, 6 (*Holmes*, 713).

The Greek Apologists

Three key influences on Irenaeus emerged in the third quarter of the second century. Justin, known as the Martyr, wrote in the early 150s and was possibly one of Irenaeus' instructors.³⁰ He is the best-known among those whose writings would contribute to the traditions received and recorded in *Against Heresies*. Two more important sources appeared in the years immediately preceding the date when it is assumed Irenaeus began writing. Athenagoras, whom tradition names an Athenian philosopher, was said to be the first director of the famed Catechetical School of Alexandria.³¹ His treatises, *Embassy for the Christians* and *The Resurrection of the Dead*,³² along with Bishop Theophilus of Antioch's *To Autolycus* were significant sources for Irenaeus in general, and for the advancement of thinking concerning the *imago Dei* in particular. Both texts are generally assumed to have been written in the 170s.³³

Justin Martyr and *On the Resurrection*

Justin Martyr did not frequently reference the *imago Dei*. There are no allusions in the *Apologies* and only one in the *Dialogue with Trypho*. There, Gen 1:26 is quoted, but its purpose has nothing to do with anthropology or spirituality. Rather, his motivation is to

³⁰ Robinson, "Debt of Irenaeus," 6–23; Minns and Parvis, eds., *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr*; Parvis, "Justin Martyr," 53–61.

³¹ For the few details known about his life, see Crehan, ed., *Athenagoras*, 3–11; For a summary of his key theological contributions, Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 100–111; See also, Rankin, *Athenagoras*.

³² Scholars have not always accepted Athenagoras' authorship. In support, see Pouderon, *D'Athènes à Alexandrie*, 71–143; In opposition, see Grant, "Athenagoras or Pseudo-Athenagoras," 121–29.

³³ See Crehan, ed., *Athenagoras*, 4–8; Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 143. Briggman offers a compelling case for Irenaeus having acquired Theophilus' *To Autolycus* mid-way through his writing of *Against Heresies*. See Briggman, "Dating Irenaeus' Acquisition," 397–402. See also; Barnes, "Irenaeus's Trinitarian Theology," 94.

illustrate that the corporate “let *us* fashion” emphasis of the text proves that Wisdom—who he associates with Christ—was with God from the beginning.³⁴

More interesting, however, is a fragment from the contested work known as *On the Resurrection*.³⁵ Here the *imago Dei* is referenced to deny claims that suggested the flesh of humanity would not be resurrected. The text reasons that since humanity is made in the very image and likeness of God, and since “fleshly man” is certainly in view (in Genesis), then

is it not absurd to say, that the flesh made by God in His own image is contemptible, and worth nothing, [And] . . . that the flesh is with God a precious possession is obvious, first from its being formed by Him, if at least the image is valuable to the former and artist; and besides, its value can be gathered from the creation of the rest of the world. For that on account of which the rest is made, is the most precious of all to the maker.³⁶

The significance of the passage is twofold. First, there is here the inference that to be created in the divine image is to resemble God. The issue is not pressed firmly, but the repudiation of the flesh is condemned as absurd by way of drawing a correlation to the divine image with human flesh. Second, the elevation of importance to the flesh in

³⁴ “‘Let us make man after our image and likeness.’ . . . I shall quote again the words narrated by Moses himself, from which we can indisputably learn that [God] conversed with some one who was numerically distinct from Himself. . . . [Moses] has declared that [there is a certain] number of persons associated with one another, and that they are at least two. . . . But this Offspring, which was truly brought forth from the Father, was with the Father before all the creatures, and the Father communed with Him; even as the Scripture by Solomon has made clear, that He whom Solomon calls Wisdom.” Justin, *Dial.* 62 (ANF 1:228).

³⁵ Osborn acknowledges scholarly doubt over the fragments’ authenticity. Nevertheless, following Prigent he argues that “a comparison of the work with Justin’s other writings supports its authenticity, and the arguments advanced against it are shown to have little force. Tertullian and Irenaeus seem to have known [it].” Osborn, *Justin Martyr*, 13; Prigent, *Justin et l’Ancien Testament*, 50–52. Parvis, in one of his several contributions to this question admits some scholars share Osborn’s position, but he indicates the position is not “widely embraced.” Parvis, *Justin Martyr*, xiv–xv. For a detailed study of the issues see Whealey, “Pseudo-Justin’s *De resurrectione*,” 420–30. Several studies of Justin do not mention *On the Resurrection* at all. Rather, it is frequently stated that there are only three authentic texts and the rest are spurious. Minns and Parvis, eds., *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr*, 33–34; Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 52; Parvis, “Justin Martyr,” 60.

³⁶ On Res., 7 (ANF 1:297).

general, and in relation to the resurrection specifically are themes of great importance to Irenaeus. If the *Resurrection* is authentically Justin's, it is easy to see its influence on the bishop of Lyons.

Athenagoras of Athens

Athenagoras is distinguished as being among the earliest Christian writers to reference the *imago Dei* in the context of anthropology.³⁷ In the twelfth chapter of *The Resurrection* humanity is recognized as the pinnacle of creation. All else in creation was made for humans, those alone endowed with reason and judgment. Indeed, "those who bear in themselves the image of the Creator, whose nature involves the possession of mind and who partake of rational judgment, He has set apart an eternal existence."³⁸ He elaborates further in the next chapter—a lengthy reflection worth repeating:

Let us examine our own nature. We put up with the needs and wastage of this life as not suited to the present time, and we have a firm hope in our permanence in immortality. We do not fabricate this hope idly from human testimony, beguiling ourselves with fraudulent hopes, but we have given credence to a surety that can never lead us astray—the mind of our maker, according to which man was made of an immortal soul and a body, was endowed with intelligence and with a law implanted in him that would safeguard and protect the Creator's gifts to him that were suited to a conscious being with a rational life. . . . We are well aware that God would not have created such a living being and endowed him with all the gifts suited to permanence, if He did not want His creature to be permanent. If then the Creator of all made man to share in a conscious life and, when he had become the witness of His majesty and all-embracing wisdom, to abide forever in the contemplation of these, according to the divine purpose and the nature he had received, then the reason for his coming guarantees his permanence forever, and his permanence guarantees his resurrection, for without this he would not be permanent as man.³⁹

³⁷ See the introduction in Crehan, ed., *Athenagoras*.

³⁸ *Res.*, 12 (ACW 23:96–97).

³⁹ *Res.*, 13 (ACW 23:96–97).

The significance of the text should be apparent, relative to the insights of the earlier writers. Here the reader notes the *imago Dei* is part of a larger discussion not only of human nature and its unique characteristics, but of the fact of the exclusive, eternal connection to the divine itself. However, the challenge with this text is the same as has been observed earlier. The question is whether the descriptive remarks concerning human nature are predicated upon the *imago Dei*, or whether humanity's "imaged" relationship to God is simply one of many unique blessings afforded to the Creator's favoured created beings. In all likelihood, the answer lies somewhere in between. Understanding, rationality, and permanence were unique to Adam and his race, but it is clear that possession of the divine image is a crucial point for Athenagoras, particularly as it relates to permanence. The purpose of the chapter, and, indeed the entire treatise, centers upon the theme of resurrection. Athenagoras' argument is that a human rising again is rational *because* of the permanence that comes *as a result* of the unique connection of humanity to God.⁴⁰ The text does not go into enough detail to warrant a claim that the *imago Dei* is clearly defined and explicated in any comprehensive way. Nor can it be said that concern for the divine image was a central feature of Athenagoras' theology. Were that the case one would expect more references to it throughout his writings, particularly in those places where human nature and composition are elsewhere discussed,⁴¹ where the pattern and fashioning of creation are described,⁴² and when humanity's potential for communion with God is outlined.⁴³

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the logic and philosophical foundations of his permanence argument, see Crehan, ed., *Athenagoras*, 174 n. 43.

⁴¹ Chapter 7 through to the end of the *Resurrection* contains more than 50 references to human nature. The appearance of the *imago Dei* in Chapter 12 is, however, the only one of its kind.

⁴² *Leg.*, 6, 8; *Res.*, 5.

⁴³ *Leg.*, 13, 33.

Apart from this one text from *Resurrection*, however, the *imago* does not elsewhere appear. Nevertheless, Athenagoras' insights are an important step in anticipation of Irenaeus.

Theophilus of Antioch

According to Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, Theophilus served as Bishop of Antioch between AD 169–177.⁴⁴ Although Irenaeus never mentioned this bishop who was contemporaneous with him, many scholars are now confident that *Against Heresies* drew upon *To Autolycus*, his lone extant work.⁴⁵

There are two important developments observed in Theophilus' discussion of the *imago Dei*. First, his three references to both the image and the likeness of God are quite rare, relative to that point in history. Prior to *Autolycus*, image (εἰκῶν) and likeness (ὁμοίωσις) appear together as a pair (following the pattern of Gen 1:26) only five times in four early Christian texts (one of which includes the lone New Testament usage).⁴⁶ General statements about the "image of God" were somewhat more common, but reference to the likeness was rare indeed. Granted, Theophilus' three citations are not

⁴⁴ *Hist. eccl.*, 4.24. Eusebius indicates Theophilus was the 6th bishop following the apostles.

⁴⁵ Loofs' study established the importance of the connection between the two second century writers. Although his critique of Irenaeus has been largely overturned, his identification of the relationship between Irenaeus and Theophilus continues. Briggman argues convincingly that Irenaeus received, or began incorporating Theophilus' ideas midway through the writings of *Against Heresies*. His argument centers on the shift in Irenaeus' quotation and use of Ps 33:6. He notes that part-way through Book 3 Irenaeus adjusts his use to follow a variant quotation of the Psalm as utilized by Theophilus. This, combined with other parallels, led Briggman to conclude Irenaeus' reception of *Autol* followed Chapter 8 of Book 3, but preceded Chapter 24. Briggman, "Dating Irenaeus' acquisition," 397–402; Loofs, *Theophilus*. Cf. Lashier (*Irenaeus on the Trinity*, 26–20) who also provides a helpful overview of the historiography on this issue. See also Hitchcock, "Loofs' Theory of Theophilus," 130–39; Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*; Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*.

⁴⁶ Rom 8:3; 1 Clem. 33; Barn. 5, 6; Trypo 62. Two references in Pseudo-Justin include *Address to the Greeks* 34 and 38. For a thorough discussion, including of references to the divine image that do not follow the Gen 1:26 construction, see Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, chapter 6.

abundant. Nevertheless, in view of how common the combined construction would become in Irenaeus, it is notable that Theophilus was the first to prefer εἰκῶν and ὁμοίωσιν over εἰκῶν alone and to provide some commentary on it.⁴⁷ That commentary provides the second important development. Not only does Theophilus expound on the meaning of the *imago Dei*, but his reflection on human nature is directly connected to divine likeness—an association only hinted at in the earlier writers.

The first pericope of note is from *Autolycus* 2.11. The chapter is a commentary on the six days of creation and contains two significant texts. The first recounts day three of God’s creative activity, including the following statement: “God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed after its kind (γένος) and in its likeness (ὁμοιότητα), and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself, in its likeness: and it was so.”⁴⁸ This passage is noteworthy as it is the first description or analogy of any kind provided for “likeness.” The picture of the seed bringing forth grass and the tree, fruit, is important as it anticipates the likeness that is to be declared between God and humanity. The term is nowhere else used to describe the various elements and creatures fashioned throughout the six days. There are the seeds and trees which produce a likeness, and on the humanity fashioned in God’s Image. Recounting the sixth day, Theophilus quotes Gen 1:26: “And God said, “Let us make man in our image (εἰκόνα), after our likeness (ὁμοίωσιν); and let them have dominion [over the creatures]. And God created man: in the image of God created He him; male and female

⁴⁷ For a thorough analysis of Theophilus’ use of Genesis and the Creation narrative, see Prostmeier, “Genesis 1-3,” 359–94.

⁴⁸ *Autol.*, II:11 (ANF 2:98). Translation modified to reflect contemporary grammar.

He created them. And God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, subdue it, and have dominion . . .’⁴⁹

The reference or allusion to Gen 1:26 has been observed several times in the earlier writers, but Theophilus’ use of *ὁμοιότητα* and *ὁμοίωσιν* suggests an important parallel. The relationship of a fruit to its tree, if used as an analogy for the relationship between humanity and God, hints at an ontological connection heretofore unexplored by earlier Christian writers. Admittedly, this one paragraph would represent shallow evidence were it to stand in isolation. Fortunately, Theophilus had more to say on the subject. Over the next several chapters commentary is provided on each of the six days of creation. Concerning the fashioning of humankind, Theophilus declared:

But as to what relates to the creation of man, his own creation cannot be explained by man, though it is a succinct account of it which holy Scripture gives. For when God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness,” He first intimates (*μηνύει*) the dignity (*ἀξίωμα*) of man. For God having made all things by His Word, and having reckoned them all mere bye-works, reckons the creation of man to be the only work worthy of His own hands. Moreover, God is found, as if needing help, to say, “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.” But to no one else than to His own Word and wisdom did He say, “Let Us make.” And when He had made and blessed him, that he might increase and replenish the earth, He put all things under his dominion, and at his service; and He appointed from the first that he should find nourishment from the fruits of the earth . . .⁵⁰

Theophilus was by no means the first to reflect upon the unique, privileged, and blessed status of humankind over and against the rest of creation. Two of the ways this had been previously stated included references to humanity’s freedom of the will and their authority to subdue and rule the earth. The *imago Dei* was frequently a part of these reflections, but *Autolycus* made the connections more explicit. Theophilus suggested

⁴⁹ *Autol.*, II:11 (ANF 2:99). Translation modified to reflect contemporary grammar.

⁵⁰ *Autol.*, II:18 (ANF 2:101).

that to speak of creation in the image and likeness of God was to reveal something about humanity's ἀξίωμα: its worth, or quality.⁵¹ The first point to describe this quality is to again express the superiority of the human race. The rest of creation is secondary, subordinate by-works (πάρεργα). The status of Adam and his progeny was not due to the good fortune of being created on the sixth day, or because of simply being favoured. The exalted position is because Adam alone was shaped by the very hands of God.⁵² Here another important parallel is revealed. As humanity's likeness to God can be compared to the likeness of a fruit and its parent tree, so humanity's worth (ἀξίωμα) is connected to being declared to be the only creation worthy (ἄξιον) of His hands. A few chapters later Theophilus goes into further detail on human nature, confirming the profound connection he envisioned between God and humankind. In Paradise, Adam was given "means of advancement, in order that, maturing and becoming perfect, and being even declared a god, he might thus ascend into heaven in possession of immortality. For man had been made a middle nature."⁵³ He elaborates further in Chapter 27 on this middle nature, indicating that humanity was created neither mortal nor immortal. Rather, he was

capable of both; so that if he should incline to the things of immortality, keeping the commandment of God, he should receive as reward from Him immortality, and should become God; but if, on the other hand, he should turn to the things of death, disobeying God, he should himself be the cause of death to himself. For God made man free, and with power over himself . . .⁵⁴

⁵¹ BDAG, 648.

⁵² Grant ("Scripture, Rhetoric and Theology," 39) observes that while Adam was fashioned with God's hands, the rest of creation was spoken into being by a "word."

⁵³ *Autol.*, II:24 (ANF 2:104). In this text Theophilus describes Adam's return to Paradise from the earth. Schoedal ("Theophilus of Antioch," 285) correctly identifies an attempt here to reconcile Gen 2:8 and 2:15: two separate accounts of Adam's placement in Eden.

⁵⁴ *Autol.*, II:27 (ANF 2:105).

It is outside the scope of this study to fully explore Theophilus' meaning that Adam had the potential to be declared a god, even to become God.⁵⁵ The point of interest is simply to highlight this intimate connection between humanity and the divine. Adam possessed something intrinsically important within his nature, something no other creature could claim: his fashioning in the image and divine likeness was the most important characteristic of his nature. It was his dignity, his great worth as a creature and this itself was predicated on God's personal handling of his formation. Humankind gained worth through the intimate touch of the divine hands and it was that touch alone that made Adam worthy.

Most of the elements discussed by Theophilus in the creation narrative have been observed in the earlier writers. The Genesis passages have been quoted, divine hands have been referenced, so too immortality, human nature, the requirements of piety, and echoes of divinization. The texts of *Autolytus* are distinguished not by the individual elements but by the central place attributed the *imago Dei*. Theophilus, more than any of his predecessors sought to clearly reflect upon the question of what it means to be in the divine image and likeness.

Tatian the Assyrian

Tatian (c. AD 120–180), known as the Assyrian or the Barbarian, is an interesting voice from the second century. His *Oration to the Greeks* is a valuable text for this study, but it, like its author, possesses peculiarities. Early in *Oration* Tatian identifies himself as a

⁵⁵ The issues will be discussed in great detail in Chapter 4. On Theophilus and deification, see Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 103–5; Kharlamov, “Deification in the Apologists,” 77–79; Tabor, “Theology of Redemption,” 166–67.

Barbarian philosopher. While it was not unusual for Christian thinkers of this era to employ the latter term (Justin and Athenagoras also styled themselves as philosophers) to admit one was a Barbarian was very unusual. As John Fojtiki demonstrates, such a move would not have endeared a Christian apologist to pagan audiences. Indeed, Tatian's treatise was addressed to the elite and educated of Greek society, making his admission even more surprising.⁵⁶ The treatise is also unique in that though it is accepted as a work of Christian apology, Tatian never refers to his faith as Christian. Again, his self-identification is to Barbarian philosophy.⁵⁷

The inclusion of Tatian in this section with other early Christian texts is somewhat controversial.⁵⁸ Irenaeus, for example, counted the self-styled Barbarian-philosopher among those who fabricated their own doctrines and demonstrated a belief in the accursed Aeon-speculations. Moreover, Irenaeus was also unimpressed with the *Diatessaron* and with Tatian's rejection of the idea that Adam was not included in Christ's recapitulative salvation.⁵⁹ The bishop of Lyons admits that while a student of Justin, Tatian remained sound in teaching. It is likely that the *Oration* was written during this period, as Emily Hunt has convincingly argued.⁶⁰ With Justin's martyrdom, however, the Barbarian "apostatized from the Church, and as a teacher he was conceited

⁵⁶ Fojtik, "Tatian the Barbarian," 23. Fojtik's article is a fascinating study that seeks to explain Tatian's motives and rhetorical strategy.

⁵⁷ Fojtik, "Tatian the Barbarian," 24.

⁵⁸ As a result, I have included him among neither the apologists, nor with the heretics that follow.

⁵⁹ Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 104, 181. For further differences between Tatian and Irenaeus, see Andia, *Homo vivens*, 122–24.

⁶⁰ Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century*, 3. Rhee (*Early Christian Literature*, 22) offers what is the standard suggestion for the likely years of composition, somewhere between the 150s and late 170s. Hunt (*Christianity in the Second Century*, 2) astutely points out the typical motivations behind the dating, noting "if one is determined to claim the *Oration* for orthodoxy a date prior to Justin's death in 165 is necessary, but if one is anxious to see elements of Tatian's heresy in the *Oration*, as indeed is Grant, one will choose a late date." Robert Grant was the most vocal proponent of a later dating (c. 178–180). See Grant, "The Date of Tatian's *Oration*," 99–101.

and elated and puffed up as if he were superior to the rest. It was then that he composed his own standard of teaching.”⁶¹

Tatian’s discussion of the *imago Dei* offers one reason why a later date of composition might be possible. Indeed, several elements of the text bear striking resemblance to Athenagoras and Theophilus’ ideas. These two writers likely wrote after Justin’s death (c. AD 165), which could, in turn, suggest Tatian’s *Oration* was also of this later date.

Similar to Theophilus, Tatian three times referenced the image and likeness together. As noted earlier, such frequency is not particularly significant other than to observe that it is only with Theophilus and Irenaeus circa AD 180 that such a construction became widespread. More significant are the *Oration*’s reflections on immortality and a quasi-divinization teaching. Whereas Athenagoras and Theophilus indicated that immortality was a possibility for humanity, Tatian was more direct. He states that humankind was “made an image of immortality, so that, as incorruption is with God, in like manner, man, sharing in a part of God, might have the immortal principle also.”⁶² A few chapters later, he attempted to qualify the statement. He was not willing to suggest that the human soul was, by nature, immortal, but that “it is possible for it [the soul] not to die.”⁶³ Concerning how the possibility is enacted, Tatian argued that if the soul “knows not the truth, it dies, and is dissolved with the body, but rises again at last at the end of the world with the body, receiving death by punishment in immortality. But, again, if it acquires the knowledge of God, it dies not, although for a

⁶¹ *Haer.*, 1.28.1 (ACW 55:93).

⁶² *Or. Graec.*, 7 (ANF 2:67).

⁶³ *Or. Graec.*, 13 (ANF 2:70).

time it be dissolved. In itself it is darkness, and there is nothing luminous in it.”

Although Tatian began clearly enough, drawing an apparent correlation between the divine image and humanity’s immortality, subsequent passages seem only to have confused matters. These latter texts make permanence a matter of the acquisition of knowledge, and the soul becomes of secondary importance.

As the discussion turns to the divine image and likeness, again, matters are somewhat confused. First, *Oration 12* identified humanity as originally possessing two “varieties of spirit, one of which is called the soul, but the other is greater than the soul, an image and likeness of God.” Hunt identifies the former as the “material spirit” and the latter as the “divine spirit.”⁶⁴ Other scholars are not so clear on the matter as Hunt. Anna Aagaard observes that with this statement it “is not easy to fathom how Tatian means this to be understood.”⁶⁵ Norman Russell agrees, noting that these two dimensions of the human spirit “are not easily distinguished.”⁶⁶

Though Tatian’s thought is not altogether clear, it is readily apparent that he was attempting to bring greater reflection to important questions. Not only was *Oration* striving to provide a more robust definition of the *imago Dei*, but he was bringing the discussion of the human constitution to bear on the subject as well. The challenge for these early Christian writers—particularly those educated in Greek philosophy—was to reconcile a long history of philosophical concepts and nomenclature with the Christian faith—a task which proved controversial for several centuries. Nevertheless, Tatian attempted to address important issues addressed only briefly by earlier writers. He

⁶⁴ Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century*, 9.

⁶⁵ Aagaard, “My Eyes Have Seen,” 310.

⁶⁶ Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 102.

wrestled with the ideas of creation in the divine image; of experiencing the loss or fracturing of that image, only to have it potentially restored (or be in the process of being restored); of the idea of being in the presence of an external, yet somehow indwelling Spirit of God. Tatian and his predecessors each wrestled with these topics and of the need for them to correspond to and interact with the biblical expressions concerning the human body, soul, and spirit. It is a complex philosophical puzzle and Tatian's attempts are a significant step of development. His conclusions may not have been clear, but the problems he sought to explain were important.

If Tatian erred with anthropological clarity, he found greater success with at least one issue of soteriology. *Oration's* ideas on what humankind was destined for and how they would find their way is not only an important advancement on previous *imago* reflections, but it clearly anticipates Irenaean theology. In Chapter 15 Tatian observes:

it becomes us now to seek for what we once had, but have lost, to unite the soul with the Holy Spirit, and to strive after union with God. The human soul consists of many parts, and is not simple; it is composite, so as to manifest itself through the body; for neither could it ever appear by itself without the body, nor does the flesh rise again without the soul. Man is not, as the croaking philosophers say, merely a rational animal, capable of understanding and knowledge; for, according to them, even irrational creatures appear possessed of understanding and knowledge. But man alone is the image and likeness of God; and I mean by a man, not one who performs actions similar to those of animals, but one who has advanced far beyond mere humanity—to God Himself. This question we have discussed more minutely in the treatise concerning animals. But the principal point to be spoken of now is, what is intended by the image and likeness of God. That which cannot be compared is no other than abstract being; but that which is compared is no other than that which is like. The perfect God is without flesh; but man is flesh. The bond of the flesh is the soul; that which encloses the soul is the flesh. Such is the nature of man's constitution; and, if it be like a temple, God is pleased to dwell in it by the spirit, His representative; but, if it be not such a habitation, man excels the wild beasts in articulate language only, in other respects his manner of life is like theirs, as one who is not a likeness of God.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ *Or. Graec.*, 15 (ANF 2:71).

Admittedly, this chapter is a difficult one. There is an interweaving of concepts and images and Tatian's meaning is not always clear. Nevertheless, there are important glimpses into his understanding of the *imago Dei*. Three elements of his thought are particularly significant. First, he provides a unique insight into the meaning of sharing in the divine image and likeness, connecting the *imago* with the indwelling presence of God himself. This was alluded to earlier, with the assertion that the soul contained two elements, one of which was related to the image. Chapter 15 began with the assertion that humanity must now search for what was lost, seeking to unite the soul with the Holy Spirit. Tatian refers to this as union (*συζυγίαν*) with God. Later in the paragraph he links this directly to the *imago Dei*, arguing that a person possesses the divine image and likeness when she has advanced beyond the normal state of humanity to "God himself." Indeed, a person can be as a temple (*ναός*) for God, who is pleased to indwell, by the Spirit. However, if God is not within a person they are no more than brute beasts and do not possess the divine image. Hunt correctly notes that Tatian's reference to the temple echoes a similar Pauline usage.⁶⁸ She argues the context of those texts concern moral ethics and, "In view of Tatian's own asceticism, it is likely that he interpreted them in an ascetic way, although it is not explicit in his Oration. Tatian uses the passage in explaining what he means by the 'divine image and likeness'; if the body is like a shrine God's spirit will dwell within it, and such indwelling makes man the image of God."⁶⁹ Hunt is correct here, albeit with one caveat. Tatian was indeed attempting to explain the meaning of the *imago*, but as I have sought to demonstrate, the most crucial component

⁶⁸ 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16.

⁶⁹ Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century*, 38.

is the indwelling of the divine presence. It is by having the Spirit of God within a person that determines whether one possesses the divine likeness. Hunt at times appears to blur the lines of distinction between human morality and the human possession of *imago*. Tatian was clear that “the Spirit of God is not with all, but, takes up its abode with those who live justly,”⁷⁰ but this determines how one seeks out the *imago*; it is not analogous with nor a characteristic of it. To put it another way, there is a causal relationship between morality and the divine image; the moral person can make their body a shrine, but the Spirit alone marks one with the God’s image.⁷¹

The second important contribution from *Oration* 15 relates to the discussion of knowledge. Correlation between the *imago* and rationality, the mind, and knowledge appeared earlier in *The Epistle to Diognetus* and with Athenagoras. Tatian’s relationship to and influence from Valentinianism has long been suspect and the reader may detect an elevated emphasis on *gnosis* in *Oration*.⁷² Indeed, there are a few texts that suggest such a connection. In *Oration* 13 Tatian indicates that through the acquisition of knowledge (ἐπίγνωσιν) the soul could be immortalized. This followed the aforementioned reference to the *imago Dei* and the statement that the human spirit was of two kinds—one of which was related to the image and likeness of God. Tatian clarified what transpired against the *imago* in humanity, noting that “in the beginning the spirit was a constant companion of the soul, but the spirit forsook it because it was not willing to follow. Yet, retaining as it were a spark of its power, though unable by

⁷⁰ *Or. Graec.*, 13 (ANF 2:71).

⁷¹ In a later chapter, Hunt is more clear on this point. Indicating Tatian’s view is that “it is man’s connection with the divine spirit that makes him become ‘the image of God.’” Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century*, 137.

⁷² See Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century*, chapter 2.

reason of the separation to discern the perfect.”⁷³ This statement followed shortly after the assertion that knowledge is required for immortality; taken together, one could deduce that Tatian envisioned a simple formula where humanity’s restoration into the *imago Dei* was repaired with possession of divine truth. The idea being that through the acquisition of *gnosis*, salvation was secured. In *Oratio* 15, however, Tatian does not follow this line of thinking. On the contrary, he critiqued the philosophers’ preoccupation with humanity’s rationality and the pursuit of understanding. He observed that even the animals possess some level of understanding and knowledge (νοῦ καὶ ἐπιστήμης). He goes on to argue, however, that there is something qualitatively different about humankind. Namely, that they alone are created in the divine image and likeness. He proceeds, as argued above, to demonstrate the fact that the *imago* in humankind is identified not as one who possesses understanding, but as one who has the divine within. The importance of the text is Tatian’s emphasis on *imago* and the fact that he stresses the need for knowledge but does not elevate the importance of that pursuit above the presence of the divine.

The third and final point of interest from *Oration* 15 concerns the relationship between the *imago Dei* and the human body. This is a theme that will prove important for Irenaeus, but which, prior to him, remained largely unexamined. In Tatian, however, the flesh took on a role of importance. Not only does the *Oration* on several occasions indicate the flesh will participate in the resurrection,⁷⁴ but the 15th chapter provides the hint of an important relationship between embodied spirituality and the *imago Dei*. He

⁷³ *Or. Graec.*, 13. For a discussion on the meaning of Tatian’s divine spark, see Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century*, 70–71.

⁷⁴ *Or. Graec.*, 6, 13, 15.

argues that there can be no soul without a body, nor can the flesh rise without the soul. Tatian moves on to the divine image and likeness texts with the emphasis on the indwelling presence of God and admits that while God himself may not have flesh, humankind is flesh; and the “bond” (δεσμός) of the flesh is the soul. Here Tatian is again not as clear nor his thinking as developed as one would hope. Nevertheless, he was beginning to explore uncharted territory with the divine image and likeness in humanity.

Section Summary

The period of time between the late-first century and the time of Irenaeus’ writing witnessed a significant shift in the interpretation of the *imago Dei*. The Old and New Testament texts are not particularly helpful as the references are sparse and their interpretations varied. The apostolic fathers demonstrate greater unity, focussing primarily on the relationship between the *imago* with Christian virtue and works of righteousness. In the writings of the Christian apologists, however, the diversity of interpretations was again significant. Justin was concerned with Christology, *On the Resurrection* with the goodness of materiality, and Athenagoras with rationality and permanency. Important developments occur, however, with Theophilus and Tatian. In their writings Gen 1:26 begins to be quoted more frequently and with greater theological reflection. They relate the *imago* to the nature of humanity and the relationship to the divine. In this, they anticipate what Irenaeus will argue and they mirror some of the developments seen in the various Gnostic groups.

The Gnostics and Valentinians on the *Imago Dei*

Introduction

A review of literature from the late-first to mid-second century reveals that discussion of the *imago Dei* was not a topic of central concern. However, as the previous section demonstrated, references to the theme increased in the years leading up to Irenaeus' writings. The first two books of *Against Heresies* reveal that image-themed discussion proliferated among those groups opposed by the bishop of Lyons. In Book 1 alone there are more than fifty uses of either *imago* or *similitudo*. This number is far in excess of all extant references prior to Irenaeus. When he articulated his own theological positions in *Haer.* Books 3 through 5 and in the *Demonstration*, he—like his opponents—continued to reference the *imago Dei* with great frequency. The degree to which Gnostic perspectives contributed to Irenaeus' own views is a matter of significant importance. This section will briefly summarize Irenaeus' perspective on his opponents' views.

It is important at the outset to acknowledge the limited scope of this examination. As the purpose is to identify influences on Irenaeus, the presentation of the Gnostic, Valentinian, and various heretical systems will consist almost exclusively of the material found in *Against Heresies*. This is not to deny the profound importance of the Nag Hammadi texts, nor any of the other significant treatises, discoveries, or secondary works from the past century. The work has been so impressive, in fact, that some have suggested contemporary scholars understand the Gnostics better than did Irenaeus himself.⁷⁵ As noted earlier, however, Irenaeus is here trusted in identifying the

⁷⁵ For one example, see Ehrman, *Lost Gospel of Judas*, 60–61. Steenberg would no doubt dismiss such a thought, arguing that “If the large numbers of shared specifics, together with the overwhelming

teachings that reached, and potentially influenced him. His portrayals and explanations may not always be entirely accurate, but this study examines his influences, not his ability to critique them. Therefore, for the purposes of this dissertation how he *perceived* the heretics is more important than whether he was correct in his analyses.⁷⁶

Common Gnostic Beliefs

The task of analyzing individual theological points between Irenaeus and his opponents is an exceedingly complex task. The difficulty stems from both the sheer number of heretical groups and the relative paucity of sources available to scholars. For this study, the heart of the issue is not the varied individual points of teaching, but the vast, underlying, and fundamental differences with their overarching worldview. These differences have significant implications for theology, cosmology, anthropology, and certainly, for human spirituality. It is therefore necessary to offer a brief summary of how Irenaeus understood the essential differences.

On Divinity

First, and most important, are the vast differences between the Irenaeus and Gnostic understanding of God. The most common theological affirmation throughout *Against Heresies* is assuredly the confession in the one, creator God. The opening statement of the Rule of Truth of *Haer.* 1.10.1 is representative of dozens of similar texts: “The

concord of broader economic approaches, are taken to indicate direct familiarity and reliance, they would seem to paint the picture of an Irenaeus who knew the Valentinians profoundly well, had read their works inside—out, and who, wittingly or unwittingly, crafted his own thought around the structures of their theology and practice.” Steenberg, “Gospel of Truth,” 101.

⁷⁶ Although much disputed, Parvis argues that “On the whole, Irenaeus comes rather well out of the comparison . . . [and] has a reasonably clear understanding of what the Gnostics are saying . . .” Parvis, “Who Was Irenaeus?,” 16. For other perspectives, see; Ayres, “Irenaeus vs. the Valentinians,” 153–87; Chiapparini, “Irenaeus and the Gnostic,” 95–119; Greer, “Dog and Mushrooms,” 146–71.

Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, 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; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God . . .” Although expressed with considerable variation from text to text, the essential elements frequently repeated throughout Irenaeus’ writings are: that there is one God—only a single divine being, and that he alone was responsible for the creation of all things—no mediators external to himself were needed. As expressed in the opening of the Rule of Truth, there is also a consistent emphasis on the divine relationship of Jesus as the Son of God, and elsewhere on the Spirit as Divine Wisdom.⁷⁷ There is not space here to elaborate on the doctrine of the Trinity, but Osborn succinctly summarizes the central issue. Citing *Epid.* 6, he argues that, in Irenaeus’ mind, “God must be father, son and spirit. It is not enough for God to make a world; he must complete it by salvation and send a paraclete who will lead his children into all truth.”⁷⁸ It is perhaps surprising that Irenaeus did not offer a more robust articulation of the trinity of the One God, particularly in the face of the Gnostic conceptions of divine generation and expansion (see below). For the moment, this summary will assume the basic Irenaeian understanding of God as a simple, that is, undivided being, and accept his under-developed view of the Godhead.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Blowers, following Simon Birger, offers a helpful summary of points of Gnostic cosmogeny consistently held by the various groups. Moreover, it is demonstrated how these points correspond to the Genesis 1–11 narrative. These include the identification of the “demiurge” of Genesis 1–2 as creator of the world and of evil and as a being distinct from the “unknowable and transcendent God.” Also, the role of Sophia and her role as a divine Mother and one complicit in the origins of evil. She it was that was described in Gen 1:2 as “hovering over the waters.” There was also the common inclusion of angels in describing the “us” of the *imago Dei* (Gen 1:26–27) and the identification of the “wisdom” of the serpent in Gen 3:1. Blowers, *Drama of Divine Economy*, 85; See also Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*.

⁷⁸ Osborn, *Emergence of Christian Theology*, 176.

⁷⁹ On the question of Irenaeus’ understanding of the Trinity, see Lashier, *Irenaeus on the Trinity*; Barnes, “Irenaeus’s Trinitarian Theology,” 67–106; Lebreton, *Histoire du Dogme*.

In contrast, *simple* is a word Irenaeus would certainly not have used to describe his opponents' views. A brief summary will suffice for this study's purposes. Regarding Irenaeus' first point of importance, the Gnostic conception of divinity was not one of a singular, divine being. Not only was the creator of humanity (the Demiurge) not the most-high being (referred to as the Unknown Father, amongst other terms), he was in fact far removed from it. The most helpful way to articulate Irenaeus' understanding is to repeat his initial summary statement. At the outset of Book 1 he states:

They maintain, then, that in the invisible and ineffable heights above there exists a certain perfect, pre-existent Aeon, whom they call Proarche, Propator, and Bythus, and describe as being invisible and incomprehensible. Eternal and unbegotten, he remained throughout innumerable cycles of ages in profound serenity and quiescence. There existed along with him Ennoea, whom they also call Charis and Sige. At last this Bythus determined to send forth from himself the beginning of all things, and deposited this production (which he had resolved to bring forth) in his contemporary Sige, even as seed is deposited in the womb. She then, having received this seed, and becoming pregnant, gave birth to Nous, who was both similar and equal to him who had produced him, and was alone capable of comprehending his father's greatness. This Nous they call also Monogenes, and Father, and the Beginning of all Things. Along with him was also produced Aletheia; and these four constituted the first and first-begotten Pythagorean Tetrad, which they also denominate the root of all things. For there are first Bythus and Sige, and then Nous and Aletheia. And Monogenes, perceiving for what purpose he had been produced, also himself sent forth Logos and Zoe, being the father of all those who were to come after him, and the beginning and fashioning of the entire Pleroma. By the conjunction of Logos and Zoo were brought forth Anthropos and Ecclesia; and thus was formed the first-begotten Ogdoad, the root and substance of all things, called among them by four names, viz., Bythus, and Nous, and Logos, and Anthropos. For each of these is masculo-feminine, as follows: Propator was united by a conjunction with his Ennoea; then Monogenes, that is Nous, with Aletheia; Logos with Zoe, and Anthropos with Ecclesia.⁸⁰

The paragraph in its entirety offers a brief glimpse into the complexity of—in this case—the Ptolemaean-Valentinian understanding of cosmogony, as articulated by Irenaeus. It should be noted that the Demiurge (creator of the material realm) is not here

⁸⁰ *Haer.* 1.1.1.

mentioned; his introduction does not occur until Chapter 4. Irenaeus' initial concern is to plunge deep into the mysterious ideas surrounding his adversary's conception of divine Aeons. He writes a great deal about these Aeons, but never offers a simple explanation as to their meaning or identity (no doubt a deliberate, obfuscating tactic). Tertullian, however, in his own work against the Valentinians proves somewhat more helpful. Writing as little as two decades later, the North African apologist borrowed heavily from Irenaeus, particularly where polemical concerns were central. Concerning the understanding of God, Tertullian stated that, "the god even of the Valentinians has his dwelling in the attics [the highest of high regions]. They call him indeed, as to his essence, *Perfect Aeon*, but in respect of his personality, *Before the Beginning*, *Beginning*, and sometimes *Depth*, a name which is most unfit for one who dwells in the heights above!"⁸¹ Although the Aeons were frequently described as emanations from the highest source, they were not viewed as independent divine beings. Unger and Dillon state emphatically that the "Valentinian Aeon was certainly a god."⁸² Nevertheless, the Aeons were subsequent to, and emanations from the highest divine source. Numbering thirty in total, they came forth in twos, with each pair being further removed from the Source than the ones before. In the final pair was the Aeon frequently named Sophia, and she was often described as mother to Demiurge, creator of the material realm.

As noted above, there were several variations to these cosmogonic myths. This brief summary is meant to illustrate two central points. First, the fragmented nature of the Gnostic god, and second, the fact that Irenaeus clearly intended to demonstrate the

⁸¹ *Val.*, 7 (ANF 3:506).

⁸² Unger and Dillon, eds., *St. Irenaeus*, 131. As to the origin of the aeon idea, Unger and Dillon note that while aeons were referenced in the Old and New Testaments, the Gnostic conception was more likely borrowed from the pagan mystery religions.

vast gulf within Gnosticism between the most-high divine source and the created realm of humankind. As noted, these were points of teaching Irenaeus repeatedly drew attention to. The portrayal of these myths was meant to reveal both inconsistency and implausibility. In contrast, he returned repeatedly to his own affirmation of the one almighty and omnipotent God. Moreover, it was the intention of that supreme being to personally oversee and fashion the creation of the material world. This leads to the second great discrepancy between Irenaeus and his opponents, the origins and nature of creation.

On the Material Realm

As noted earlier, it has been repeated frequently that Gnostic teaching betrayed a rigid, platonic dualism: a view that sees the material realm as evil, inconsequential, and/or accidental. The body and the entirety of the created realm are both temporary and unholy. Irenaeus elsewhere offers many examples illustrating the varieties and discrepancies between heretical teachings, but concerning this issue of the material realm, he is consistent in stressing the goodness of materiality in general and the “flesh” in specific. Often, this portrayal is presented as a direct response to a contrasting position held by one or all his opponents. Recent scholarship has convincingly demonstrated that not all Gnostics loathed all things material.⁸³

To offer a brief overview, Irenaeus’ presentation on these matters will focus on two key points: the issue of the sordid origins of the material realm, and the way those inauspicious beginnings led inevitably to an equally inauspicious material reality. First,

⁸³ See, for example Blowers, *Drama of Divine Economy*, 80–85; Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*, 96–101.

Against Heresies sought to clearly present the Gnostic creation myths as narratives rooted in and defined by error and brokenness. Whereas his own position was to express faith in the one God who personally created the cosmos with love and intentionality, his opponents' views were construed as representing the exact opposite. Irenaeus presents the root of the problem within the Gnostic god itself. As a result of the ever-increasing gap between the emanating Aeons with the Highest Source/Unknown Father, the outcome was a final pair (of Aeons) that were far-removed from the Source. Sophia—the name consistently given to one of the final-pair Aeons by most of the Gnostic groups—grieved her distant position and longed for greater fellowship with the Father.

Against Heresies states:

In like manner, the rest of the Aeons also, in a kind of quiet way, had a wish to behold the Author of their being, and to contemplate that First Cause which had no beginning. But there rushed forth in advance of the rest that Aeon who was the latest of them, and was the youngest of the Duodecad which sprang from Anthropos and Ecclesia, namely Sophia, and suffered passion apart from the embrace of her consort Theletos. This passion, indeed, first arose among those who were connected with Nous and Aletheia, but passed as by contagion to this degenerate Aeon, who acted under a pretence of love, but was in reality influenced by temerity, because she had not, like Nous, enjoyed communion with the perfect Father. This passion, they say, consisted in a desire to search into the nature of the Father; for she wished, according to them, to comprehend his greatness.⁸⁴

The result of these passions was Sophia experiencing what may be described as an over-extension of the self—an extension, which, in turn, mysteriously resulted in the production of “the substance of the matter from which this world was formed. For from her desire of returning to him who gave her life, every soul belonging to this world, and that of the Demiurge himself, derived its origin. All other things owed their beginning to

⁸⁴ *Haer.* 1.2.2 (ANF 1:528). Cf. 2.18.7.

her terror and sorrow.”⁸⁵ Later, Irenaeus repeats the narrative, stating with greater clarity that following Sophia’s episode she “suffered, was the cause of ignorance and gave birth to a formless, from which, according to them, all the material works were brought forth—death, corruption, error, and such like.”⁸⁶

Two words adequately summarize Irenaeus’ perspective on the Gnostic understanding of the origins of the material realm: sordid and defective. In contrast to his own vision of the Almighty God personally fashioning the world and its inhabitants, *Against Heresies* portrays these ideas as outlandish, contradictory, and altogether nonsensical. Moreover, in the same way that the events leading to creation were represented as defective, so too was the perspective on the nature and essence of the material itself. It is at this point that discussion of “image” returns.

Spirituality, Materiality, and Divine Image

Spirituality, as previously defined, concerns questions of anthropological potential. Both Gnostic and orthodox Christians admitted a significant dichotomy between the material and spiritual realms and the study of spirituality examines the potential of the latter to inhabit and influence the former. This brief survey of the Gnostic view of God and of creation reveal profound implications for the human condition. If the reality of humanity’s earthly existence is to occupy a world created through error and by ignorant powers far removed from the true divine power (who alone is the truly spiritual), then the situation, Irenaeus would have remarked, is grim. Indeed, according to the bishop, there was very little hope at all in such systems of thought.

⁸⁵ *Haer.* 1.4.2 (ANF 1:530).

⁸⁶ *Haer.* 2.20.3 (ACW 65:69).

Despite the protestations throughout *Against Heresies* and in all subsequent polemic literature, Gnostic teaching was not without appeal. Were it otherwise, there would have been no need for the apologists at all. In fact, groups such as the Valentinians were thriving and were drawing members away from the churches of Irenaeus' tradition. As Paul Blowers notes, "Irenaeus and other writers assailed Gnostic schools of thought not because they feared Christians would be swept away by the sheer philosophical force of their cosmogonic speculations but because they presented compelling mythical frameworks for imagining the plight of soul and body in the material world and beyond."⁸⁷ Irenaeus demonstrates two foundational points of concern for seekers of spirituality: first, to raise doubt whether the Gnostic god is truly accessible. *Against Heresies* strives to show the folly in aligning with a god so far removed from human affairs. Second, he introduces the question as to whether such a god is even worthy of pursuit. If all humanity is born out of ignorance and folly, is allegiance and praise the logical response? As stated above, these points are repeated throughout *Against Heresies* in stark contra-distinction to the Irenaeian perspective on the Creator and created.

The *Imago Dei*

This leads the study back to the central issue of the present chapter, the question of the interpretation of humanity's creation in the divine image and likeness. Thus far, two important trends have been observed. First, with the patristic witnesses prior to Irenaeus there was observed a slowly increasing level of importance on utilizing Gen 1:26. Though the various texts differed in their interpretation of what exactly it meant to be

⁸⁷ Blowers, *Drama of Divine Economy*, 82.

created in the divine image and likeness, the central point of importance was the close association between humanity and the Creator. All writers took for granted that Genesis affirmed the direct action of the one true God to fashion humanity and that in some important respect, the first man bore some semblance of the divine image within himself. The Gnostics, however, cast most of those assumptions aside.

As noted above, Irenaeus indicated that his opponents spoke often about the created order as “image.” Thus far, this study has focussed strictly on those texts that mirror Gen 1:26 in that they reference both the divine image *and* likeness. Interestingly, this was not a pattern typically followed in Gnostic texts. Jacques Fantino provides a helpful chart in which he organizes all *Against Heresies*’ references to both *imago* and *similitudo*. He shows that of the one hundred and forty-three instances where *imago* appears in isolation, 70% of those appear in Books 1 or 2 (the portion of the treatise dedicated almost exclusively to describing heresy). On the other hand, when the two terms appear together, 85% are in Books 3 through 5 (those containing Irenaeus’ constructive theology).⁸⁸ This reflects Irenaeus’ general tendency to use the terms together when outlining his own position (in continuity with Genesis), whereas the Gnostic usage typically references *imago* alone.

Irenaeus’ Presentation of the Gnostic Imago

Irenaeus’ presentation of the Gnostic conception of the divine image will be limited to two examples. The first (*Haer.* 1.2.2–4) refers only to the *imago* and is representative of

⁸⁸ Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 183–86. The complete statistics are as follows: 100 of 143 *imago* references fall within Books 1/2 and 4 of 26 *imago* plus *similitudo* are in Books 1/2. The instances where *similitudo* appear alone are more evenly split: 26 of 65 (43 per cent) are in Books 1/2.

dozens of similar texts throughout *Haer.* 1 and 2. The Second example (*Haer.* 1.4.5—5.5) incorporates both *imago* and *similitudo*—one of only four such constructions in these two books.

Irenaeus' 1st Usage: *Haer.* 1.2.2–4

But there rushed forth in advance of the rest that Aeon who was much the latest of them, and was the youngest . . . namely Sophia, and suffered passion . . . [and] acted under a pretence of love, but was in reality influenced by temerity, because she had not, like Nous, enjoyed communion with the perfect Father. But others of them fabulously describe the passion and restoration of Sophia as follows: . . . Being greatly harassed by these passions, she at last changed her mind, and endeavoured to return anew to the Father. When, however, she in some measure made the attempt, strength failed her, and she became a suppliant of the Father. The other Aeons, Nous in particular, presented their supplications along with her. And hence they declare material substance had its beginning from ignorance and grief, and fear and bewilderment. The Father afterwards produces, in his own image, by means of Monogenes, the above-mentioned Horos . . . And by this Horos they declare that Sophia was purified and established, while she was also restored to her own consort.⁸⁹

Irenaeus' first recounting of a Gnostic use of "image" occurs early in *Against Heresies*. Though the context of the passage is spiritual (in that it references the spiritual realm) it is not a spirituality for humanity. Moreover, the overall tone of the passage is like none of the texts examined thus far. On the contrary, the context of *Haer.* 1.2.2–4 concerns Valentinian cosmogony in general, and specifically Sophia and that power known as 'Limit' which was said to preserve the radical distinction between the spiritual and material realms.⁹⁰ The narrative begins with young Sophia, that unsettled Aeon who longed for fellowship with the Perfect Father. As mentioned earlier, these cravings led her to over-extend herself, an action Irenaeus understood to be a quasi-rebellious

⁸⁹ *Haer.* 1.2.2–4 (ANF 1:317–18). With emendation.

⁹⁰ For an overview of the various ways Valentinians understood "Limit," see Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 279–83.

indulgence of passion. This passion threatened to destroy her because in her agony she was “ever stretching forward” in search of the Father. Such actions would eventually have destroyed her, had it not been for that power known as Limit.⁹¹ According to Irenaeus, the Valentinians taught that the Father emitted Limit through one known as Only-begotten and that Limit was made in the Father’s own *imago*.⁹² Thus, in this first reference to the divine image, humanity is not in view, but the power that keeps the material and spiritual realms divided, this is the power that shares in the divine *imago*.

Irenaeus’ 2nd usage: *Haer.* 1.4.5—5.5

A second example occurs two chapters later and repeats many of the themes observed in the first usage. Whereas Limit was the subject of the first, Achamoth features here.

Irenaeus devotes most of Chapter Four describing Achamoth, a character that, in this particular Gnostic schema, emerged (or split) from Sophia.⁹³ The significance of this text is that it, like Gen 1:26, references both image and likeness.⁹⁴ It reads: “They teach, too, that when Achamoth had been freed from passion and had with joy received the contemplation of the lights . . . of the Angels that were with [Saviour], and had yearned after them, she brought forth fruits after their image (*εἰκὼν/imago*), a spiritual offspring, born after the likeness (*ὁμοίωσιν/similitudo*) of Saviour’s bodyguard.”⁹⁵ The significance

⁹¹ *Haer.* 1.2.2.

⁹² *Haer.* 1.2.4. *Pater autem praedictum Horon super haec per Monogenem praemittit in imagine sua.*

⁹³ *Haer.* 1.4.5. The aforementioned Sophia was, in one system, divided into two beings: Achamoth and Saviour. The latter had spiritual progeny “born in the image of the Saviour’s attendants.” For a discussion of Achamoth, see Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 34–35.

⁹⁴ Thomassen notes that editors of the critical editions do not identify this text as a possible allusion to Gen 1:26, despite the rare occurrence of *eikwn* and *homoiosis* appearing together. Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 437 n. 24; Fantino, however, suggests “Ce passage constitue peut-être une interprétation spirituelle de Gn 1,26.” Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 70.

⁹⁵ *Haer.* 1.4.5 (ACW 32–33). Dillon and Unger provide a helpful summary of the challenges this text has been for the editors of the critical editions. See Unger and Dillon, eds., *St. Irenaeus*, 155–56 n. 30.

of the text is the distinction made between image and likeness. Fantino suggests that likeness refers to a shared substance, while image speaks to the correspondence between the original model and its copies.⁹⁶ Though it is often difficult to follow Irenaeus' account of these cosmogonic myths, for the purposes of this study the key point is that *Against Heresies* provides evidence of Gnostic reference to Gen 1:26. Not only is the allusion to Genesis noteworthy, but of particular importance is the differentiation made between image and likeness. The passage concludes Chapter 4 and the emphasis on Achamoth, but leads directly into the paragraphs which follow, and which begin to discuss the creation of humanity.

The first paragraph of chapter 5 includes several more mythical references to creation in an image, but for the purposes of this study, the texts of particular concern—those describing humanity's formation—occur later in the chapter.⁹⁷ The first reference occurs in Paragraph 3. Here, Demiurge was said to have fashioned creation, yet not known nor fully understood what was created. Nor did he understand the fact that he was not alone in the process of creation. Indeed, Demiurge was not truly aware of the nature of his own existence or place in the cosmos.⁹⁸ As noted earlier, Irenaeus portrays

⁹⁶ Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, 70. "Le sens est clair. Likeness renvoie à la substance commune des anges et des éléments spirituels fruits de l'enfantement spirituel réalisé par Achamoth. Image suppose une correspondance établie entre les exemplaires produits et leurs modèles, correspondance qui porte sur le nombre commun mais sans doute aussi sur la forme identique (306) des anges et des éléments spirituels."

⁹⁷ Paragraph One includes a rather convoluted tale of creating and imaging. Here, Intention formed images of the Aeons, but Intention herself was in the image of the invisible Father. The Demiurge, meanwhile was said to be in the image of the only-begotten Son, who was himself created by angels in the image of the rest of the Aeons. If the Gnostic narratives seem convoluted, it is no doubt because this is exactly the response Irenaeus hoped for.

⁹⁸ "They go on to say that the Demiurge imagined that he created all these things of himself, while he in reality made them in conjunction with the productive power of Achamoth. He formed the heavens yet was ignorant of the heavens; he fashioned man yet knew not man; he brought to light the earth, yet had no acquaintance with the earth; and, in like manner, they declare that he was ignorant of the forms of all that he made and knew not even of the existence of his own mother but imagined that he himself was all things." *Haer.* 1.5.3 (ACW 55:34).

a process marked by confusion and error; a creation formed from fear, grief, and perplexity.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, this Demiurge did play a crucial, albeit partial role in humanity's formation. Irenaeus expresses that role in this way:

After the world had been created, Demiurge in turn made the earthly element of man. He did not make him from this dry earth, but from the invisible substance, from the fusible and fluid matter; then, they decree, into this part he breathed the ensouled element. This is he who was made after the image and likeness. The material element is after the image, by which it comes near to God, though it is not the same substance as he; the ensouled element is after the likeness. Hence his substance was also called the Spirit of life, since it came from a spiritual emission. Finally, he was clothed in a skin-like garment; and this, they say, is the fleshy element that can be perceived by the senses.¹⁰⁰

Of initial importance is the fact that both *εἰκῶν* and *ὁμοίωσιν* are once again utilized, and with a distinction of meaning between the terms. Of greatest importance, however, is the fact that the terms are applied to humanity. Fantino—one of the few to scholars to comment directly upon this passage—points out that the distinction and application of the terms incorporate both Gen 1:26 and 2:7.¹⁰¹ The latter being the second of the Genesis texts to describe Adam's formation. Here, there is no mention of the *imago*, but instead, the statement that God formed him “from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.”¹⁰²

Among the Irenaeus-recorded Gnostic references to *imago*, this reference bears the closest similarity to those observed among the earlier Christian writers. There is, however, one crucial point of difference with this text. According to the Valentinians, the image and likeness of the first man reflected the Demiurge and this being, it must be

⁹⁹ *Haer.* 1.5.4. For a repetition of this argument in Tertullian, see *Val.*, 21, 22.

¹⁰⁰ *Haer.* 1.5.5 (ACW 55:35). The claim of ignorance in the Creator is no doubt an attempt to explain the claims of divine exclusivity in Genesis and throughout the Old Testament.

¹⁰¹ Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, 72.

¹⁰² Gen 2:7.

remembered, is not himself the highest God or Perfect Father. On the contrary, although the Demiurge was occasionally referenced as one who possessed the *imago* of the Father,¹⁰³ he was nevertheless an inferior being. In fact, their theory was that the Demiurge was ignorant and weak to such an extent as to be unable “to recognize any spiritual substance, [and he] thought that he alone was God.”¹⁰⁴ Thus the Creator may have thought humanity was formed as a spiritual creature, but the Valentinians argued otherwise. Fantino observes that what was breathed into man was not the truly spiritual, but rather, the *psychic*—the soul.

The Demiurge breathed a breath of life into man, that is to say, a part of himself, therefore something of a psychical nature. This psychic man, or soul, is like the Demiurge. Likeness means that the soul shares the same nature as the demiurge . . . Likeness reflects the outcome of the process that leads to the creation of man, not this process itself.¹⁰⁵

It is clear, therefore, that these Ptolemaean Valentinians had a different understanding of the *imago Dei* than did the previously examined writers. Though the text states that “the material image is after the image, by which it comes near to God,” the general consensus is that the Demiurge, and not the Father, is here in view.¹⁰⁶

Gnostic motivations behind *Imago* and Seed

The Gnostics’ unique discussion of *imago* is most likely due to two key factors. First, the influence of the Platonic, rather than the Judaic and early Christian understanding of

¹⁰³ *Haer.* 1.5.2 (ACW 55:33).

¹⁰⁴ *Haer.* 1.5.4 (ACW 55:34).

¹⁰⁵ “le Démiurge insuffla un souffle de vie dans l’homme, c’est-à-dire une partie de lui-même, donc quelque chose de nature psychique. Cet homme psychique, ou ame, est à la ressemblance du Démiurge. Resemblance (ὁμοίωσις) signifie que l’âme est de même nature que le Démiurge. Remarquons au passage que la ressemblance traduit le résultat du processus qui conduit à la création de l’homme, et non ce processus.” Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 72.

¹⁰⁶ Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 72–73; “Rousseau . . . thinks this refers to the ensouled Demiurge. he feels this term issues from the Gnostic source Irenaeus is using.” Unger and Dillon, eds., *St. Irenaeus*, 162.

εἰκῶν; second, the elevation of the divine-seed idea over and against that of the divine image.

Platonic Image

The early Christian understanding of εἰκῶν was rooted in the centuries-older Gen 1:26 text; so likewise were the Greek thinkers of the second century rooted in an ancient tradition of interpretation concerning εἰκῶν. Dating back to Plato (5th c. BC), images were the material and imperfect copies of the perfect, eternal forms.¹⁰⁷ Though the varieties of Gnosticism reveal varieties of influences, the evidence of Platonic elements of thought is obvious. For example, the entirety of *Haer.* 2.7 was dedicated to refuting the idea that the things of the created world are images of those things residing above. In fact, the seven paragraphs of this chapter contain the highest concentration of “image” discussion in any of Irenaeus’ writings.¹⁰⁸ This chapter alone established a clear point of reference between the Gnostics and Platonic thinking. John Dillon, author of an important introduction to Middle Platonism, agrees.¹⁰⁹ He argues there is a clear influence of Greek philosophy upon the Valentinian Gnostics. He notes that despite the great differences between the various Valentinian sects there is, “behind the welter of details, a basic framework which can, I think, be seen to derive in part from certain

¹⁰⁷ Thomas, “Plato and his Predecessors.” For an analysis of whether “image” is the appropriate translation to convey Plato’s meaning with εἰκῶν, see Chang, “Plato and Peirce,” 301–12.

¹⁰⁸ Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 184–86. Fantino counts thirty instances of εἰκῶν, ten of ὁμοίωσιν, and twice where the two appear together.

¹⁰⁹ This “middle” designation refers to the Platonist thinkers and distinctions of thought during the period of time between classical and Neo-Platonism, typically demarcated by the second centuries before and of the common era. For an argument against the usefulness of the middle platonic category, see Catana, “Origin of the Division,” 166–200.

forms of contemporary Platonism.”¹¹⁰ Moreover, “as for the basic framework of the [Valentinian] system, it is, if anything, reminiscent of Pythagorean metaphysics.”¹¹¹

Concerning the specific question of Gnostic influences on their understanding of εἰκῶν, Fantino offers a helpful summary. He notes that Plato primarily referred to images in a cosmological sense, with no anthropological significance. Indeed, “in classical Greek thought, man is not in the image of God.”¹¹² Over time, there evolved a variety of interpretations and new directions concerning the meaning of images, particularly insofar as their derivation was concerned. One stream of thought introduced the concept of the Demiurge, archetypes, and emanations; the myths of Irenaeus’ opponents were clearly influenced by such traditions.¹¹³

Another point of connection between Gnosticism and Greek thought was the emphasis on reason and the mind. This too intersects with the primary subject of the present study. As Osborn observes, among both Platonists and Stoics the central feature of image in the material realm was its connection to rationality. A likeness to God was possible only through “a perfection of reason.”¹¹⁴ Although the Valentinians described in *Against Heresies* had a unique twist on these themes, the Greek influence is nevertheless perceptible. The cosmogonic image present in humanity found fulfilment among those in possession of the true *gnosis*—a possession of the rational mind.

¹¹⁰ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 385.

¹¹¹ Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 385.

¹¹² Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 6. “Image a donc une utilisation cosmologique dès Platon, mais n’a pas de signification anthropologique : dans la pensée grecque classique, l’homme n’est pas à l’image de Dieu.”

¹¹³ Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 6 “Dans le premier cas elle est l’œuvre d’un artisan grâce à un processus technique : le monde sensible est ainsi fait par un démiurge chez Platon et d’autres. Dans le second cas, l’image est produite naturellement par les modes, elle est issue directement de lui : c’est l’origine de la théorie platonicienne de l’émanation et de la théorie stoïcienne de la sympathie. Platon préfère cependant le premier mode de réalisation.”

¹¹⁴ Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 211.

Despite the brevity of the summary, it is not difficult to recognize the connections between Gnostic ideas and the concepts of ancient Greek philosophy, most notably that of Platonism. The significant differences between the latter with the patristic *imago* texts prior to Irenaeus are as obvious as are those resonant points of similarity with platonic philosophy.

Philo of Alexandria

Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 BC–AD 40) provides another relevant point of comparison. A century-and-a-half before Irenaeus, Philo was incorporating platonic concepts to his Jewish theology. There were many implications to this attempted yoking of worldviews, but his discussion of the *imago Dei* proves useful for the present study. First, like Plato before him, Philo associated εἰκὼν with divine rationality. In his treatise *On the Creation*, he writes of “the invisible divine reason, perceptible only by intellect, [which Moses] calls the image of God. And the image of this image is that light, perceptible only by the intellect, which is the image of the divine reason.”¹¹⁵ The difference between this text and those of the “Gnostics” should be immediately obvious. The Alexandrian, unlike the Valentinians, incorporated an emphasis on rationality without excluding a commitment to a singular divine being. And like the early Christian texts surveyed above, Philo also made a point of arguing that the biblical teaching on the *imago Dei* spoke to the intimate connection between Creator and created. He writes that:

Moses says that man was made in the image and likeness of God. And he says well; for nothing that is born on the earth is more resembling God than man . . . But as it is not every image that resembles its archetypal model, since many are unlike, Moses has shown this by adding to the words “after his image,” the

¹¹⁵ *Det.*, 82–83. Quoted in Dillon, “Philo of Alexandria,” para. 11.

expression, “in his likeness,” to prove that it means an accurate impression, having a clear and evident resemblance in form.¹¹⁶

Here Philo offers a unique explanation for the double description, the εἰκὼν and ὁμοίωσιν of God in humanity. Rather than treat them as synonyms, or attempt an explanation at differentiating them, he instead spoke of an intensification of meaning. The likeness of God is a truly accurate image of its source. In another treatise, awkwardly translated as *That the Worse is Wont to Attack the Better*, Philo again emphasized this intimate, intensified meaning:

Having considered that the knowledge of the Creator and the proper understanding of the work of Creation would be of great advantage to the creature (for such knowledge is the boundary of happiness and blessedness), he breathed into him from above something of his own divine nature. And his divine nature stamped her own impression in an invisible manner on the invisible soul, in order that even the earth might not be destitute of the image of God.¹¹⁷

The significance of Philo’s testimony is the stark contrast evident between his own concept of the *imago* with that offered by the Gnostics. Philo was eager to reflect deeply on the insights of Greek philosophy and to use it for the betterment of his Jewish theology. But insofar as the fundamental principles and beliefs about God were concerned, Philo’s loyalties were clear: he maintained a strict belief in the One God revealed in the Hebrew scriptures. The influence of Platonic thought was, with this issue at least, subsumed under the larger priority of Jewish theology. These same principles, however, were evidently not in force for the Gnostic conceptions of the divine. For them, the very notion of God and of humanity was completely revised in comparison to both the Old and New Testaments, and as such, reveal a more significant degree of platonic influence.

¹¹⁶ *Opif.*, 134 (Dillon, “Philo of Alexandria,” 13).

¹¹⁷ *Det.*, XXIV:86 (Yonge, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/yonge/book7.html>).

Philosophy of the Seed

The section of text in *Haer.* 1.5.5—8.1 is important because Irenaeus clearly lays out the key anthropological difference between his system and those of his opponents. In this section he utilizes the terminology of divine image and likeness as well as the language of the divine and spiritual seed. In so doing, he reveals the vastly different and incompatible presuppositions related to the creation, nature, and potential for humankind.

As noted above, *Haer.* 1.5.5 is the text meant to demonstrate the relationship of the Gnostic teachings to Gen 1:26, and thus, by extension, to the tradition of interpretation of the *imago Dei*.¹¹⁸ The Demiurge was shown to be the Gnostic figure who mirrors the role of Creator in the text. Unlike in Genesis, however, the Demiurge is not alone. Unbeknownst to this ignorant creator, his mother Sophia/Achamoth enters the scene,¹¹⁹ and thus introduces the all-important seed to his creation.¹²⁰

Furthermore, they declare that Demiurge himself was ignorant of the offspring of Achamoth, their Mother, which was conceived by virtue of her contemplation of the Angels who surround Savior, and which was spiritual like the Mother. Secretly, without his knowledge, she deposited this [offspring] in him that through him it might be planted as a “seed” in the soul which came from him, and thence in this material body; and, having been borne in them as in a womb and grown, it might become fit for the reception of perfect knowledge. So Demiurge, as they assert, was ignorant of the fact that the spiritual man, together with his breath of life, was planted in him by Achamoth by means of an unutterable power and forethought. For just as he was ignorant of his Mother, so also of her offspring. This same offspring is, according to them, Church, the antitype of Church on high. Such, then, according to their idea, is Man: his soul

¹¹⁸ As noted earlier, discussion here of Gnostic beliefs mirrors Irenaeus’ tendency to focus with particular attention to the Ptolemaean-Valentinian views. Other views are presented throughout *Against Heresies*, however. For example, there are summaries and analysis of the Marcosians (1.18.2), Saturninus (1.24.1), and Marcus (1.14.5).

¹¹⁹ Some Gnostic groups identify Sophia with Achamoth, while others understand the latter to have emerged out of the former. For a discussion, see Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 34–36.

¹²⁰ Thomassen indicates that the Mother-seed concept was common among a variety of Valentinian groups, although some attributed to placement of the seed with the Logos. See *Spiritual Seed*, 434–37.

is from Demiurge, his body is from the earth, his fleshy element is from matter, and his spiritual element is from his Mother Achamoth.¹²¹

The paragraph is repeated in its entirety as it contains several of the crucial elements of Gnostic anthropology. First, it reiterates again the insignificance of the *imago Dei* in the Valentinian system; insignificant, that is, if measured by the standards of the Jewish and early Christian thinkers. The Demiurge attempted to create humanity after his own image, but being ignorant, this image was wholly unsatisfactory. It was only with the intervention of the Mother that true spirituality entered. Second, the paragraph introduces the Gnostic understanding of the three classes of humanity. Here, the first man received a tripartite nature: the soul, the flesh, and the spiritual. Subsequent humans, would not, however, enjoy a unity of being. Indeed, they would be divided into three classes, corresponding to the three elements of human nature.

There are three classes of people—the spiritual, the ensouled, and the earthly . . . The earthly indeed goes into corruption; but the ensouled, if it chooses the better things, will rest in the intermediate region . . . the spiritual people whom Achamoth has planted as “seeds” from then until now in just souls, and which have been disciplined and nourished here below—because they were sent forth immature—and have finally become worthy of perfection, will be given brides to the Angels of Savior . . .¹²²

This text reinforces the third and final point of importance from our primary text above (*Haer.* 1.5.6). Human spirituality, according to these Gnostics, is possible only for those in whom the seed of Achamoth resides. It is this gift of the Mother which allows a person to be fit to receive perfect knowledge—true *gnosis*. Thus, while there are similarities between the two creation-*imago* narratives—both the Demiurge and the God of Gen 1:26 attempted to create the first man in his image—both are eclipsed by the

¹²¹ *Haer.* 1.5.6 (ACW 55:35, 36).

¹²² *Haer.* 1.7.5 (ACW 55:40).

profundity of Achamoth's actions. It is her work, her seeds alone that enable humanity to experience truth and life. It is important to note also, that these truths apply to both the earthly and heavenly/spiritual realms. In this life, those with the seed are those able to receive the perfect knowledge and thus able to be disciplined and nourished.

Chapter Conclusion

The principal difference between the early patristic and Gnostic conceptions of the *imago Dei* is clear. The former understand creation in the divine image to be the fundamental element of human nature, while the latter does not. Though rarely able to explain it with depth, the early Christians and Jews identified humanity's intimate connection to the One God as their defining characteristic, while the Gnostics located the seed of Achamoth as the locus of spiritual importance. In view of these differences, it is of great interest to observe Irenaeus' *imago* strategy. Unlike his predecessors such as Justin and Theophilus, he could not simply assume the unquestioned connection between God and humanity, nor could he simply relate the divine image to rationality or physicality. Indeed, Irenaeus was faced with a horizon of interpretations far beyond what his predecessors either knew or were willing to engage.

CHAPTER 3:
AGAINST HERESIES, BOOK 3:
THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

As noted, *Against Heresies* Books 1 and 2 are largely dedicated to cataloguing the teachings of the various heretical groups.¹ It is in Book 3 that Irenaeus begins to outline in greater detail his own positions. This is true for all of his doctrines, including those related to the spiritual life. There are three sections of texts to be examined in this chapter. *Haer.* 3.17 and 18 is the first and probes the *imago* theme of restoration. The texts of this section demonstrate Irenaeus' understanding of salvation history as a grand design of God, accomplished through the restorative work of both the Son and Spirit. Section 2 looks at *Haer.* 3.19 through 22 and examines the salvific process by which God secures humanity's restoration, most notably through the incarnation and Christ's recapitulative work. The third selection covers *Haer.* 3.23 and 24. Here the theme focusses on the heart of the problem regarding spiritual health, identifying what it was that was "lost" to Adam after his disobedience and "fall." Each of the sections contributes to the theological foundations of Irenaeus' understanding of the spiritual life. He identifies the problem facing humanity and explains the divine plan for the resolution of that problem.

¹ Reading through *Against Heresies* is made much easier by reading alongside an overview and reading guide. For the best of these, see Donovan, *One Right Reading?*; Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*.

***Haer.* 3.17.1—18.3: Spiritual Restoration as the Grand Design**

Introduction

Irenaeus does not discuss the *imago Dei* for the first two-thirds of Book 3. This is no doubt in part because issues of the spiritual life are not among the first of his themes explored in Chapters 1 through 16. Rather, his early themes are primarily related to authority and doctrine. Thus, apostolicity and Christology are prominent. It is not until Chapter 18 that the first image and likeness text appears.²

We have clearly shown that in the beginning the Word was with God, and that through Him all things were made, that He was also always with the human race, and that, according to the time preordained by the Father . . . was united with His Handiwork and became man . . . He recapitulated in Himself the long unfolding of humankind, granting salvation by way of compendium, that in Christ Jesus we might receive what we had lost in Adam, namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God.³

The text begins with a reference to an Irenaean priority for Book 3, namely, to offer the constructive vision of God and his plan, over and against the heretical schemes outlined in Books 1 and 2. This text also represents the transition point for how Irenaeus will employ the *imago* motif. Although apologetic and polemical concerns are never far from view, it is generally true that from this point forward his allusions to Gen 1:26 are primarily constructive. As such, unlike the Gnostic-themed emphases, here, neither creation nor cosmology are in view. Rather, the focus is primarily on spiritual renewal.

² It is interesting that the first “constructive” *imago* text occurs at the point of Book 3 where Briggman believes Irenaeus began incorporating insights from Theophilus. It is most likely coincidental, but it would nevertheless be worthwhile to examine more carefully what influence *To Autocyclis* may have had on Irenaeus’ doctrine of the *imago Dei*. Briggman, “Dating Irenaeus’ Acquisition,” 397–402.

³ *Haer.* 3.18.1 (ACW 54:87–88). Books 1 through 3 are the only portions of *Against Heresies* fully translated into English since the appearance of the ANF. Where available, the ACW will be used and noted, as will selected translations of Books 4 and 5 from Behr, Steenberg, and Briggman.

The passage is brief, but it is nevertheless replete with many of the important theological themes to be revisited throughout Books 3 through 5: incarnation, recapitulation, salvation, renewal, and the economy of God, to name a few.

The analysis of this text begins with the preceding chapter. In so doing, a primary theme emerges. Chapters 17 and 18 demonstrate a particular emphasis on recovery and restoration. This subject matter will dominate throughout the Book 3 texts, but in view of Chapter 17, specific attention will be given to Irenaeus' concern for the Spirit. As referenced earlier in the introductory comments on Irenaeus' spirituality, the role of the Holy Spirit is crucial in his understanding of what authentic Christian spirituality entails. In this, the first of the *imago* texts, he makes clear that there is an important connection between a human person participating in the divine likeness and that person's nurturing by the Holy Spirit. He utilizes the theme of water and moisture to illustrate the human need.

Haer. 3.17:1–4: The Nourishing Work of the Spirit

In the early chapters of Book 3 Irenaeus references water, a motif that appears throughout *Against Heresies*. In the midst of his polemics against the heretics and their teaching, he presents his argument for the apostolic succession of tradition.⁴ The purpose of that argument was to claim orthodox exclusivity on the one hand, while arguing for the inauthenticity of his opponents on the other hand. Irenaeus declares that since his tradition could be so clearly identified as the true recipient of the apostolic

⁴ Two older, but excellent surveys of tradition in the second century generally, and on Irenaeus specifically, are Flesseman-Van Leer, *Tradition and Scripture*; Hanson, *Tradition in Early Church*. See also Bauckham and Drewery, eds., *Scripture, Tradition, and Reason*; Ehrhardt, *The Apostolic Succession*.

teachings it is foolish to seek truth from other sources. Indeed, it is in the Church alone where one “can draw from the *drink of life*, for she is the entrance to life.”⁵

The first two-thirds of Book 3 is dominated by concern for establishing the validity of the Church’s traditions over and against the Gnostics. As the chapters progress Irenaeus makes an important shift. If the churches within his own tradition represent the one well and source of nourishing truth, the Holy Spirit is represented as the one source that enlivens and restores the human being. Irenaeus employs a number of metaphors throughout Chapter 17 to illustrate this point.

Giving to the disciples the power of regeneration into God, Jesus 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 [the Spirit] 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 beings, and to dwell in the workmanship of God, working the will of the Father in them, and renewing them from their old habits into the newness of Christ.⁶

Irenaeus’ claims for the exclusivity of his Church tradition were rooted in a straightforward theory of succession: Jesus commissioned his apostles, those apostles established churches, and the modern day “orthodox” congregations and their teachings shared both ecclesial and confessional continuity with those original churches. For Irenaeus, however, the issues were not merely a concern for the preservation of historicity or for a certain structure of governance. In his mind, only the communities in true continuity with Christ would share in the reception of the Holy Spirit. He referenced Matt 28:19 and Joel 2:28 to emphasize the necessity for the reception of the

⁵ *Haer.* 3.4.1 (ACW 64:34). Cf. Rev 22:17, John 7:37.

⁶ *Haer.* 3.17.1 (ACW 64:85).

Spirit. The Spirit first indwelt Christ, the Son of Man, enabling him, in turn, to be accustomed fully to the human race. As such, this initiated the opportunity for human restoration with God. The point being, human fulfilment—or, the renewal in the divine image, as he will refer to it a few paragraphs later—is possible only with the indwelling work of the Spirit. To illustrate this, Irenaeus employs the first of his metaphors, that of the dough of wheat.

This is the Spirit whom David petitioned for the human race, saying, “And strengthen me with Your sovereign Spirit.” Luke tell us that this Spirit descended on the disciples after the Lord’s ascension, at the Pentecost, since He possessed the power over all nations for admitting them to life and for opening the new covenant . . . Wherefore the Lord too promised to send the Comforter, who would prepare us for God. For just as out of dry wheat without some moisture one cannot make dough or bread, so neither could we, the many, have become one in Christ Jesus, without the water that is from heaven.⁷

In v. 2 Irenaeus repeats his thesis, stating that there is no hope for humanity apart from receiving the Spirit. There are several elements to this hope. The text references the power and comfort of the Spirit, the revelation of truth in the new covenant, and a passing allusion to the corporate unity experienced in Christ. Each of these themes will be explored in more detail elsewhere in *Against Heresies*, but the principle promise and hope relate to the entrance to the true “life” that is associated with union in Christ. The picture of the dry wheat is effective in illustrating humanity’s insufficiencies; readers from any era will understand the futility of expecting dry flour to transform to pliable dough and on to a finished loaf. Something more is needed. Whereas the relevance of the arguments over cosmogony may have seemed other-worldly to Irenaeus’ readers, the

⁷ *Haer.* 3.17.2 (ACW 64:85).

emphasis on the Spirit was meant to be profoundly relatable and important. One could not have life without it. Paragraph 2 continues with another moisture-themed metaphor.

And just as dry earth, if it does not receive moisture, does not produce fruit, so also we, since we were first dry wood, would never produce the fruit that is life without the gratuitous heavenly rain. For our bodies were united to imperishability by means of the bath; but our souls by means of the Spirit. And so both are necessary, since both prepare us for life with God. The Lord received this life as a gift from the Father, and he, by sending the Holy Spirit into the whole world, bestows it upon those who partake of Him.⁸

Here humanity is compared to arid dirt and to an unfruitful tree. Once again, nourishment from the heavenly Spirit is required, and once again, union with God is equated with life fulfilment. Eternal life is participation with him and requires the divine rain.⁹ There is an element to the text that foreshadows Irenaean commentary on the *imago Dei* in Book 5. Reference is made to two separate types of watering: the bath (*lavacrum*) for the body and the reception by the soul of the Spirit. Scholars note the former likely refers to baptism, but with an important caveat. Irenaeus is clear that the washing of baptism also requires the indwelling of the Spirit—“both are necessary,” he plainly stated. Behr observes that “Irenaeus seldom writes of baptism as being for the remission of sins. Remission of sins, or a purificatory washing, would still leave man ‘in Adam.’”¹⁰ The primary importance in this text, in view of the *imago Dei*, is the dual role for moisture and nourishment in the human life. The first bath for the body, the Holy Spirit for the soul. At this point, Irenaeus has not yet explicitly referred to the divine image or likeness; when he does, four paragraphs later, he also does not discuss the

⁸ *Haer.* 3.17.2 (ACW 64:85–86).

⁹ Behr (*Asceticism and Anthropology*, 67–71) offers an extended commentary on this paragraph and notes there is also a corporate element to the text. “The Spirit is the author of communal unity in Christ” (68). See also Unger and Steenberg, eds., *St. Irenaeus of Lyons*, 168.

¹⁰ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 68. For a survey of the second-century theology and overall context of baptism, see Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 201–301.

potential differences between the two terms, nor their correlation to body and soul, a point he will later make explicit.¹¹ In this text his primary aim is to argue for the need of the entire human person to receive the healing waters of the divine. He continues the theme with another vivid illustration:

Gideon . . . foresaw this grace as a gift . . . and prophesied that the dryness would come upon the fleece of wool—a type of the people—on which there had first been only dew. This signified that they would no longer possess the Holy Spirit from God . . . and that, on the contrary, on the entire earth there would be dew, which is the Spirit of God, who descended on the Lord . . . who in turn gave Him to the church, when He sent upon the entire earth the Paraclete. . . . Wherefore, we have need of God’s dew, that we might not be burned up or become unfruitful. . . . And so the Lord entrusted the Holy Spirit to his own man, who had fallen in with robbers, on whom he had compassion and bound his wounds, giving also two royal denarii, that having received through the Spirit the image and inscription of the Father and the Son, we might make the denarius entrusted to us productive, thereby returning to the Lord the increase in denarii.¹²

There is, admittedly, a great deal going on in this paragraph. No less than four biblical narratives are employed and collated. The story of Gideon and the fleece (Judg 6:36–40), the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), Caesar’s coin (Matt 22:20), and the parable of the talents/minas (Matt 25:14–30; Luke 19:12–27). The first and last reinforce Irenaeus’ moisture thesis, that humanity cannot be productive or faithful without the reception of the Holy Spirit. In addition, he adds two points to his interpretation of the Gideon narrative to counter-act themes observed in the Gnostic interpretation. Against the idea that only an elect received the seed of spirituality, Irenaeus stresses that the gift of the Spirit is offered to all humanity. Against the random, chaotic ordering of their

¹¹ The most striking example is *Haer.* 5.6.1, “for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God.”

¹² *Haer.* 3.17.3 (ACW 64:86), with revisions following Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 122.

cosmology, he asserted—by way of Gideon’s prophecy—the implication that all was unfolding according to the divine *economia*.

Of particular interest is the function of the denarius parables. The basic meaning is clear. In the same way the Samaritan blessed and care for the wounded man, so too did God do likewise for all humanity through the Spirit. He incorporates the parable of the talents in order to bring greater cohesion to his earlier allusion to moisture and growth. In the same way water was needed for dry land, trees, and dough to flourish, so too does the Spirit animate the human person so as to increase. This theme will prove much more important in later *imago* texts, but he points ahead to what will be a central theme throughout this study.

More problematic is Irenaeus’ meaning with his reference to the image and inscription (*imaginem* and *inscriptionem*). It is tempting to identify the *imaginem* reference among the many other image and likeness texts, particularly in view of *Haer.* 3.18.1. That text, to be discussed in detail below, stands only one paragraph removed from this one and clearly has Gen 1:26 in view. Here, the text is unique not only because it refers to *inscriptionem*, but also because it conflates three of the aforementioned biblical references into a single teaching point. The good Samaritan’s wounded man is the Church, who receives the image and inscription (Caesar’s coin) of the Spirit, in order to faithfully increase and multiply the denarii (the talents/minas). This weaving of gospel texts signals that Irenaeus was attempting to connect certain proverbial dots of his theology. Fantino, one of the very few to reflect deeply on this passage, suggests that Irenaeus’ motivation was to show the cooperative ministry of the Son and Spirit on the one hand, while connecting their ministry with the humanity’s reception of the

knowledge of God on the other hand. He states that the denarius “bears the image of God, and this image is the knowledge of the Son.”¹³ Such an interpretation, however, requires the conflation of nearly as many Irenaean texts as is witnessed in *Haer.* 3.17.3 itself.

To make his point, Fantino introduces *Haer.* 4.36.7, the one other text that mentions a parabolic coin and its image and inscription.¹⁴ In this reference, there is no question as to the meaning of the passage: it is explicitly stated that the image and inscription *is* the knowledge of God.¹⁵ Fantino also incorporates chapter seven from the *Demonstration*, and here there is no mention of coins, inscriptions, or the *imago Dei*. Rather, the paragraph is a description of knowledge from a strictly soteriological context.¹⁶ In *Haer.* 3.17.3, however, there is no mention of knowledge or salvation and Fantino assumes Irenaeus’ motivation in *Haer.* 4.36.7 mirrors that in these other passages.

In view of the repeated emphasis on moisture and growth and on the Spirit’s function as that living water that brings life to humankind, however, I suggest another reading of the text. When Irenaeus states that we “received through the Spirit the image

¹³ “Car le salaire est le denier qui porte l’image de Dieu, et cette image est la connaissance du Fils.” Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 101.

¹⁴ A third text of note is in *Haer.* 4.30.2, where a non-parabolic reference is made to a coin with an image and inscription of Caesar.

¹⁵ This text introduces another parable, that of the tenants of the vineyard (Matt 21:28–46; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19). Incorporating that parable to his discussion, Irenaeus writes “For there is but one . . . dispensator, for there is one Spirit of God who arranges all things; and in like manner is there one hire, for they all received a penny each man, having [stamped upon it] the royal image and superscription, the knowledge of the Son of God, which is immortality.” *Haer.* 4.36.7 (ANF 1:518).

¹⁶ “The baptism of our regeneration proceeds through these three points: God the Father bestowing on us regeneration through His Son by the Holy Spirit. For as many as carry (in them) the Spirit of God are led to the Word, that is to the Son; and the Son brings them to the Father; and the Father causes them to possess incorruption. Without the Spirit it is not possible to behold the Word of God, nor without the Son can any draw near to the Father for the knowledge of the Father is the Son, and the knowledge of the Son of God is through the Holy Spirit; and, according to the good pleasure of the Father, the Son ministers and dispenses the Spirit to whomsoever the Father wills and as He wills.” *Epid.* 7.

and inscription of the Father and the Son, [that] we might make the denarius entrusted to us productive, thereby returning to the Lord the increase in denarii,” his purpose follows the line of thought explicit throughout Chapter 17. Namely, that through the Spirit humanity is enabled to flourish, and indeed, the *expectation* is that there must be growth. Irenaeus ties together the various biblical references with the parable of the talents to demonstrate not only that God’s gracious activity is a blessing, but an investment also. This reading is strengthened in the next verse, *Haer.* 3.17.4, where the discussion turns back to the Gnostics and any would-be followers. A brief selection will suffice:

And so the Spirit descended because of the preordained economy . . . and the Word became incarnate in humanity for the sake of humanity, and fulfilled the entire economy concerning humanity. . . . Consequently, it will be incumbent on you, in fact, on all who read this writing (*scripturae/ταύτη τῆ γραφῆ*) and are solicitous about their salvation, not to succumb readily to the discourses of these heretics . . . because their doctrines kill . . .¹⁷

In this paragraph Irenaeus not only equates his opponents’ teachings with death (in addition to earlier references to wickedness and blasphemy as descriptive of Gnostic doctrine), and not only does he inform his readers that it would be incumbent upon them to obey, but there is also the fascinating element of authority Irenaeus *appears* to ascribe to own writings. As Steenberg convincingly argues, however, the fact that he identifies his work by calling it “scripture” (*scripturae/γραφῆ*) is more innocuous in his context than it would be for contemporary readers.¹⁸ Regardless, there is a clear element of

¹⁷ *Haer.* 3.17.4 (ACW 64:86–87).

¹⁸ Steenberg (“Irenaeus on Scripture,” 29–66) offers a comprehensive analysis of Irenaeus’ understanding and use of the term *γραφῆ*. Steenberg notes the three instances in *Against Heresies* where Irenaeus used the word in reference to his own writing. The essay’s argument is convincing, however, that “we can be sure that he did not regard himself as an author of scripture; [and] context in each instance makes clear the intended reading of the term as simply ‘writing’ or ‘book,’ achieved grammatically by delimiting the attribution of ‘a writing’ to a specific text of underlined and noted non-scriptural authorship. Irenaeus refers to ‘this writing’ (*ταύτη τη γραφῆ*), specifying not the general notion of scripture as a written body or broad collection, but a specific text under review” (51–52).

exhortation to the text. Not only was Irenaeus alerting his audience to something they should be doing, but he was revealing to them the heart of the divine plan: the *economia* of God.

The subject is one of great importance in Irenaeian scholarship.¹⁹ It was important to the bishop because, as was expressed above, the Gnostics themselves were offering detailed, cosmological narratives about the nature and origins of the universe. As a result, the most discussed themes throughout both *Against Heresies* and the *Demonstration* all fit within a larger, well-defined divine schema. Eric Osborn, following Hans Urs von Balthasar, expressed this strategy as Irenaeus' theological aesthetic and made this a central motif of his own study.²⁰ The idea of the economy is important for the topic of this chapter because it serves to illustrate the central place Irenaeus' understanding of human development occupies in his larger theological framework. The Spirit's descent and the Word's incarnation came for humanity, he wrote, they came to fulfill the entire economy concerning all people. John Behr quotes *Haer.* 5.15 that says that, "The work of God is the fashioning of man" and comments that "this is the basic structure of Irenaeus's thought. It determines his theology at all levels."²¹

Chapter 17 of Book 3 serves as an effective introduction to Irenaeus' perspective on the *imago Dei*. Although his first constructive commentary on Gen 1:26 and the *imago* and *similitudo* follow in the next paragraph, I suggest that Chapter 17 was meant to anticipate and introduce that text. The emphasis throughout the chapter on the work

¹⁹ For three detailed surveys, see Blowers, *Drama of Divine Economy*, 67–135; Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 51–94; Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 34–85.

²⁰ Osborn, *Irenaeus*; Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*.

²¹ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 116.

of and need for the Spirit corresponds to the foundational points of his spirituality, as defined at the outset of this study. Prior to commenting on the *imago Dei* and the nature of the human condition, Irenaeus first offers a positive appraisal of the Spirit's work and availability for all humanity. With that in mind, the next paragraph introduces the first of the key *imago* texts.

Haer. 3.18:1-3: The Recapitulative Work of the Son

We have clearly shown that in the beginning the Word was with God, and that through Him all things were made, that He was also always with the human race, and that, according to the time preordained by the Father . . . was united with His Handiwork and became man . . . He recapitulated in Himself the long unfolding of humankind, granting salvation by way of compendium, that in Christ Jesus we might receive what we had lost in Adam, namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God.²²

With the introduction of Chapter 18 Irenaeus shifts focus. As demonstrated, the previous section paid particular attention to the therapeutic and empowering role of the Holy Spirit. However, Christ was never far from view; in fact, Irenaeus made clear that the possibility for the ministry of the Spirit came only as a result of the Incarnation. In this section, the focus falls squarely on Christ.

Chapters 17 and 18 continue a theme that was introduced in the final paragraphs of Chapter 16. There, Irenaeus began to explore the doctrine of recapitulation (*anaképhalaiôsthai*), one of the most well-known features of his theology. The importance of this concept cannot be overstated, as it appears prominently throughout

²² *Haer.* 3.18.1 (ACW 64:87-88).

both *Against Heresies* and the *Demonstration*. Predictably, it has received extensive treatment from scholars.²³

In the strictest sense, recapitulation refers to a summarization of key details. For example, a book of teaching might conclude with a summarizing chapter that repeats and draws together the key teaching points; such a chapter would be a work of recapitulation. Robert Grant points out, however, that while Irenaeus used the term in this, its typical grammatical and rhetorical context, he more often than not “theologized the concept for his own purposes.”²⁴ Sesboüé admits that though the precedent for such a usage is uncertain prior to Irenaeus,²⁵ there is strong evidence to suggest his ideas follow biblical precedents.²⁶ In other words, Irenaeus’ efforts are primarily rooted in biblical authority, and only secondarily dependent on earlier exemplars.

As to the Irenaean meaning of the concept, Osborn counted no less than eleven elements or usages of meaning.²⁷ Behind them, however, he observed four foundational purposes: recapitulation can be understood to be a salvific summing up that “corrects and perfects humankind; it inaugurates and consummates a new humanity.”²⁸ Irenaeus

²³ For a recent, comprehensive analysis, see Sesboüé, *Tout récapituler*. See also Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 97–140; Bushur, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 51–80; Andia, “Adam-enfant chez Irénée,” 91–103; Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 123–33; Steenberg, “Role of Mary,” 337–61; Dunning, “Virgin Earth,” 57–88; Fantino, “Le Passage,” 418–29; Smith, “Chiliasm and Recapitulation,” 313–31; Scharl, *Recapitulatio mundi*.

²⁴ Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 46–52.

²⁵ Sesboüé, *Tout récapituler*, 127–29. The point has been made that Irenaeus simply borrowed the concept of recapitulation from Justin. Although it is true that *Dialogue with Trypho* 100 explores the typological relationship between the two Adam’s, Justin does not here use the term recapitulation. His solitary reference to the word survives only in Irenaeus’ quotation of a now-lost Justinian work against Marcion. Sesboüé points out that the quotation reads suspiciously Irenaean, and not in the style of Justin.

²⁶ Sesboüé, *Tout Récapituler*, 127–28. Sesboue sees Irenaeus’ recapitulation to be the amalgam of three key Pauline verses. First, the one instance (Eph 1:10) where Paul uses the term in its traditional, literary sense, and two places (Rom 5; 1 Cor 15:45–48) where contrast is made between the two Adams.

²⁷ Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 97–98. “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.”

²⁸ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 97.

introduced the idea in Chapter 16, Paragraph 6, stating “The Only begotten Word, who is always present with the human race, was united and closely grafted to His handiwork . . . Jesus comes through every economy and recapitulates in Himself all things... [that] He might draw all things to Himself at the proper time.”²⁹ To condense Osborn’s four points down to a single emphasis, I suggest the primary concern here is with the restoration of humanity. Jesus’ “drawing in” of all things is an idea chiefly concerned with the renewal of humankind found in and secured through Christ. As such, the close relationship between recapitulation and the ministry of the Spirit is obvious.

Therefore, through the concept of recapitulation, the unity of purpose is clear between Chapter 17—with its emphasis on the Spirit, and Chapter 18—with a more Christological focus. Both are elements of God’s divine plan, the *economia*, and both contribute to Irenaeus’ grand narrative: the fashioning of the human person. It is at this point that the bishop introduced a discussion of the *imago*, his leveraging of Gen 1:26, and the idea of a divine image and likeness in humanity.

At the outset, it should be clear why the interpretation of the *imago* is centrally important to Irenaeus’ understanding of the spiritual life. As noted, the previous chapters expressed God’s grand purpose for the human race. Christ descended to earth and “became flesh . . . suffered for us and rose for our sakes . . . that He might draw all things to Himself.”³⁰ The *imago* is important because it is the way in which Irenaeus describes what exactly was deficient in the person unattached to Christ. He declares that Christ came in order for humanity to receive what had been lost in Adam—to be according to the image and likeness of God. With this one motif Irenaeus summarizes

²⁹ *Haer.* 3.16.6 (ACW 64:81–82).

³⁰ *Haer.* 3.16.6 (ACW 64:82).

the central issue for human existence: that which separates the creature from the Creator. In the second of the *imago* texts to be examined (*Haer.* 3:23.1—24.1) the focus will shift to what was lost in Adam. To conclude this section, however, Paragraphs 2 and 3 of Chapter 18 serve to remind and reinforce Irenaeus' first theme:

In fact, it was not possible for humankind, which had once been conquered and had been dashed to pieces by its disobedience, to refashion itself and obtain the prize of victory. Again, it was not possible for the human race, which had fallen under sin, to receive salvation. And so the Son, Word of God that He is, accomplished both, by coming down from the Father and becoming incarnate, and descending even to death, and bringing the economy of our salvation to completion.³¹ Jesus himself suffered for us; He who lay in the tomb also rose again; He who descended also ascended, the Son of God having been made man, as the very name indicates. Indeed, in the name of Christ is implied He who anoints, and He who is anointed, and the ointment with which He is anointed. And so it is . . . the Father who anoints, and the Son who is anointed, and the Ointment, which is the Spirit.³²

These last texts resumed again that polemical tone that is never far from the surface of Irenaeus' writings. *Against Heresies* repeatedly affirms the doctrine of the one, true God—the revelation of the divine presence and operations of each of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Against the dramatic, often sordid narratives of Gnostic cosmogony, and in opposition to the assertions of the inferiority and wickedness of the material realm, the bishop of Lugdunum offered a counter-narrative. Not only was the material realm not evil, but the Son of God himself took up material flesh in order to heal humankind. Moreover, this incarnation was the divine plan from the very beginning; it was all part of his grand design.

³¹ *Haer.* 3.18.2 (ACW 64:88).

³² *Haer.* 3.18.3 (ACW 64:89).

Section Summary

Irenaeus' first constructive reference to Gen 1:26 and the divine image and likeness occurs within the context of God's plan for humankind. The grand design, the *economia*, has as its chief aim the restoration of the human person. This restoration occurs as humanity is restored to God himself, and this process was possible only by the salvific work of the Father through the actions of His Son and Spirit. Leading up to the first *imago* reference (*Haer.* 3.18.1) Irenaeus' strategy was to first establish certain foundational principles. One does not find significant reflection on the lexical meaning of *imago* or *similitudo* in these chapters. The allusion to the Genesis passage is expressed almost in passing, seemingly dwarfed by larger concerns. As fleeting as the reference to the *imago* may be, I suggest it nevertheless is important. In the context of God's grand design for salvation and restoration, Irenaeus constantly repeats the themes of divine healing and human need. In Chapter 17 the emphasis on need focused on the work of the Spirit. This work was likened to the moisture required to make dough for bread or the need for water to nurture parched land and trees. Not only did these illustrations effectively point to humanity's need for the Spirit, but they also proved an effective contrast to the Gnostic teachings.

As outlined earlier, Irenaeus' opponents suggested that spirituality was possible only for those in possession of the divine seed—that deposit from above (usually from Achamoth or Sophia). The seed was not a part of the original design of the creator, known as Demiurge, but was done through an act of subterfuge by the creator's cunning Mother. Therefore, the seed was not only omitted from the original design for humankind, but it was itself an alien substance. It was no doubt for this reason that Gnosticism so despised the material realm. The spiritual seed alone belonged to the

heavenly realm and nothing from the material realm would accompany it in the return journey.

The water from heaven provides an entirely different narrative. As the illustrations of dough and dry land express, these objects do not just need the water, their very survival—the design of their nature *requires* the water. The Spirit is not an alien substance but is that which brings life to the human person. The Spirit works in tandem with the material body and together they constitute a true being. In the same way, the work of the Son cannot be understood as an external, alien intrusion. His connection to humanity is expressed in two ways. First, through the incarnation he becomes one with Adam's heirs. Once again in direct opposition to the Gnostics, Irenaeus repeatedly emphasizes the real and full human nature of Jesus, the Word, Christ, and Son of God. He had been "always present with the human race, [and] was united and closely grafted to His handiwork according to the Father's good pleasure . . . He recapitulated humanity into himself."³³ Christ became "accustomed" to his people, that they might be accustomed back to God.³⁴ That Christ's incarnation was a natural, not alien, intrusion is confirmed by the second point: his coming was a part—indeed, the defining moment of—God's redemptive plan for humanity.

In later texts Irenaeus will make more explicit the relationship of the Son and Spirit to the image and likeness, respectively. In this the first of the many constructive *imago* passages, however, he first identified the great human need, established the Son and Spirit as the sources of restoration, and concluded by drawing the principles

³³ *Haer.* 3.16.6 (ACW 64:82).

³⁴ Cf. *Haer.* 3.20.1, 4.14.2, 4.20.5, 4.38.3, 5.pref, 5.8.1.

together under the *imago* motif. In subsequent texts, Irenaeus began to offer a greater reflection on exactly what the divine image entails.

***Haer.* 3.19.1—22.1: The Process of the Design: The Son's Saving Work**

Introduction

They who assert that Christ received nothing from the Virgin are in great error; in casting out the inheritance of the flesh, they likewise reject the likeness [between Jesus and Adam]. For if Adam had a formation and substance from the earth by both God's hand and skill [but Christ did not], then he did not preserve the likeness of man, who was made according to His image and likeness, and He will appear to be an inconsistent artificer. . . . And if He was not made what we are, He did nothing great when He suffered and endured. That we, however, are a body taken from the earth and a soul that receives the Spirit of God, everyone will acknowledge. This, then, is what the Word of God became, since he recapitulated in Himself His own handiwork.³⁵

This *imago* text, from the first paragraph of Chapter 22, represents the conclusion of a larger section of text (*Haer.* 3.19.1—22.1). The text is significant in that it establishes a connection between the divine image and likeness in humanity with Christ himself. This is not surprising given the context. Much of what Irenaeus wrote in the preceding and following chapters was highly polemical, with the preponderance of the paragraphs defending the humanity and real flesh of Christ.³⁶ This focus on Christ's humanity leads to an emphasis on the process, or *mechanism*, for the restoration of the *imago* in humankind. Part 1 of this section examines the sources of healing, and will identify how

³⁵ *Haer.* 3.22.1 (ACW 64:103).

³⁶ Steenberg demonstrates the challenge of sorting the critiques from chapters eighteen through to twenty-two. At issue is the fact that Irenaeus responds to two different Gnostic views of Christ: the Ebionites, with a more adoptionistic perspective, and the Valentintinians, with a view roughly analogous to Docetism. Unger and Steenberg, eds., *St. Irenaeus of Lyons*, 194.

exactly Christ's recapitulative work brings healing in general and restores the *imago* specifically.

Haer. 19.1—20.2: Accustomization to the Son

Chapters 18 to 22 in some ways resemble the polemical *refutation and overthrow* emphasis of Books 1 and 2. Here, the teaching of the heresies is not repeated, but Irenaeus' defense of Christ's full humanity and divinity, along with the myriad of scriptures employed, is vast (and not a little repetitive). Nevertheless, there are many important spiritual themes interspersed throughout the narrative. This survey begins three chapters prior to the *imago* text referenced above.

Those that assert Jesus was a mere man are liable to death, since they remain in the slavery of the former disobedience; for they have not yet been united with the Word of God the Father, nor have they received liberty through the Son . . . But since they are ignorant of the Emmanuel who was born of the Virgin, they are deprived of His gift, which is eternal life. And since they do not have the Word of imperishability, they continue in the mortal flesh and are debtors to death, because they do not have the antidote of life. . . . They are those who have not received the gift of adoption, but who . . . defraud humankind of its ascent to God. . . . The Word of God became man . . . to this end, that man, having been united with the Word of God and receiving adoption, might become a son of God.³⁷

It is observed that the hopeful elements of the text are largely eschatological in nature. As such, they are not directly applicable to the so-called "every-day" concerns of the spiritual life of the believer. Nevertheless, they are important for establishing the theological foundations of Irenaeus' spirituality. The hopeful promises point ahead to salvation, though the author is much more positivistic than escapist. That is to say, the

³⁷ *Haer.* 3.19.1 (ACW 64:92–93). On Irenaeus' use and interpretation of Psalm 82, see Nispel, "Christian Deification," 297–301.

text does not promise a soteriology whose great aim is simply to escape the prison of the material realm. On the contrary, the primary thrust is to promote the incomparable promise of union with God himself. This is a theme to which Irenaeus returns frequently.³⁸ In later texts, union and communion will also feature prominently in the *imago* discussion, as will be outlined below.

There is a noticeable emphasis on Christology, beginning here in Chapter 19 and continuing until the *imago* text in the afore-quoted *Haer.* 3.22.1. The adopted must not be ignorant of the Son and must receive liberty and sonship directly through him. The gift of life comes from him—this antidote of life, which Christ alone possesses. These two themes: eschatological promises and Christocentric theology dominate the next two chapters as Irenaeus continues to rebuke his opponents' understanding of Jesus' nature. In Paragraph 3 he offers a striking illustration, writing, "He, in Himself, offered the first fruits of the resurrection of humankind, that, as the Head rose from the dead, so also . . . the rest of the body made up of every human being who is found in life might rise, having been nourished . . . and having grown with the growth that is from God."³⁹ It is a vivid picture. Christ, symbolically rising from the dead, the head emerging from the earth, with the rest of the body (the Church) naturally rising as well. Those that are raised are those found in Him; quite literally, they must be attached to him. Chapter 20 takes a positive turn, shifting from the defensive and polemical tone and reflecting instead on the benefits and graces to be enjoyed by those found in Christ. As the chapter progresses, Irenaeus returns to his Christocentric themes, stressing again the centrality

³⁸ For an overview, see Springer, "Tell Us No Secrets," 85–94.

³⁹ *Haer.* 3.19.3 (ACW 64:94).

of the incarnation for the fulfilment of the graces. In fact, the significance of the promises lies entirely in their connection to God himself. He writes,

In truth, God is the glory of humanity, but humanity is the vessel of God's working, of all his wisdom and power. . . . With love, obedience, and thankfulness, we will receive the greater glory from Him, making such progress as to become wholly like Him who died for them. For He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh that he might condemn sin . . . and also, that He might invite humankind to His own likeness, inasmuch as he designated humans as imitators of God, led them to the Father's law that they might see God, and granted them the power of receiving the Father. He was the Word of God who dwelt in humanity, and was made the Son of Man in order that he might accustom humankind to receive God, and accustom God to dwell in humanity according to the Father's good pleasure.⁴⁰

The text begins to show the relationship between incarnation and *imago* as he revealed the two sides of the coin of "likeness" (*similitudinem*). First, Christ took up human form, sharing in humanity's likeness. This, in turn, allows for the invitation for humanity to take up the likeness of the Son. This transformative transaction and process can be translated as accustomization,⁴¹ or, more recently, it is referred to as representing the exchange or interchange formula. David Litwa summarizes the latter idea as "a scenario in which the Savior and the saved mutually participate in one another to realize the economy of salvation. Interchange involves some sort of exchange . . . that can be viewed as holistic (an exchange of natures) or partial (an exchange of properties)."⁴² The idea reinforces the salvific meaning of being found "in Christ" and it provides an important connection to the understanding of the *imago Dei*.

⁴⁰ *Haer.* 3.20.2 (ACW 64:96).

⁴¹ Accustomize translates *adsuesceret*; for a full discussion, see Éviex, "Théologie de l'accoutumance," 5–54.

⁴² Litwa, "Wondrous Exchange," 312; See also Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature*, 50, 55, 56; Macaskill, *Union with Christ*, 58–60.

Fantino does not employ the terminology of accustomization or exchange, but he does reflect on the passage's importance as it relates to the *imago*. He notes that the use of "likeness" is presented as a dynamic process. Humanity becomes assimilated to God (raised up to Him) and thus begins to share in divine resemblance (likeness).⁴³ Further, Fantino sees in this text a clear example of divinization.⁴⁴ This is another theme that will be explored in greater detail below. The significance of the present section is to identify the progress Irenaeus was making to explain the process of how human restoration would occur. Thus far, he has made clear that the process was, above all, thoroughly Christocentric. In response to his opponents, whether they be Valentinian, Ebionite, or the followers of Marcion, *Against Heresies* repeatedly stresses that humanity's hope is in Jesus Christ, predicated upon the fact that he must have possessed full divinity and humanity in order to accomplish restoration.

Haer. 3.21.10: The Virgin Mary and Recapitulating Eden

In Chapter 21 Irenaeus returns to the theme of recapitulation and begins to isolate how and why Christ's incarnation had a restorative outcome. Several of the opening sections again reflect on the need for Jesus to have possessed real flesh, but here the role of the Virgin Mary is emphasized.

He has recapitulated in Himself even the ancient first-fashioned man. To explain, just as by one man's disobedience sin came . . . so by one man's obedience, justice was brought and produces the fruit of life for those who in time past were dead. First, just as the first-fashioned Adam got his substance from untilled and as yet virgin soil . . . and

⁴³ Man reacquires the divine likeness, though he did not previously possess immortality. "Cela ne suppose pas que l'homme ait eu cette immortalité, mais il possédait le moyen de la recevoir et ce moyen, c'était la ressemblance. . . à l'œuvre de restauration et de libération déjà rencontrée précédemment, le passage ajoute celle d'achèvement de l'homme qui doit saisir Dieu: il s'agit de la divinisation de l'homme." Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, 113.

⁴⁴ Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, 113–14.

was formed by God's hand, that is, the Word of God . . . In like manner, since He is the Word recapitulating Adam in Himself, He rightly took from Mary, who was yet a virgin, His birth that would be a recapitulation of Adam.⁴⁵

It is here that Irenaeus, following Rom 5:18–19, provides greater articulation to his understanding of the process of recapitulation. Of particular interest is the clarification to the concept of Jesus as the second Adam. He took Paul's understanding, the basic typological parallel between the first man and the incarnate, perfect man, and offered significant elaboration to the concept. The first example where this is observed is with the issue of virginity. Irenaeus makes a point to draw the connection between Adam's emergence from virgin dirt with Mary's virginity. This is done in part to further reinforce Jesus' humanity, but the most interesting aspect is the typological parallel between the men's virginal sources of being. The rationale behind this interpretation lies in Irenaeus' concern for the *imago Dei*, as observed in these concluding remarks to Chapter 21.

If the former man was from the earth and fashioned by the Word of God, it was necessary that the same Word, since He was recapitulating Adam in Himself, have the same kind of birth. Why, then, did God not take earth a second time, instead of making the handiwork from Mary? In order that no different handiwork might be made, and that it might not be a different handiwork that would be saved; but that the same might be recapitulated, the likeness having been preserved.⁴⁶

These paragraphs introduce a fascinating glimpse into Irenaeus' understanding of soteriology and recapitulation. This is evidence of a rather rigid interpretation of Paul's meaning, with a strong reliance on analogical causality and a particular philosophy of

⁴⁵ *Haer.* 3.21.10 (ACW 64:102).

⁴⁶ *Haer.* 3.21.10 (ACW 64:102–3).

human origins.⁴⁷ Simply put, in these brief texts Irenaeus exhibits a resolute commitment to preserving typological parallels. This is true not only for Adam and Christ, but the parallels extend further, incorporating several elements from both the Genesis “rise and fall” and the Virgin “birth and restoration” narratives. The basis of the argument rests on the assumption that “no different handiwork” could be made. Adam was created in the image and likeness of God and restoration of that image required a Saviour to be constituted by that very same handiwork. Christ came to redeem humanity, thus he was required to share the same substance (handiwork).

Christ as the second Adam is the foundational piece of the recapitulative parallels. Strictly speaking, however, Jesus is second to the first man in only one respect: the incarnation followed creation in the timeline of God’s economy. In that sense, the second followed the first, but in every other regard, Jesus *reversed* nearly everything else associated with Adam. This is clear from the biblical statement that just as sin entered through the disobedience of one man, so righteousness came *through* the obedience of the other man. The fascinating element to Irenaeus’ thinking, however, is his insistence on extending the typology.

The most significant secondary parallel is between Eve and Mary, a feature of Irenaeus’ theology that has recently garnered renewed interest from scholars. First, Steenberg approached the issue from an important perspective. He simply asked, why did Irenaeus do this? To be more precise, his essay on Mary as a “co-recapitulator” probed the specific question of why and how she was important to this Irenaeus’ doctrine. This avenue of research prompted others to follow, and to examine Mary’s

⁴⁷ For an introduction to analogical inference, see Lee and Holyoak, “Role of Causal Models,” 1111–22.

soteriological role from different perspectives. Two notable examples include Dunning, who approached the question from a largely feminist perspective, and very recently Miola, who examined the specific use and imagery of the “tied and untied” knots described in *Against Heresies*.⁴⁸ Each of the studies highlighted the importance of the texts that suggest a role of special importance to Mary in the salvation of humanity.⁴⁹

In the same way that Christ accounts for and reverses the sin of Adam, so too does Irenaeus present Mary in parallel to Eve. Among the more notable passages is that found in *Haer.* 3.22.4 (four paragraphs after the last-quoted text).

The Virgin Mary was found obedient, saying [to the angel], “let it be done to me according to Your word.” Eve, however, was disobedient, for she did not obey when she was yet a virgin . . . She was disobedient, and became the cause of death for herself and the entire human race. In the same way, Mary, betrothed yet still a virgin, was obedient and was made the cause of salvation for herself and the entire human race . . . [signifying] the return-circuit from Mary to Eve. For in no other way is that which is tied together loosed, except that the cords of the tying are untied in the reverse order, so that the first cords are loosed by the second.⁵⁰

Each of the three aforementioned scholars highlighted Irenaeus’ noteworthy statement that with her obedience, the virgin *became the cause* of salvation.⁵¹ This is a profound claim. It is true that throughout his writings Irenaeus displays a sacred view of Mary. Moreover, it is undoubtedly unfair to simply brush these two texts aside, as some have previously attempted.⁵² The interest in these Marian passages center on the sense of causality that is suggested. Reference to “rescue by the virgin” (*Haer.* 5.19.1), and that

⁴⁸ Dunning, “Virgin Earth,” 57–88; Miola, “Mary as Un-tier,” 337–61.

⁴⁹ For an overview of the Church’s reception of Marian ideas, see Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*. See also Berrizbeitia Hernández, “Mariología Como Introducción,” 214–43.

⁵⁰ *Haer.* 3.22.4 (ACW 64: 104–5).

⁵¹ Cf. *Haer.* 5.19.1 (ANF 1:547). “As the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so is it rescued by a virgin.”

⁵² Hitchcock, *Irenaeus of Lugdunum*, 137–38.

she was the “cause of salvation,” are certainly issues in need of study. However, such study must pay careful attention to the larger context of Irenaeus’ thought, particularly his concern for the typological parallels. It is my suggestion that the interpretation of Jesus and Mary as the “second” Adam and Eve need to be understood in harmony with the other parallels employed in *Against Heresies*.

Irenaeus establishes a connection not only between the two men and the two virgins, but also between trees, angels, the soil, the dove, and the serpent. To summarize, Irenaeus argued that the Lord’s obedience on the tree recapitulated the disobedience of the first tree.⁵³ Also, not only were the two women betrothed virgins, but emphasis is also placed on the fact that just as Jesus emerged from a virgin mother, so too was Adam created from virgin soil, a point which Dunning explores in considerable detail.⁵⁴ There are also three sets of parallels for the serpent. First, the angel who brought good news of truth to Mary is contrasted by the seduction of the “angel” who came to Eve.⁵⁵ Second, the scheming serpent is balanced out by the innocent and truthful dove.⁵⁶ And lastly, there is a parallel between Christ and the snake. The former as the “one whose sole was bitten but who has the power to tread on the head of his enemy,” the latter as “the one who bit and killed,” but who is destined to be trampled.⁵⁷ It is clear that Irenaeus saw deep significance in almost every element of the Edenic narrative. Significance, that is, in that each of the elements needed a restorative counterpart in events surrounding the conception, birth, and life of Christ. In all, then,

⁵³ *Haer.* 5.19.1.

⁵⁴ *Haer.* 3.21.10, *Epid.* 32. Dunning, “Virgin Earth,” 68–72.

⁵⁵ *Haer.* 5.19.1.

⁵⁶ *Haer.* 5.19.1.

⁵⁷ *Haer.* 3.23.7.

there is Adam and Jesus, Eve and Mary, there is disobedience balanced by obedience, the two virginities, two trees, as well as the threefold serpent/angel parallels.

Despite these fascinating typological maneuvers, these secondary parallels have not received a great deal of attention from scholars. There is good reason for this, as neither the angel, nor the dove, and certainly the tree could not be understood as a “co-recapitulator,” as Steenberg identified Mary. Indeed, with these elements, the tendency has been to view them as examples of Irenaeus’ love for order and aesthetic. As Osborn put it, these secondary elements help tie the argument together.⁵⁸ I suggest, however, that a closer look is necessary to fully grasp Irenaeus’ understanding of how exactly the *imago Dei* was to be restored.

The Larger Context

To that end, there are two often overlooked statements in these recapitulation sections that ought to be part of the discussion. The first concerns this issue of obedience. At the core of Mary’s involvement is her faithfulness; a faithfulness which Irenaeus describes as being that which untied the knot of Eve’s disobedience. As a result, the interpretation has been offered that Mary is thus participating in Christ’s recapitulating work. Indeed, Miola suggests “she herself also recapitulates all things in Christ . . . Mary is intimately associated with her Son and cooperates in all his work.”⁵⁹ Moreover, God was “binding the wounds of humanity with the gentle fingers of a Virgin Mother.”⁶⁰ Miola sees Mary as a contributor to recapitulation on account of her faithfulness. This faithfulness,

⁵⁸ Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 98 n. 5.

⁵⁹ Miola, “Mary as Un-tier,” 341.

⁶⁰ Miola, “Mary as Un-tier,” 361.

however, needs to be understood against Irenaeus' larger Christocentric emphases.

Consider the following text from *Epid.* 34. There he states that

the transgression which occurred through the tree was undone by the obedience of the tree—which [when] the Son of Man, obeying God, was nailed to the tree, destroying the knowledge of evil and introducing and providing the knowledge of good . . . So, by means of the obedience by which He obeyed unto death, hanging upon the tree, He undid the old disobedience occasioned by the tree.⁶¹

Clearly, the suggestion of the text is not that the timber of the cross volitionally contributed to humanity's salvation. For though it is stated that the obedience of the tree undid the prior disobedience, he makes very clear his meaning. It was Christ's obedience on the cross that was the true cause of salvation. This does not deny, however, that Irenaeus understood the tree as occupying an important place in his recapitulative schema. The role played by the tree of life in Eden required a balancing opposite. As Osborn put it, "one tree was set right on another tree, the cross. This only worked because the obedience of Jesus was directed to the same father as was the disobedience of Adam. In the second Adam we are reconciled to God because in him we are made obedient to death."⁶² The question, then, is whether Mary's role is at all analogous to that of the tree, despite the undeniable fact that she—and she alone—made a legitimate, volitional contribution to the historical events of the recapitulation. This leads to the second a text of interest, from *Haer.* 3.21.10, already referenced above. "He has recapitulated in Himself even the ancient first-fashioned man . . . so by one man's obedience, justice was brought and produces the fruit of life for those who in time past

⁶¹ *Epid.* 34 (Behr, ed., *Irenaeus: Apostolic Preaching*, 62); Cf. *Haer.* 5.17.4.

⁶² Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 100.

were dead . . . since He is the Word recapitulating Adam in Himself, He rightly took from Mary, who was yet a virgin, His birth that would be a recapitulation of Adam.”⁶³

Later in the paragraph, also quoted above, was the statement that Jesus was required to come from a virgin in order to maintain that “likeness” to be shared with the rest of humanity. Both these texts—located only four paragraphs before the first virgin-causing-salvation text—reveal the fully Christocentric focus of the recapitulation. Christ himself recapitulates Adam; it was the *one man's obedience* that was key, and it was he who “took” from Mary his birth (*ex Maria*). Altogether, it portrays a decidedly isolated focus on who is ultimately responsible. It is also significant to note what Irenaeus’ response was to the question of why Jesus was not formed from the earth as was Adam. In his response he did not mention any need for the virgin, but that the likeness of the handiwork was to be maintained. In fact, Irenaeus consistently emphasized the Christocentric priority where recapitulation and soteriology were concerned. A text from *Haer.* 3.23.1 is, I believe, faithfully representative. It was the Lord, Irenaeus affirms, that while seeking out those injured by the serpent, he bound that strong man and abolished death . . . [and thus] the captives were loosed from the bonds of punishment.

Christological Focus

Two questions remain unanswered. First, it seems relevant to pick up again the question of why Irenaeus concerned himself with any of these issues related to typology, parallels of balancing and reversal; why the need for the second Adam, Eve, tree, and angel? I propose that the answer resides in Irenaeus’ concern to articulate clearly the all-

⁶³ *Haer.* 3.21.10 (ACW 64:102).

encompassing and restorative process of Christ's work. The promises of salvation were important, but so also were the mechanics of it. This was probably something of a response to the Gnostic creation narratives. As Blowers noted above, Irenaeus would not have invested such energies refuting those teachings unless they had proved attractive.⁶⁴ One of the ways doctrines such as the Valentinians could be countered was to offer compelling alternatives. His opponents provided detailed narratives to explain human origins and redemption, and here Irenaeus does something similar. His focus was not cosmogonic, however, but redemptive. With this teaching, he drew on the Genesis account of creation, along with Paul's ideas of recapitulation, and offered a comprehensive counter-narrative. This is true in two ways. Not only as a response to the "Gnostics" themselves, but to one of their principle objections: the potential for spiritual health in the existing material realm. Irenaeus does not ascribe to the belief that fallen humanity represents the inevitable conclusion to the erred creative process (because of the ignorant Demiurge), but on the contrary, *restoration* in this life is possible. This possibility occurs because of the great reversal that occurs with Christ's recapitulative work. This explains why Irenaeus seems to have been compelled to balance out and reverse every element of the original sin event. Thus, Rousseau used the word *contrebalancée*, a counter balance, to describe Mary's relationship to Eve.⁶⁵ Complete restoration required complete healing.⁶⁶ This helps to explain Irenaeus' use of

⁶⁴ Blowers, *Drama of Divine Economy*, 82.

⁶⁵ Rousseau et al., eds., SC 153:251. *Et quemadmodum adstrictum est morti genus humanum per virginem, salvatur per virginem: aequa lance disposita virginalis inobedientia per virginalem obedientiam.*

⁶⁶ This same principle, this attention to detail and restoration is also found elsewhere. Perhaps the most bizarre example is the famous passage on the lifespan of Jesus. He believed Christ "sanctified every age by a likeness to Himself. He came to save all . . . through Himself . . . infants, children, youth, young adults, elderly. Therefore, he passed through every age." (*Haer.* 2.22.4). Since every age required sanctification, Christ was thus required to live through each one. Most baffling is the assertion that "the

typological parallels along with some of his bizarre forays into analogy and numerology.⁶⁷ His interest is in expressing how Christ fully and completely restores God's creation: every detail and every phase finds healing and fulfilment in Him.

The second unresolved question comes back to Mary. If the Christocentric texts suggest that her role should not necessarily be identified as co-recapitulator, how should she be understood? Though Steenberg used the term co-recapitulator in his essay's title, I nevertheless agree that his thesis is right. He argued that the virgin mother, like Eve, was a helper and that her role typified the social element of salvation. He writes,

Mary is in the unique position of being herself recapitulatory, not in the same sense as Christ whose recapitulation is of human nature, but as one whose role in the recapitulative economy is to restore the proper character of human interrelatedness that this nature requires. Irenaeus can see this as a role distinct from that of Christ inasmuch as the healing of social relationships requires a relationship . . .⁶⁸

Moreover, though "salvation [is] wrought by Christ . . . [it is] worked out in concert with the society of humankind, typified first in Eve and later in Mary."⁶⁹ I would also agree with Sesboüé, who goes further to argue that Irenaeus deliberately avoided referencing Mary's actions as recapitulative, choosing instead to speak of a recirculation.⁷⁰ This point has also been made by Steenberg in the notes to his translation of Book 3. He points out that recirculation suggests a meaning similar to recapitulation, but Irenaeus

Lord truly did advance into his senior years, he was closer to fifty than he was forty" (*Haer.* 2.22.5–6). For commentary, see Unger, Dillon, ACW 2, 145–46 n.30.

⁶⁷ Numerological examples: as many days as it took to create the world, in so many thousand years will it conclude (*Haer.* 5.28.3); Adam's death through disobedience came on the sixth day, so thus did Jesus die on the sixth; so, in turn, the new creation for humanity corresponds to the original day of creation (*Haer.* 5.23.2); Adam gave in to the temptation of food, Christ rejected temptation after forty days without food (*Haer.* 5.21.2).

⁶⁸ Steenberg, "Role of Mary," 136.

⁶⁹ Steenberg, "Role of Mary," 137.

⁷⁰ Sesboüé, *Tout récapituler*, 144.

coined the newer term to “express the role of Mary in the work of recapitulation—[a term] which is reserved to Christ.”⁷¹

To summarize, Mary, like all the other positive elements of the typological parallels, was necessary for the economy of salvation to be secured. Each broken element related to the fall required a reversal through a balancing counterpart. Mary’s role was distinguished by the fact that she alone actively contributed to the work of reversal, typifying the response necessary in salvation. A proper understanding of this dynamic is crucial for grasping Irenaeus’ chief concerns as they relate to the spiritual life. As has been clear, the foundations of spirituality rest firm on the work of the Son and the Spirit. The former secures salvation, the latter enlivens it. The point firmly established, Irenaeus returns to the theme of the *imago Dei* and again refers to Mary. Once more, his Christocentric soteriology will be clear.

Haer. 3.22.1: The Image of God through the Flesh of Man

They who assert that Christ received nothing from the Virgin are in great error; in casting out the inheritance of the flesh, they likewise reject the likeness [between Adam and Jesus]. For if the former had a formation and substance from the earth by both God’s hand and skill [but Christ did not], then he did not preserve the likeness of man, who was made according the His image and likeness, and He will appear to be an inconsistent artificer . . . And if He was not made what we are, He did nothing great when He suffered and endured. That we, however, are a body taken from the earth and a soul that receives the Spirit of God, everyone will acknowledge. This, then, is what the Word of God became, since he recapitulated in Himself His own handiwork.⁷²

⁷¹ Unger and Steenberg, eds., *St. Irenaeus of Lyons*, 201.

⁷² *Haer.* 3.22.1 (ACW 64:103).

For Irenaeus, the issue to be settled first is the likeness shared between Adam and Christ. His teachings on the spiritual life depend on this since the heart of spirituality is restoration. If restoration is the key, and Christ is the means by which fulfilment is possible, then there must be a fluid continuity between the first man, the perfect man, and those to be redeemed. Ultimately, this is one of the principle reasons Mary is afforded such an important place, because *Jesus was required to come in true, human flesh*. The renewal of humankind is predicated by Irenaeus on the concept that Christ can redeem those who fell, because he himself is one of them. The *imago* can be restored because he shares in the *similitudo*.

Section Summary

Irenaeus held to a rigid order and balanced structure to the world and to the economy of salvation. He stressed repeatedly the fact that all of creation is well-ordered, and fashioned in harmony, beauty, with wisdom and care. Because of God's artistry, nothing could possibly be out of order; indeed, if people will only listen to the melody of the artist they would hear and praise Him.⁷³ These convictions are aesthetic, but for Irenaeus the issue is more than just a concern for symmetry and beauty; for him, the very integrity of God was at stake. Also at stake was the destiny of humanity. Irenaeus' concern was for God's people to "become like him:" to experience complete and comprehensive healing. So why the Eden to incarnation parallels? Because Irenaeus' theology demanded all sin be balanced in the opposite, and because a reversal was

⁷³ *Haer.* 2.2.4; 2.15.2; 2.25.1; 3.16.6/7; 4.4.2.

necessary to ensure the potential for human restoration. These are the mechanics of recapitulation and of the healing of the *image Dei*.

***Haer.* 3.23.1—24.1: The Spiritual Problem: The Image Lost**

Introduction

To this point, the two *imago* texts and their surrounding contexts have identified two key themes. First, that God desires, through the ministry of the Word and Spirit, to restore humanity back to the divine image and likeness. The first section focused on the Son and Spirit of God as the key sources which bring the necessary healing. Second, Irenaeus began to describe the process by which humanity would be restored. Recapitulation describes the mechanics—the means by which Adam’s heirs would experience a reversal of fortunes. In this third and final section of Book 3, Irenaeus begins to explore what it was that was lost viz. the *imago Dei*.

Haer. 3.23.1: The Image Injured and Lost

It was necessary, therefore, that the Lord, when coming to the lost sheep and making a recapitulation of so great an economy, and seeking out His handiwork, should save the very man who was made according to His image and likeness, that is, Adam, who was filling out the time of his punishment, which was imposed because of his disobedience . . . If humankind, which was made by God that it might live, but which lost that life when it was injured by the serpent who corrupted it, would no longer return to life but would be altogether abandoned to death, God would be overcome and the serpent’s wickedness would thus prevail over God’s will.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ *Haer.* 3.23.1 (ACW 64:105).

Texts such as these are those that make interpreting Irenaeus a challenge. The purpose of this study is to take a broad view of the many references to the *imago Dei* and, hopefully, to better understand the meaning of individual texts such as this one. If one isolates only this pericope, however, it is clear why his ideas can be unclear. In *Haer.* 3.23.1 this much is obvious: humanity is described as having been like a lost sheep, suffering under a time of punishment. This punishment resulted in the loss of the life for which it had been created for. Also clear in the text is the association between the divine image and Christ. Irenaeus states that the Lord came to save those made in *his* image and likeness. There is also no ambiguity in the text concerning the origin of humanity's sad plight. The serpent corrupted the first man and because of Adam and Eve's disobedience, the punishment of exile and death followed.

Though there is not enough information here to articulate what precisely was lost with the image and likeness, two points are important moving forward. First, that the image according to which the first man was created is linked to Christ. The text here only hints at the meaning and implications of this association, but that link will prove important in later sections. Second, that image is also directly linked to life itself. At least, to life as it was intended for humankind. Thus, there is a Christ-imago-authentic life trifacta here at work. Irenaeus does not tease out the details at this point, but he clearly established the importance of the theme.

But since God is unconquerable and long-suffering, He showed Himself long-suffering in the correction of humanity and put all under probation, as we have said. He bound the strong one by the second Man, and plundered his vessels, and abolished death by vivifying the man who had been killed. . . . Moreover, the human race, which had been captive, was loosed from the bonds of punishment.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ *Haer.* 3.23.1 (ACW 64:105–6).

In an interesting twist on the parable of the strong man, Irenaeus here identified God not only as the strongest man, but indeed as the plunderer as well.⁷⁶ As a result of humanity's exile, the enemy held the entire race captive; they were bound by the proverbial bonds of punishment. But through Christ, the second Man, the enemy was plundered. His bounty was taken from him and captive humanity was loosed. What is of interest in the text is the reference to vivification (*vivificans*). This idea of the quickening, or the bringing to life is one Irenaeus frequently utilizes in discussion of the *imago Dei*.⁷⁷ There seems to be two dynamics at work in humanity's restoration. First, the enemy needed defeating; second, the human race needed rehabilitation. In this text, the two events are not clearly differentiated; the victory over the strong man appears to simultaneously vivify humanity. In later texts, however, these dynamics will be more clearly differentiated.⁷⁸ This leads to a second challenge in the text.

In Paragraph 2 Irenaeus references bondage and enslavement, but in Paragraph 1 and elsewhere the image and likeness is described as being "lost."⁷⁹ These are two striking illustrations, but not easily reconciled. The solution to bondage is to be freed, but the loss of the divine image *within* a person seems altogether more complicated. Slavery is imposed externally, but the likeness of God is a matter of ontological interiority. This connects to the aforementioned critique of Wendt and Loofs and the issue of tension between the two dynamics of restoration. In this text Irenaeus indicates

⁷⁶ The parable of the strong man concerns Jesus' authority over demons (Matt 12:22–36; Mark 3:22–27; Luke 11:14–23), but Irenaeus may have also had Isaiah in view. There, the prophecy speaks of the Lord rescuing captives from the enemy and retrieving plunder (Isa 49:24–25).

⁷⁷ *Haer.* 3.18.7; 3.23.7; 3.24.1; 4.2.7; 4.20.10; 5.8.2–9.2; 5.11.1–12.2.

⁷⁸ Behr sees the references to vivification as a wholly eschatological experience. Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 86, 96.

⁷⁹ Adam's child-like mind and that robe of holiness was described as lost, clearly in view of the *imago* reference in the same paragraph. Cf. *Haer.* 4.39.1.

both that freedom needed to be secured, but a work of divine healing was also needed for human nature/condition. The matter is not solved in this text but is one to keep in view as the study progresses. In the next paragraph, Irenaeus elaborates on the implications of human freedom.

Haer. 3.23.2–3: Adam as Forefather of both Image and Brokenness

Adam was the first-fashioned, concerning whom Scripture affirms that God said, “Let us make man in our image and likeness.” We, moreover, all take our origin from him, and since we are from him, therefore we also inherit his name. Now since humanity is saved, it is proper that that man be saved who was created first. . . . God, who has given aid to humanity and restored humans to their freedom, is not devoid of power, nor is He unjust.⁸⁰

This text is another example of Irenaeus’ commitment to the reversal aspect of recapitulative salvation. In the same way that Adam’s sin infected all humanity moving *forward*, so was Christ’s redemptive act no less powerful moving *backward*. This text also reveals how the bishop consistently applies a dual and dynamic meaning to the image of God. As noted a few paragraphs earlier, the Word of God is himself the definitive image. Here, however, Adam is again identified as the one to whom the *imago* was applied, and it is his inheritance and fate subsequent humanity shares. Thus, in Irenaeus’ mind, Adam also needs to be included in recapitulative salvation.⁸¹

The question, however, is how these implications affect one’s understanding of the spiritual life. As Irenaeus continues his narrative, he begins to identify the spiritual consequences—though eminently material and practical—of this new reality. The

⁸⁰ *Haer.* 3.23.2 (ACW 64:106).

⁸¹ There are clearly important soteriological implications of this verse. For a discussion, see Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, chapter 3.

purpose of this study is to identify in what ways the opposite is true; that is to say, how did Irenaeus envision the restoration of the *imago Dei* to practically impact the everyday lives of his congregants? Are there any elements of a realized eschatology in the restored *imago*? These are the questions subsequent chapters will seek to answer. In the next paragraphs of Chapter 23 Irenaeus begins to unpack the implications of enslavement. He starts by qualifying the extent of Adam's punishment.

God uttered no curse against Adam himself, but against the earth . . . But as punishment for his transgression, the man received weariness and earthly labor, and to eat his bread in the sweat of his face . . . and the woman weariness, labors, sighs, and servitude [to her husband]. Thus, they were not cursed by God, that they might not perish altogether; but neither were they left unreprimanded, lest they come to despise God. The whole curse, however, fell upon the serpent . . . ⁸²

Following Gen 3:17,⁸³ Irenaeus makes an important distinction. Though Adam and all his progeny would be exiled, they would not be cursed. The text places significant importance on this fact, noting that had Adam received the curse, all hope would have been lost. He would have been irredeemable and thus, spiritually dead. Nevertheless, punishment was necessary. Not only as a consequence of the sin, but for salvific purposes as well, as will be evident in Paragraph 6 below. In the meantime, it is nonetheless true that “the wages of sin is death,”⁸⁴ and Irenaeus affirms that the eternal fire was thus prepared. “Not originally for humankind,” he reasoned, “but for him who seduced humankind and caused humans to sin . . .”⁸⁵ Further soteriological questions emerge with his elaboration on hell, noting that the fire is also for those who “continue

⁸² *Haer.* 3.23.3 (ACW 64:106–7).

⁸³ “And to the man he said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.’” Gen 3:17.

⁸⁴ Rom 6:23.

⁸⁵ *Haer.* 3.23.3 (ACW 64:107).

in their wicked deeds devoid of penitence and without retracing their steps.”⁸⁶ Adam, as will be observed in Paragraph 5, did not continue in his disobedience. Nevertheless, the consequences to his sin were immense and in this next section, Irenaeus at last provides insight into what precisely was “lost” to him.

Haer. 3.23.5–6: Lost at Eden

Adam showed his repentance by his action . . . he covered himself with fig leaves . . . as a garment appropriate for his disobedience. He resisted the petulant impulse of the flesh, since he had lost his natural disposition and childlike mind and had come to the knowledge of evil things. . . . It was as if he wished to say: Since through disobedience I have lost the robe of holiness that I had from the Spirit, I now acknowledge that I deserve such a garment that offers me no pleasure, but gnaws at the body and pricks it.⁸⁷

There are two features Irenaeus indicates that were lost to Adam, and thus by extension, to all of humankind. These two elements, Adam’s “disposition and childlike mind” and the “robe of holiness,” are both worth examining in detail.

A Loss of Innocence

The first reference is to Adam having lost his natural disposition and childlike mind (*indolem et puerilem amiserat sensum*).⁸⁸ The issue is a complicated one, with Irenaeus providing several allusions to Adam and Eve as children in their prelapsarian state. One chapter earlier, they were described as: naked, without shame, only recently created, and

⁸⁶ *Haer.* 3.23.3 (ACW 64:107).

⁸⁷ *Haer.* 3.23.5 (ACW 64:108), with emendation.

⁸⁸ I have reverted to Steenberg’s earlier translation from Steenberg, “Children in Paradise,” 11. In his 2012 ACW translation he rendered *indolem* as “guileless,” rather than “natural disposition.” The latter is similar to Behr’s translation (“natural and childlike”). See; Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 118. Steenberg offers no comments in the ACW apparatus for the change. For a discussion of the development of the doctrine of original sin, including the key issues which potentially affect the translations offered by scholars from different traditions, see Wiley, *Original Sin*; Rondet, *Le péché originel*.

without knowledge of procreation, for they had yet to grow up (*Haer.* 3.22.4). In *Haer.* 4.38.1–2 they are referred to as infants or infantile four times.⁸⁹ *Demonstration* 12 twice more identifies Adam as a child, while Chapter 14 has perhaps the most unique of the passages. There, the claim of *Haer.* 3.23.5 is closely followed, calling them those with “an innocent and childlike mind.” Moreover,

they preserved their nature [intact], since that which was breathed into the handiwork was the breath of life; and while the breath remains in [its] order and strength, it is without comprehension or understanding of what is evil: and thus “they were not ashamed,” kissing [and] embracing each other in holiness as children.⁹⁰

At first reading it is difficult to imagine interpreting these in a literal sense; that is, taking Irenaeus’ meaning to be in reference to children in the physically underdeveloped sense. Indeed, with few exceptions, most scholars dismiss such a notion.⁹¹ However, Steenberg points out that Irenaeus was very deliberate with his choice of words, choosing those which would naturally lead to a *physical* interpretation. In addition, Steenberg argues that Irenaeus generally demonstrates a literal reading of the scripture, over and against the allegorical and philosophical methodologies of his Gnostic opponents. “The intention of Irenaeus’ entire polemic is patently literalistic, and this literalism must not be forgotten in the examination of his particular doctrines.”⁹² Although the second-century bishop occasionally employed allegorical interpretation, Steenberg nevertheless provides a helpful balance to the discussion.⁹³ While not

⁸⁹ Steenberg offers a detailed analysis of the terminology used by Irenaeus in these texts, with particular attention to the distinctive use of *νήπιοι* for children/infant. See Steenberg, “Children in Paradise,” 1–22.

⁹⁰ *Epid.* 14 (Behr, ed., *Irenaeus: Apostolic Preaching*, 48).

⁹¹ For one exception, see Smith, “Chiliasm and Recapitulation,” 318–19.

⁹² Steenberg, “Children in Paradise,” 9.

⁹³ For an excellent discussion on Irenaeus’ anti-allegorical, yet occasionally “non-literal” readings of scripture, see Ayres, “Irenaeus vs. the Valentinians,” 153–87.

advocating for the idea that Adam and Eve were pre-pubescent in the physical sense, he nevertheless forces the reader to acknowledge the significant tension in the text. There seems little doubt that his intent was for his congregants to take seriously his portrait of Adam and Eve as children, regardless of the paradox of the assertion. “Irenaeus employs the imagery and language of childhood in a manner essential to his reading of sin and subsequently of salvation, [but he does not] make explicit the details of his usage nor offer a precise definition of his understanding of the term *νήπιιοι*.”⁹⁴

In view of the biblical sources upon which Irenaeus was drawing, the most natural interpretation is to view Edenic life in an ontological sense. That is to say, citizens of that realm were like children, not in a physical sense, but vis-à-vis their status before God. To illustrate, in Book 4 Irenaeus comments on the text where Jesus indicated who it is who would enter the Kingdom. Jesus taught that one must “change and become like children . . . Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”⁹⁵ Irenaeus references the text in combination with an allusion to the Israelites who had fled from Egypt. Among them, he asked,

who are they that have been saved and received the inheritance? Those, doubtless, who do believe God, and who have continued in His love; as did Caleb of Jephunneh and Joshua of Nun, and innocent children, who have had no sense of evil. But who are they that are saved now, and receive life eternal? Is it not those who love God, and who believe His promises, and who “in malice have become as little children?”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Steenberg, “Children in Paradise,” 2.

⁹⁵ Matt 18:3–5.

⁹⁶ *Haer.* 4.28.3 (ANF 1:501–2).

There are two points of importance in this text. First, he accepted as innocent those young Israelite children who had no “sense of evil.” Second, and for those in his own era, Irenaeus argues that the faithful must continue to love and believe in God, in the same manner as was expected of those before Jesus. In addition, for Christians—and presumably of an adult, no-longer-innocent age—the expectation is to obey Jesus’ words from Matt 18 and become like children. Clearly, there is a quality to childhood that Irenaeus saw as being of great importance. It is noted that in the text just quoted from Book 4, as well as the primary text under examination (*Haer.* 3.23.5), reference is made to the presence of evil in the mind. Gen 3:7 states that with their sin Adam and Eve had their eyes opened; they now saw their nakedness. Irenaeus notes that earlier, they had no knowledge of evil things, much in the same way that the youngest of the fleeing Israelites had no “sense” of evil. In combination with the call for believers to become like children, two points are clear: there is both a descriptive and progressive quality to this child-like purity. It is descriptive because the inhabitants of Eden and the children of Israel *were* understood to be innocent and pure. They possessed a certain quality of character and integrity that was accepted by God. With sin, and with the inevitable coming of age, that quality disappears, however.

The second quality to child-like purity is its progression and growth. The implication of a Christian “becoming like” a child is itself a progressive concept. One must become what one is not. There is also the implication behind the fact that an innocent child must mature and grow. Irenaeus in no way believed that the human person was created with a child-like mind and disposition that was intended to remain static and unchanged. As will be explored in further detail below, growth and

progression were fundamental elements in Irenaeus' theology and spirituality. Humanity was created to always grow nearer to God. He alone is perfect, but humankind "receives advancement and increase towards God. For as God is always the same, so also man, when found in God, shall always go on towards Him. For neither does God at any time cease to confer benefits upon, or to enrich man; nor does man ever cease from receiving the benefits, and being enriched by God."⁹⁷ In light of this emphasis on growth, this creates an interesting dilemma concerning our principal question, namely, what was it that Adam lost?

Wingren notes the tension between recapitulation and restoration on the one hand, with an emphasis on eternal growth on the other hand. As noted, these themes have led scholars to see a contradiction in Irenaeus' thought and an incompatibility in his sources.⁹⁸ Wingren argues that the key to understanding Irenaeus is to avoid viewing the Edenic era as humanity's "original state." He argues one should not use the term because "it tends to suggest a static scheme."⁹⁹ Rather, both Steenberg and Wingren prefer to speak of Adam's potential. Neither he nor Eve were mature because they yet fell short of the perfect. Nevertheless, they were "possessed-but-not-yet-realized" with all that they needed.¹⁰⁰ In terms of what was lost, Wingren provides a helpful example of a child losing the ability to speak.

It is not illogical to argue that one may lose what one has never had. An accident may deprive a child of the power of speech before it has reached the age when it occasionally spoke a few words. If, however, the child which suffered from such a defect were cured by medical skill, the recovery of its health would be evidenced by the fact that it

⁹⁷ *Haer.* 4.11.2 (ANF 1:474).

⁹⁸ Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, 27.

⁹⁹ Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, 25 n. 74.

¹⁰⁰ Steenberg, "Children in Paradise," 14; Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, 24–28; Lawson, *Biblical Theology of Irenaeus*, 207–14.

spoke, by doing something, that is, which it had never done before.
The child recovers its power of speech which it never had.¹⁰¹

Those in Eden were child-like then, not because they were of small stature, but because of their purity before God, as well as their ontological distance from him. The distinction between God and Adam is “real and ontological, not simply a state of mind or logical distance. This monumental gulf between them, a gulf founded here in Adam's own being as newly created man, is not one of physical distance nor deprivation of grace, but the natural difference of being that exists between Creator and created.”¹⁰²

The distinction between Creator and created is another theme of great importance throughout Irenaeus' writings, and another which will be explored in more detail below. In this text, Irenaeus argues that Adam lost his natural disposition and childlike mind. Regarding the latter, Adam (representing all humanity) was no longer capable of growing naturally unto perfection. As to the former, he maintained his “natural” position relative to God (Creator versus created), but lost the potential intended for that disposition. Where there had been purity and possibility, the knowledge of and indebtedness to evil now characterized human identity.

A Loss of the Spiritual?

Adam showed his repentance by his action . . . he covered himself with fig leaves . . . as a garment appropriate to his disobedience . . . It was as if he wished to say: Since through disobedience I have lost the robe of holiness that I had from the Spirit, I now acknowledge that I deserve such a garment as offers me no pleasure, but gnaws at the body and pricks it.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, 27.

¹⁰² Steenberg, “Children in Paradise,” 15.

¹⁰³ *Haer.* 3.23.5 (ACW 64:108).

Both the Genesis narrative and *Against Heresies* make clear Adam and Eve's self-induced affliction. Their sin led to their punishment; the transgression fractured their God-intended potential. At the same time, however, the idea of the loss of the "robe of holiness from the Spirit" speaks to the withdrawal of the divine. As this robe is clearly associated with the Holy Spirit, yet another dilemma is introduced: in what sense was humanity's "spiritual" nature stripped after Eden? Scholars have debated how this relates to a generic spiritual nature, to the breath of God as received by the nascent man in Gen 2:7, to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and to the divine image and likeness of Gen 1:26. As is often the case, Irenaeus does not offer a simple solution. On the one hand, he clearly distinguishes between the breath of life which "animated" Adam, and the vivifying Spirit that causes one to "become spiritual." The breath is common to all, but not so the fullness of the Holy Spirit. He says elsewhere that

The breath is temporal, but the Spirit eternal. The breath, too, increases in strength for a short period, and continues for a certain time; after that it takes its departure, leaving its former abode destitute of breath. But when the Spirit pervades the man within and without, inasmuch as it continues there, it never leaves him . . . For there had been a necessity that, in the first place, a human being should be fashioned, and that what was fashioned should receive the soul; afterwards that it should thus receive the communion of the Spirit. Wherefore also the first Adam was made by the Lord "a living soul, the second Adam a quickening spirit." As, then, he who was made a living soul forfeited life when he turned aside to what was evil, so, on the other hand, the same individual, when he reverts to what is good, and receives the quickening Spirit, shall find life.¹⁰⁴

As noted above, *Epid.* 14 expresses it this way: prior to their fall Adam and Eve were innocent because they "preserved their nature intact, since that which was breathed into the handiwork was the breath of life; and while the breath remains in its order and

¹⁰⁴ *Haer.* 5.12.2 (ANF 1:538).

strength, it is without comprehension or understanding of what is evil.”¹⁰⁵ Scholars have debated the relationship between the presence of the breath at creation, with the presence of the Spirit available to humanity following Pentecost. Fantino links the robe of holiness with the divine “likeness,”¹⁰⁶ while Behr and Steenberg seem to view the breath as sufficiently empowering Adam such that he would not later be in need of the Spirit, were he to have remained without sin.¹⁰⁷ That possibility raises further issues, not the least of which concerns whether humanity is constituted as bi-partite or tripartite. That is a question, however, which falls outside the scope of this project.¹⁰⁸

The principal question of this chapter has been to consider what exactly was lost by Adam following his transgression. What is certain is that Irenaeus understood the first man to have been, in some way, stripped of something spiritual. In view of the language (the robe of holiness), Fantino is likely correct that it was not meant to convey “a change of human nature.”¹⁰⁹ Rather, the primary point is that humanity lost the vibrancy and life-giving nourishment of the Spirit’s presence. Moreover, without that divine connection, the human life existed in a temporal state, unable to ascend to or co-

¹⁰⁵ *Epid.* 14 (Behr, ed., *Irenaeus: Apostolic Preaching*, 48).

¹⁰⁶ Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 162.

¹⁰⁷ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 111–13; Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 130–38.

¹⁰⁸ There is a temptation to over-analyze Irenaeus’ meaning on this issue. Steenberg provides a helpful, cautionary note: “the usual classifications of biblical anthropology into ‘bipartite’ or ‘tripartite’ schemes breaks down vis-à-vis Irenaeus. He can, and does, at times declare the human person to be a composite of ‘body and soul’ (bipartite), and at others of ‘body, soul and spirit’ (tripartite). This spirit, however, as much as it is an integral part of humanity’s being through the inbreathing and indwelling of God, is never part of his proper composition, inasmuch as it is the Holy Spirit of God (cf. Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 99–101). I have followed Irenaeus and refrained from employing such terms or categories in the attempt to describe his view on the structure and nature of the human person.” Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 134. For an interesting comparison of Irenaeus’ and Origen’s views of the human constitution, see Jacobsen, “Constitution of Man,” 67–94.

¹⁰⁹ “La faute d’Adam n’a pas entraîné un changement dans la nature humaine, mais, abandonnée à sa faiblesse, elle est dorénavant soumise au péché, à la mort et à Satan.” Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 102.

exist with the Creator. The “robe of holiness” was external in the sense that it was not part of Adam’s nature, but intrinsic to his compatibility with God through the Spirit.

The robe is paralleled in the opposite with the “garment of disobedience.” Reminiscent of the call in Ephesians to put off the old man and put on the new, here the first man was stripped of the old and original and puts on something new and wholly inferior. Despite the emphasis on what was “lost” with the Edenic fall, there is a symbol of hope both in Paragraph 5 and 6.

Potential Restoration

This study of Paragraph 5 has focused entirely on those elements that Irenaeus suggests were lost to Adam on account of his disobedience. In truth, though these features of the text are critical for this study, those elements of the text do not represent the bishop’s central concern in that pericope. Both the idea of having lost his “natural disposition and childlike mind” and the “robe of holiness from the Spirit” are given as reasons to explain Adam’s repentance.

Adam showed his repentance by his action . . . he covered himself with fig leaves . . . as a garment appropriate to his disobedience. He resisted the petulant impulse of the flesh, since he had lost his natural disposition and childlike mind and had come to the knowledge of evil things. It was as if he wished to say: Since through disobedience I have lost the robe of holiness that I had from the Spirit, I now acknowledge that I deserve such a garment as offers me no pleasure, but gnaws at the body and pricks it.¹¹⁰

One paragraph earlier (*Haer.* 3.23.4), Irenaeus reflects on the post-Edenic first-family and uses Cain as an illustration of one who did not choose faithfulness. On the contrary, his hardness of heart, murderous actions, and, above all, his irreverence before God

¹¹⁰ *Haer.* 3.23.5 (ACW 64:108).

brought a curse upon himself. Adam, however, is presented in a positive light as one who acknowledged and responded appropriately to his transgression.¹¹¹ Irenaeus offers the interesting interpretation that the dressing of fig leaves was a deliberate act of penitence: a garment appropriate in light of the transgression.¹¹² Adam is thus offered as an exemplar, one who admitted his error and accepted the consequences. Indeed, his acceptance was such that he initiated his own punishment. Irenaeus argued this action was demonstrated by Adam's choice of foliage outerwear. From the lush garden there were undoubtedly a wide variety of leaves available. The fig tree, however, was not an ideal choice, for its leaves are rough and prickly. Later Jewish traditions suggested that Eden's tree of knowledge was itself a fig tree and that this inspired the choice of the fig leaf.¹¹³ Irenaeus' testimony, however, is among the earliest extant witnesses to suggest this type of symbolic meaning behind the famed Edenic garments. The donning of the fig leaves not only foreshadows the spirit of the "sackcloth and ashes" of later generations, but, according to *Against Heresies*, the garment also visually symbolized the spiritual consequences of what had occurred. Irenaeus suggested that Adam's action was him admitting his forfeiture of the spiritual garment and instead of that glorious robe, he clothed himself with something that would provide not blessing, but pain. The

¹¹¹ "Immediately [after his sin] he was seized with fear and hid himself—not as if he could escape from God, but . . . he felt unworthy of coming into the presence of and conversing with God. However, since 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of understanding,' knowledge of the transgression led to repentance—and God bestows His kindness on those who repent." *Haer.* 3.23.5 (ACW 64:107).

¹¹² Behr has an interesting take on Adam's mindset, suggesting that "Adam, mistaking the symptom for the cause, then tries to control or negate by adopting a state of continence, one which 'gnaws and frets the body.' In such a state of repentance, but self-imposed continence, man would not have been able to receive the growth and increase which God has set before him: he has taken control of himself, no longer allowing God to act in him. Thus the economy of God, in this instance, is to replace these fig-leaves, the self-imposed continence, with garments of skin." Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 119.

¹¹³ *Ber.* 40a; *Gen. R.* 15:7. (*Berakot* {Talmud, AD 300s}; *Genesis Rabbah* {Rabbinic, AD 300–500}).

bishop interpreted this as active penitence: Adam humbled himself before God, who, in turn, showed mercy. The father, unlike the son (Cain), was not to be cursed. Irenaeus extends the mercy motif to the exile from Eden.

For this reason He also cast them out of paradise and removed them far from the tree of life. Not that He envied them the tree of life . . . but by way of pitying them, that they might not continue forever as a transgressor, and that the sin that had them surrounded might not be immortal, nor their evil interminable and incurable. So He checked their transgression by interposing death, and He made sin cease by putting an end to it through the disintegration of the flesh . . . so that humanity, ceasing at length to live in sin, and dying to it, would begin to live to God.¹¹⁴

Though banished from Eden and stripped of the Spirit, humanity was not forgotten by God. Not only was the irreversible curse leveled upon the Serpent, rather than against the primordial couple, but the punishment was itself strategic in measure. Expulsion from Eden and death itself were gifts of grace: gifts enabling them to avoid an eternity separated from God. It was also a punishment which left open the door of opportunity for the restoration of that which was lost. This reinforces Irenaeus' emphasis on the Divine economy as a prefigured, well-planned work of salvation history.

Section Summary: *Haer.* 3.24.1

This faith we safeguard, having received it from the Church. It is like some excellent deposit in a suitable vessel, that always, under God's Spirit, rejuvenates itself and rejuvenates the vessel in which it is. For this, God's gift, has been entrusted to the Church, as the life-breath to the first-fashioned, so that all the members receiving it might be vivified. And in this gift has been deposited the communion of Christ, that is, the Holy Spirit, the pledge of imperishability, the strength of our faith, and the ladder of ascent to God. Those, then, who are not in communion with Him, neither are nourished by the mother's breasts

¹¹⁴ *Haer.* 3.23.6 (ACW 64:108).

unto life, nor receive from the most fresh and clear spring that proceeds from the body of Christ.¹¹⁵

This section began in *Haer.* 3.23.1 with the assertion that in the recapitulation God was coming to the lost sheep, he was seeking out his own handiwork in order that man, made in the image and likeness of God, might be saved. Salvation was needed because God had intended for his people to *live*, but the very basis of that life had been stripped away. The human mind had been corrupted by evil and the blessing of the Spirit removed. As such, the connection to the divine was severed and Adam, Eve, and all progeny were left to suffer in the new realm marked by evil and death.

In this concluding paragraph, Irenaeus parallels the reception of the Holy Spirit to the original breath granted to Adam. Whereas that first blessing enlivened man and prepared him for the life God intended, the Holy Spirit reestablishes communion with God through Christ and is a vivification of what had been lost. In a word, *life* had been lost, because the true life intended for humanity was one in connection to and nourished by God himself. True, a significant emphasis of *Haer.* 3.24.1 is on the assertion that this Spirit is found only in the true Church (here equated with Irenaeus' tradition). From the perspective of spirituality and theology, however, the emphasis of note is identifying the essence of what was lost by Adam, and what is possible to be regained through Word and Spirit. What was lost was the potential for true life—a life characterized above all by the presence of the divine Spirit, enabling connection to the living God. Although Irenaeus is subtle in drawing the connection between the *imago* with these points, there is no doubt they are intimately interconnected, a point that will be made clear in Books 4 and 5.

¹¹⁵ *Haer.* 3.24.1 (ACW 64:110).

Book 3 Conclusion

This chapter has examined three sections of text from *Haer.* 3. It should be noted, that, although these sections have been studied individually, together they represent one larger unit (*Haer.* 3.17—24). These sections were selected for the spiritual themes that surround key Gen 1:26 references, but the fact that of their proximity to each other should not be missed. Indeed, it is not difficult to see the thematic trajectory of Irenaeus' thought. The key text from section one (*Haer.* 3.18.1) indicated that humanity had lost being "according to the image and likeness" of God, but that God, through the restorative work of the Son and Spirit meant to heal that which had been broken. Section two probed the specifics of that healing process, identifying Christ's recapitulative work as the chief means by which humanity was healed, and the *imago* restored. Section three takes a step back, focusing on Adam and what it was that changed for him, and for all humanity, after the disobedience in Eden.

Together, these sections identify the theological foundations of the spiritual life. Through the exploration of these themes Irenaeus lays the proverbial groundwork upon which he builds his framework of understanding for Christian spirituality. He identifies the dilemma faced by humanity, explores how God's salvation plan has unfolded and outlines how the Son and Spirit continue that work into the present. With these foundations established, Irenaeus continues to develop his meaning behind the spiritual life throughout Chapter 4 of *Against Heresies*.

CHAPTER 4:
AGAINST HERESIES, BOOK 4:
GROWTH UNTO GOD: DIVINE INTENTION, HUMAN PARTICIPATION

Book 3 established the theological foundations of Irenaeus' understanding of spirituality: the spiritual problem faced by humanity, and the solution offered by God. In the texts that were examined Gen 1:26 occupied an important place, though Irenaeus provided little exegetical commentary or theological reflection. The divine image and likeness was referenced with little qualification throughout Book 3, but in Book 4 Irenaeus begins to probe deeper with his analysis. The key *imago Dei* texts of Book 3 were concentrated between Chapters 17 and 24 and the situation is similar in Book 4. The first 19 chapters are largely devoid of *imago* references, but Irenaeus' discussion of the divine image and likeness increases significantly throughout the rest of the book. In this chapter, three key sections of text will be examined. The first, *Haer.* 4.19–20, identifies the connection between being created in the image and likeness of God with God's desire for humanity to know him. The second section, *Haer.* 4.35–37, explores how human liberty is an important aspect of sharing in the divine likeness. The final section, *Haer.* 4.38, analyzes Irenaeus' theory that humanity was created to be creatures of growth, even growth into the divine nature.

***Haer.* 4.19.1—4.20.7: Created in His Image: To See and Know Him in Fellowship**

Introduction

At the outset of *Haer.* 4.14.1 Irenaeus addresses a difficult question: “Why did God create humankind?” It is an interesting dilemma and an important one for this study. Irenaeus’ answer is to admit that God had no need of humanity, but that he desired someone upon whom he could “confer his blessings.” This strikes to the core of the concern for the spiritual life throughout *Against Heresies*, namely, the possibility for, indeed, the divine desire for, connection between the creator and his people. In the chapters that follow that probing question, the discussion centers upon the expectations placed upon humanity by God. A primary point of the section is to understand the Mosaic law and how it applies in view of Christ’s redemptive work. Irenaeus’ answer is that throughout human history the essential requirements remain the same: God’s people are to offer themselves to their creator, despite the fact that he is one without any needs.¹ This brings together the two points, God did not create because he was lacking, nor does he ask for obedience because he is in need. Rather, Irenaeus identifies the purpose, and indeed the heart of spirituality, to be the dwelling together of creator and creature. That this is his point is illustrated by the closing statement of *Haer.* 4.18.6, a conflation of two texts from the Book of Revelation. Pointing to the worship and service in heaven to illustrate the intended dynamic between God and all creation, he writes that:

Since He does not stand in need of these [obedience and sacrifice], yet does desire that we should render them for our own benefit, lest we be unfruitful; so did the Word give to the people that very precept as to the making of oblations, although He stood in no need of them, that they might learn to serve God: thus is it, therefore, also His will that

¹ *Haer.* 4.18.6.

we, too, should offer a gift at the altar, frequently and without intermission. The altar, then, is in heaven (for towards that place are our prayers and oblations directed); the temple likewise is there, as John says in the Apocalypse, "And the temple of God was opened:" the tabernacle also: "For, behold," He says, "the tabernacle of God, in which He will dwell with men."²

That Irenaeus' concern was to emphasize the fellowship between God and humanity is clear from the way he combines the texts from Revelation. The first pericope, Rev 11:19, is the scene of worship at the heavenly temple following the sounding of the seventh trumpet of the apocalypse.³ Irenaeus employs this text because he seeks to define and illustrate authentic worship. His addition of Rev 21:1 is important because his desire is to also demonstrate that kingdom-life is characterized by this intimate dwelling of God with humanity.⁴ That is not established in the Rev 11 text, however, because there, after the temple is "opened," it is the ark of the covenant revealed. Irenaeus wants this "opening" to reflect the newness of connection that is to occur between Creator and creature, thus the inclusion of Rev 21. That this was Irenaeus' purpose seems clear from the variant contexts between the texts. Rev 11 concerns worship in the temple of heaven, whereas Rev 21 speaks of the conditions of the new heaven and earth with the new Jerusalem specifically in view, and where worship is not occurring. Thus, Irenaeus conflates the pericopes in order to combine these two themes:

² *Haer.* 4.18.6 (ANF 1:486).

³ "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet . . . Then the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, singing . . . Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail." Rev 11:15–19.

⁴ "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the tabernacle of God is among mortals. He will tabernacle with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.'" Rev 21:1–3.

worshipful obedience and fellowship with God. It is that context that leads into *Haer.* 19, and transitions to the issue of how that eschatological connection to God begins.

4.19.1—20.1a: The Proper Context—Knowing God

In Chapter 19 Irenaeus returns again to a critique of the heretics and their endless speculations. Among his concerns was their leveraging of concepts related to “types” and “images.” In a rare concession, he acknowledges the potential validity in exploring the ideas of typology but warned that those who do “will find it necessary to be continually finding out types of types, and images of images, and will never [be able to] fix their minds on one and the true God. For their imaginations range beyond God, they having in their hearts surpassed the Master Himself, being indeed in idea elated and exalted above Him, but in reality turning away from the true God.”⁵

Irenaeus’ concern here is not primarily related to the *imago Dei*, but to the problem of being turned away from God. As the previous chapters illustrated, it is the divine concern for Creator and creature not to be apart, but to dwell together in fellowship. He follows this line of inquiry into the next chapter. *Haer.* 4.20 begins with a beautiful description of the majesty of God, noting the immensity, power, strength, and authority needed to create such a grand and illustrious work of creation, such as the world so clearly is. In the midst of this, however, Irenaeus introduces a point of tension. On the one hand, the Lord of the universe is clearly one beyond the reckoning of a simple human mind; on the other hand, this is a God who wants to be known. This follows the theme of the previous chapter, that “God cannot be measured in the heart, and is

⁵ *Haer.* 4.19.1 (ANF 1:487).

incomprehensible in the mind . . . yet is also present with every one of us . . . He illumines the heavens . . . yet also openly nourishes and preserves us.”⁶ In the next paragraph, and the one immediately preceding an important *imago* text in *Haer.* 4.20.1, he rhetorically asks what sense there was in there being such a great God if he were to remain unknown. Irenaeus admits none could fully know the fullness of His goodness, and yet, “His greatness is not defective, but contains all things, and extends even to us, and is with us—we who will confess and proclaim in a manner worthy of God.”⁷ The tension, to know the unknowable, is not fully resolved, but the implication is that there is progress that can be made in the journey towards this God. This is the context of *Haer.* 4.20, but commentary on the pericope frequently isolates only the second half of the text.

4.20.1: A Trinitarian Image?

Haer. 4.20.1b: The Two Hands of the Father

We do always learn that there is so great a God, and that it is he who by himself has established, fashioned, adorned and does contain all things. . . . And this is he of whom the scripture says, “And God formed man, taking dust of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life.” It was not angels, therefore, who made or formed us. . . . For God did not stand in need of these, in order to accomplish what he had determined with himself beforehand should be done, as if he did not possess his own hands. For with him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, he made all things, and to whom he speaks, saying, “Let us make man after our image and likeness,” taking from himself the substance of the creatures formed and the pattern of things made, and the type of all the adornments of the world.⁸

⁶ *Haer.* 4.19.2 (ANF 1:487).

⁷ *Haer.* 4.19.3 (ANF 1:487, with emendation).

⁸ *Haer.* 4.20.1 (translation, with emendations, from Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 112–13).

A number of significant themes are presented in this one brief paragraph. To know God and be led to him through love speaks to the spiritual life, while obedience relates to ethics and piety as spirituality. As is often the case with the quotations of Gen 1:26, there is here another reference to humanity's formation. Notice here, however, that Irenaeus combined the two creation accounts. Gen 1:26 and 2:7 are presented in unity. The *imago Dei* passage is of central interest to this study, but *Haer.* 4.20.1 is frequently noted for its reference to the Word and Wisdom as the hands of God, with a particular interest in how those hands contribute to the shaping and substance of the human being. Scholars have been particularly intrigued by the Trinitarian implications behind the hands-*imago*-human substance relationship.

Steenberg focuses on the obvious Trinitarian element of the text. He argues Irenaeus was here emphasizing not only the Triune participation in Adam's creation, but the fact that the act of fashioning "humanity is presented as one taken in mutual action with mutual will. The creation of man was not only worked *by* the Son and Spirit, but *in* them; and as such, it cannot be said that the Father alone wills the formation—that his 'hands' are but executors of what would be to them a manner of external command."⁹ Though the Father spoke things into being, it was done "within the eternal nature of the triadic relationship." As such, Steenberg sees here a "striking articulation of the mutual interrelatedness of the trinitarian persons . . . some 150 years before Nicaea, and several centuries prior to the more robust clarification that would come about in the era of the Cappadocians . . ." ¹⁰

⁹ Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 114.

¹⁰ Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 114.

This reading seems a rather stretching interpretation of the text. Steenberg's rationale for this "striking articulation" rests solely on the statement that the Son and Spirit are those "by whom and in whom" the Father made all things, and to them who it was said, "Let us make man after our image and likeness." There is no doubt Irenaeus was attempting to solidly integrate the Father's two hands with the relational aspect of Gen 1:26 ("Let *us* create . . . in *our* image"). The association is noteworthy, but it seems unwise to associate it too closely with Nicaea and the Cappadocians.

Steenberg also extends this line of thinking to the final line of *Haer.* 4.20.1—a line of great importance for Irenaeus' *imago Dei*. Here, Gen 1:26 is not only referenced in passing, but it marks one of the few times the bishop included direct commentary. God said, "'Let us make man after our image and likeness,' taking from himself the substance of the creatures formed and the pattern of things made, and the type of all the adornments of the world."¹¹ Steenberg comments:

it is not simply God's will, as the generic will of a transcendent deity, that establishes the substance of created beings: it is the mutual will of the Father, Son and Spirit, from which all beings have their nature and continuance. . . . When God the Creator fashions Adam from the dust, the resulting *plasma*, the created handwork, is the manifestation of the "pattern" (ὑπόδειγμα / *exemplum*) natural to God's own triune nature. The substance of human being [sic], its essence as a communicated imprint of the "type of all things made," is, Irenaeus explicitly declares, the communication of the entire triune reality of God. . . . Here Irenaeus emphasizes that the *substance* wrought in the image of these, the very nature of the resultant creation, is thereby established in the union of all three.¹²

¹¹ *Ipse a semetipso substantiam creaturarum et exemplum factorum et figuram in mundo ornamentorum accipiens.* SC 100(2):626.

¹² Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 115. Italics original.

It should be noted that Steenberg's commentary followed a section that argued for the Trinitarian creation of humanity.¹³ That section included interaction with a number of Irenaean passages and presented a strong case for reading a robust triunity in Irenaeus' presentation of creation. This commentary on *Haer.* 4.20.1, however, incorporates the findings of that previous study and thus sees "striking articulations" in a text that, in and of itself, presents only subtle inferences.

Antonio Orbe offers another interesting interpretation of the text. Although he does not mirror Steenberg's proto-perichoretic reading, he nevertheless draws an important parallel between the two hands of God and the divine image and likeness. Like Steenberg, Orbe indicates that the Father's use of his "hands" was not merely an indication of process. Rather, he sees the pattern of humanity consisting of the Word/Son as representative of the divine image, while the Wisdom/Spirit corresponds to the likeness.¹⁴ This is similar to Steenberg's argument insofar as both see an aspect of the triunity of God at work in the fashioning of humanity. Orbe's analysis, however, does not extend the commentary to include discussion of the potential for an "immanent Trinity" in Irenaeus' thought.

A final comment on the text is provided by Paul Blowers. Blowers, following Fantino, and contra Steenberg, suggests that when *Haer.* 4.20.1 refers to God taking from himself the *substantia* and the pattern (*exemplum*) of things he made, that such a reading must bear in mind that "such declarations, however, belong to a context in which Irenaeus is accentuating the absolute creative omnipotence of God."¹⁵ He also

¹³ Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 103–12.

¹⁴ Orbe, *Antropología de San Ireneo*, 41.

¹⁵ Blowers, *Drama of Divine Economy*, 179.

points to the important work of Fantino, who argued that insofar as this issue of divine “substance,” Irenaeus was careful to distinguish his prepositions:

matter is “from” (*ab* = ἀπό) God in the sense of origin, not made “out of” (*ex* = ἐκ) God’s being. “Creation *ex nihilo* signifies that there is no material cause at the inception of creation. God created the substance of beings directly, by his will and power. Always Irenaeus remains silent as to the manner in which God produced matter.” Given this nuance, it is understandable how a later writer like Eusebius could use the phrase ἐκ θεοῦ rather innocently of creation as derived from God, for which reason Athanasius insisted on clarifying that the uncreated Son was uniquely “from the essence of the Father” (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατροῦ).¹⁶

Each of these scholars identifies an important element in Irenaeus’ theology, particularly as it relates to the possible connection between the Trinity and human origins. However, Blowers’ comments on *Haer.* 4.20.1 are important words of caution. The overarching theme of both that text and the entire chapter concerns divine omnipotence. This priority is important, not only for the overall integrity of the text’s interpretation, but with specific reference to a proper understanding of the *imago Dei*. To better frame Irenaeus’ meaning, the often-neglected opening lines of the chapter must be considered.

Haer. 4.20.1a Nearness to God

In regards to His greatness, it is not possible to know God, for it is impossible that the Father can be measured; but in regards to His love (for this it is which leads us to God by His Word), when we obey him, we do always learn that there is so great a God, and that it is he who by himself has established, fashioned, adorned and does contain all things . . .¹⁷

This introduction repeats the previously noted emphasis from Chapter 19 on knowing God. The conclusion of this sentence is also a natural transition-marker for the

¹⁶ Blowers, *Drama of Divine Economy*, 179. Cf. Fantino, *La théologie d’Irénee*, 311–12.

¹⁷ *Haer.* 4.20.1 (ANF 1:487).

trinitarian-themed creation pericope discussed above. That pericope is the second-half of *Haer.* 4.20.1 but, for strategic purposes, was examined first. The commentary on the introductory portion of the text has been delayed in order to demonstrate clearly the danger of analyzing the second-half apart from its larger context. Steenberg, for example, omits the first sentence from his translation and analysis. In fact, it is the only sentence not quoted by him from *Haer.* 4.20.1. To remove it, however, robs the text of its transition marker and contextual anchor. The temptation is to view the trinitarian section as instructive primarily on the triune nature of God and how the implications of that triunity affect our understanding of human origins. While it is necessary to analyse the text for its insights on the divine nature, it is equally important to consider the larger context.¹⁸

Consider the following: the first line of *Haer.* 4.20.1 refers to *knowing* God, to being led *to* Him, *through* His Son, and *in* His love. Moreover, the promise is that the obedient can *learn* of the greatness of this God. The rest of the paragraph stresses the fact that this God himself is He who personally fashioned humankind, breathing the breath of life directly into his face and taking *from himself* that which was needed to fashion his creation. It has long been recognized that one of Irenaeus' motivations for referencing the "hands of God" was to establish the closeness of God to the creation. As Osborn put it, "Irenaeus uses this vivid metaphor . . . to underline the immediacy and continuity of God's activity. Man's mixture of soul and flesh is achieved by God

¹⁸ My point here is not to minimize the important trinitarian insights offered by Irenaeus. As numerous scholars have demonstrated, *Against Heresies* and *Demonstration* both contain significant insights into the nature of the Triune God, particularly in relationship to other second century writers. My point is that these important points tend to dwarf Irenaeus' concern for human spirituality, which was, I argue, his greater concern in the text. See Barnes, "Irenaeus's Trinitarian Theology," 67–106; Lashier, *Irenaeus on the Trinity*; Lebreton, *Histoire du Dogme*; Lebreton, "La théologie de la Trinité," 89–120; Leahy, "Holy Spirit in Trinitarian Rhythm," 11–31.

through his hands, the son and the spirit.”¹⁹ Indeed, the hand is “a symbol of the descending love by which God is known. For we do not merely meet God face to face, but are formed by God’s hands in effable proximity.”²⁰ Behr adds that the imagery of the hand provides a sense of immediacy to Adam’s creation, making it “quite literally, a ‘hands-on affair.’”²¹ Despite that universal acknowledgement, scholars have not drawn a connection between that emphasis on intimacy in *Haer.* 4.20.1 with the related emphases from the first line of the paragraph. It is not just that God reveals his triunity through Christ and the Spirit, not that he was intimately involved at creation, but I argue that Irenaeus means to show this intimacy as a characteristic feature of the Creator. He was not only close as the fashioner, but as the God who continues to invite his people *closer*. To know Him, be led to him, to experience His love, and to learn more about his greatness. This is important because it has implications for interpreting Irenaeus’ use of the *imago Dei* in *Haer.* 4.20.1. Before drawing out those implications, however, there is another neglected point of context needing to be explored in the next paragraphs.

Haer. 4.20.2–5: The Beholding of God

Truly, then, the Scripture declared, which says, “First of all believe that there is one God, who has established all things . . .” [so also] does the apostle say, “There is one God, the Father, who is above all, and in us all.” Likewise does the Lord also say: “All things are delivered to Me by My Father . . .” [thus] nothing has been kept back {from Him}, and . . . “He shall Open, and no man shall shut: He shall shut, and no man shall open.” (Rev 3:7) For no one was able, either in heaven or in earth, or under the earth, to open the book of the Father, or to behold Him, with the exception of the Lamb who was slain, and

¹⁹ Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 91.

²⁰ Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 92.

²¹ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 38. See also Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 124–25; Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 81–83; Bingham, “Himself within Himself,” 137–51; Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, 5–22, 154–56; Hitchcock, *Irenaeus of Lugdunum*, 107–8; Lashier, *Irenaeus on the Trinity*, ch 5; Lawson, *Biblical Theology of Irenaeus*, 119–39.

who redeemed us with His own blood, receiving power over all things from the same God who made all things by the Word, and adorned them by His Wisdom, when the Word was made flesh . . . He Himself being made the first-begotten of the dead; and that all things, as I have already said, might behold their King; and that the paternal light might meet with and rest upon the flesh of our Lord, and come to us from His resplendent flesh, and that thus man might attain to immortality, having been invested with the paternal light.²²

It is important to observe the transitions employed by Irenaeus to further his argument.

He began with his standard meta-theme, that there is the One God that created all things.²³ From there he quoted Matt 11:2 to shift the focus to the Word.²⁴ The Father and his hands established creation, but “all things” were entrusted to the Son, who came in the flesh, redeemed humanity by his blood, in order that “all things . . . might behold their King.” Alluding to Rev 5, here none but the Lamb were able to open the book, nor behold the King. Through the Son, all are now able to behold him and to receive that “paternal light” of God. The Word of God, himself “resplendent in the flesh,” makes possible humanity’s participation in that light, ultimately progressing to the attainment of immortality. It is the movement towards this light that corresponds to the previous paragraph’s emphasis on growing closer to God. The text’s concern is not on issues of triunity, but on humanity seeing the light of God.

That Irenaeus’ concern was to emphasize the promise for humanity to “behold” God is apparent in three key ways. First, the climax of *Haer.* 4.20.2 is clear in its concern for the theme of seeing God and participating in His glorious light. Irenaeus

²² *Haer.* 4.20.2 (ANF 1:488).

²³ In a fascinating twist, the “scripture” quoted here on “believing that there is one God,” is in fact a direct quotation from *The Shepherd of Hermas* (Herm. Mand. 1.1 [26.2]). For a discussion, see Steenberg, “Irenaeus on Scripture,” 59–65; Hill, “The Writing which Says,” 127–38.

²⁴ In fact, Irenaeus here employed a battery of quotations and allusions to scripture, each one for the purpose of moving his argument along. In addition to Matt 11:27: Mal 2:10, Eph 4:6, Rev 3:7, Rev 5, 1 Pet 2:23, Col 1:18.

lists two outcomes of the salvation secured by the Lamb's sacrifice: to behold the King and to attain to the immortality that occurs as a result of having been invested with the paternal light. The entire paragraph weaves to this conclusion through careful, if not somewhat creative exegesis. Second, the allusion to Rev 5 is one example of creativity. The first of the many references to seeing or beholding God is actually a text that is not about God but concerns the inability of any to see into the scroll.²⁵ Irenaeus, however, modifies the text by inserting *paternum*/πατρικόν, thus it is the scroll of the Father that is in view, creating uncertainty as to the antecedent of the pronoun (Latin: *eum*). In view of the paragraph's context (beholding God), there is little doubt that Irenaeus meant for the pronoun to be re-identified so that it was God (him), rather than "it" (the scroll) being beheld. Both the ANF and Behr translate *Haer.* 4.20.2 along these lines (God being seen),²⁶ despite the fact that the Latin, like the Greek of Revelation, could be translated either way.²⁷ The point is this: In *Haer.* 4.20.2, Irenaeus' creative exegesis demonstrates a clear prioritization of the beholding of God. There is no concern for the scroll or for the visions of the apocalypse but for the importance of humanity encountering their Creator.²⁸

²⁵ "And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it." (καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ οὐδὲ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐδὲ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον οὔτε βλέπειν αὐτό.) Rev 5:3 SBLGNT.

²⁶ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 64–65; ANF 1:488.

²⁷ Rousseau, in his Greek retroversion, follows the Greek of Revelation, with the exception of the insertion of πατρικόν between the "scroll" and its definite article. Thus, τὸ βιβλίον becomes τὸ πατρικόν βιβλίον. SC 100(2):631.

²⁸ This reading is further strengthened when compared to a text later in Chapter 20. In v. 11 Irenaeus again wrote of John (author of the book of Revelation) standing before the throne of God. He references Rev 1:17 that describes John falling to the ground as dead. Irenaeus added the comment that it was because John "could not endure the "sight" that he fell. Moreover, this act brought "to pass that which was written, 'No man sees God and shall live.'" The incorporation of the Ex 33:20 text further reinforces Irenaeus' interest in the notion of humanity-beholding-God. *Haer.* 4.20.11 (ANF 1:491, with emendation). Cf. Ochagavia, *Visibile Patris Filius*.

The third and final reason the reader can be assured that “seeing God” is a central theme of *Haer.* 4.20.2 is found in the evidence of the subsequent texts. Paragraphs 4 through 11 of Chapter 20 contain a remarkable number of references to the seeing/ beholding/ perceiving (Latin: *video*) of God. In all, there are more than sixty examples in the Latin text of *video* and its cognates. A few examples will serve to illustrate Irenaeus’ continued emphasis on the theme.

Now this is His Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, who in the last times was made a man among men, that He might join the end to the beginning, that is, man to God. Wherefore the prophets, receiving the prophetic gift from the same Word, announced His advent according to the flesh, by which the blending and communion of God and man took place according to the good pleasure of the Father, the Word of God foretelling from the beginning that God should be seen by men, and hold converse with them upon earth, should confer with them, and should be present with His own creation, saving it, and becoming capable of being perceived by it, and freeing us from the hands of all that hates us, that is, from every spirit of wickedness; and causing us to serve Him in holiness and righteousness all our days, in order that man, having embraced the Spirit of God, might pass into the glory of the Father.²⁹

Once again Irenaeus writes of the promises for those in Christ. The Word came in the flesh in order to “save” his creation and it is the nature of that salvation that is of interest for this study. Paragraph 2 emphasized the divine desire for humanity to behold their God. Here, Irenaeus provides another perspective to this notion of seeing him. In order for the fulfilment of eschatological glory, that is, to behold God in His fulness, humanity first needs to see him as one of their own. Thus, in the incarnation was the blending and communion in the person of Christ that which was needed in the rest of humankind. God needed to be seen by his people, and the Word therefore came in such a fashion as to be

²⁹ *Haer.* 4.20.4 (ANF 1:488).

perceivable to them. With his coming, and with the gift of the Spirit who could now be embraced, humanity now had the opportunity to pass into the glory of the Father.

Contrary to those that allege, that He who was seen by the prophets was a different [God] . . . The prophets, then, indicated beforehand that God should be seen by men; as the Lord also says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” But in respect to His greatness, and His wonderful glory, “no man shall see God and live,” for the Father is incomprehensible; but in regard to His love, and kindness, and as to His infinite power, even this He grants to those who love Him, that is, to see God, which thing the prophets did also predict. “For those things that are impossible with men, are possible with God.” For man does not see God by his own powers; but when He pleases He is seen by men, by whom He wills, and when He wills, and as He wills. For God is powerful in all things, having been seen at that time indeed, prophetically through the Spirit, and seen, too, adoptively through the Son; and He shall also be seen paternally in the kingdom of heaven, the Spirit truly preparing man in the Son of God, and the Son leading him to the Father, while the Father, too, confers [upon him] incorruption for eternal life, which comes to every one from the fact of his seeing God. For as those who see the light are within the light, and partake of its brilliancy; even so, those who see God are in God, and receive of His splendour. But [His] splendour vivifies them; those, therefore, who see God, do receive life. And for this reason, He, [although] beyond comprehension, and boundless and invisible, rendered Himself visible, and comprehensible, and within the capacity of those who believe, that He might vivify those who receive and behold Him through faith. For as His greatness is past finding out, so also His goodness is beyond expression; by which having been seen, He bestows life upon those who see Him. It is not possible to live apart from life, and the means of life is found in fellowship with God; but fellowship with God is to know God, and to enjoy His goodness.³⁰

Paragraph 5 provides the most compelling evidence for the importance Irenaeus’ placed on seeing God. To summarize, 1.) God planned from the beginning that he should be seen by humanity; 2.) It was not possible for a person to see God; the all-powerful love, an initiative of the Divine, was required; 3.) Beholding God is a Trinitarian act: The Spirit prepares, the Son adopts and leads, the Father first initiates and welcomes; 4.) To

³⁰ *Haer.* 4.20.5 (ANF 1:488–89).

live eternally *comes from* seeing God; 5.) To partake of the divine light is to be vivified: to receive true life; 6.) True life is fellowship with God and the enjoyment of his blessings. The essence of this rather stunning paragraph is simply this: all that was planned for humanity, all that can be hoped for is described with the simple description of “seeing God.” To behold Him is to be saved. More than that, it is life itself.

It is obvious that such a concept is suggestive of far more than a visual experience. When Irenaeus speaks of seeing God his meaning extends beyond setting one’s eyes upon something. Rather, to behold Him is to share in the divine fellowship. It is to know Him and enjoy the blessings of his goodness. In Paragraph 6 he elaborated further, suggesting that “Men therefore shall see God, that they may live, being made immortal by that sight, and attaining even unto God.”³¹ Here the language is suggestive of theosis, a point this study will return to when Book 5 is explored. It is in this context (in Paragraph 7) that the most frequently cited of Irenaean quotes emerges: “the glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God.” Less commonly cited is the next sentence, “For if the manifestation of God which is made by means of the creation, affords life to all living in the earth, much more does that revelation of the Father which comes through the Word, give life to those who see God.”³²

Section Conclusion

This section began with an analysis of *Haer.* 4.20.1 and its allusion to the divine image and likeness. The reference to the “two hands” and the statement concerning the substance and pattern for humanity being drawn from the Father and those hands

³¹ *Haer.* 4.20.6 (ANF 1:489).

³² *Haer.* 4.20.7 (ANF 1:489–90).

understandably dominates much of the scholarly discussion. As a result, however, those discussions tend to focus on the implications for the doctrine of the Trinity, with an only secondary concern for issues related to spirituality. A closer look at the texts on either side of *Haer.* 4.20.1 has provided a greater sense of the context out of which Irenaeus was writing. In so doing, I have demonstrated the overarching Irenaean concern for humanity's beholding of God and connection to God. Furthermore, this context provides an important element of context to better understanding Irenaeus' reference to the *imago Dei*.

First of all, it must yet be admitted that the allusion to Gen 1:26 remains something of a passing reference in what is a large, complex section. Interpreters must therefore proceed with great caution. Second, it must also be conceded that the Trinitarian insights are not insignificant. Irenaeus was clearly seeking to describe an intimate connection between the triunity of God and the formation of the human being. Nevertheless, it is my contention that these insights are not complete without due attention to this larger concern for knowing and seeing God. In fact, greater attention to this theme serves to reinforce and deepen the insights of the Trinitarian aspects of the text.

Though Irenaeus referenced seeing God more than five dozen times in Chapter 20, it is obvious that he had in mind what might be more easily described as a concern for divine encounter, participation, or fellowship. If seeing God is what constitutes authentic life, then Irenaeus' position is that such life is fulfilled only in direct connection to him. In light of *Haer.* 4.20.1 an analogy can therefore be drawn between this beholding principle with the *imago Dei*. In the same way that to see God is actually

to encounter him, so when one speaks of the divine image one must not have only *resemblance* in mind. This is the implication of Irenaeus stating that with his hands the Father fashioned the first man, creating him in “our image and likeness,” and “taking from himself the substance of the creatures formed.” It is not just the triune God pouring himself into his creation, but imprinting himself upon humanity so that humanity has within it the compatibility necessary to one day be drawn fully into divine communion. Irenaeus began this section in *Haer.* 4.19.1, noting the heretics propensity for typology and iconography, a pursuit which ultimately turned their focus away from God and on to themselves. The vision of Chapter 20 was to demonstrate the need not to look to the cosmos, nor to theoretical speculations, and certainly not to oneself or to heretics. On the contrary, Irenaeus points to the God who is meant to be seen, and to his prized creation, they who are fashioned and stamped with that very image of God himself. He is not far off, he is near to each one. It was Irenaeus’ concern to emphasize that very nearness of the Divine, in the very fabric of human nature. As God sees himself in those that bear His image, so will they who look to their God find themselves in Him.

***Haer.* 4.35—37: Created with Liberty**

Introduction

The next section of Book 4 to be explored marks an important point of transition in Irenaeus’ reflections on the *imago Dei*. Previous texts have focussed on the motif primarily with concern for the creation of humankind into the divine likeness and the subsequent loss, or impairment of the image. Henceforth, allusions to Gen 1:26 will begin to discuss the theme from a perspective that is more explicitly concerned with the

spiritual life. This transition begins in Chapters 35 through 37 and discusses the connection between having been created in the likeness of God and human liberty. As noted in the survey of writers prior to Irenaeus, the human intellect and will were among the primary ways the *imago Dei* was traditionally understood.

This section of texts marks the one exception to this study's criteria for the selection of the key texts, for there are no allusions to both the *imago* and *similitudo* anywhere between Chapters 35–37. However, the section is deemed crucial for the following reasons: first, there is an obvious reference to Gen 1:26 in *Haer.* 4.37.4, where mention is made of humanity “made in the likeness of God.” Second, the section is unique in that it connects that likeness of God to human liberty, an association made in earlier patristic texts. Third, these chapters precede and provide context to *Haer.* 4.38, whose four paragraphs and two references to the *imago Dei* are important for this study.

Haer. 4.35/36: The Context: The Necessity for Obedience

In the opening four paragraphs of Chapter 37 Irenaeus presents a robust defense of human liberty. As is usually the case throughout the treatise, the defense follows the refutation of a heretical teaching, in this case outlined in Chapters 35 and 36. The issue under protest in that section was the claim (made popular first by Marcion) that the apostolic writings, functioning as scripture, were not inspired by the god depicted in the Old Testament. In order to put the Hebrew scriptures and their difficulties aside, various individuals proposed divorcing Christian texts from them.³³ The repudiation or

³³ “Then again, in opposition to the Valentinians, and the other Gnostics, falsely so called, who maintain that some parts of Scripture were spoken at one time from the Pleroma through means of the seed [derived] from that place, but at another time from the intermediate abode through means of the audacious mother Prunice, but that many are due to the Creator of the world, from whom also the prophets had their mission . . . Therefore let them not any longer assert that Peter and Paul and the other apostles

alteration of texts was unacceptable to Irenaeus.³⁴ For him, the key issue was not canonicity, as such, but of the posture of submission required of every human person.³⁵

Irenaeus was deeply concerned that believers under his care understood the importance of obedience. There are at least two reasons this would have been a matter of great import to the bishop. First, his own theology placed an extraordinary emphasis on the necessity for proper balance, order, and alignment of roles between the created realm and the Creator. This will be dealt with in more detail in the concluding chapter, but in summary, Irenaeus expresses the opinion that at the heart of the heretics' errors was their unwillingness to submit to their God as was befitting his authority. The proper response for all people is to "render to Him all obedience."³⁶ It is through submission to the Creator that balance and order is achieved and maintained. The second reason Irenaeus would emphasize obedience to all the scriptures was likely to have been affected by his understanding of Gnostic piety, or the perceived lack thereof. Later in Chapter 36, the connection is made linking obedience with holiness. Submission is equated with blessing, thus "we ought, after our calling, to be also adorned with works

proclaimed the truth, but that it was the scribes and Pharisees, and the others, through whom the law was propounded. But if, at His advent, He sent forth His own apostles in the spirit of truth, and not in that of error, He did the very same also in the case of the prophets; for the Word of God was always the self-same . . ." *Haer.* 4.35:1, 2 (ANF 1:513).

³⁴ This concern brings to mind Tertullian, who had more to say on the issue. "One man perverts Scripture with his hand, another with his exegesis. If Valentinus seems to have used the whole Bible, he laid violent hands on the truth with just as much cunning as Marcion. Marcion openly and naked used the knife, not the pen, massacring Scripture to suit his own material. Valentinus spared the text, since he did not invent scriptures to suit his matter, but matter to suit the Scriptures. Yet he took more away, and added more, by taking away the proper meanings of particular words and by adding fantastic arrangements." *Prescr.* 38 (Greenslade, ed., *Early Latin Theology*, 59).

³⁵ The question is not whether Irenaeus firmly believed some texts were apostolic and therefore authoritative, while others were not. His concern here was on the posture of humility and obedience that is required in order for one to accept the truth of those sacred texts. See Bingham, "Senses of Scripture," 26–55; Gallagher and Meade, *Biblical Canon Lists*; Bingham and Todd, "Irenaeus's Text," 370–92.

³⁶ "For the vessel of his goodness and the instrument of his glorification is the man who is thankful towards him that made him; and again, the vessel of his just judgement is the ungrateful man, who despises his Maker and is not subject to his Word." *Haer.* 4.11.2 (Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 39–40).

of righteousness, so that the Spirit of God may rest upon us.”³⁷ The heretics, however, were presented as those unconcerned with the holy life. As noted above, Irenaeus indicated that some Gnostics believed all carnal experiences were important for a person to become spiritual.³⁸ The conservative bishop would not have welcomed such indulgence into his own congregations, thus, it is not surprising that obedience would feature prominently in his teaching.

In this section the concern is initially expressed as a response to the rejection of texts of scripture, but, as noted, this was symptomatic of a larger problem. Irenaeus did not discuss issues of canonicity, nor did he repeat his earlier arguments viz. the truth of there being only one true God. Nevertheless, these issues provide the background to Chapter 37 and the emphasis on human liberty.

Haer. 4.37:1: Human Liberty

As noted earlier, Valentinians, Gnostics, and all other manner of sects were thriving in the second century. Some, but certainly not all of those groups represented a decisive break from a perceived rigidity of asceticism and piety in Irenaeus’ tradition.³⁹ As such, in *Haer.* 37 Irenaeus transitions his argument. He moves from what *ought* to be (fealty), to what *can* be (power in liberty). Paragraphs 1 through 4 contain some of Irenaeus’ strongest statements concerning human liberty. He writes:

The ancient law of human liberty: God made man free from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, to obey the requirements of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of

³⁷ *Haer.* 4.36.6 (ANF 1:517).

³⁸ “Others of them yield themselves up to the lusts of the flesh with the utmost greediness, maintaining that carnal things should be allowed to the carnal nature, while spiritual things are provided for the spiritual.” *Haer.* 1.6.3 (ANF 1:324). Cf. *Haer.* 2.30.1.

³⁹ See Lewis, *Introduction to “Gnosticism”*; Brakke, *The Gnostics*; Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, chapter 8; Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, chapter 11.

God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will [towards us] is present with Him continually. And therefore He gives good counsel to all. And in man, as well as in angels, He has placed the power of choice (for angels are rational beings), so that those who had yielded obedience might justly possess what is good, given indeed by God, but preserved by themselves. On the other hand, they who have not obeyed shall, with justice, be not found in possession of the good, and shall receive just punishment: for God did kindly bestow on them what was good; but they themselves did not diligently keep it, nor deem it something precious, but poured contempt upon His super-eminent goodness. Rejecting therefore the good, and as it were spewing it out, they shall all deservedly incur the just judgment of God.⁴⁰

Chapter 37 begins with reference to free will as the “ancient law of human liberty” (*veterem legem libertatis hominis*). Not only does Irenaeus stress the freedom of the individual will, but he makes a point to emphasize this as the deliberate and thoughtful design of God. This purposeful act of creation was done in order that humanity would have the opportunity to choose and follow after God. Once again, this assertion stands in stark contrast to what Irenaeus believed true of many of his opponents’ teachings. He consistently portrays their worldview as rigidly deterministic. Irenaeus offered this opinion near the beginning of *Against Heresies*, stating that his opponents (specifically the Valentinians) thought of themselves as “spiritual, not by conduct, but *by nature*, and so will be saved entirely and in every case.”⁴¹ He provides more detail in *Haer.* 2.29.1–3, clearly juxtaposing Gnostic determinism, with the orthodox faith in “righteousness

⁴⁰ *Haer.* 4.37.1 (ANF 1:518, with emendation).

⁴¹ *Haer.* 1.6.2 (ACW 55:37, italics my own).

and faith.”⁴² Scholars have convincingly shown that not all of Irenaeus’ opponents were determinists, but that perspective held sway until very recently.⁴³

Regardless of the accurateness of his portrayal of the Valentinians et al, there is little doubt of Irenaeus’ position vis-à-vis human liberty. He argued salvation could not possibly rely on one’s nature, for all humanity would then be deemed either reprehensible or each would have been granted an eschatological reward that was undeserved.⁴⁴ Such an argument does not engage his opponents’ positions, because according to Irenaeus, they admitted that some received the spiritual seed, while others did not. Nevertheless, he turns to the testimony of his scriptures for support, and it is here that the *imago Dei* text appears in connection to human liberty.

Haer. 4.37.4–5: The Role of the Will in Salvation

If it were not in our power to [obey or disobey], what reason had the apostle, and much more the Lord Himself, to give us counsel to do some things, and to abstain from others? But because man is possessed of free will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free will, in whose likeness man was created, advice is always given to him to keep fast the good, which thing is done by means of obedience to God.⁴⁵

Against Gnostic claims, Irenaeus sought to assert that humanity should submit to God not only because it was the proper response, but because such a response is in fact embedded within the fabric of human nature. This accepts the aforementioned allusion

⁴² “Certainly, if nature and substance save, then all souls will be saved; if, on the other hand, righteousness and faith save, why do they not save the bodies that are condemned to destruction just as much as the souls?” *Haer.* 2.29.1 (ACW 65:93). He also alludes to this principle in the present chapter, though here the Gnostics are not in view. He states that it would be a mistake to believe there is any merit to doing good if done “by nature rather than by will.” *Haer.* 4.37.6.

⁴³ Denzey, *Cosmology and Fate*; Hodges, “Gnostic Liberation,” 359–73; Löhr, “Gnostic Determinism Reconsidered,” 381–90.

⁴⁴ *Haer.* 4.37.2.

⁴⁵ *Haer.* 4.37.4 (ANF 1:519).

between liberty and the divine image. Rousseau makes the connection explicit in his translation, stating that *because* God possesses a free will, so too does humanity, in whom His image they are made.⁴⁶ The spiritual person is thus not she who is awakened to the fact of there being a predestined spiritual seed within them, but it is that person who chooses to accept who they are in relationship to their Creator.

This text, along with the paragraphs that follow, introduce a significant point of tension in Irenaeus' thinking. He is attempting to balance human liberty with human nature. He cannot accept Gnostic determinism, but neither can he neglect the implications of humanity having been created in the *imago Dei*. The tension is exacerbated in the next paragraphs as he introduces a variety of ancillary issues. I will briefly outline each one.

First, to introduce the *imago* comment of Paragraph 4, Irenaeus states that “Because man is possessed of free will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free will, in whose likeness man was created, advice is always given to him to persevere in the good, which is done by means of obedience to God.”⁴⁷ Here again is another possible implication related to creation in the divine likeness. Is Irenaeus here suggesting that *because* of the *imago Dei* humanity receives counsel from Him? If one accepts the previous point, the answer seems to be in the affirmative. Thus, “*because man* is in the divine *imago* (with his liberty) . . . *advice is always given* . . . ” Rousseau's translation causes some doubt, however, as he connected the two clauses with “*aussi, de tout temps.*” In so doing, the sentence reads more along these lines: “humanity possesses

⁴⁶ “Mais l'homme est libre depuis le commencement—car libre aussi est Dieu, à la ressemblance de qui l'homme a été fait . . . ” Translating “*Sed quoniam liberae sententiae ab initio est homo, et liberae sententiae est Deus cujus ad similitudinem factus est . . .*” *Haer.* 4.37.4 (SC 100: 932–33).

⁴⁷ *Haer.* 4.37.4.

free will because God possesses the same; *also*, He provides counsel to those who obey.” The French translation, with its addition of *aussi*, makes it difficult to determine whether the concluding clause is one of addition or consequence. The Latin contains no such conjunction or adverb, however.⁴⁸ Either way, it introduces a confusing element into the question of the relationship between human liberty and nature (to be according to the *imago Dei*).

The second element for potential confusion is found in the next paragraph, where the issue of faith is introduced to the discussion. Following immediately after the previously quoted text, Irenaeus affirms:

And not merely in works, but also in faith, has God preserved the will of man free and under his own control, saying, “According to your faith be it unto thee;” thus showing that there is a faith specially belonging to man, since he has an opinion specially his own. And again, “All things are possible to him that believes.” . . . Now all such expressions demonstrate that man is in his own power with respect to faith. And for this reason, “he that believes in Him has eternal life while he who does not believe the Son does not have eternal life, but the wrath of God shall remain upon him.”⁴⁹

Irenaeus frequently addresses faith as an essential component in salvation. A few chapters earlier he wrote of the new covenant, the new heart and spirit to be given God’s people, and the “new wine” which is faith in Christ.⁵⁰ More importantly, he made explicit, if not frequent, reference to “justification by faith.”⁵¹ Despite the tendency to express his view of the atonement in a way that has come to be known as *Christus Victor*, Irenaeus also expresses with clarity the belief that redemption is secured through

⁴⁸ *Semper consilium datur ei continere bonum, quod perficitur ex ea quae est ad Deum obaudientia. Haer.* 4.39.4 (SC 110: 932).

⁴⁹ *Haer.* 4.37.5 (ANF 1:520, with emendation).

⁵⁰ *Haer.* 4.33.14, cf. 4.33.4, 4.34.2.

⁵¹ *Haer.* 4.9.1, 4.13.1, 4.25.1, 5.32.2; *Epid.* 35, 93. For commentary, see Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 100–104; Choi, “Irenaeus on Law,” 53–61.

Christ's sacrificial, substitutionary, atoning death.⁵² Nevertheless, the text from *Haer.* 4.37.5 provides a fascinating perspective. The assertion is that human liberty is provided not only for righteous deeds but for faith itself. Despite his frequent assurances that salvation is secured through the work of Christ, neither *Against Heresies* nor the *Demonstration* ever quotes Eph 2:8,⁵³ nor do they refer to faith as a gift. Eschatological promises are frequently referred to as gifts, as is the reception of the Spirit. There is one instance where faith and gift are mentioned together, but it is most likely that it is the Spirit being described as the gift.⁵⁴

In this text, faith is subject to the human will. Therefore, even were the bishop to explicitly speak of faith as a gift of God he would undoubtedly qualify the statement to include the requisite human response. It is in a person's "power" to either believe or not believe. In Paragraph 6 Irenaeus repeats the theme mentioned earlier from Paragraph 2, namely, the claim that one could be saved by virtue of one's nature, rather than the will.

The third point essentially reinforces the previous argument, albeit with even greater emphasis. In Paragraph 7 Irenaeus offers another interesting interpretation, this one in response to Jesus' difficult statement concerning the "violent taking the Kingdom

⁵² "But again, showing that Christ did suffer, and was Himself the Son of God, who died for us, and redeemed us with His blood at the time appointed beforehand, he says: 'For how is it, that Christ, when we were yet without strength, in due time died for the ungodly? But God reveals His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' . . . [We are] now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." *Haer.* 3.16.9 (ANF 1:444, with emendation). Cf. Rom 8:6, 8. See also *Haer.* 2.22.2, 3.20.3, 5.14.3. Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 16–35; Hochban, "Irenaeus on the Atonement," 525–57; Purves, "Spirit and *Imago Dei*," 99–120; Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, Cross*, 115–32.

⁵³ "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast." Eph 2:8–9.

⁵⁴ "[T]he preaching of the Church is everywhere consistent, and continues in an even course, and receives testimony from the prophets, the apostles . . . and through the entire dispensation of God, and that well-grounded system which tends to man's salvation, namely, our faith; which, having been received from the Church, we do preserve, and which always, by the Spirit of God, renewing 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 . . ." *Haer.* 3.24.1 (ANF 1:458).

by force.”⁵⁵ Irenaeus sees this statement in a positive light, interpreting it to refer to those who demonstrate “strength and earnest striving.” He then incorporates 1 Cor 9:24–27 with its call to run the race so as to obtain the prize and Paul’s own refusal to run aimlessly or box at nothing but air. As the apostle punished his own body and enslaved it, so are all exhorted to pursue their faith with vigor.

Haer. 4.37.7: The Tension of Grace and Liberty and the Telos of the *Imago*

The struggle for immortality, that we may be crowned, and may deem the crown precious, namely, that which is acquired by our struggle . . . the harder we strive, so much is it the more valuable; while so much the more valuable it is, so much the more should we esteem it . . . Since, then, this power has been conferred upon us, both the Lord has taught and the apostle has enjoined us the more to love God, that we may reach this [prize] for ourselves by striving after it. . . . But in proportion as it is more precious, so much the more do we prize it; and if we have prized it more, we shall be the more glorious in the presence of God.⁵⁶

These are Irenaeus’ concluding thoughts to what was a lengthy discourse on human liberty. Incorporating these physical—even violent—illustrations serves to powerfully conclude his exhortations on the freedom of the will. The poignancy of the conclusion can serve no other purpose but to emphatically stress the need for all Christians to take seriously the call of obedience. The section began with reference to the heretical misuse of scripture, transitioned to the theme of submission, and concluded with the eschatological picture of dwelling in the glory of God. The last sentence, though in the middle of Paragraph 7, marks an important turning point in Irenaeus’ treatment on the

⁵⁵ Matt 11:12. “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.”

⁵⁶ *Haer.* 3.37.7 (ANF 1:520, with emendation).

imago Dei. It also introduces two final points of tension related to the divine likeness and human liberty.

God therefore has borne all these things for our sake, in order that, having been instructed through all things, henceforth we may be cautiously prudent (*cauti*) in all things and, having been taught how to love God in accordance with reason, remain in his love: God exhibited patience in regard to the apostasy of man . . . ⁵⁷

One of the critiques leveled by scholars against *Against Heresies* is the perceived incompatibilities in his thought.⁵⁸ It is with paragraphs such as this one where the critics' concerns are fueled; indeed, the turn of thought in this paragraph is remarkable. Irenaeus provides what amounts to a proverbial 180-degree turn: from advocating for a violent striving after righteousness, to emphasizing the sovereign and gracious redeeming actions over and against a powerless humanity. The tensions of these few sentences are several.

First, immediately following the last of the “striving” statements is the assertion that God has “therefore” endured (or borne) all things for our sake.⁵⁹ The implication is that, despite this clear call upon humanity, a call to which each one was said to be fully empowered to fulfill, God nevertheless was “therefore” required to come and provide assistance. This is a surprising development, particularly as it is situated in the middle of Paragraph 7 and abruptly ends the lengthy emphasis on the ability of humankind to

⁵⁷ *Haer.* 4.37.7 (Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 45, with emendation). Cf. Nispel, “Christian Deification,” 297–301.

⁵⁸ Loofs' is the most famous example of this critique, but more than a century later, the charge persists. For a more recent example, see Brown, “Necessary Imperfection,” 17–25. Brown argues for the complete incompatibility between Irenaeus' portrayal of the *imago Dei* as something both lost in Eden and eschatologically perfected. For two attempts at reconciling the perceived incompatibility, see Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 148–81; Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, 26–38.

⁵⁹ *Haer.* 4.37.7 (SC 100(2):942), *Pro nobis igitur omni haec sustinuit Deus*. The ANF renders *Deus* as “the Lord.” This is unfortunate as it risks adding further, and unnecessary confusion to the text, since the expression “what the Lord endured” might specifically evoke the crucifixion. (ANF 1:520). For commentary on the translation of *sustinuit*, and whether God “bore” or possibly “allowed” all things, see Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 45 n. 39.

faithfully obey. Irenaeus does not here specify what is in view viz. what was endured by God. However, in such instances—such as in the next paragraph—he is generally referring to the recapitulative significance of the incarnation. Thus, “for this cause our Lord in these last times, when He had summed up all things into Himself, came to us . . .”⁶⁰

The text continues, adding another level of tension. On the one hand, he writes of humanity’s apostasy and the aforementioned need for God to bear things for our sake. This suggests brokenness and failure; the inability to accomplish those previous actions that Irenaeus said was within humanity’s power to achieve. On the other hand, there is an element to the text which seems to suggest God’s actions were to assist, rather than replace or compensate for. “God bore all things for our sake, *in order that*, having been instructed . . . we may be cautiously prudent in all things, having been taught how to love God in accordance with reason, remain in his love.” The implication is that humanity was empowered and capable but needed instruction. Christ came and brought greater instruction and love so that humanity could more effectively remain in the divine love. In this section, therefore, one sees the tension in understanding the relationship between where humanity erred and what God did in response. In the concluding statements of the paragraph, however, Irenaeus once again references the *imago Dei*, and in so doing, offers some explanation for the conflicting emphases. The *imago* texts also mark the moment in *Against Heresies* where the focus shifts almost exclusively to the eschatological.

God exhibited patience in regard to the apostasy of man, and man being taught by it, as the prophet says: “Your own apostasy shall heal you;” God thus determining all things beforehand for the bringing of

⁶⁰ *Haer.* 4.38.1 (ANF 1:521).

man to perfection, for his edification, and for the revelation of His dispensations, that goodness may both be made apparent, and righteousness perfected, and that the Church may be fashioned after the image of His Son, and that man may finally be brought to maturity at some future time, *becoming* ripe through such privileges to see and comprehend God.⁶¹

The first point of interest is to note the clarity regarding humanity's apostasy. Not only is healing needed, and not only was there a requirement to learn how to love God, but Irenaeus quotes Jer 2:19 to suggest that humanity must learn from its own apostasy. Indeed, that "your own apostasy shall heal you." How this healing is realized is not altogether clear. The text offers no further comment on brokenness or need, but transitions instead to a focus upon the future and on transformation. In saying that God had determinized *beforehand* for the bringing of man to perfection the implication is that humanity's course is progressing according to the divine plan. Humankind becoming self-aware is part of that plan, but once again, the tension of being healed by one's own apostasy is not clearly reconciled with the statement that God himself is the one to perfect all righteousness. Behr offers his own unique interpretation, offering: "That Irenaeus can inscribe man's apostasy into the unfolding of the divine economy indicates that he did not consider the economy simply as a plan which progresses automatically. Rather, God created beings capable of initiative, as only such beings would be able to respond freely to God and to love him."⁶² The advantage of this interpretation is that it incorporates all previous tension related to human liberty. Adam, along with all who followed, were granted the liberty to choose or reject God and his counsel. Behr suggests the subsequent rejection was not itself a divine-initiated element

⁶¹ *Haer.* 4.37.7 (ANF 1:521).

⁶² Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 46.

of the economy, but that God presumably acted in response—albeit always under the larger aims of the predetermined goals. Behr does not elaborate, but it is difficult to see another scenario if the *economia* is not “automatic,” as he put it. Fantino offers a more straightforward interpretation, suggesting that

God, who knows everything in advance, knew that man would sin. Nevertheless, it allowed man to disobey for man to preserve his freedom and he integrated the apostasy of man into his plan of salvation, so that man, through the misfortunes and sorrows that overwhelm, would turn to Him, recognize Him as the Savior and receive salvation from Him.⁶³

What the text does make clear is this: humanity was in need of healing and God’s plan was to do more than just erase the consequences of history; it was also to do more than simply make provision for humanity’s guilt. Yes, God himself was required to bear the burden and sin did require atonement. Part of the beauty to Irenaeus’ theology, however, was his concern to emphasize the positive, redemptive, and holistic plan for all humanity. Thus, the *telos* of the economy was to bring man to righteous perfection; not only a forensic righteousness, but one in which the people of God would finally reach their intended maturity. This maturity, again characterized above all by being able to behold and know God, is here described as the fashioning of the Church after the image of the Son. And as has been repeatedly mentioned, this statement marks an interesting and important transition in regard to *imago* references. Not only is the *ecclesia* (rather than man) mentioned in connection to the divine image, but it is expressed in the future tense. Subsequent *imago* passages will continue this trend of looking forward and will

⁶³ “Dieu, qui connaît toute chose d’avance, savait que l’homme pécherait. Il a néanmoins permis que l’homme désobéisse pour que l’homme conserve sa liberté et il a intégré l’apostasie de l’homme à son dessein de salut, de sorte que l’homme, à travers les malheurs et les peines qui l’accablent, se tourne vers lui, le reconnaisse comme étant le Sauveur et reçoive de lui le salut.” Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 140.

provide further clarity concerning the resolution of the various tensions mentioned above.

Section Summary

In this section Irenaeus' attempts to balance two non-negotiable, but not easily reconcilable theological tenets: human liberty, with its power to choose the good, and the spiritual lostness of humanity, redeemable only through the redemptive work of Christ. In this text Irenaeus draws a more explicit connection between the spiritual life and the idea of being created in the likeness of God. We have human liberty, the power of volition, because we are made in his image, he argues. From this, he establishes the critical place of obedience as an important feature of authentic spirituality. Irenaeus is not oblivious to the implications this emphasis on human liberty has for soteriology. Thus, he concludes the chapter with an impassioned restatement of the belief in a redemption that is made possible only through the work of God. In attempting to strike the balance between these two crucial points, Irenaeus sets the context for Chapter 38, which contains two important Gen 1:26 quotations.

Haer. 4.38.1-4: Created to Grow unto God

Introduction

The transition begun in the previous chapters, from a focus on *imago* past to *imago* present (and future), is an issue that raises important questions. Most importantly, in what ways are the two different? And how is it that they can *be* different? It was largely Irenaeus' response to these questions that led Robert Brown to conclude, like Wendt

before him, that the bishop's position not only contradicted Paul, but that within *Against Heresies* there is evidence of two "separate theological systems, and that the two systems are mutually incompatible on a number of important issues."⁶⁴ Brown's brief study examined the same portion of text (*Haer.* 4.38) that will be covered in the present section, thus enabling a careful analysis of the critique.

The concluding statements of Chapter 37 looked ahead to the Church's transformation into the image of God. Irenaeus predicated that transformation on the approach to and beholding of God himself, a reoccurring theme throughout *Against Heresies*. Chapter 38 attempts to address the nature of the journey between the *imago* at creation and that which is received in the presence of God. To begin, Irenaeus asked why progression unto God was necessary.

Haer. 4.38.1: Why Humanity was not Perfected in the Beginning

If, then, anyone says, "What then? Was not God able to have made man perfect from the beginning?" Let him know that, as far as God is concerned . . . all things are possible to Him. But those things made by Him, because they have a later beginning of creation, must for this reason be inferior to Him who created them. For it was not possible for things recently created to be uncreated; and since they are not uncreated, on this account do they fall short of the perfect. And since these things are of a more recent origin, so are they infantile; and since they are infantile, so are they unaccustomed to and unexercised in perfect discipline. For certainly it is in the power of a mother to give strong food to her infant, yet [she does not do so, since] the child is not yet able to receive stronger nourishment. So too, it was in the power of God Himself to grant perfection to man from the beginning; but the man, on the contrary, was unable to receive it . . .⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Brown, "Necessary Imperfection," 17.

⁶⁵ *Haer.* 4.38.1 (Steenberg, *Children in Paradise*, 15).

Irenaeus poses the question, could God have created man perfect? His answer: yes, because God can indeed do all things. The retort seems somewhat of an obligatory response, for in the next lines he essentially retreats from his affirmative response. The more nuanced answer is predicated on what can be identified as Irenaeus' first axiom viz. the relationship between the Creator and the creation. This principle, observed in earlier texts, asserts that there is and will always be a vast gulf between God and all other things. Steenberg rightly notes this "is this concept which grounds the notion of radical incompleteness that stands as a driving theme behind Irenaeus' larger conception of humankind."⁶⁶ As a result of this gulf, Adam and Eve in the garden, though yet sinless, nevertheless were unable to receive full nourishment from God. They were in a state that prohibited them from receiving the fullness of what God intended for them.⁶⁷

Brown sees incongruity in this logic. To be sure, it does appear that Irenaeus restricted the flexibility of his arguments by answering in the affirmative that God could do all things, including creating man perfect. What Brown does not address, however, were the reflections on human liberty from the preceding chapter. Those texts make clear God's desire to create his people as free agents, able to choose the good, but also able to reject it. In fact, this ability and freedom of the mind is part of what constitutes being human.⁶⁸ What Irenaeus seems to have in view, is the belief that God could indeed

⁶⁶ Steenberg, "Children in Paradise," 16.

⁶⁷ For insights into how Augustine (early in his career) differed from Irenaeus on these matters, see Boersma, *Augustine's Early Theology of Image*.

⁶⁸ Brown goes too far when he argues that in most texts describing the Image of God Irenaeus equated it with "the capacity to exercise free will." This has been proved untrue in the vast majority of texts so far examined. Brown, "Necessary Imperfection," 20.

have created a man perfect, but this would not have been the creature he intended; such a being would bring no glory.⁶⁹

The combination of the first axiom with the divine desire for human liberty created, according to Irenaeus, the inevitable result of humanity being required to progress through a long and slow process of growth. Thus the description of the first couple as being in an infantile state. In such a state they were thus unable to receive the fullness of divine blessings. They could not receive perfect maturity, because they were ill prepared for it. Brown refers to this as the “instability” of creation.⁷⁰ Where Brown sees instability, however, Irenaeus saw opportunity. This leads to the second axiom: the necessity for created things to grow.

And for this cause our Lord in these last times, when He had summed up all things into Himself, came to us, not as He might have come, but as we were capable of beholding Him. He might easily have come to us in His immortal glory, but in that case we could never have endured the greatness of the glory; and therefore it was that He, who was the perfect bread of the Father, offered Himself to us as milk, because we were as infants. He did this when He appeared as a man, that we, being nourished, as it were, from the breast of His flesh, and having, by such a course of milk nourishment, become accustomed to eat and drink the Word of God, may be able also to contain in ourselves the Bread of immortality, which is the Spirit of the Father.⁷¹

The second half of the first paragraph explains another action God could have taken. Just as he might have created humanity perfect, so too could God have appeared in all his glory and fullness to Adam and Eve. He does not elaborate on what the consequences might have been, only that they would have been unable to bear it.⁷² The

⁶⁹ In a text to be examined in Book 5 (*Haer.* 5.6.1), there is a more comprehensive definition of what it means to be truly human.

⁷⁰ Brown, “Necessary Imperfection,” 22–24.

⁷¹ *Haer.* 4.38.1 (ANF 1:521).

⁷² For a thorough treatment of the issues, see Andia, *Homo vivens*, 127–45.

point is thus made that just because God was able to act in a certain way, does not mean this action would have been in humanity's best interest. Since humankind were created beings, and since they required growth, there was no option but for them to start at the beginning. Fantino suggests that in identifying Adam and Eve as infantile, he means to suggest their newness, innocence, and immaturity.⁷³

Does *Against Heresies* struggle with certain points of logic with these arguments? Perhaps. Irenaeus claimed at the beginning of Book 1 to be a simple man, one unschooled in skills such as rhetoric.⁷⁴ Few believe his self-deprecating claims,⁷⁵ but one point is clear. The bishop was not as concerned with speculative philosophical questions as he was those related to humanity and salvation. Where *Against Heresies* excels is in demonstrating the redemptive effects of the Incarnation. Chapter 37 concluded with the allusion to Christ's coming, noting that with the revelation and the unfolding of the divine plan the means for humanity's perfection had begun. The people of God—the Church—were to be fashioned after the image of the Son. Thus, the issues that Irenaeus wanted to develop were those related to growth and transformation. *Haer.* 4.38.1 is the introductory paragraph that attempts to explain how humanity's need for growth corresponds to divine perfection. The second key question, how growth relates

⁷³ "Irénee exprime dans ce passage une des idées maitresses de sa theologie: parce qu'il est créé, l'homme n'est qu'un enfant. Le texte nous precise que le terme enfant traduit à la fois la nouveauté et l'inexpérience. Irénée, dans d'autres passages, complete la description de cette notion: enfant signifie aussi l'état d'innocence de l'homme Adam avant sa désobéissance . . ." Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, 136.

⁷⁴ "You cannot expect from me, who am resident among the Celts, and am accustomed for the most part to use a barbarous dialect, any display of rhetoric, which I have never learned, or any excellence of composition, which I have never practised, or any beauty and persuasiveness of style, to which I make no pretensions." *Haer.* 1.pref.3 (ANF 1:316).

⁷⁵ Discussion of Irenaeus and rhetoric as been a topic of great interest in recent years. See especially Moringiello, "Irenaeus Rhetor." See also Briggman, "Literary Rhetorical, Part 1," 500–527; Briggman, "Literary Rhetorical, Part 2," 31–50; Harris, "Irenaeus's Engagement," 405–20; Ferguson, "Rule of Truth," 356–75.

to creation in the *imago Dei*, has yet to be fully answered. And so he continues into

Paragraph 2:

Haer. 4.38.2: The Infants of Eden?

On this account Paul declared to the Corinthians, “I have fed you with milk, not with meat, for previously you were not able to bear it.” That is, you have indeed learned the advent of our Lord as a man; nevertheless, because of your infirmity, the Spirit of the Father has not as yet rested upon you. “For when envying and strife,” he says, “and dissensions are among you, are you not carnal, and walk as men?” That is, that the Spirit of the Father was not yet with them, on account of their imperfection and shortcomings of their walk in life. As, therefore, the apostle had the power to give them strong meat—for those upon whom the apostles laid hands received the Holy Spirit, who is the food of life—but they were not capable of receiving it, because their cognitive capacity was still weak and untrained in the practice of things pertaining to God; so, in like manner, God had power at the beginning to grant perfection to man; but as the latter was only recently created, he could not possibly have received it, or even if he had received it, could he have contained it, or containing it, could he have retained it . . . ⁷⁶

To explain his point Irenaeus turns to the Pauline source of his milk motif. And here is a most fascinating interpretation and application. He compares Adam and Eve with the immature recipients admonished in 1 Cor 3.⁷⁷ He argues that the “meat” to which they were not entitled was a reference to the Holy Spirit. He did so, first, because Paul said he could not call the Corinthians spiritual, but only carnal, mere infants.⁷⁸ Second, Paul called them those “still in the flesh . . . living by human inclinations.”⁷⁹ Finally, he

⁷⁶ *Haer.* 4.38.2 (ANF 1:521, with emendation).

⁷⁷ “I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? 4 For when one says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not merely human?” 1 Cor 3:1–3.

⁷⁸ “οὐκ ἠδυνήθητι λαλῆσαι ὑμῖν ὡς πνευματικοῖς ἀλλ’ ὡς σαρκίνοις.” 1 Cor 3:1 (SBLGNT).

⁷⁹ “ἔτι γὰρ σαρκικοί ἐστε . . . οὐχὶ σαρκικοί ἐστε καὶ κατὰ ἄνθρωπον περιπατεῖτε” 1 Cor 3:3.

concluded with the observation that their behaviour indicated they remained “merely human.”⁸⁰ To support his idea that the Holy Spirit is the solid food, Irenaeus was required to omit certain elements of the Pauline text. He does not include the statement at the end of the first verse where Paul does call them infants *in* Christ (νηπίοις ἐν Χριστῷ), nor v. 16, where the readers are referred to as God’s temple and that “God’s Spirit dwells within you.” Including those would certainly dampen the point Irenaeus was trying to make.

The purpose of this study is not to evaluate the bishop’s skills in exegesis, but to understand what exactly he was attempting to describe. The important point is the lengths Irenaeus was willing to go in order to detail the limits to human receptivity. It is fascinating that Irenaeus would compare Adam and Eve with first-century Christians and his doing so provides important insights into his understanding of Edenic immaturity. The key is the explanation in *Haer.* 4.38.2 of why the infantile Corinthians were not receiving the gift of the Spirit.

At first glance, it seems that sin serves as the hindrance to the indwelling of the Spirit. Indeed, his statement seems clear: “the Spirit of the Father was not yet with them because of their imperfection and shortcomings of their walk of life.”⁸¹ It should be noted, however, that Irenaeus does not actually mention sin; he referred only to an imperfection (ἀκατάριστον/ *imperfectionem*) in their lives. He then adds that the apostles had the power to lay hands on the Corinthians to receive the Spirit, but could not, because “they were not capable of receiving it, because their cognitive capacity was

⁸⁰ “οὐκ ἄνθρωποι ἐστε” 1 Cor 3:4.

⁸¹ “τουτέστιν ὅτι οὐ δήπω τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ Πατρὸς ἦν σὺν αὐτοῖς διὰ τὸ ἀκατάριστον αὐτῶν καὶ ἀσθενὲς τῆς πολιτείας” *Haer.* 4.38.2 (SC 100(2): 948).

still weak and untrained in the practice of things pertaining to God.”⁸² This is an important statement. Here, they are not incapable because of something present within them (sin), but because of what was lacking. Irenaeus here used the rare word *αἰσθητήρια* to describe their deficiency.⁸³ The term literally means “organ of sense,” but figuratively the “capacity for discernment; the ability to make moral decisions.”⁸⁴ As Rousseau rightly notes, the statement is almost certainly inspired by Heb 5:14. That verse also refers to solid food, noting that it is for “the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.” It is the only verse in the New Testament that uses that same keyword, *αἰσθητήρια*.⁸⁵

The parallels between the Edenic couple and the Corinthians is threefold: First, Irenaeus (probably following 1 Cor 3), refers to both as infantile. This was a deliberate and strategic choice, for as Steenberg points out, the Greek word (*νηπίοις*) is one of many that could have been chosen. But *Against Heresies* follows Paul by employing it over the alternatives.⁸⁶ Second, both groups are described as imperfect and immature. Third, the solution for all involved was a greater injection of nourishment/solid food. What makes the association important for this study was the two exegetical choices made by the bishop. First, that he would associate the Holy Spirit with the deficiency in Paul’s readers, and second, that he would place the spiritual receptivity of the Christians

⁸² “ἐκεῖνοι δὲ ἡδυνάτουσαν λαβεῖν αὐτὸ διὰ τὸ ἀσθενῆ ἔτι καὶ ἀγύμναστα ἔχειν τὰ αἰσθητήρια τῆς πρὸς θεὸν συγγυμνασίας.” *Haer.* 4.38.2 (SC 100(2):950).

⁸³ Reputable Greek fragments of this text have been preserved.

⁸⁴ BDAG 29.

⁸⁵ There are three parallels between Heb 5:14 and *Haer.* 4.38.2. *αἰσθητήρια*, the reference to solid food, and the shared root word for “training.” Hebrews 5 uses *γεγυμνασμένα*, Irenaeus uses *ἀγύμναστα* and *συγγυμνασίας*.

⁸⁶ Steenberg, “Children in Paradise,” 1–22; Andia, *Homo vivens*, 129–40.

of Corinth—stunted in the faith as they may have been—on par with the prelapsarian Adam.

There are at least two key observations to be drawn from this text. On the one hand, it provides a probable answer as to why the Edenic couple was referred to as infantile. Above all, it was in reference to the state of their minds. They were simply not able nor prepared to receive the fullness of God's glory. On the other hand, the sum total of these last chapters reveals that for Irenaeus, the divine plan for humanity was a lengthy, multifaceted process of growth. The motif of infancy is used to demonstrate the beginning of a lifetime of growth; the reference to "untrained" minds speaks to the transformative spiritual nurturing needed, and solid food signals the consistent, life-long supply needed. In response, the recapitulative "summing up" and "accustomization" provided by Christ is the salvific act enabling the fulfilment of these needs, while the nourishment of the Spirit enacts and empowers the believers to live the promises out in their daily lives; a response they are able to accomplish as they were created with the strength of will needed to participate in the divine plan. Together, these elements reveal an Irenaean plan both complex in nature and lengthy in process. It is to the progressive element that *Against Heresies* turn with Paragraph 3.

Haer. 4.38.3: *Imago Dei* and Eternal Process of Growth

With God there are simultaneously exhibited power, wisdom, and goodness. His power and goodness [appear] in this, that of His own will He called into being and fashioned things having no previous existence; His wisdom [is shown] in His having made created things parts of one harmonious and consistent whole; and those things which, through His super-eminent kindness, receive growth and a long period of existence, do reflect the glory of the uncreated One, of that God who bestows what is good ungrudgingly. For from the very fact of these things having been created, [it follows] that they are not

uncreated; but by their continuing in being throughout a long course of ages, they shall receive the capacity of the Uncreated, through the gratuitous bestowal of eternal existence upon them by God. And thus in all things God has the pre-eminence, who alone is uncreated, the first of all things, and the primary cause of the existence of all, while all other things remain under God's subjection.⁸⁷

Irenaeus confirms the previous point, that humanity was indeed intended to grow over a long period of existence. Elsewhere, he suggests this period of time is eternal: humanity is meant to always progress unto God.⁸⁸ This corresponds to an earlier assertion, namely, that the ultimate goal is to reside in the presence and glory of God himself. The first axiom is preserved in that God eternally remains the Creator, while all others persist in their created state. But in that state, in the presence of the divine, transformation occurs. Irenaeus makes clear that the eternal, ontological gulf between God and humanity is not indicative of either God's powerlessness nor lack of affection. The previous paragraphs dealt with the former and herein explains the latter. He argues that the human trajectory is the course of development prefigured and enacted by the good, benevolent, and loving God. The process of growth was part of the divine *economia* and it was the product of God's power and wisdom.

In the previous paragraph Irenaeus stressed that in the incarnation Christ came as infant, not for his own benefit, but for humanity's. Ysabel de Andia argues that this is another aspect of the revealed love of God for his people. It was not only the stages of the divine plan being dutifully completed, it was an act of love by the Creator for his children. He desired them to know and receive him. Moreover, that profundity of that

⁸⁷ *Haer.* 4.38.3 (ANF 1:521, with emendation).

⁸⁸ Humanity is created in order to "always possess something towards which [we] might advance." *Haer.* 4.20.7. Cf. *Haer.* 4.11.1-2; 4.28.2; 5.27.1. See Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 37 n. 12.

gap between God and humanity serves to reveal the profound depth of the Creator's love. Christ spanned the ontological gulf, revealed the "elusive" Father and enabled humankind to receive his gracious redemption.⁸⁹

It is at this point that Irenaeus begins to reflect more deliberately upon what the redemptive transformation will entail. In this first half of Paragraph 3 he references four of the foundational points observed throughout many of the texts so-far examined. The transformation will be a lengthy process of growth, humanity will begin to reflect the glory of God, and more than mere reflection, humanity will begin to receive in itself the power, or the capacity of the uncreated One (*δύναμιν ἀγενήτου προσλήψεται*). The fourth and final point of summary observed in the opening of this paragraph is the re-emphasis on the need for humankind to remain under God's authority. Human liberty is not explicitly expressed here, but it again affirms that axiomatic principle that there must always be the decisive distinction between Creator and created.

Of the four points, the one least explored to this point is the idea of receiving the power of the uncreated. In the ANF, the translation suggests that what is to change within humanity is the reception of the "faculty of the uncreated," no doubt alluding to Paragraph 2 and the Edenic and Corinthian deficiency of the mind (*αἰσθητήρια*). Here, however, Irenaeus indicates not only that humanity will be functionally capable of receiving the glory of God, but that they will actually receive *power* (*δύναμιν*). Briggman's translation, however, does not link this power with a change to the mind,

⁸⁹ "L'homme ne pourra saisir le Père qu'à travers le Fils ou dans le Fils. Tel est donc l'amour de Dieu qui se laisse comprendre par sa creature: le Père insaisissable est mesuré par le Fils et le Fils lui-même se donne à comprendre à la mesure de l'homme, selon que l'homme était 'capable de le saisir' . . . La distance entre l'incompréhensibilité du Père et l'enfance du Verbe mesure l'amour de Dieu qui se donne à saisir par sa créature." Andia, *Homo vivens*, 166.

nor explicitly here to human nature. Rather, the power of the uncreated is received “through the gratuitous bestowal of eternal existence.”⁹⁰ Following Fantino, Briggman connects this process of growth with the transformation into the divine image and likeness.⁹¹ This leads to the second half of paragraph three and the first of several important *imago* texts. Following up on the theme of obedience, Irenaeus affirms:

Submissiveness (ὕποταγή) before God is continuance in immortality, and immortality is the glory of the uncreated. By this order and such rhythms and such a movement the created and fashioned man becomes in the image and likeness of the uncreated God: the Father planning everything well and commanding, the Son executing and performing, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing, and man making progress day by day and ascending towards perfection, that is, approaching the Uncreated One. For the Uncreated is perfect, and this is God. Now, it was first necessary for man to be created; and having been created, to increase; and having increased, to become an adult; and having become an adult, to multiply; and having multiplied, to strengthen; and having strengthened, to be glorified; and having glorified; to see his Master; for God is he who is yet to be seen, and the vision of God produces incorruptibility, and “incorruptibility renders one close to God.”⁹²

This text, perhaps more than any other, illustrates the importance of examining Irenaeus’ *imago* passages in their larger context. In isolation, the reference to the divine image and likeness appears almost as an unnecessary addendum to the text. To be sure, Irenaeus does, on occasion reference the *imago Dei* in this way. The most common example of this is when he makes a generic, positive comment about humanity. He will frequently

⁹⁰ Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 179.

⁹¹ “And yet, given the proper amount of time, which allows for the unfolding of the divine economy, including the redemptive work of Christ and the reception of the Spirit as discussed in *Haer.* 4.38.2, human beings ‘will receive the power of the Uncreated, through the gratuitous bestowal of eternal existence’ and will be ‘rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God,’ once again tying together the reception of power and grace with eternal life and the restoration of the likeness of God. He concludes by characterizing this process as a gradual ascent to the perfect, which, he is careful to say, does not result in human beings being as perfect as God, but rather results in their approximation to God, the uncreated One, the perfect One.” Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 179–80; Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 137.

⁹² *Haer.* 4.38.3 (Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 124).

conclude such a statement with “in whom was created after God’s image and likeness.” The purpose of those instances was not to reflect on the image nor likeness, but simply to assert the divine connection between humanity and God. Not so, however, with this text in *Haer.* 4.38.3. Here, Irenaeus describes the telos of humankind. Incorruptibility is the destination—a promise rooted once again in the divine glory.⁹³ As Fantino notes, the *imago* is important here because the divine image and likeness “are presented here as a goal to be attained.”⁹⁴

Progress is also once again central in the text. Irenaeus describes not only the major stages of earthly human existence—initial creation to adulthood, but also the qualitative experience of life—increase, multiplication, strengthening, and glorification.

Behr comments

This is the rhythm and pattern which God has arranged for the growth of man to his full perfection. It is clear that this arrangement is that of the course of each human life. It is no less clear that its progression unfolds with the divine economy, as we have traced it. Each human being, like the human race itself, comes into being as an infant, who must grow to adulthood, the age for procreation, and then strengthen into the fullness of human maturity, before passing into the glory and vision of God. As the economy has unfolded, this includes death, which is followed by the Kingdom of the Son upon the earth, where we mature in the glory of the Son before everything is submitted to the Father.⁹⁵

There are three important themes introduced in this half-paragraph that further clarify the process of growth and progression envisioned by Irenaeus. First, the opening statement expresses the need for submissiveness and this signals the element of human

⁹³ Whereas Behr chooses “incorruptibility,” the ANF strangely translates ἀφθαρσίας/*incorruptela* as “immortality.”

⁹⁴ “Image et ressemblance sont ici présentées comme un but à atteindre.” Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 137.

⁹⁵ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 124–25.

participation in the process. Though the entire section is focussed largely on eschatological fulfilment, it is not exclusively so. This point is made explicit in the next chapter of *Against Heresies*, but the point will be explored fully at the end of this study. The second theme is the remarkable trinitarian emphasis as part of the growth process. The Father, Son, and Spirit are each attributed specific tasks (planning, performing, and enabling, respectively) in the transformative journey to the *imago Dei*. This trinitarian participation is presented alongside human involvement as a form of redemptive symmetry. This theme will also be examined in more detail in the concluding chapter. The final point is the passing remark that this process renders one close to God. As is the case with the first two points, so again will Irenaeus expand upon this theme in Book 5. The primary reason these crucial three themes are here only briefly mentioned is that this follows Irenaeus' own strategy. These themes are introduced in a cursory way, much the same as it was noted that the *imago Dei* texts are on occasion utilized. As paragraph four illustrates, the bishop had other concerns in view. To that end, he writes:

Haer. 4.38.4: Growth as Divinization

Irrational, therefore, in every respect, are they who await not the time of increase, but ascribe to God the infirmity of their nature. Such persons know neither God nor themselves, being insatiable and ungrateful, unwilling to be at the outset what they have also been created: men subject to passions; but go beyond the law of the human race, and before that they become men, they wish to be even now like God their Creator, and they who are more destitute of reason than dumb animals [insist] that there is no distinction between the uncreated God and man, a creature of today. For these, [the dumb animals], bring no charge against God for not having made them men; but each one, just as he has been created, gives thanks that he has been

created. For we cast blame upon Him, because we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men . . .⁹⁶

Irenaeus does not here expand on the eschatological meaning or implications of divine participation or theosis because first principles needed first to be established. He argues that his opponents not only focussed on such themes (“wishing to be like God in the present”), but they did so from an irrational set of presuppositions. Once again, the issue concerns that first axiom of creation. The Gnostics focussed upon the divinity within themselves, but failed to acknowledge that ontological divide so important to Irenaeus. He describes this perspective as both irrational and ungrateful since it rejects the limitations inherent in the created being, and the mercy of God who is willing to participate in human affairs despite their shortcomings. The previous paragraphs outlined the divine plan of progressively working in humankind for their good, which is why Irenaeus referred to the Gnostics as those who would not “await the time of increase.” It was not simply the matter of a lack of patience, but theirs was an outright rejection of the Irenaeian axiom. Indeed, since the heretics viewed themselves as ones that shared in the divine nature, Irenaeus points out the implications: they “ascribe to God the infirmity of their own nature.” In elevating themselves, they denigrated the character of the divine.⁹⁷ Moreover, Irenaeus offers an ironic summation of the heretics’

⁹⁶ *Haer.* 4.38.4 (ANF 1:522, with emendation).

⁹⁷ The clause in question is a curious one (inscribe to God the infirmity of their nature / *suae naturae infirmitatem adscribunt Deo*). There are no Greek fragments of this paragraph and the Latin states it is an *inscribunt* to God of the human nature. The word is a technical one, typically referring to an inscription or writing. Rousseau provides *προσγράφω* as the likely Greek original, which carries a similar meaning. Curiously, however, with his French translation Rousseau opts for *grief*, rather than scribal terms such as *inscrire* or *imprimer*. *Grief* interprets the clause to mean that the heretics have a grievance or complaint against God (*viz.* their infirm nature). This does not fit the overall context of the paragraph, however. Irenaeus’ claim is that his opponents elevate themselves to divine status, not that they bemoan their inferiority. They claim, or stamp upon God that which is true of themselves. Rousseau, *SC* 100, 956–57.

position. These Gnostics—those claiming superlative, divine *knowledge*—in fact reveal that they *know* neither God nor themselves.⁹⁸ Following this critique, he begins to address the issue of humanity’s potential for sharing divine nature.

We have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods; although God has adopted this course out of His pure benevolence, that no one may impute to Him invidiousness or grudgingness. He declares, “I have said, you are gods; and you are all sons of the Highest.” But since we could not sustain the power of divinity, He adds, “But you shall die like men,” setting forth both truths: the kindness of His free gift, and our weakness, and also that we were possessed of power over ourselves. For after His great kindness He graciously conferred good [upon us], and made men like to Himself, [that is] in their own power; while at the same time by His prescience He knew the infirmity of human beings, and the consequences which would flow from it; but through [His] love and [His] power, He shall overcome the substance of created nature. For it was necessary, at first, that nature should be exhibited; then, after that, that what was mortal should be conquered and swallowed up 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.⁹⁹

Irenaeus’ axiomatic principle is seemingly challenged here in the second half of paragraph four. Where he previously argued at length for the radical ontological difference between God and humanity, here he begins to address the issue of humankind’s own potential for divinity. A more detailed discussion of Irenaeus’ understanding for deification (theosis) will be explored in Book 5, but these concluding statements of Book 4 include three important introductory points: deification’s biblical context, the Christological foundation, and its connection to the *imago Dei*.

⁹⁸ As indicated above, there are no surviving Greek texts or fragments of this paragraph. It would be tempting to assume that Irenaeus indicated the heretics’ deficiencies of knowledge by using the term *γνωσις*. Fantino is most likely right, however, to suggest *εἰδότες*, rather than *γνωσις*. The former is not used widely throughout *Against Heresies*, though it does appear a few chapters earlier (*Haer.* 4.31.1) and the Greek to Latin combination (*εἰδότες/scientes*) is the same as that proposed by Fantino for *Haer.* 4.38.4. Moreover, Irenaeus’ Latin translator frequently favoured *agnitio* as the preferred rendering for *γνωσις* (Cf. *Haer.* 3.12.17, 4.38.3). See Rousseau, *SC* 100: 956–57.

⁹⁹ *Haer.* 4.38.4.

First, Irenaeus makes clear that any discussion concerning an orthodox view of theosis will be rooted in scripture. He establishes Ps 82:6, with the allusion to humanity as “gods,” as a key and foundational text.¹⁰⁰ This is a text he explained in greater detail in two places in Book 3.¹⁰¹ The first and most detailed discussion occurs in *Haer.* 3.6.1. There he surrounded the reference to Ps 82 with eight other scriptural citations.¹⁰² His purpose in that text was first to refute the heretical teachings on the plurality and multiplicity of the divine nature. He acknowledges the unique human-divinity dynamic of Ps 82 but makes clear that it must be understood within the context of the biblical and apostolic tradition: namely, that there is one God alone and one Lord, Jesus Christ.¹⁰³ There is a sense in which humanity can be described as divine, but it must first be rooted in the testimony of scripture. As Irenaeus begins to explain the meaning of the text, he introduces his second key principle of interpretation: the centrality of Christ.

To explain the meaning of the difficult verse Irenaeus refers to the first verse of Ps 82, which he repeats in this form: “God stood in the congregation of the gods, He judges among the gods” (Ps 82:1). He argues that the verse, “refers to the Father and the Son, and those who have received the adoption; but these are the Church. For she is the synagogue of God, which God—that is, the Son Himself—has gathered by Himself.” He then conflates Ps 50:1 and its reference to “the God of gods” with Ps 82:6 and asks, “and who are these ‘gods’? . . . those, no doubt, who have received the grace of ‘adoption, by

¹⁰⁰ Cf. John 10:34.

¹⁰¹ For an excellent summary of the three occasions in which Irenaeus interprets Ps 82:6, see Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 105–7.

¹⁰² Cf. Ps 110:1, Gen 19:24, Ps 45:6, Ps 82:1, Ps 50:1, Ps 50:3, Isa 65:1, Rom 8:15.

¹⁰³ “Therefore neither would the Lord, nor the Holy Spirit, nor the apostles, have ever named as God, definitely and absolutely, him who was not God, unless he were truly God; nor would they have named any one in his own person Lord, except God the Father ruling over all, and His Son who has received dominion from His Father over all creation,.” *Haer.* 3.6.1 (ANF 1:418).

which we cry, Abba Father.”¹⁰⁴ Including the citation of Rom 8:15 reinforces the concern to remain biblically rooted and establishes a basic interpretation of what it means for humanity to be described a “god.” Irenaeus understands the Psalms to be looking ahead to adoption by grace that comes through Christ. In the subsequent four sections of *Haer.* 3.6 he makes clear that the ontological divide between Creator and created must always be maintained. He points to the many occasions where the scriptures refer to idols or demons as gods and asserts that “it does not, as I have already remarked, declare them as gods in every sense, but with a certain addition and signification, by which they are shown to be no gods at all.”¹⁰⁵ The statement referred directly to things of ungodly character, but the point proves true for humanity as well. Indeed,

to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we through Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him. For he has made a distinction, and separated those which are indeed called gods, but which are none, from the one God the Father, from whom are all things, and, he has confessed in the most decided manner in his own person, one Lord Jesus Christ . . .¹⁰⁶

The statement that humanity was initially made as “merely men” and “then at length gods” is both clear and provocative. Humanity is trending upwards, but this progression of growth is entirely dependent on the grace of God effected through the incarnational achievement of Christ. It was the Son of God who “knew the infirmity of humanity” and “overcame the substance of created nature.” He overcame corruptibility with his incorruptibility, mortality with his immortality. This Christological emphasis is a significant departure from the tradition received by Irenaeus. As Russell demonstrates,

¹⁰⁴ *Haer.* 3.6.1.

¹⁰⁵ *Haer.* 3.6.2 (ANF 1:419).

¹⁰⁶ *Haer.* 3.6.5 (ANF 1:419).

Justin, Theophilus, and the Rabbinic text *Sifre to Deuteronomy* all connected Ps 82:6 will deification similar to what is found in *Haer.* 4.38.4. Where they differ from Irenaeus, however, is in their insistence that “obedience to God enables a human being to be called a god.”¹⁰⁷ Obedience, though it was stressed repeatedly throughout the previous chapters, does not appear here in the Ps 82 discussion of becoming like God.¹⁰⁸

These statements from Book 3 must inform the interpretation of the Ps 82:6 citation in 4.38.4. For Irenaeus, deification is a concept rooted in the biblical testimony, but it is also Christological; the only way a human can in any way share in divinity is through the work of Christ and the gracious adoption in divine sonship.¹⁰⁹

The third point of importance is noting the relationship between deification and the *imago Dei*. Russell astutely points out that the context of the paragraph is distinct from the earlier occasions where Ps 82:6 was employed. In *Haer.* 4.38.4, the reference to the Psalm “occurs in an important discussion of why humanity was not made perfect from the beginning (*Haer.* 4. 38. 3).”¹¹⁰ As a result of that discussion, the link between deification and the *imago Dei* becomes clear. The progression to God is humanity’s

¹⁰⁷ Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 104.

¹⁰⁸ In the *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin wrote to prove that “the Holy Ghost reproaches men because they were made like God, free from suffering and death, provided that they kept His commandments, and were deemed deserving of the name of His sons, and yet they, becoming like Adam and Eve, work out death for themselves; let the interpretation of the Psalm be held just as you wish, yet thereby it is demonstrated that all men are deemed worthy of becoming “gods,” and of having power to become sons of the Highest; and shall be each by himself judged and condemned like Adam and Eve. Now I have proved at length that Christ is called God.” (*Dial.*, 124). Theophilus similarly stated that it is through obedience to God’s commandments that a person might “win immortality as a reward from him and become a god.” (*Autol.* 2.27). For a discussion of the Rabbinic *Sifre to Deuteronomy*, see Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 100, 101, 104.

¹⁰⁹ He makes the connection between Christology, adoption, and deification explicit in the second of his Ps 8:6 citations. “[To] those who assert that He was simply a mere man . . . the Word says, mentioning His own gift of grace: ‘I said, You are all 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, but who despise the incarnation of the pure generation of the Word of God, defraud human nature of promotion into God.” *Haer.* 3.19.1.

¹¹⁰ Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 107.

intended telos—it was the divine plan from the outset of creation. As Irenaeus’ explanation of the divine plan unfolds, he begins to introduce more pointed anthropological issues. He notes that Christ’s victory was a victory over the “substance of created {human} nature (*naturae substantiam*).” Moreover, “it was necessary, at first, that nature should be exhibited; then, after that, that what was mortal should be conquered and swallowed up by immortality . . . and that man should be made after the image and likeness of God.” There is much here to unpack; to summarize, however, there are two important elements in the relationship between the *imago* and theosis. First, the reference to the overcoming of the substance of human nature reinforces the Christological foundation and indicates the fact that ontologically speaking, humanity is meant to truly change. Second, this change is linked directly to the *imago Dei*. This is the eschatological “becoming” that allows Irenaeus to seamlessly connect theosis with the divine likeness intended for humankind.

At the end of Book 4 Irenaeus briefly introduces these important topics related to deification. They are to be expanded in Book 5, but he here establishes the three central points: Theosis must be biblical, Christological, and it must correspond to the overarching divine *economia*. This latter he achieves by linking the subject with the *imago Dei*.

Section Summary

In the introduction to this section, the critique against Irenaeus’ theological consistency was addressed. Wendt, Loofs, and more recently, Brown, took issue with the tendency throughout *Against Heresies* to attempt to attribute to the *imago Dei* both a sense of lostness and something into which humanity was meant to grow. A careful study of

Haer. 38, combined with the earlier examination of Book 3, has demonstrated the compatibility of these ideas. At the centre of Irenaeus' thinking was the belief that humanity was meant from the beginning to grow. As created beings, ontologically distinct from the Creator, it was inevitable that there would be a divide between God and his favoured creatures. He could have created them initially perfect, but his goal was for humanity to be a creature, and yet share in divinity—to share in the image and likeness of himself. This required progress and maturation. As Book 3 revealed, the sin of Eden stunted the process and disabled the opportunity for growth. In that sense, the *imago* was lost to humanity. In Christ, however, Irenaeus makes clear that progress may once again be restored. Indeed, it may lead to the human being experiencing fullness of the divine plan, to share in divine nature. In Irenaeus' mind, these concepts of lostness and progress are not incompatible, but are the natural development of a created, then broken creature.

Book 4 Conclusion

Book 3 of *Against Heresies* emphasized the foundational elements of the spiritual life, elements of which corresponded to humanity's creation according to the image and likeness of God. Thus, the previous chapter of this study examined the *imago Dei* in terms of what it meant to be created in the image, what it meant to have lost that image, and ultimately, how humanity would experience restoration in the image. Book 4 moved forward in the narrative, addressing issues concerned with the divine plan for a restored spiritual life in the image of God. Thus, section one identified the purpose of a restored *imago* being centered upon the desire for God to be in fellowship with his people; section two addressed humanity's role in the progress to that fellowship, with special

concern for the exercise of the liberty each person has been granted; finally, section three introduced the themes of progress and divinization. These built upon the notion of sharing in fellowship with the divine and explained how this is a fulfilment of the eternal *economia* of God. In Book 5 of *Against Heresies*, and with the final chapter of this study, Irenaeus elaborates on these themes, probing what exactly it means to have the Spirit of God actively at work in a living person, drawing them into divine fellowship.

CHAPTER 5:
AGAINST HERESIES, BOOK 5:
IMAGO FULFILLED: THE JOURNEY TO RESTORATION

Irenaeus begins Book 5 with a brief summary of the previous four books. He expresses confidence that the heretical doctrines were clearly exposed and that such teachings should be seen as obviously incongruent with the tradition of the prophets, with Christ's own teaching, and with the apostolic tradition, as preserved throughout the world in the "orthodox" churches. Book 5's contribution, he writes, will be to reinforce these truths from the testimony from the "rest of the Lord's doctrine and the apostolic epistles."¹ At the conclusion of the introductory chapter to Book 5 and into the opening chapters, Irenaeus continues the themes explored at the conclusion of Book 4. It cannot be said that the *imago Dei* or deification are the central themes of *Against Heresies*' final book, but their importance is significant.

***Haer.* 5.pref—2.1: Participation with God through Incarnation and Communion**

Introduction

The opening paragraphs of *Haer.* 5 are notable for their allusions to theosis and to communion with God. Scholars have isolated these texts to focus on a number of Irenaean themes, notably divinization, imitation, and the incarnation-

¹ *Haer.* 5.pref (ANF 1:526).

exchange/interchange concept. This section seeks to examine carefully the larger context of these opening paragraphs, identifying how each of the key themes should properly be understood in view of the whole.

Haer. 5.pref—5.1.1a: Becoming as He Is

In the four preceding books . . . all the heretics have been exposed . . . It will be incumbent upon you, however . . . to peruse with great attention what I have already said, that you would obtain a knowledge of the subjects against which I am contending . . . and be prepared to receive the evidence brought forward against them, casting away their doctrines as filth by means of the celestial faith; but following the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.²

In *Haer.* 4.38.4 Irenaeus cited Ps 82:6 for a third time, and, as noted above, the Psalm refers to humanity as “gods.” In each of the three instances where Irenaeus cited this text, he was careful to qualify the meaning of the Psalm, always maintaining his axiomatic principle concerning the Creator and created. In the preface of Book 5, Ps 82 is not mentioned, nor is the language of gods or divinity. The final sentence of the preface is, however, perhaps Irenaeus’ most famous quote, with its reference to Christ becoming what we are that we might be what he is.³ The statement is often linked with *Haer.* 3.19.1, where he states that “The Word of God became man . . . to this end, that man, having been united with the Word of God and receiving adoption, might become a son of God.”⁴ As noted earlier, these ideas are often described by contemporary scholars

² *Haer.* 5.pref (ANF 1:526).

³ *Verbum Dei, Jesum Christum Dominum nostrum : qui propter immensam suam dilectionem factus est quod sumus nos, uti nos perficeret esse quod et ipse.* SC 153:14.

⁴ *Haer.* 3.19.1 (ACW 64:92–93). It should be noted that *Haer.* 3.19.1 is the same paragraph where Irenaeus cited Ps 82:6 for the second time. Although *Haer.* 5.pref and the third Ps 82 reference are separated between Books 4 and 5, only the concluding three chapters of Book 4 separate them. This is not

as Irenaeus' "exchange formula."⁵ It is interesting to note, however, that the scholars utilizing the language of "exchange" are often those evaluating Irenaeus' doctrine of soteriology, Christology, or anthropology, and often in view of a larger interest in deification. These studies are either brief sections of larger works,⁶ or are individual journal articles or chapters in edited volumes.⁷ In larger studies dedicated entirely to Irenaeus, however, discussion of this selection of *Haer.* 5 is rather lacking. Several otherwise excellent studies do not discuss this pericope in great depth.⁸ It is noteworthy that neither Behr nor Briggman interacts with the pericope, but it is especially surprising that de Andia also largely neglects it. Unlike Behr and Briggman, deification is a central theme of her study. She refers to the text on three occasions,⁹ but never seriously interacts with it. All three scholars reference *Haer.* 3.19.1 a few times each, but again, serious engagement is lacking. There are two scholars who do interact with the text, but who do so in combination with the opening statements of the subsequent paragraph, *Haer.* 5.1.1, which reads:

For in no other way could we have learned the things of God, unless our Master, existing as the Word, had become man. For no other being had the power of revealing to us the things of the Father, except His own proper Word . . . we could have learned in no other way than by seeing our Teacher, and hearing His voice with our own ears, that, having become imitators of His works as well as doers of His words, we may have communion with Him, receiving increase from the perfect One, and from Him who is prior to all creation.¹⁰

a significant gap if Book 5 is understood to have been written immediately after Book 4. Thus, their moderately-close proximity is interesting, in view of *Haer.* 3.19.1.

⁵ Litwa, "Wondrous Exchange," 311–41; Aagaard, "My Eyes Have Seen," 311–13; Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature*, 49–55; Macaskill, *Union with Christ*, 58–61.

⁶ Examples include Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature*; Macaskill, *Union with Christ*.

⁷ Aagaard, "My Eyes Have Seen," 302–28; Litwa, "Wondrous Exchange," 311–41; Litwa, "God 'Human,'" 70–94; Finch, "Irenaeus on Christological Divinization," 86–103.

⁸ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*; Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*; Andia, *Homo vivens*.

⁹ Andia, *Homo vivens*, 228, 230.

¹⁰ *Haer.* 5.pref—1.1.1 (ANF 1:526–27).

In his commentary on the text, Fantino isolates the theme of imitation. Initially focussing on the key statement from the Preface (“he became what we are”), Fantino rightly identifies the fact that Irenaeus is insisting on the necessary role of the incarnation of the Word. However, he then places the locus of importance on human response. He argues that it is “by becoming imitators of the Word incarnate that we have communion with him.”¹¹ As will be demonstrated from the rest of the chapter, Fantino is again correct to stress the importance of the relationship between communion with Christ and this notion of becoming what he is. Later in the paragraph imitation is again emphasized, indicating that “it is not enough to listen to [Christ’s words]: they must be put into practice to become his imitator. As a result, communion with Christ results from believers’ faith and behavior in deeds and words.”¹² For Fantino, Irenaeus’ understanding of divine communion represents a causal dependence on human initiative. There is directness to this interpretation, one that sees connection to God as directly dependent on imitation.

At first glance, it is clear why Fantino would place central importance on this theme. First, as noted above, this perspective is a tradition received by Irenaeus from Justin and Theophilus. As Russell demonstrated, there was little ambiguity between the dependence of connection to God through human imitation.¹³ Second, Irenaeus’ statement seems equally clear. He does state that it is by becoming imitators of his words and works that “we may have communion with Him.” Though this interpretation

¹¹ “En devenant imitateurs du Verbe incarné nous avons communion avec lui.” Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 114.

¹² “Il faut les mettre en pratique pour devenir son imitateur. En conséquence, la communion au Christ résulte et de la foi du croyant et de son comportement en actes et en paroles.” Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 114.

¹³ Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 101–5.

answers the challenge of the imitation sentence and corresponds to the received tradition, it nevertheless fails in two important respects. First, it neglects the context of the rest of that chapters of *Haer. 5* and it likewise fails to explain the relationship between “becoming,” incarnation, communion, and the *imago Dei*, which feature prominently in the rest of the paragraph. Irenaeus continues:

Haer. 5.1.1: Communion with God through Participation

[W]e could have learned in no other way than by seeing our Teacher . . . having become imitators of His works as well as doers of His words, we may have communion with Him, receiving increase from the perfect One, and from Him who is prior to all creation. We—who were but lately created . . . by Him also who has the gift of immortality, having been formed after His likeness (predestinated, according to the prescience of the Father, that we, who had as yet no existence, might come into being), and made the first-fruits of creation—have received, in the times known beforehand, [the blessings of salvation] according to the ministration of the Word, who is perfect in all things, as the mighty Word, and very man, who, redeeming us by His own blood in a manner consonant to reason, gave Himself as a redemption for those who had been led into captivity. And since the apostasy tyrannized over us unjustly, and, though we were by nature the property of the omnipotent God, alienated us contrary to nature, rendering us its own disciples, the Word of God, powerful in all things, and not defective with regard to His own justice, did righteously turn against that apostasy, and redeem from it His own property, not by violent means, as the [apostasy] had obtained dominion over us at the beginning, when it insatiably snatched away what was not its own, but by means of persuasion, as became a God of counsel, who does not use violent means to obtain what He desires; so that neither should justice be infringed upon, nor the ancient handiwork of God go to destruction. Since the Lord thus has redeemed us through His own blood, giving His soul for our souls, and His flesh for our flesh, and has also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and, on the other hand, attaching man to God by His own incarnation, and bestowing upon us

at His coming immortality durably and truly, by means of communion with God, all the doctrines of the heretics fall to ruin.¹⁴

Following the imitation statement, Irenaeus expands on his horizon of meaning viz. communion. Union with Christ is not a concept bereft of concrete meaning, but, on the contrary, the text includes three levels of explanation: historical, eschatological, and practical. Each of these contributes to a more complete understanding of union with Christ, and, as will be demonstrated in *Haer.* 5.1.3, each one is an important element in the fulfilment of the realized *imago Dei* in humanity.

First, Irenaeus roots the potential for communion within the divine economy in history. As Fantino observed but did not expound, humanity's connection to God is predicated—above all else—upon the incarnation of the Word. Not only was Christ the impetus (or exemplar), but Irenaeus clearly identifies the Word as the ultimate *cause* for humanity's salvation. Salvation, as argued above, is for Irenaeus closely associated with communion. On three occasions in *Haer.* 5.1.1 there is an explicit identification of Christ as the source of humankind's redemption. It was he who gave himself as a redemption; it was through his own blood that he has redeemed (twice stated).¹⁵ In view of this emphasis, Irenaeus' comment on the relationship between humanity's need for imitation and communion with Christ must be evaluated within the larger context of the paragraph. Imitation is identified as important, but how does the point correspond to his Christocentric soteriology? The question arises again with the second theme evident in the paragraph.

¹⁴ *Haer.* 5.1.1 (ANF 1:526–27).

¹⁵ *Haer.* 5.1.1 (SC 153:18, 20).

Communion is firstly grounded in history with the incarnation, but there is also an important eschatological element. Rooted on the incarnation, the “exchange formula” of the Preface promised that Christ’s coming made possible the opportunity for humanity to become like him. At the end of Paragraph 1, the theme is repeated, stressing that humankind is attached to God by the incarnation and by the Spirit of God and that this divine work results in the bestowal of immortality on those participating in the divine communion.¹⁶ This connection between immortality and communion demonstrates the future, not-yet-realized component to the union with the divine. As with the historical element of the divine economy, so is the eschatological element to communion firmly dependent on the work of God—here expressed in specifically trinitarian terms.

The third element to divine communion is the practical. Irenaeus states that the faithful can learn from none other but from “our” Teacher and that through imitation of His word and deeds one may have communion with him. There is no doubt a practical element to this text. The bishop desires for his reader to respond to the Lord with obedience and emulation. In the subsequent sentences, however, greater meaning is given to how human participation corresponds to the aforementioned historical and eschatological initiatives of God. Irenaeus describes humanity as having (after Eden) been “led into captivity,” whereupon each person became a tyrannized disciple of

¹⁶ The English of the ANF quoted above is an awkward translation; Rousseau’s French is a significant improvement. “faisant descendre Dieu dans les hommes par l’Esprit et faisant monter l’homme jusqu’à dieu par son incarnation, et si en toute certitude et vérité, lors de sa venue, il nous a gratifiés de l’incorruptibilité par la communion que nous avons avec lui-même . . .” There are no Greek fragments of this section of text. The Latin reads, *et effundente Spiritum Patris in ad unionem et communionem Dei et hominum, ad homines quidem deponente Deum per Spiritum, ad Deum autem rursus imponente hominem per suam incarnationem, et firme et vere in adventu suo donante nobis incorruptelam per communionem quae est ad eum*. See ANF1:527; SC153:20, 21.

captivity. Neither the devil specifically nor evil generally is here mentioned. On the contrary, humanity is said to be alienated from God contrary to nature, a nature which is no doubt related to having been initially formed after “his likeness”—a statement made in the preceding sentence. In response to the crisis of captivity, the redemptive work of Christ is described as a work of liberation. However, it is a liberation that seeks to preserve human liberty, which, as noted from the study of *Haer.* 4.37, is a requisite component of what it means for humanity to share in the image and likeness of God. Thus, the redemptive working of God is inviolable (for God is omnipotent, Irenaeus asserts), yet his salvific act is not “violent.” That is to say, the redemptive plan does not impose upon humanity the preference of God, which is to welcome his people into communion with Himself. It is “by means of persuasion, as became a God of counsel . . . to obtain what He desires.” Not only does this correspond to the earlier teaching on the relationship between human liberty, the divine *economia*, and the *imago Dei*, but it corresponds also to the first sentence from *Haer.* 5.1.1. To repeat once more the statement given such a prominent place by Fantino, “[W]e could have learned in no other way than by seeing our Teacher . . . having become imitators of His works as well as doers of His words, we may have communion with Him, receiving increase from the perfect One.” It seems likely that there is some level of correspondence between the call to imitate the Teacher, with the subsequent emphasis on the redemptive God who draws in humanity by means of persuasion. Moreover, in view of the historical and eschatological emphasis on Divine, rather than human initiative in salvation and communion, it is clear that the expectations on imitation need be carefully articulated in view of the prevailing work of God.

It was earlier noted that two scholars provided commentary on the Preface of Book 5. Fantino was the first and the second is Eric Osborn. Like his predecessor, Osborn also emphasizes the importance of imitation in Irenaeus' theology. Unlike Fantino, however, Osborn is careful to situate the theme within the larger context of God's redemptive activity. He does this by identifying "participation" as a central and overriding theme of Irenaeian theology.¹⁷ Indeed, nearly half of Osborn's important treatise is dedicated to the subject.¹⁸ In his discussion of the key "becoming" or "exchange" passages of Book 5's Preface and the first chapter, issues of deification are not in the foreground. Indeed, neither the "becoming as He is" nor the "imitation" aspect is of primary concern for Osborn. Instead, he focuses on the preceding statement concerning the need to see and learn from the Teacher, because "knowledge works through exchange. There is no other way to learn the mind of God than through our teacher who is the word of God made man. We may know what he is by seeing, hearing and imitating our teacher. The exchange produces participation . . ." ¹⁹ Whereas Justin, Theophilus, and Fantino suggested a causal link between faithful imitation of Christ with connection to God, Osborn sees the reception of divine truth as central and the Word of God as the primary vehicle for this knowledge. The outcome of such a reception leads to communion. Much of Osborn's volume seeks to explore the challenging dynamic of humanity's role in divine participation—a dynamic that is difficult to isolate in *Against Heresies* when individual texts such as the Preface of Book

¹⁷ Osborn argues there are four key concepts to Irenaeus' theology; Divine intellect, economy, and recapitulation are the first three. Participation is the fourth, representing the "human response" to the first three, which are the work of the Triune God. Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 143.

¹⁸ Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 143–263.

¹⁹ Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 261.

5 are not situated within their larger context. Osborn's perspective on participation is summarized in this way: "Participation is brought about through the descent of God's firstborn word to grasp the creature, and by the ascent of the creature who grasps the word and ascends beyond the angels to become the image and likeness of God. Mutual participation assimilates the creature to the divine likeness."²⁰ Though these statements provide a helpful perspective on the human role in imitation and communion, it does not interact with the other key themes from *Haer.* 5.1. Osborn points in the right direction, however, noting as he does the focus of God's initiative towards the divine image and likeness. This leads to the third paragraph of Chapter 1.

Haer. 5.1.3: Reanimated *Imago*, Revitalized Communion

Vain also are the Ebionites, who do not receive by faith into their soul the union of God and man, but who remain in the old leaven of [the natural] birth, 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, and showed forth a new [kind of] generation; 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 the heavenly wine, and wish it to be water of the world only, not receiving God so as to have union with Him, 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, that breath of life which proceeded from God, having been united to what had been fashioned, animated the man, and manifested him as a being endowed with reason; so also, in [the times of] the end, the Word of the Father and the Spirit of God, having become united with the ancient substance of Adam's formation, rendered man living and perfect, receptive of the perfect Father, in order that as in the natural [Adam] we all were dead, so in the spiritual 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 (*fine*), not by

²⁰ Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 262.

the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, but by the good pleasure of the Father, His hands formed a living man, in order that Adam might be created [again] after the image and likeness of God.²¹

Irenaeus' Christocentric focus persists throughout the three sections of *Haer.* 5.1.

Paragraph 2 argues again for the true humanity of Jesus and Paragraph 3 for his true divinity. To deny either is, for Irenaeus, a blasphemous proposition. The divinity of the Word is particularly important for the theology of the *imago Dei*, for it is as a result of the divine incarnation that a "new generation" (*novam generationem*) is formed. This refers again to the exchange formula, whereby the divine has intermingled with humanity so that humanity might become intermingled with the divine. This paragraph is important because it relates these ideas to the *imago Dei* in a more substantive way than had occurred previously. Following the theme from Paragraph 1, here again, communion proves to be centrally important—both for humanity's initial and eschatological reception of the divine image and likeness.

The reference to remaining in and being formed in Adam refers to humanity's initial creation in the divine likeness. There is an aspect of communion here in that Irenaeus states that the breath of life (Gen 2:7) proceeded from God and became united to the first man. Moreover, the reception of the divine breath produced "reason" in Adam. This is another text reinforcing the idea that the initial perspective on divine likeness was closely tied to the mind. Human liberty, as identified in Book 4.37, and here reason, are the chief elements of what it means for the first couple to share in the image and likeness of God. There is considerable debate interpreting Irenaeus' understanding of the breath of life described in Gen 2:7 compared to the subsequent

²¹ *Haer.* 5.1.3 (ANF 1:527).

reception and work of the Holy Spirit. John Behr discusses the issue at length,²² arguing that “the soul is the breath of life to the body, whilst itself being the locus of intellectual activity.”²³ A corollary of this view is that Behr sees the vivifying work of the Holy Spirit as primarily an eschatological phenomenon. Every living person, by virtue of having a soul, has a spiritual element within them, but in the resurrected life the Spirit will breathe new life into those adopted by Christ.²⁴ By extension, they will thus share in the divine communion. Briggman does not deny the eschatological but emphasizes a more active and exclusive role for the Spirit prior to the eschaton.²⁵ Whereas Behr sees in Irenaeus a spirituality true for every living person, Briggman argues for a “careful restriction of the presence of the Spirit to those who experience the adoption of sons . . .” Thus, “while the Spirit creates the breath of life that is present in all people, the Spirit itself is only present to a select group of people.”²⁶ Moreover, the Spirit is responsible not only “for the resurrection to eternal life and for the present participation in eternal life experience by the believer.”²⁷

The paragraph presently under examination supports Briggman’s thesis. Irenaeus distinguishes sharply between the initial animation of humanity by the breath from the subsequent rendering unto living perfection. The former is associated with the first Adam and with death; the latter with the re-created (second) Adam and with the true image and likeness of God. In both, however, what is key is the activity of God through the Spirit. In both the bestowal of breath and the re-animated life their significance is

²² Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 89–115.

²³ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 91.

²⁴ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 100.

²⁵ Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 166–73.

²⁶ Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 169.

²⁷ Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 171.

rooted in their being a degree of union with God himself; the first only partial, the second fully realized. Irenaeus concludes this sub-section by again reaffirming divine communion as the central theme of these paragraphs.

Haer. 5: 2.1: Incarnation for Communion

And vain likewise are those who say that God came to those things which did not belong to Him . . . He did not truly redeem us by His own blood, if He did not really become man, restoring to His own handiwork what was said [of it] in the beginning, that man was made after the image and likeness of God; not snatching away by stratagem the property of another, but taking possession of His own in a righteous and gracious manner. As far as concerned the apostasy, indeed, He redeems us righteously from it by His own blood; but as regards us who have been redeemed, [He does this] graciously. For we have given nothing to Him previously, nor does He desire anything from us, as if He stood in need of it; but we do stand in need of fellowship with Him. And for this reason it was that He graciously poured Himself out, that He might gather us into the bosom of the Father.

At the beginning of this section, the “exchange” text of the preface was noted for its inclusion in a variety of deification studies. Thus far, Irenaeus has provided little material that would warrant this manner of theological speculation. Indeed, Fantino’s commentary suggested that Irenaeus’ chief understanding of becoming like God was predicated upon the efforts of an individual’s imitation of Christ. That line of thinking, however, has also been shown to be unwarranted in view of the larger context of Book 5’s opening paragraphs. Irenaeus clearly has a place for imitation, but it is not the central theme of the section; indeed, it is not discussed again apart from the isolated text identified by Fantino. Central, however, is the concern for the communion and union between God and humanity. Creation, redemption, incarnation (and exchange), and

eternal life are each described in connection to communion, seen here as the chief purpose of the divine economy.

In this final paragraph of the present section under examination, Irenaeus addresses the connection of divine communion with humanity and its relationship to the subject of this present study—the *imago Dei*. Here he speaks of returning to “his own” and restoring them to what was intended from the beginning: to be in the image and likeness of God. To share in this comes as a result of this redemptive work of God. It is to be gathered into “his bosom.” Communion, and not imitation is the central key. As Behr emphasizes, the fullness of these realities occurs in the consummated kingdom. As Briggman points out, however, Irenaeus also showed concern for the practical side of the spiritual life.

In the next section, Irenaeus at last summarizes what exactly he envisions a restoration unto the divine image and likeness. Following the Christocentric concerns repeated throughout *Against Heresies*, the restoration is characterized by two key elements: restoration of both flesh and spirit.

Section Summary

This section has demonstrated that although scholars are often drawn to the theosis themes of the Preface, that idea represents a minor place in the context of the opening paragraphs of Book 5. More important is Irenaeus’ larger concern for how the incarnation of the Word re-establishes communion between God and humanity, and, by extension, allows for the restoration of the divine image and likeness. Through the rest of Book 5, the bishop of Lyons begins to offer his most important explanations of what the rejuvenated *imago* entails for humankind.

Haer. 5.6.1, 5.8.1: Imago Restored in Flesh And spirit

Introduction

To this point, Irenaeus has left many questions unanswered. Chief among them are the recently introduced ideas related to deification, but most important for this study are the issues of the spiritual life and of renewal in the divine image and likeness. What has been clear throughout *Against Heresies* is that these issues, and indeed, the entirety of Irenaeus' theology, are centered on the need for humanity to be drawn into eternal communion with God—an opportunity established exclusively through the redemptive work of the incarnate Word. In these last sections that explore the *imago Dei*, Irenaeus attempts to draw these points to a conclusion. An attempt which, I will demonstrate, reveals that each of these theological issues are profoundly interconnected. The incarnation made possible redemption, which in fullness, is an eternal communion with God producing the divinization of humankind. This process *is* the fulfilment of the originally intended destiny for Adam and Eve: to share in the divine image and likeness is the inevitable result of the process.

In the opening two chapters of Book 5 Irenaeus returns to one of his most repeated arguments against the heretics: the full humanity and divinity of Christ. The entire economy—all the salvific initiatives of God depend on these points. Following these reassertions, Irenaeus spends nearly one-third of *Haer. 5* demonstrating how these same two themes are essential for a redeemed humanity. Indeed, these points form the basic understanding of what it means to be restored into the divine likeness. The humanity and divinity of Christ correlate to the intended eternity of both the flesh and the spirit of humanity. The flesh is restored in the image of the Incarnate Word and the

Spirit is restored according to the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Irenaeus deals with each aspect in two key sections: Chapter 6 is dedicated to the eschatological, Chapter 8 introduces the temporal.

Haer. 5.6.1: Humanity's Eternal Flesh and Spirit

Haer. 3–5 are primarily concerned with arguing for the goodness of humanity's material constitution, and, specifically, the reasonableness of accepting that this materiality is a worthy recipient of divine power and eternity. Indeed, Irenaeus, following the Pauline idea of strength being made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9), asserts that the weakness of human flesh is ideally suited for the purposes intended by God. He asks, "how could a man have learned that he is himself an infirm being, and mortal by nature and that God is immortal and powerful, unless he had learned by experience what is in both?"²⁸ He adds, "the experience of both confers upon him the true knowledge as to God and man, and increases his love towards God. Now, where there exists an increase of love, there a greater glory is wrought out by the power of God for those who love Him."²⁹ Irenaeus continues the emphasis on glory in Chapter 6, where he begins, with greater detail, to describe the meaning of the divine image and likeness. The first paragraph of the chapter is among the most important in all of Irenaeus' writings, particularly as this study is concerned. As Briggman notes, for the purposes of identifying Irenaeus' meaning behind the Holy Spirit's leading believers to perfection, eternity, and divine likeness, *Haer.* 5.6.1 is "the most fundamental passage."³⁰ Indeed, no other scholar

²⁸ *Haer.* 5.3.1 (ANF1:529).

²⁹ *Haer.* 5.3.1 (ANF1:529).

³⁰ Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 173.

references this pericope more than Briggman.³¹ As such, the paragraph will be closely scrutinized.

Now God shall be glorified in His handiwork, fitting it so as to be conformable to, and modeled after, His own Son. For by the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit, man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the likeness of God.³²

Irenaeus begins the chapter with reference to the theme of materiality, following from his discussion of the previous three chapters. The emphasis quickly turns to an examination of the Spirit, but in this opening sentence, he first makes a few important statements about the flesh. First, he does not merely counter the platonic aversion to the flesh by arguing for its acceptability. On the contrary, the promise is that God will, in fact, be glorified in it. The creation of the human body is the pinnacle of his handiwork and not only will it not be destroyed—as suggested by the Gnostics—but glorification will come through it. Second, this glory is achieved through its transformation into divine likeness. Specifically, and as alluded to earlier, there will be a resonance between humanity and the Son of God. In these statements, Irenaeus looks ahead to the future. As he has noted repeatedly, those adopted in Christ will be led to perfection. There will be glory. There will be conformity between God and his creatures. In the next statement, Irenaeus again demonstrates the continuity between the beginning and the end: between creation and the eschaton. All that unfolds is according to the divine economy because he affirms the promises will unfold because “man, not merely a part of man” was made in the divine likeness by the Father through his two hands: the Son and Spirit. In this, he

³¹ Comparing the key monographs relevant to this study, Briggman’s volume contains more references to this text than Behr, Fantino, and de Andia combined. Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*; Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*; Andia, *Homo vivens*; Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*.

³² *Haer.* 5.6.1 (ANF1:531).

not only connects the end to the beginning, but he initiates the transition to his next point of discussion: that humanity is and must always be made up of both flesh and spirit.

Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a part of the man, but certainly not the man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was molded after the image of God. For this reason does the apostle declare, "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect," terming those persons "perfect" who have received the Spirit of God . . . they being spiritual because they partake of the Spirit, and not because their flesh has been stripped off and taken away, and because they have become purely spiritual. For if anyone takes away the substance of flesh, that is, of the handiwork [of God], and understand that which is purely spiritual, such then would not be a spiritual man but would be the spirit of a man, or the Spirit of God. But when the spirit here blended with the soul is united to [God's] handiwork, the man is rendered spiritual and perfect because of the outpouring of the Spirit, and this is he who was made in the image and likeness of God.³³

Here Irenaeus more explicitly connects the *imago Dei* to the motif of the divine "hands."

He introduced this in the first text, but as noted, there the emphasis was specifically connected to glory. In these statements, a correlation is established between the unity and interconnectedness of God (the Father and his two hands, the Son and Spirit) and the trichotomous constitution of the human person. Irenaeus' purpose is not necessarily to suggest a direct parallel between Father, Son, and Spirit with body, soul, and spirit. There is, however, the possibility that he is hinting at the divine origination of unity in plurality. Thus, just as God is omnipotent and perfect yet revealed to humanity in a threefold form, so is it reasonable to accept the plurality of humanity's constitution.

Perfection is the key term of the paragraph and Irenaeus makes clear three points. First, against the Gnostics, his primary opponents, he declares emphatically that

³³ *Haer.* 5.6.1 (ANF1:531–32).

the flesh of humanity is good. Indeed, a spiritual person is not one whose materiality has been defused, but, on the contrary, it is one who has had the Holy Spirit “commingle” with his material nature. This is the second point: a true human is one who has experienced a fusion within. It is not just that the flesh must survive, or that it is good simply because it was made by God. The material aspect of humanity must be preserved because it is the receptacle of the divine Spirit. Third, this fusion relates to the *imago Dei*. Perfection is to be made in the image and likeness of God because the handiwork of God is to be fashioned by the Word and Spirit and the perfection of that handiwork is the indwelling of the same Spirit into the one who was fashioned according to the Son—who is the image of God.³⁴

But if the Spirit is lacking from the soul, such a one is indeed of an animal nature, and being left carnal, shall be an imperfect being, possessing indeed the image [of God] in his formation (*plasmate*), but not receiving the likeness through the Spirit; and thus is this being imperfect. Thus also, if anyone takes away the image and set aside the formation (*plasma*), he cannot then understand this as being a man, but as either some part of a man, as I have already said, or as something else than a man. For that flesh which has been molded is not a perfect man in itself, but the body of a man, and part of a man. Neither is the soul itself, considered apart by itself, the man; but it is the soul of a man, and part of a man. Neither is the Spirit a man, for it is called the Spirit, and not a man; but the commingling and union of all these constitutes the perfect man.³⁵

To this point, Irenaeus’ perspective on the substance—the very matter constituting the human person—has not been widely discussed. Typically translated into English as humanity’s “formation,” or “handiwork,” the Latin in this text employs *plasmatio*, and elsewhere, surviving fragments of related texts reveal Irenaeus’ original use of the Greek *πλασις*. As Nielsen demonstrates, the terms are employed with both an active and

³⁴ In this I follow Briggman, rather than Behr. Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 148–82.

³⁵ *Haer.* 5.6.1 (ANF1:532, with emendation).

passive sense. The former to “denote God’s activity in creating man,” the latter “to denote that which was created by God.”³⁶ In *Haer.* 5.6.1 it is the created substance in view, though clearly within the context of God’s imminent creative activity. Indeed, in texts such as this with the emphasis on the Father and his two hands, several scholars, perhaps Steenberg and Orbe most notable among them, see an important connection between God’s triunity and humanity’s material formation. Steenberg sees the connection as a twofold reality, in a way that corresponds to Nielsen’s twofold definition of *plasmation/πλασις*. The triunity of God is firstly active in the divine vision and intention for humanity’s formation. “it is not simply God’s will, as the generic will of a transcendent deity, that establishes the substance of created beings: it is the mutual will of the Father, Son and Spirit . . .”³⁷ Steenberg therefore interprets the opening statement where Irenaeus declares that the humanity was made by the hands of the Father to indicate active, rather than passive participation by the Son and Spirit. The two hands are not mere tools in the process, but engaged partners at the level of the “will.” Steenberg also sees a trinitarian imprint on the formation itself.

When God the Creator fashions Adam from the dust, the resulting plasma, the created handwork, is the manifestation of the ‘pattern’ (*ὑπόδειγμα / exemplum*) natural to God’s own triune nature. The substance of human being, its essence as a communicated imprint of the ‘type of all things made,’ is, Irenaeus explicitly declares, the communication of the entire triune reality of God.³⁸

Orbe had stressed this point prior to Steenberg and connected this idea of the triune imprint to Irenaeus’ theology of the *imago Dei*. Thus, not only are the Son and the Holy Spirit the two hands that form humanity, but the Son makes up the divine image and the

³⁶ Nielsen, *Adam and Christ*, 16.

³⁷ Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 115.

³⁸ Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 115.

Spirit the divine likeness that goes into the human person. “Only in the plasma modeled by both divine persons, do they print their own form in a perfect way.”³⁹ In *Haer.* 5.6.1 Irenaeus does not explicitly tie the unity of the human constitution to God’s triunity,⁴⁰ but he is explicit that perfect human nature must contain its trichotomous form. In the final statements of Paragraph 1, Irenaeus addresses this unity in the context of future fulfilment, and the expectations upon humanity to contribute to it.

And for this cause does the apostle, explaining himself, make it clear that the saved man is a complete man as well as a spiritual man; saying thus in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, “Now the God of peace sanctify you perfect (*perfectos*); and may your spirit, and soul, and body be preserved whole without complaint to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Now what was his object in praying that these three, that is, soul, body, and spirit, might be preserved to the coming of the Lord, unless he was aware of the [future] reintegration and union of the three, and [that they should be heirs of] one and the same salvation? For this cause also he declares that those are “the perfect” who present unto the Lord the three [component parts] without offence. Those, then, are the perfect who have had the Spirit of God remaining in them, and have preserved their souls and bodies blameless, holding fast the faith of God, that is, that faith which is [directed] towards God, and maintaining righteous dealings with respect to their neighbours.⁴¹

Briggman notes that the first half of *Haer.* 5 “has more to say about the life-giving activity of the Holy Spirit than any other portion of Irenaeus’ work.”⁴² It is at this stage (*Haer.* 5.6) that this life-giving emphasis extends to both the eschatological and

³⁹ “Sólo en el plasma modelado por ambas personas divinas, imprimen éstas su propia forma de manera perfecta.” Orbe, *Antropología de San Ireneo*, 43.

⁴⁰ As important as Steenberg and Orbe’s insights may be for trinitarian studies, it is important to note, as Jackson Lashier demonstrates, that Irenaeus’ theological reflection on the nature of God was not intended to break innovate new ground. Lashier notes that, as a rule, Irenaeus avoids philosophical speculation in favour of more “straightforward” interpretations. He is deliberate to avoid not only the mythic cosmologies of the Gnostics, but also the more philosophical inquiring of Athenagoras. As such, modern readers must be cautious when drawing anthropological insights. Lashier, *Irenaeus on the Trinity*, 78.

⁴¹ *Haer.* 5.6.1 (ANF 1:532, with emendation).

⁴² Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 148.

temporal facets of life. Irenaeus asserts that a human person possesses a body, soul, and spirit, and—contra the Gnostic view—one is not really human if one is lacking any of the three. Moreover, one is only perfected if the Spirit of God indwells the person. The emphasis throughout Books 4 and 5 have strongly emphasized this fact that each person must come to have the Holy Spirit take up this dwelling within. Irenaeus' reference to the *future integration and union of the three* illustrates the fact that humanity's trichotomous nature is not a fixed, eternal state. One is not predetermined to possess a kingdom-ready, spiritually fulfilled body, soul, and spirit. Theologically, his point is that the Gnostic denigration of the flesh cannot be true. Whether one accepts or denies the goodness of materiality does not change its reality. The same is not true, however, for the spiritual aspect of life. The flesh need not be acquired, but for Irenaeus, the spirit of humanity only becomes spiritual with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Only in this, can a person become "perfect."

As Steenberg and Orbe made the connection between God's Triunity and humanity's constitution, Briggman likewise connects the idea of perfection to the divine image and likeness. He notes that while several texts suggest that the possession of the Spirit is what entails perfection, there is a more nuanced explanation. He argues that the "simple reception of the Holy Spirit, however, does not fully explain what Irenaeus means by the term 'perfect.'"⁴³ That concept, he argues, becomes clearer in *Haer.* 5.8.⁴⁴

Haer. 5.8.1: Flesh and Spirit in the Temporal

But we do now receive a certain portion of His Spirit, tending towards perfection, and preparing us for incorruption, being little by little

⁴³ Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 175.

⁴⁴ The important ethical element of the text will be discussed in the final chapter of this study.

accustomed to receive and bear God; which also the apostle terms an earnest . . . This earnest, therefore, dwelling in us, renders us spiritual even now, and the mortal is swallowed up by immortality. “For you,” he declares, “are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.” This, however, does not take place by a casting away of the flesh, but by the impartation of the Spirit . . . If therefore, at the present time, having the earnest, we do cry, “Abba, Father,” what shall it be when, on rising again, we behold Him face to face . . . For if the earnest, gathering man into itself, does even now cause him to cry, “Abba, Father,” what shall the complete grace of the Spirit effect, which shall be given to men by God? It will render us like unto Him, and accomplish the will of the Father; for it shall make man after the image and likeness of God.⁴⁵

Ephesians 1:14 provides Irenaeus with the language to express the nature of the Spirit’s activity in the temporal, material realm. Indeed, the opening statement of Chapter 8 is among the most explicit teachings on the role of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

Irenaeus takes the Pauline notion of the Spirit as a deposit or pledge (*ἀρραβῶν*),⁴⁶ and supplements it with his understanding of spiritual progression.⁴⁷ He expresses the gradual progression in three ways. The believer receives the Spirit tending towards perfection; it is an experience of preparation and a gradual process of accustomization.⁴⁸ Each of these refers specifically to the potential for spiritual advancement, and as such, are matters of personal interiority. And yet, as with all elements of Irenaeus’ theology, the interiority is not an end unto itself. On the contrary, the progression is a process of maturity that has two ultimate goals. On the one hand, it brings the individual to a place

⁴⁵ *Haer.* 5.8.1 (ANF1:533, with emendation).

⁴⁶ “In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge (*ἀρραβῶν*) of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.” Eph 1:13–14

⁴⁷ BDAG defines *ἀρραβῶν* as a “payment of part of a purchase price in advance; a first installment, deposit, down payment, pledge . . . which secures a legal claim to the article in question, or makes a contract valid.” BDAG:134.

⁴⁸ *Nunc autem partem aliquam a Spiritu ejus sumimus ad perfectionem et praeparationem incorruptelae, paulatim assuescentes capere et portare Deum.* *Haer.* 5.8.1 (SC 153:92). Behr translates the key sentence, “towards perfection and preparation for incorruptibility, being slowly accustomed to contain and bear God.” Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 175.

to be able to receive and bear God; on the other hand, it is the fulfilment of our key point of inquiry: the process leads the person to become in the image and likeness of God.

Commenting on this text, Behr and Briggman emphasize different aspects of Irenaeus' concern. Consistent with the theme throughout his study, Behr notes that the pericope shows that Irenaeus is "emphatic, as one would expect, that this takes place in the flesh: they become spiritual not by abandoning the flesh, but by being 'in the Spirit', having the Spirit dwelling in them."⁴⁹ While Behr highlights the material focus, Briggman elucidates the spiritual. In references to the specific claim of receiving perfection and the ability to receive and bear God, he notes that "Both of these . . . correspond to the effect of the complete grace of the Spirit to which Irenaeus refers at the end of *Haer.* 5.8.1: 'It will render us like unto him, and will accomplish the will of the Father; for it will make a human being after the image and likeness of God.'"⁵⁰ The difference in emphasis between Behr and Briggman are not mutually exclusive, as evidenced by Irenaeus' comments through the rest of Chapter 8, to be examined in the next section of this study.

Section Summary

A theme throughout *Against Heresies* is Irenaeus' oft-repeated arguments for both the true humanity and divinity of Jesus, the incarnate Word. That emphasis corresponds to his concern for humankind to be eternally restored in both flesh and spirit. As is so often the case throughout his writings, Irenaeus' teachings largely mirror the critiques and claims of his heretical opponents. As has been demonstrated throughout this study,

⁴⁹ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 75.

⁵⁰ Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 177.

issues of the spirit and flesh are a central issue in his opponents' theology. Irenaeus' work does not decisively (or even consistently) explain the key issues of anthropology, but he establishes these two key tenets of restored humanity and the fulfilled *imago Dei*.

***Haer.* 5.8–10: The Spiritual Life: The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Participating Believer**

Introduction

In the previous section, the first paragraph of *Haer.* 5.8 was introduced in order to illustrate the temporal dimension of humanity's renewal. In this section, the emphasis on the temporal life is expanded, with greater attention given to the practical elements of the spiritual life. Irenaeus affirms that the earnest of the Spirit dwells within the believer, preparing them for an eternity with God, but also that the presence of the Spirit "renders us spiritual even now."⁵¹ The complete grace of the Spirit fulfills humanity's formation according to the image and likeness of God, but the next several chapters are devoted to actions of the spiritual life that lead to that outcome. In Paragraph 2, Irenaeus qualifies his earlier statement that suggested it was the Spirit alone that makes one spiritual. In this section, he identifies the necessary role played by the believer.

Haer. 5.8.2, 4: Spirituality through Righteous Living

Those persons, then, who possess the earnest of the Spirit, and who are not enslaved by the lusts of the flesh, but are subject to the Spirit, and who in all things walk according to the light of reason, does the apostle properly term "spiritual," because the Spirit of God dwells in them. Now, spiritual men shall not be incorporeal spirits; but our substance, that is, the union of flesh and spirit, receiving the Spirit of

⁵¹ *Sic ergo pignus hoc habitans in nobis jam spiritalis efficit.* SC 153:92, 94.

God, makes up the spiritual man. But those who do indeed reject the Spirit's counsel, and are the slaves of fleshly lusts, and lead lives contrary to reason, and who, without restraint, plunge headlong into their own desires, having no longing after the Divine Spirit, do live after the manner of swine and of dogs; these men, [I say], does the apostle very properly term "carnal," because they have no thought of anything else except carnal things . . .⁵²

In this first paragraph outlining the practical spiritual life, Irenaeus begins on familiar grounds. As always, a person can be truly "spiritual" only with the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God. The "earnest" of the Spirit must reside within and, continuing with another theme from the preceding section, the spiritual life is a matter of both flesh and spirit. True spirituality, however, requires participation. To describe the action required, Irenaeus outlines both the positive and negative responses necessary for the spiritual person. Positively, the Christian will be led by God. The Spirit dwells within and provides "counsel" that is meant to be followed. Irenaeus describes this as walking according to the light of reason. It is reasonable, because the Spirit leads according to what is right and true, and it is a "walk" because it is meant to be something to be embraced at every step of one's life. This is the positive articulation of the spiritual life. The negative side of the equation relates to the "rejection" element of the spiritual life. Irenaeus contrasts following the Spirit with living a life contrary to reason. Indeed, it is a life enslaved by the lust of the flesh.

Irenaeus explored the theme of obedience earlier in *Against Heresies*, notably in the previously examined section on human liberty.⁵³ What is unique about this section is not only that the theme of obedience appears in the section on authentic spirituality, but

⁵² *Haer.* 5.8.2 (ANF 1:534).

⁵³ Among the relevant texts includes *Haer.* 4.37.4, "because man is possessed of free will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free will, in whose likeness man was created, advice is always given to him to keep fast the good, which thing is done by means of obedience to God."

that it is the first element identified as essential. To elaborate further on distinguishing between what is spiritual and what is carnal, Irenaeus offers in Paragraph 4 a lengthy allegorization on the Levitical laws that categorize animals as either clean or unclean.

Now the law has figuratively predicted all these, delineating man by the [various] animals: whatsoever of these, says [the Scripture], have a double hoof and ruminant, it proclaims as clean; but whatsoever of them do not possess one or other of these [properties], it sets aside by themselves as unclean. Who then are the clean? Those who make their way by faith steadily towards the Father and the Son; for this is denoted by the steadiness of those which divide the hoof; and they meditate day and night upon the words of God, that they may be adorned with good works: for this is the meaning of the ruminants. The unclean, however, are those which do neither divide the hoof nor ruminant; that is, those persons who have neither faith in God, nor do meditate on His words: and such is the abomination of the Gentiles. But as to those animals which do indeed chew the cud, but have not the double hoof, and are themselves unclean, we have in them a figurative description of the Jews, who certainly have the words of God in their mouth, but who do not fix their rooted steadfastness in the Father and in the Son . . . those who do not meditate on the words of God, neither are adorned with works of righteousness; to whom also the Lord says, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say to you?" For men of this stamp do indeed say that they believe in the Father and the Son, but they never meditate as they should upon the things of God, neither are they adorned with works of righteousness; but, as I have already observed, they have adopted the lives of swine and of dogs, giving themselves over to filthiness, to gluttony, and recklessness of all sorts.⁵⁴

Irenaeus offers an interesting interpretation linking the Jews, Gentiles, and heretics to the various animals—all unclean. For the purposes of this chapter, there are several insights of note. First, several themes are reinforced that demonstrate the important connection between doctrine, faith, and the spiritual life. One who is "clean" is, first and foremost, one who has accepted in faith belief in the Father and Son. Authentic spirituality is the theme of this section and the basic theological tenets of Christian

⁵⁴ *Haer.* 5.8.4 (ANF 1:534).

doctrine are a non-negotiable foundation. In addition, Irenaeus expands on the central point of obedience from the previous paragraph. In this section, he adds three important components to the obedience required. First, he repeats his frequent emphasis on progress. The spiritual are those who, by faith, steadily move towards the Father and Son. This “steadfastness” is an essential element of obedience. What is also significant about this text is an explanation of how such advancement is achieved. Thus, the second and third components of obedience expand upon the first. These include the identification of the truly spiritual as those who meditate on the words of God and a quality of life demonstrating good works of righteousness. He continues these emphases in Chapter 9.

Haer. 5.9.2, 3: The Spiritual Person Preserves the Activity of the Holy Spirit

On the other hand, as many as fear God and trust in His Son’s advent, and who through faith do establish the Spirit of God in their hearts, such men as these shall be properly called both “pure,” and “spiritual,” and those living to God, because they possess the Spirit of the Father, who purifies man, and raises him up to the life of God. For as the Lord has testified that the flesh is weak, but the spirit is willing. For this latter is capable of working out its own suggestions. If, therefore, anyone admix 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, so that the weakness of the flesh will be absorbed 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.⁵⁵

At the beginning of Paragraph 2, Irenaeus adds three points to his previous discussion of the spiritual life. A believer must: fear God, trust in the Son’s appearing (*adventum*), and

⁵⁵ *Haer.* 5.9.2 (ANF 1:535).

possess faith. These again are identified as those qualities equated with one who is truly spiritual—one authentically “living to God.” They form an important qualification to the previous chapter’s emphasis on the works of righteousness. There, the spiritual were identified as those who performed good works. Here in Chapter 9, however, Irenaeus makes clear his emphasis is not a works-righteousness soteriology. The reason the pure can live to God (*viventes Deo*) is on account of their “possession of the Spirit of the Father, who purifies.” He reminds the reader of Christ’s words that the flesh is weak, yet the spirit is willing. The bishop interprets the “spirit” here as referring specifically to the Spirit of God. By doing so, he argues that despite the weakness of human flesh the Spirit is willing, and thus able, to overcome what is weak and bring purification. That which was impure is “absorbed” by the strength of the Spirit. He continues into the next paragraph:

The flesh, therefore, when destitute of the Spirit of God, is dead, not having life, and cannot possess the kingdom of God . . . But where the Spirit of the Father is, there is a living man; the rational blood preserved by God for the avenging; the flesh possessed by the Spirit, forgetful indeed of what belongs to it, and adopting the quality of the Spirit, being made conformable to the Word of God. And on this account he (the apostle) declares, “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.” What, therefore, is the earthly? That which was fashioned. And what is the heavenly? The Spirit. As therefore he says, when we were destitute of the celestial Spirit, we walked in former times in the oldness of the flesh, not obeying God; so now let us, receiving the Spirit, walk in newness of life, obeying God. Inasmuch, therefore, as without the Spirit of God we cannot be saved, the apostle exhorts us through faith and chaste behaviour to preserve the Spirit of God, lest, having become non-participators of the Divine Spirit, we lose the kingdom of heaven.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *Haer.* 5.9.3 (ANF 1:535).

Irenaeus continues with themes already established, stressing the need for the indwelling Spirit to be present in order for one to be able to be made “conformable” to the Word. There are, however, several interesting elements added. First, the paragraph explicitly links the spiritual life to the *imago Dei*. The conformation to the Word is declared to be a bearing of the image of Him who is from heaven. The implications of this are explored in greater detail in the next section. Also interesting is the indication that these image bearers will be those who have adopted, or assumed, “the quality of the Spirit” (*qualitatum autem Spiritus assumens*).⁵⁷ Once again drawing on Pauline imagery, Irenaeus links this life by the action of one “walking in the newness of life.”⁵⁸ This life is one possible only through the Spirit. Indeed, such is the importance of these principles that Irenaeus states that it is only where the Spirit of the Father is, “there is a living person.” The alternative life is no life at all.⁵⁹

Following with the larger theme of this chapter, Irenaeus again addresses the practical elements of the teaching. What is entailed in walking the new walk? Several previous points are repeated, namely, that the oldness of the flesh (and its behaviours) must be rejected, obedience embraced, and faith exercised. What is unique to this paragraph is its concluding sentence. Certainly, discussion of the meaning and implications behind “losing the kingdom of heaven” is noteworthy.⁶⁰ For this study,

⁵⁷ No Greek survives for this text, but Rousseau assumes *ποιότητα* as the root for “quality.” Thus, the idea is to describe the features of one’s nature, rather than it be a reference to the essence of that nature. SC 153:115.

⁵⁸ Cf. Gal 5:16, 2 Cor 5:17, Eph 4:24, Col 3:12–14.

⁵⁹ In this Irenaeus almost concedes an important element of Gnostic teaching. In saying that a true living person is one with the Spirit, the corollary could be argued: that one who is “material”: that is, one without the Spirit, is without authentic life. His purpose, however, is not to denigrate the flesh, but to prioritize the Divine Spirit.

⁶⁰ Irenaeus several times makes the point that humanity is predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. On this point, see Presley, *Intertextual Reception*. On the other hand, Irenaeus also makes a point to stress that humanity must remain faithful to the end in order to preserve the work of the Spirit

however, what is of greater interest is the idea behind the preservation of (*conservare*) and participation (*participatione*) with the Spirit. The latter corresponds to the larger theme of the spiritual life as discussed throughout this chapter, but the idea of preserving the Spirit is a unique one. Such a “conservation” is secured, Irenaeus asserts, through faith and chaste behaviour (*castam conversationem*). Though he previously referenced the importance of good and righteous works, this statement is more indicative of an internal quality.⁶¹ Regardless, the point is that it is this chastity, or purity combined with faith that preserves in one’s life the activity of the Spirit. Or, as he expresses it later in the sentence, it is to participate in the divine Spirit. In the next paragraph, Irenaeus provides his final thoughts concerning the actions of the spiritual life. In so doing, he brings into greater clarity the relationship of the divine image and likeness to authentic spirituality.

Haer. 5.10.1,2: The Grafting of the Spirit

Chapter 10 of Book 5 may be among the most important Irenaean texts for understanding his view on the spiritual life. In these paragraphs, he not only provides important insights for his meaning behind the divine image and likeness, but he also reveals one of his central concerns with spiritual theology: the relationship between the action and grace of God and the requirements for human obedience. Using the Romans 11 metaphor of the wild branch grafted upon the healthy tree, Irenaeus argues for a

within. This is another point of tension Irenaeus seems either unaware or unconcerned with. Irenaeus’ views of election are not as well-probed as his other doctrines, but for an introduction to the issues, see Hochban, “Irenaeus on the Atonement,” 525–57; Bilby, “A Disappearing People.”

⁶¹ A Greek fragment indicates that “chaste behaviour” emerges from ἡγνῆς, suggesting behaviour that is innocent or pure. SC 153: 114.

spiritual reliance upon God's gracious initiative in tandem with the responsive action required of his people.

In order that we may not reject the engrafting of the Spirit while pampering the flesh. "But you, being a wild olive tree," he says, "have been grafted into the good olive-tree, and been made a partaker of the fatness of the olive tree." As, therefore, when the wild olive has been engrafted, if it remain in its former condition, viz., a wild olive, it is "cut off, and cast into the fire;" but if it takes kindly to the graft, and is changed into the good olive-tree, it becomes a fruit-bearing olive, planted, as it were, in a king's park: so likewise men, if they do truly progress by faith towards better things, and receive the Spirit of God, and bring forth the fruit thereof, shall be spiritual, as being planted in the paradise of God. But if they cast out the Spirit, and remain in their former condition, desirous of being of the flesh rather than of the Spirit, then . . . "That flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God;" just as if anyone were to say that the wild olive is not received into the paradise of God. Admirably therefore does the apostle exhibit our nature, and God's universal appointment, in his discourse about flesh and blood and the wild olive. For as the good olive, if neglected for a certain time, if left to grow wild and to run to wood, does itself become a wild olive; or again, if the wild olive be carefully tended and grafted, it naturally reverts to its former fruit-bearing condition: so men also, when they become careless, and bring forth for fruit the lusts of the flesh like woody produce, are rendered, by their own fault, unfruitful in righteousness. For when men sleep, the enemy sows the material of tares; and for this cause did the Lord command His disciples to be on the watch. And again, those persons who are not bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, and are, as it were, covered over and lost among brambles, if they use diligence, and receive the word of God as a graft, arrive at the pristine nature of man—that which was created after the image and likeness of God.⁶²

Once more, the oft-mentioned theme of progress and advance towards God is repeated.

Here, Irenaeus roots that promise clearly in the practical reality of the spiritual life. To do so he employs the Pauline reference to the Church being as a new branch grafted upon the olive tree.⁶³ The "fruit" of that tree corresponds to the righteous and chaste

⁶² *Haer.* 5.10.1 (ANF 1:536).

⁶³ For discussion of Irenaeus' use of this metaphor, along with the horticultural objections to the original Pauline metaphor, see Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction*, 92–92.

quality of life previously discussed. The final insights for practical spirituality emerge from the call for these fruitful individuals to “use diligence and receive the word of God.” Such diligence, Irenaeus suggests, is linked to one’s progress in the *imago Dei*. A closer examination of the sentence is required, however, in order to fully appreciate its significance.

The ANF translation, “if they use diligence, and receive the word of God as a graft” (*diligentiam percipientes et velut insertionem accipientes verbum dei*) is reasonable. What it fails to demonstrate, however, is the close degree to which this statement parallels one from earlier in the paragraph. One sentence earlier, Irenaeus elaborated on the olive tree/grafting metaphor and stated (in the ANF) that if the wild olive was “carefully tended and grafted” it would “naturally revert to its former . . . condition.” Compare the Latin of the two statements:

<i>diligentiam percipiens et inserta in pristinam naturae recurrit fructificationem</i> carefully tended and grafted, it naturally reverts to its former fruit-bearing condition
<i>Diligentiam percipientes et velut insertionem accipientes verbum Dei, in pristinam veniunt hominis naturam</i> use diligence, and receive the word of God as a graft, arrive at the pristine nature of man

The ANF reveals only one of the five key Latin terms that are found in both sentences.⁶⁴

It is clear that Irenaeus was drawing a close parallel between the rejuvenated wild olive branch and the restored spiritual person. While the comparison is still evident in the ANF translation, noting the precise connection between the two sentences is important for drawing out the full implications for the spiritual life in relationship to the *imago Dei*. There are three such implications.

⁶⁴ Donaldson rightly translates both *inserta* and *insertionem* to reflect the idea of “grafting,” but the following pairs are translated dissimilarly: *diligentiam/diligentiam*=carefully tend/use diligence; *percipiens/percipientes*=revert/arrive; *pristinam/pristinam*=former/pristine; *naturae/naturam*=condition/nature.

The Spiritual Life Requires Spiritual Diligence

Irenaeus has made clear throughout the texts examined in the section the need for action in the spiritual life. The seriousness of the call to choose obedience and righteous living are obvious. Equally obvious is the emphasis on “diligence,” as noted in the ANF’s translation of *Haer.* 5.10.1’s final sentence. What is not so clear, however, is how exactly this diligence is meant to be applied. To “use diligence and receive the word of God as a graft” is an unusual expression, with a meaning that is not entirely clear. In the same way that the Gentiles were definitively grafted in as the people of God through Christ, does Irenaeus thus here relate diligence to a soteriological reception of Christ *the Word*? Or, more in keeping with the emphasis on the spiritual life, does this diligence to the word have more to do with one’s life and the *teaching* of Christ (and the apostles)? The former is a theme expressed repeatedly through *Against Heresies*, but in this paragraph, the latter option is most fitting. This is clear from observing Irenaeus’ use of the olive tree grafting metaphor.

The comparison of the two Latin sentences reveals how important the parallel is between the rejuvenated spiritual life of humanity with the wild branch grafted upon the healthy olive tree. Earlier in the paragraph, the need for the grafting is explained. A wild and unfruitful tree is worthy only of the fire, while a person lacking the Spirit will be unable to inherit the Kingdom of God. With that context in mind, the above sentences reveal that both the tree and person can, through the grafting process, be restored to their *pristinam naturae*. Irenaeus provides two perspectives in order to understand the path to this restoration. First, the grafting process is contrasted sharply with the factors which lead to the crisis of need. Once again, the Latin text makes the point clear, while the ANF does not. Olive trees grow wild after a period of “neglect” (*neglecta*), while

humanity if they become “careless” (*neglegentia*) viz. the lusts of the flesh, they too will lose the Kingdom. Irenaeus’ purpose is to contrast both situations of neglect with the alternative response. This second perspective is the positive, righteous response. Whereas *neglecta/neglegentia* lead to wildness, diligence (*diligentiam percipiens*) is required in order to experience the restoration of “grafting.”

Diligentiam refers to the quality of being diligent, careful, and industrious,⁶⁵ while *percipiens* speaks of seizing something entirely, or taking whole possession.⁶⁶ Each of the words is representative of themes present throughout this chapter. Diligence, as the antithesis to negligence, reveals Irenaeus’ concern for people to take action when it comes to their spiritual lives. That was particularly evident in the paragraph which precedes the one presently under examination. This, the introduction to Chapter 10, reads:

One must not reject the engrafting of the Spirit while pampering the flesh. . . . [But if they] do truly progress by faith towards better things, and receive the Spirit of God, and bring forth fruit, we shall be spiritual, as being planted in the paradise of God. But if they cast out the Spirit, and remain in their former condition, desirous of being of the flesh rather than of the Spirit, [they will] not inherit the kingdom of God.⁶⁷

In the next paragraph, already quoted, Irenaeus indicates that such individuals are in their condition “by their own fault.”⁶⁸ Thus, rejection, false desire, and obstinacy are identified as actions of the human will which prevent the reception of the Spirit.

⁶⁵ *Diligentia*, Lewis & Short Latin Dictionary. Perseus Digital Library. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.

⁶⁶ *Percipiens*. Lewis & Short Latin Dictionary. Perseus Digital Library. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.

⁶⁷ *Haer.* 5.10.1 (ANF 1:536).

⁶⁸ *Sic et homines in neglegentia constitute et concupiscentias carnis tamquam silvestria fructificantes secundum suam causam infructuosi iustitia constituuntur.* Cf. Rousseau’s translation, “ils produisent ces fruits sauvages que sont les convoitises de la chair et ils deviennent, par leur Faute.” SC 153:127.

Reception is an important concept for Irenaeus. Thus, the text identifies the need for *diligentiam percipiens*, which suggests that the choice of careful diligence is a quality of life that must be wholly embraced, or, to put it another way, to be fully received within oneself. Just as the negligence of life comes to fully define the tree or the disobedient person, so too is the principle the same for the faithful. Rousseau's translation renders the expression *entouré de soins*, which gives the impression of a "careful encompassing."⁶⁹ The idea being that such diligent care must characterize one's life completely.

In summary, Irenaeus puts forward an understanding of the spiritual life that requires diligent action on the part of the Christian. However, the emphasis on action-as-participation is only a part of the equation. As noted, themes of reception are important throughout *Against Heresies*, and this is especially true in terms of the need for all individuals to receive the Spirit. This is perhaps why *diligentiam* was qualified with *percipiens*. Human effort on its own was not what was required, but rather, a diligence for that which needs to be received. This point is clearer in the second of the key elements for understanding the relationship between the spiritual life and the *imago Dei*.

The Spiritual Life Requires Diligent Reception

Irenaeus' meaning can be further understood by carefully examining the manner in which the "graft" metaphor is employed. The first point that stands out is the reversal of interpretation he applies to this teaching. In the original Pauline context from Rom 11,⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Rousseau, SC 153:127.

⁷⁰ "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles . . . if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you." Rom 11:13, 17, 18.

the branches grafted in are Gentile Christians, those admitted to the family of God through grace by faith. Irenaeus, however, is only interested in the idea of a wild branch becoming joined to a healthy and fruitful vine. He does not follow Paul's metaphor in emphasizing the grace extended to Gentile Christians, but to the spiritual vitality available for any person.

The exclusion of the Gentile narrative is not the only adjustment to the Pauline image. More significant is the apparent role reversal that occurs in Irenaeus' example. Whereas Rom 11 compared the Gentiles to the branch grafted upon the tree, the bishop referred to the faithful as those to whom *received* the graft. This is expressed most clearly in Paragraph 2: "a person, if she does not receive through faith the engrafting of the Spirit, remains in her old condition."⁷¹ This, as Minns notes, corresponds more accurately to the true horticultural practice of grafting.⁷² Osborn agrees, *contra* Presley,⁷³ noting that "Just as a branch of a good olive may be grafted into a wild olive which may accept or reject the graft, so the flesh may bear fruit in a king's paradise . . ." ⁷⁴ Minns and Osborn correctly note the reversal of the metaphor, but both make two errors in their interpretation. The first—perhaps more an over-emphasis than an error—concerns the context in which both situate this text. Whereas this study attempts to situate the teaching amidst Irenaeus' concern for the role of the Holy Spirit in the spiritual life of the believer, Minns and Osborn are more concerned with the discussion of the flesh. The positive view of the flesh has been noted elsewhere in this study, but that does not seem

⁷¹ *Haer.* 5.10.2 (ANF 1:536).

⁷² Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction*, 92; Cf. Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 131.

⁷³ The controlling text in this section is the imagery of the wild olive tree in Rom 11:17, which he interprets as the flesh that is engrafted to the Spirit as the good olive tree. Presley, *Intertextual Reception*, 191–92.

⁷⁴ Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 131.

to be a primary concern in Chapter 10 of Book 5. More problematic is the two scholars' misidentification of the graft.

In his notes on the Latin text, Rousseau, citing one of the few Greek fragments of this portion of Book 5, notes that Irenaeus was closely following Paul's terminology from Rom 11. Thus, "graft" comes from ἐνεκεντρίσθης, a word appearing six times in Rom 11, but nowhere else in the New Testament. Paul's meaning is best observed in v. 17, which reads "they also, if they do not remain in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in." The significant point, Rousseau observes, is in the fact that the Greek term, unlike the French or English, has only one possible meaning: ἐνεκεντρίσθης can only refer to the *action* of grafting, and not to a stem or branch itself.⁷⁵ Moreover, the graft of the Spirit "is not the one by which the Spirit is grafted onto us (subjective genitive), but the one by which we are grafted onto the Spirit (a kind of objective genitive), in order to share in its sap and to be able to bear fruit."⁷⁶

Minns and Osborn rightly note that Irenaeus corrects Paul's misunderstanding, identifying that it is a healthy branch which is always grafted onto a wild one. This is done in order to "stimulate the production of fruit on the cultivated tree itself."⁷⁷ They are also correct to note the central role of the Spirit in the restorative process. The misidentification concerns the graft itself. Von Balthasar translates the key text in this way, "if they are carefully tended and accept the grafting of the Word, [they] return to

⁷⁵ "Le mot français 'greffe' est équivoque, pouvant désigner tantôt la petite tige que l'on emprunte à un arbre et que l'on ente sur un autre arbre, tantôt l'opération par laquelle on ente cette tige. Il n'en va pas de même du mot grec ἐνεκεντρίσθης, qui ne peut désigner que l'action de greffer (soit activement exercée, soit passivement recue)." Rousseau, SC 152 :253.

⁷⁶ "n'est donc pas celle par laquelle l'Esprit serait greffé sur nous, mais celle par laquelle nous sommes greffés sur l'Esprit, pour avoir part à sa sève et devenir capables de porter ses fruits." Rousseau, SC 152:254.

⁷⁷ Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction*, 93.

the pristine nature of man, the nature, that is, which was created in the image and likeness of God.⁷⁸ A new inclusion to the narrative, Irenaeus clearly identifies the Word (*verbum Dei*) as that which is required to be diligently *received* as a graft. There are, therefore, two actions at work which, together, make up the grafting process. It is the diligent reception, in tandem with the ministry of the Spirit through the Word of God that enables previously negligent humanity to find restoration in God.

The grafting of the wild olive branch upon the tree is an ideal illustration for Irenaeus' theology, particularly his concern for the spiritual life. As has been demonstrated repeatedly throughout this study, one of the chief themes of *Against Heresies* is the potential for communion between God and humanity. The process of "grafting" was, in the Greek mind with ἐγχευτρίζω, one whereby one shoot was united with the stock of another.⁷⁹ Where there was one that was healthy and one that was not, healing and productivity become true for both. For this reason, it is no surprise that the metaphor was embraced by Irenaeus. The final element of the spiritual life observed at the conclusion for *Haer.* 5.10.1 is the emphasis on the effect of spiritual restoration upon human nature.

The Spiritual Life and Human Nature

The comparison above of the two *diligentium* sentences revealed how the two statements closely parallel one another. It was noted that they share five key Latin terms, representing three important elements regarding the spiritual life. The third and final of these concerns the reference to the "former condition" of the wild olive, and the

⁷⁸ Balthasar, *Scandal of the Incarnation*, 106.

⁷⁹ BDAG, 273.

“pristine nature” of those created after the image and likeness of God. As before, these terms share the identical Latin construction, the *pristinam naturae*. One point already observed is that both parallels identify fruitfulness as the by-product of restoration. The olive tree is meant to produce healthy olives, while the person in the image of God is meant to exhibit the fruit of righteousness. There is an interesting element to the parallel that differs, however. The engrafted branch that has been restored is said to have “reverted” (*recurrat*) to its pristine nature, while the Spiritually indwelt person has “arrived” (*veniunt*) at theirs. In this, the ANF translation effectively reflects the difference between the Latin terms.

In this paragraph, Irenaeus teases at a clear answer to the question of what exactly is lost and restored when speaking about humanity’s creation, loss, and return to the image and likeness of God. He states that just as the tree “naturally reverts to its former *pristinam naturae*, so also humanity . . . if they use diligence and receive the word of God as a graft, arrive at the *pristinam naturae* of humankind—that which was created after the image and likeness of God.” This has led some, including Minns, Osborn, and Presley to suggest that what is meant here is the return to the pre-lapsarian human condition, which as yet remained in the image and likeness of God.⁸⁰ None of the three suggest that Adam’s condition corresponds only to the eschatological perfection described throughout *Against Heresies*, but they nevertheless appear to be suggesting an ontological shift in human nature. Paragraph 2 discourages that thought:

But as the engrafted wild olive certainly does not lose the substance (*substantiam*) of its wood, but changes the quality of its fruit (*qualitatum autem fructus immutat*), and receives another name, being now not a wild olive, but a fruit-bearing olive, and is called so; so

⁸⁰ Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction*, 93; Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 227; Presley, *Intertextual Reception*, chapter 4.

also, when man is grafted in by faith and receives the Spirit of God, he certainly does not lose the substance of flesh (*substantiam carnis*), but changes the quality of the fruit [brought forth, i.e.,] of his works, and receives another name, showing that he has become changed (*transmutationem*) for the better, being now not [mere] flesh and blood, but a spiritual man.⁸¹

The idea of an individual being restored in one's nature is a powerful one. Regardless of the terminology used to describe this restoration, whether it be with reference to a return, renewal, or of a reverting, the basic premise is clear: something *of fundamental importance changes* for the individual. In this Irenaean text, the change is directly linked to the realization of the divine image and likeness in humanity. As noted earlier, scholars have offered a variety of interpretations as to the exact meaning of these ideas. However, as also noted, few have interacted with these two paragraphs from Book 5. This is unfortunate, as a careful examination of Chapter 10 reveals important insights into Irenaeus' thinking.

In the same way the previous paragraph was shown to be a careful and nearly term-for-term parallel, the same is true here. Indeed, Irenaeus' statements about the wild olive and spiritual human mirror each other even more closely here than in the previous paragraph.⁸² In *Haer.* 5.10.1, humanity engrafted by the Spirit were said to come to, or approach (*veniunt*) the pristine nature, that which was created after the divine image and likeness. Paragraph 2 does not again mention the *pristinam naturae*, but it does reference two important concepts: human "substance" and the "change" experienced by

⁸¹ *Haer.* 5.10.2 (ANF 1:536).

⁸² *Sed quemadmodum oleaster inserta substantiam quidem ligni non amittit, qualitatem autem fructus immutat et aliud percipit vocabulum, jam non oleaster sed fructifica oliva existens et dicitur, sic et homo per fidem insertus et assumens Spiritium Dei substantiam quidem carnis non amittit, qualitatem autem fructus operum immutat et aliud accipit vocabulum, significans illam quae in melius est transmutationem, jam non caro et sanguis sed homo spiritualis existens et dicitur. Haer. 5.10.2 (ANF 1:536).*

those who are alive spiritually. These questions are important because the work of the Spirit in humanity is frequently tied to the issue of human nature. If restoration is tied to the repair of one's nature, the importance of the activity of the spiritual life may seem of diminished significance. If, however, Irenaeus is not suggesting an ontological transformation, then the activity of the spiritual person gains increased importance.

The Latin text indicates Irenaeus employed three terms to refer to different varieties of change.⁸³ First, in regard to the "substance" (*substantia*) of the olive tree's wood and humanity's flesh, the expression here is that the substance itself is not "lost" (*āmitto*). The term often has a passive connotation, indicating that something has been inadvertently lost to or from oneself.⁸⁴ The second term indicates the positive change that does occur, namely, the improvement in the quality (*qualitatem*) of the fruit. This word here is *immūtātīo*, which indicates a direct transaction, either an exchange or substitution.⁸⁵ Lastly, and most importantly, is the change used to describe the overall effects of a person engrafted by the Spirit. In such an individual it is revealed that they have "become *changed* for the better, being now not mere flesh and blood, but a spiritual person." The word to reflect this shift is *transmūto*, which, predictably, is the source of the English word "transmute."⁸⁶ This change is one that is more fundamental than the others. It is not a mere shift, turn, or trade, but speaks to a transformation of the very essence of something. To illustrate, the one occurrence of the word in the Vulgate

⁸³ There are no Greek fragments for this paragraph, though Rousseau's retroversion will be discussed at each point.

⁸⁴ Rousseau assumes ἀποβαλλει as the antecedent to *āmitto*. The two terms share similar meanings. SC 153:129.

⁸⁵ Rousseau here chooses μεταβάλλει SC 153:129. The Greek term carries more of a sense of a sudden turn, rather than exchange.

⁸⁶ Rousseau selects μεταβολῆς to reflect *transmute*. The two words share similar meanings.

appears in Jas 1:17. After stating that God can neither be tempted by evil nor tempt others, James affirms that: “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation (*transmutation*) or shadow due to change.”⁸⁷ The point is that there can be no change of any kind in God. This principle undoubtedly has both his nature and behaviour in view, and thus, speaks to a fundamental truth about the character of the divine. It is a word similar to this (we do not have the Greek original) which Irenaeus uses, I argue, to describe what is the most important of the changes that occur in the spiritual person. The transformation concerns more than the *substantia*, more than mere flesh and blood. The Spirit engrafted upon a human being is alive spirituality, where formally death reigned. Thus, there is not just an elemental change, but a reversal of status, quality, and destiny.

There is a fourth shift in the life of the Spirit enlivened person. Here, Irenaeus does not use the terminology of change, but of receiving a new name, or designation (*aliud accipit vocabulum*). Just as the wild olive will no longer be referred to as wild once engrafted with that which is healthy, so too will the same be true for redeemed humanity. The promise is to “receive another name, showing that they have become changed for the better, being now not mere flesh and blood, but a spiritual person, and is called such.” This new designation speaks to the new identity. Irenaeus expands on this idea elsewhere, declaring in the *Demonstration* that

In the end, by means of His name, they, who served God, would be saved, Isaiah says, “And those who served me shall be called by a new name, which will be blessed . . .” And that He Himself was going to effect, by Himself, this blessing and to redeem us Himself by His blood, Isaias announces, saying, “Not an intercessor nor an angel, but the Lord Himself saved them because he loves them and spared them; He Himself redeemed them.” He does not want the redeemed to turn

⁸⁷ Jas 1:17.

back to Mosaic legislation . . . but, through faith and love towards the Son of God, to be saved in the newness by the Word. . . . He who prepared the new way of godliness and righteousness, also caused rivers to flow abundantly, sowing the Holy Spirit upon the earth . . . ⁸⁸

Quoting Isaiah, Irenaeus affirms that this new name and identity correspond to a new “way” of life and is entirely secured by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. In the *Demonstration*, like *Haer.* 5.10, the spiritual person is spiritual on account of the work of the Spirit. There is a change that occurs, but it is not an ontological one. The essence of a person is not transmuted, but the quality of that life can indeed be.

Section Summary

Irenaeus consistently refers to the spiritual life in the simple terms of receiving the Spirit of God into one’s life. There is never any question that the achievement of redemption is secured by the work of Christ, the Word of God, and enacted into believers through the work of the Spirit. Equally consistent, however, is Irenaeus’ conviction that there is an active spirituality that accompanies such a life. The principal change that occurs in the person who is restored to the state once enjoyed by the prelapsarian Adam is not within the essence of his nature. Rather, the chief transformation is the quality of fruit produced by that life. In place of works of earthly lust and selfishness are works of godly love and righteousness. The full implications of this will be explored in the final section.

⁸⁸ *Epid.* 88–89. Translation: Behr, ed., *Irenaeus: Apostolic Preaching*, 94. Cf. Isa 65:15–16; 63:9.

Haer. 5.11.1—12.4: True Spirituality: The Expulsion of the Carnal

Introduction

Chapters 11 and 12 continue the theme from the preceding sections, with a strong emphasis on the goodness of the material flesh. Irenaeus also continues his emphasis the spiritual action needed from believers. True spirituality is the life lived in communion with the Spirit, over and against the carnality of the world. The “flesh” is important in this regard, not only because the body represents the vehicle by which the Spirit performs its restorative work, but also because the body is itself part of that image in which humanity was created.

Haer. 5.11.1, 2: The Fractured Imago: The Life of Carnality

[Paul], foreseeing the wicked speeches of unbelievers, has made known the works which he terms carnal; and he explains himself, lest any room for doubt be left to those who pervert his meaning, saying: “Now the works of the flesh are obvious: adultery, fornication . . . and the like; of which I warn you, as also I have warned you, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Thus he points out to his hearers in a more explicit manner what it is that he means by: “Flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” For they who do these things, since they do indeed walk after the flesh, have not the power of living unto God. And then, again, [Paul] proceeds to tell us the spiritual actions which vivify a man, that is, the engrafting of the Spirit; saying, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace . . . [and the like]. As, therefore, he who has gone forward to the better things, and has brought forth the fruit of the Spirit, is saved altogether because of the communion of the Spirit; so also he who has continued in the aforesaid works of the flesh, being truly reckoned as carnal, because he did not receive the Spirit of God, shall not have power to inherit the kingdom.”⁸⁹

⁸⁹ *Haer. 5.11.1* (ANF 1:537).

Irenaeus' primary concern with his opponents were their "unorthodox" doctrines. This has been seen to be especially true for the teachings on the Father, the Incarnate Son, and regarding the spiritual nature of humanity. As noted earlier, Irenaeus also had much to say about the ethics and lack of piety among his adversaries. His views on such matters followed a literal interpretation of the scriptural axiom that "you will know a tree by its fruit."⁹⁰ His primary concern in Chapters 11 and 12, however, are not firstly a critique of Gnostic ethics. Rather, he continues his attack on their repudiation of the flesh.

Irenaeus was willing to concede that there was a problem; thus, Paul's remark about the flesh not inheriting the earth. But the real issue was not the materiality—the substance of the flesh itself. The concern was for carnality, and thus his argument is that when Paul speaks of the flesh he is speaking entirely about carnal living. To live in the flesh is to have a worldly, rather than heavenly orientation and identification. De Andia argues that according to Irenaeus "we must therefore distinguish between 'the flesh properly speaking' and 'works of the flesh' or 'covetousness of the flesh.'"⁹¹ This is true, in the sense that the works of the flesh are clearly not referring to human "skin." And yet, one must be careful drawing too clear a distinction in *Against Heresies*. Not because that distinction is denied, but because Irenaeus rarely, if ever, has literal skin in view. When flesh is referenced it is nearly always in the context of a metaphor. Frequently, as here in Paragraph 1, that metaphor applies to unrighteous living. In the

⁹⁰ "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits." Matt 7:15–20.

⁹¹ "Il faut donc distinguer entre 'la chair à proprement parler' et les 'oeuvres de la chair (*operae carnis*)' ou les 'convoitises de la chair (*concupiscentiae carnis*).'" Andia, *Homo vivens*, 294.

next paragraph, however, it is used to describe life, or human existence, in a general sense. The important point, with respect to the spiritual life, is that Irenaeus sees the actions of life as fundamentally important for true spirituality. There is an unequivocally bond between life *in* the Spirit and a life *exhibiting* spiritual behaviour. In the next paragraph, Irenaeus connects the issue to the *imago Dei*.

Since, therefore, in that passage [Paul] recounts those works of the flesh which are without the Spirit, 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, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Now this which he says, "as we have borne the image of him who is of the earth," is analogous to what has been declared, "And such indeed you were; but ye have been washed, but ye have been sanctified, but ye have been justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our 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" were complete (*perficiebantur*) in us. And then, again, when [do we bear] 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, nor the image of our [primary] formation (*imaginem plasmatis*), but the former vain way of life (*pristinam vanitatis conversationem*). In these members, therefore, in which we were going to destruction by working the works of corruption, in these very members are we made alive by working the works of the Spirit (*in iisdem ipsis vivificamur, operantes ea quae sunt Spiritus*).

Irenaeus does not explicitly reference the *imago Dei* in this text. He speaks of the earthly and heavenly *imago*, but does not mention the likeness. Nevertheless, it is clear that Gen 1:26 remains in view. In the previous paragraph, he spoke of the works and the walk of life, whether they be carnal or righteous. These are the "fruits" of living, but the *imago* of one's life refers to the deeper truths of identity. Quoting Paul, Irenaeus asserts that to bear the image of earth is to live with the works of carnality flourishing in one's life. To bear the image of the one in heaven, however, is to believe in the name of the Lord, and

to receive the Spirit. The Spirit, in turn, brings about a spiritual cleansing of the effects of the carnal deeds. The latter point is meant as another critique of Gnostic theology. Whereas his opponents envisioned the truly spiritually being those whose bodies dissolve in the presence of true spirit (in the spiritual realm), the effect of the Holy Spirit has no such effect. It is not the substance nor our original nature/formation that are washed away, but the power and effects of sin. As Fantino notes, “The fault of Adam did not bring about a change in human nature, but, abandoned to his weakness, he is now subject to sin, death, and Satan. . . . The flesh is modeled and bears the form of the incarnate Son; but the image is also modeled spiritually through the presence of the Spirit in man.”⁹² Thus, to participate in the life and works of the Spirit is, as has been previously noted, to participate in the restorative work of God.

Haer. 5.12.1–4: True Spirituality: Life Driving out Death

For as the flesh is capable of corruption, so is it also of incorruption; and as it is of death, so is it also of life. These two do mutually give way to each other; and both cannot remain in the same place, but one is driven out by the other, and the presence of the one destroys that of the other. If, then, when death takes possession of a man, it drives life away from him, and proves him to be dead, much more does life, when it has obtained power over the man, drives out death, and restores him as living unto God. For if death brings mortality, why should not life, when it comes, vivify man? Just as Isaiah the prophet says, “Death devoured when it had prevailed.” And again, “God has wiped away every tear from every face.” Thus that former life is expelled, because it was not given by the Spirit, but by the breath.⁹³

⁹² “La faute d’Adam n’a pas entraîné un changement dans la nature humaine, mais, abandonnée à sa faiblesse, elle est dorénavant soumise au péché, à la mort et à Satan. La chair est modelée et porte la forme du Fils incarné; mais l’image est aussi modelée spirituellement grâce à la présence de l’Esprit dans l’homme.” Fantino, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, 162.

⁹³ *Haer.* 5.12.1 (ANF 1:537).

The Gnostics and all Platonist/dualists were quite right, Irenaeus suggests, that there is an element of duality faced by humanity. It is not, however, the material and spiritual which are incompatible, but rather, death and life. The former characterized by a way of living in pursuit of earthly things, the latter marked by those immersed in the heavenly. Or, to put it in Irenaeus' terms, to have the heavenly immersed in humanity by the indwelling presence of the Spirit. This is where the emphasis on the activities of the spiritual life will prove important for Irenaeus. Since humanity has not yet reached perfection,⁹⁴ this life is one where the power of life must continually be allowed to drive out the darkness. As it was expressed earlier, "we do now receive a certain portion of His Spirit, tending towards perfection, and preparing us for incorruption,"⁹⁵ Commenting on the key terms of that text, Briggman notes that each of them refers "to the transformative effect of the grace of the Spirit in the life of the believer, which renders the believer spiritual or perfect in the present. . . . Therefore, 'perfection' also refers to the process by which the believer conforms to the character of God at this present time by means of the presence of the Spirit and the concomitant reception of grace."⁹⁶ The life in the body on earth is a season of preparation. Irenaeus uses the words restoration (*viventem hominem restituete*) and vivification (*vivificabit*) to refer to that process which expels (*expellet*) the ways of the former life. This is a key tenet of the spiritual life, and he continues the emphasis into the next paragraph.

For the breath of life, which also rendered man an animated being, is one thing, and the vivifying Spirit another, which also caused him to become spiritual. And for this reason Isaiah said, "Thus saith the Lord, who made heaven and established it, who founded the earth and the

⁹⁴ For a discussion of the already/not yet aspect of perfection in Irenaeus' thinking, see Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 173–79.

⁹⁵ *Haer.* 5.8.1 (ANF 1:533).

⁹⁶ Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 177.

things therein, and gave breath to the people upon it, and Spirit to those walking upon it;" thus telling us that breath is indeed given in common to all people upon earth, but that the Spirit is theirs alone who tread down earthly desires. And therefore Isaiah himself, distinguishing the things already mentioned, again exclaims, "For the Spirit shall go forth from Me, and I have made every breath." Thus does he attribute the Spirit as peculiar to God which in the last times He pours forth upon the human race by the adoption of sons; but [he shows] that breath was common throughout the creation, and points it out as something created. Now what has been made is a different thing from him who makes it. The breath, then, is temporal, but the Spirit eternal. The breath, too, increases [in strength] for a short period, and continues for a certain time; after that it takes its departure, leaving its former abode destitute of breath. But when the Spirit pervades the man within and without, inasmuch as it continues there, it never leaves him. "But that is not first which is spiritual," says the apostle, speaking this as if with reference to us human beings; "but that is first which is animal, afterwards that which is spiritual," in accordance with reason. For there had been a necessity that, in the first place, a human being should be fashioned, and that what was fashioned should receive the soul; afterwards that it should thus receive the communion of the Spirit. Wherefore also "the first Adam was made" by the Lord "a living soul, the second Adam a quickening spirit." As, then, he who was made a living soul forfeited life when he turned aside to what was evil, so, on the other hand, the same individual, when he reverts to what is good, and receives the quickening Spirit, shall find life.⁹⁷

In addition to the dualistic tendencies, it was also noted at the beginning of this study that many of Irenaeus' opponents were strict determinists as well. Their view was that the truly spiritual were those predestined with the spiritual seed from above, thus allowing them to progress unto true life, spirituality, and eternity. Lest there be any confusion, Irenaeus makes clear that the breath of God breathed into Adam (Gen 2:7) is not an analogous principle to that espoused by the Gnostics. Every person, he argues, also requires the indwelling and vivifying work of the Holy Spirit. The promise is that this presence "never leaves" a person. Nevertheless, every person with the Spirit is empowered (and expected, he would no doubt add) to pursue the spiritual life. Here

⁹⁷ *Haer.* 5.12.2 (ANF 1:538).

again, righteous living is held alongside the saving, sanctifying work of the Spirit. Those with the Spirit do what is good and right, and, they reject the carnal, earthly desires.

Those who live this way, Irenaeus argues, possess the Spirit and “shall find life.”⁹⁸

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. 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, and had become breathless and dead. This same, therefore, was what the Lord came to quicken, that as in Adam we do all die, as being of an animal nature (*animales*), in Christ we may all live, as being spiritual, not laying aside God's handiwork, but the lusts of the flesh, and receiving the Holy Spirit; as the apostle says in the Epistle to the Colossians: “Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth.” And what these are he himself explains: “Fornication, uncleanness, [and the like].” The laying aside of these is what the apostle preaches; and he declares that those who do such things, as being merely flesh and blood, cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. For their soul, tending towards what is worse, and descending to earthly lusts, has become a partaker in the same designation which belongs to these, which, when the apostle commands us to lay aside, he says in the same Epistle, “Cast off the old man with his deeds.” But when he said this, he does not remove away the ancient formation [of man]; for in that case it would be incumbent on us to rid ourselves of its company by committing suicide.⁹⁹

Paragraph 3 is a curious and somewhat difficult text. Irenaeus' meaning appears to be twofold. First, he reiterates the emphasis on the goodness of materiality. It was the physical body, or rather, the prospect of human death in the body, which Jesus identified with sheep that are lost. More important for the purposes of this study is the second theme of the text. Having indicated previously the fact that the spiritual person will be restored and progress unto righteousness, Irenaeus here express the corollary truth. In

⁹⁸ It is outside the scope of this study to analyze the many anthropological implications of Irenaeus' fascinating comments here. Not only his thoughts on the difference between the body, soul, and spirit, but especially the difference between the breath of God and the Holy Spirit. The latter issue is one that has prompted significant discussion, notably between Anthony Briggman in response to John Behr. See Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 93–97; Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 167–81.

⁹⁹ *Haer.* 5.12.3 (ANF 1:538).

the same way that those with the Spirit progress upward, so will those remaining in carnality “trend towards what is worse” (*declinans in pejus*). As a result of this notion of trending in life, be it either for good or ill, Irenaeus therefore stresses the response necessary for humanity to choose what is better. In the final paragraph he brings together the major emphases explored throughout this section. Humanity’s life in the flesh and potentiality for fulfilment reside in the activity of the Spiritual life. This, he concludes, is rooted in the work of Christ and the *imago Dei*.

But the apostle himself also, being one who had been formed in a womb, and had issued thence, wrote to us, and confessed in his Epistle to the Philippians that “to live in the flesh was the fruit of [his] work;” thus expressing himself. Now the final result of the work of the Spirit is the salvation of the flesh. For what other visible fruit is there of the invisible Spirit, than the rendering of the flesh mature and capable of incorruption? If then [he says], “To live in the flesh, this is the result of labour to me,” he did not surely condemn the substance of flesh in that passage where he said, “Put ye off the old man with his works;” but he points out that we should lay aside our former way of life (*conversationis*), that which waxes old and becomes corrupt; and for this reason he goes on to say, “And put ye on the new man, that which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him who created him.” In this, therefore, that he says, “which is renewed in knowledge,” he demonstrates that he, the selfsame man who was in ignorance in times past, that is, in ignorance of God, is renewed by that knowledge which has respect to Him. For the knowledge of God renews man. And when he says, “after the image of the Creator,” he sets forth the recapitulation of the same man, who was at the beginning made after the image of God.¹⁰⁰

Irenaeus continues his emphasis on the goodness of the body. Contrary to the beliefs of the Gnostics here in view, the body is here proclaimed to be worthy of resurrection along with the Spirit. As noted in Paragraph 3, the body does perish and the breath of life ceases—that very breath breathed into Adam by God. Irenaeus points out, however, that both Christ and Paul were men of the flesh and both spoke of the need for humanity

¹⁰⁰ *Haer.* 5.12.4 (ANF 1:538).

to become more than flesh and blood. Life is found through the indwelling Spirit of God, and humanity's task is to live by that Spirit. This truth, however, does not minimize the importance of the human form. Indeed, the human body is that which was formed in the image of the Creator, and it is clear that when he speaks of the Creator it is Christ that is specifically in view.¹⁰¹ It is Irenaeus' position that the image after which Adam and Eve were first created was, in fact, the pre-incarnate image of Jesus, the Word. As such, the form of humanity—the very flesh—is good, and certainly necessary for redemption.

That the form of Christ provided the *imago* for humanity is a point virtually uncontested among scholars of Irenaeus.¹⁰² Having clearly established in the preceding chapters the need for an active role of the Holy Spirit in the spiritual life of humanity, Irenaeus reasserts his Christocentric emphasis. This emphasis intersects with the concern both for the spiritual life and the implications of the *imago Dei*. Contrary to the so-called knowledge of Irenaeus' opponents, *Against Heresies* presents a Christ-centered knowledge that incorporates the life and work of Jesus' life, with the spiritual life on his would-be followers. Humanity was originally fashioned to resemble the form of Jesus, but this form does not represent the full extent of what it means to be human.

¹⁰¹ In this paragraph Irenaeus refers to humanity as being in the image of: "Him who created him"; "the Creator"; and "of God." It is clear, however, that he does so because he is repeating (as well as commenting upon) Col 3:10. There is no doubt that Irenaeus has Christ specifically in view. This is generally apparent from the preceding paragraphs, but especially so from a statement made a few sentences later. In Paragraph 6 he states, "For the Maker of all things, the Word of God, who did also from the beginning form man, when He found His handiwork impaired by wickedness, performed upon it all kinds of healing." *Haer.* 5.12.6 (ANF 1:539).

¹⁰² Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, 162; Orbe, *Antropología de San Ireneo*, 41–42; Andia, *Homo vivens*, 68–70; Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation*, 20, 90–96; Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 115, 127; Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction*, 74; Jacobsen, "Importance of Genesis," 308–10; Hitchcock, *Irenaeus of Lugdunum*, 115, 287, 306; Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 175n106; Cartwright, "Image of God," 174; Daley, *God Visible*, 79. For a more nuanced perspective, see Steenberg, *God and Man*, 32–34.

Following Col 3, Irenaeus stresses that the much-discussed life of carnality (in the flesh) must be laid aside, or, put off. Alternatively, the new self, renewed in knowledge after the image of the Word, must be “put on.” There is no question, however, that such an act is possible only with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. He does not mention the Spirit in Paragraph 4, but the point was made clear throughout the chapter. It is the Spirit which causes one to be spiritual (*Haer.* 5.12.2) and, as expressed one paragraph earlier, it is “in Christ [that] we may all live, as being spiritual, not laying aside God’s handiwork, but the lusts of the flesh, and receiving the Holy Spirit.” (*Haer.* 5.12.3) As Briggman observes, “it is important to note that while the reception of the Spirit is the means by which the likeness of God is restored to human beings, the basis for this restoration is the person and work of Jesus Christ.”¹⁰³

Section Summary

Chapters 10 and 11 are distinct from each of the other texts examined in this study, insofar as there is no specific mention of the likeness (*similitudo*) of God.¹⁰⁴ The chapters are nevertheless important, not only because the *imago Dei* is clearly in view, but, in particular, because of the strong emphasis on human action. In these paragraphs Irenaeus make clear several fundamental points: the spiritual life is the life redeemed by the Word of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, to live a life under the power of that Spirit for the rejection of carnal living, in order to see the fullness of the

¹⁰³ Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 175n106.

¹⁰⁴ The ANF mistranslates *imago* as likeness once in *Haer.* 5.12.4. *Similitudo* is not used in the Latin text, nor does Rousseau suspect that *homoousin* was behind it. SC 153:156–57.

heavenly image fully restored in the human person. Thus, in these two chapters, the *imago Dei* and the spiritual life are interconnected in an important way.

Haer. 5.15/16: The Imago Dei: The Telos of the Divine Plan

Introduction

Briggman noted that the first half of Book 5 is the section most populated with a discussion of the Spirit's life-giving activity.¹⁰⁵ This same section also contains a disproportionately larger percentage of the references to the *imago Dei*.¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, these chapters are also dominated by the two key issues mentioned throughout Book 5: namely, the flesh and the spirit. Specifically, Irenaeus returns repeatedly to the arguments that Christ surely possessed both the real flesh of humanity, and that both he and the rest of humanity required the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. All of these issues are inextricably tied to each other. The restoration of the human being is described by Irenaeus as the coming of the person into the image and likeness of God; as such, the process is entirely predicated upon the salvific work of the incarnation (in the flesh, empowered by the Spirit) and the redemptive ministry of the Holy Spirit (restorative spirit indwelling humanity's flesh). In this final *imago* text-section to be examined, Irenaeus emphasizes this process as representative of the great telos of the divine economy.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Briggman, *Theology of Holy Spirit*, 148.

¹⁰⁶ For the statistics, see Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, 184–86.

¹⁰⁷ This section from Chapters 15 and 16 are not the final references to the *imago Dei* in *Against Heresies*. Irenaeus refers on numerous occasions to either the image or the likeness, and there are three further instances of the terms being used together. However, this section represents the last time the Gen 1:26 reference is utilized as part of a larger, related discussion.

Haer. 5.15.1 Renewal in the Flesh by the Spirit

Now, that He who at the beginning created man, did promise him a second birth after his dissolution into earth, Isaiah thus declares: “The dead shall rise again, and they who are in the tombs shall arise, and they who are in the earth shall rejoice. For the dew which is from Thee is health to them.” . . . And Ezekiel speaks as follows . . . “the Lord to these bones, Behold, I will cause the spirit of life to come upon you, and I will lay sinews upon you, and bring up flesh again upon you, and I will stretch skin upon you, and will put my Spirit into you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.” As we at once perceive that the Creator is in this passage represented as vivifying our dead bodies, and promising resurrection to them, and resuscitation from their sepulchres and tombs, conferring upon them immortality also . . . He is shown to be the only God who accomplishes these things, and as Himself the good Father, benevolently conferring life upon those who have not life from themselves.¹⁰⁸

Following several chapters of further emphasis on the goodness of the flesh, and leading up to this, the last of the *imago* texts to be examined, Irenaeus begins by alluding once more to the creation of humankind. He does not repeat his earlier observations about the creative process, however, but instead invokes prophetic texts from Isaiah and Ezekiel to emphasize humanity’s re-creation. In light of Irenaeus’ teaching on materiality and the resurrection, it would be surprising if he did not reference these passages. Indeed, these selections are among the most explicit biblical references to eschatologically portray a person becoming materially reconstituted.

Irenaeus also returns to an illustration used in the very first of the *imago* texts examined. In *Haer.* 3.17.1—4. There, he understood the dew of Gideon’s fleece to point ahead to the Holy Spirit that would come upon all of humanity. Or, to be more precise, it is the dew that “we have need of . . . that we might not be burned up or become

¹⁰⁸ *Haer.* 5.15.1 (ANF 1:542–43). Cf Isa 26:19; Ezek 37:1–10. Irenaeus also quotes Ezek 37:12–14. Thus, he omits those verses (11, 15) which clearly identify the “bones” of the passage with the Jewish nation.

unfruitful.”¹⁰⁹ In Book 5, Irenaeus quotes Isaiah’s reference to the dew, associating it with the second birth and the vivification that comes with renewed health and resurrection. This work, it is asserted, is no mere development of history. Indeed, it is the *purpose* of history.

Haer. 5.15.2: God’s Work: The Fashioning of Humanity

And for this reason did the Lord most plainly reveal Himself and the Father to His disciples, in order that they might not seek after another God besides Him who formed (*plasmaverit*) man, and who gave him the breath of life; and that men might not rise to such a pitch of madness as to invent another Father above the Creator. . . . Now the work (*opera*) of God is the fashioning (*plasmatio*) of man. For, as the Scripture says, He made [man] by this kind of process (*operationem*): “And the Lord took clay from the earth, and formed (*plasmavit*) man.”¹¹⁰

The reference in the previous paragraph to the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel suggested the idea of God’s overarching plan, but these statements of Paragraph 2 make the point clear. Irenaeus states simply that God’s work *is* the fashioning of humanity. The context does not mean to suggest that the divine work for and with humanity is the only or singularly important work of God. Nevertheless, at least as far as human history is concerned, God’s work with his people is the pinnacle of his creation. As such, Behr argues that teaching on the formation of humanity is central to Irenaeus’ theology. It is “the basic structure of [his] thought. It determines his theology at all levels.”¹¹¹

Therefore, according to this second-century bishop, the creation, shaping, and progress of humanity is a subject second to none.

¹⁰⁹ *Haer.* 3.17.3 (ACW 64:86).

¹¹⁰ *Haer.* 5.15.2 (ANF 1:543).

¹¹¹ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 116.

As the paragraph continues, Irenaeus expands on the scope of this work of God. Fantino argues that there is a deliberate attempt throughout the chapter to show that humanity's creation and restoration are both parts of the single divine process. This is evident by the fact that the narrative of the blind man healed with mud by Jesus is paired with the creation narrative.

As the Lord also spat on the ground and made clay, and smeared it upon the eyes, pointing out the original fashioning [of man] (*plasmationem*), how it was affected, and manifesting the hand of God to those who can understand by what [hand] man was formed (*plasmatus*) out of the dust. For that which the artificer, the Word, had omitted to form (*plasmare*) in the womb, [viz., the blind man's eyes], He then supplied in public, 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 (*plasmatus*), nor another Father; knowing that this hand of God which formed (*plasmavit*) us at the beginning, and which does form (*plasmavit*) us in the womb, has in the last times sought us out who were lost, winning back His own, and taking up the lost sheep upon His shoulders, and with joy restoring it to the fold of life.¹¹²

Fantino's argument is that Irenaeus uses the one term *plasma* (and its cognates) to signify the connection between the modeling of the creation and the spiritual modeling. There is thus a "unity between creation and salvation."¹¹³ In addition to the nine *plasma* references in Paragraph 2, there are another fifteen usages in Paragraphs 3 and 4. These are utilized in a similar way, demonstrating the working of God in both the original creation, as well as the ongoing restoration of redeemed humanity. The principle is similar to the concept of recapitulation, albeit from a different perspective. For Irenaeus, recapitulation is understood to describe the manner in which Christ's life and work

¹¹² *Haer.* 5.15.2 (ANF 1:543).

¹¹³ "Irénee utilise dans ce passage le même terme pour désigner le modelage de la création et le modelage spirituel, marquant ainsi l'unité existant entre création et salut. C'est d'ailleurs le Verbe qui effectue les deux modelages." Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu*, 172.

encompass and offers redemption to all of human history. In a similar manner, this emphasis on *plasma*/modeling stresses the ongoing work of formation of humanity by God the Creator. It is the unifying, over-arching meta-themes such as these that prompted scholars such as von Balthasar and Osborn to see theological aesthetics as such a vital element of Irenaean theology.¹¹⁴ This fashioning, by the hand of God, is brought in this final text back to the *imago Dei*.

Section Summary: *Haer.* 5.16.1, 2

Thus was the hand of God plainly shown forth, by which Adam was fashioned, and we too have been formed; and since there is one and the same Father, whose voice from the beginning even to the end is present with His handiwork, and the substance from which we were formed is plainly declared through the Gospel, we should therefore not seek after another Father besides Him, nor [look for] another substance from which we have been formed, besides what was mentioned beforehand, and shown forth by the Lord; nor another hand of God besides that which, from the beginning even to the end, forms us and prepares us for life, and is present with His handiwork, and perfects it after the image and likeness of God.¹¹⁵ And then, again, this Word was manifested when the Word of God was made man, assimilating Himself to man, and man to Himself, so that by means of his resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father. For in times long past, it was said that man was created after the image of God, but it was not [actually] shown; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created, Wherefore also he did easily lose the similitude. When, however, the Word of God became flesh, He confirmed both these: for He both showed forth the image truly, since He became Himself what was His image; and He re-established the similitude after a sure manner, by assimilating man to the invisible Father through means of the visible Word.¹¹⁶

In this final pericope, Irenaeus brings together several all of the key themes explored throughout this study. He summarizes his central concerns regarding a doctrine of God,

¹¹⁴ Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*; Osborn, *Irenaeus*.

¹¹⁵ *Haer.* 5.16.1 (ANF 1:544).

¹¹⁶ *Haer.* 5.16.2 (ANF 1:544).

the work of the Son, and he makes reference to both humanity's creation and restoration into the image and likeness of God.¹¹⁷ Most importantly, the text—the last major reference to Gen 1:26 and the *imago Dei*—summarizes Irenaeus' key concerns related to the *imago*.

First, Irenaeus repeats once more his key doctrinal tenet, that there is only one God and there is no other who should be sought after. His purpose here is to do more than just summarize, however. With reference to the “hand” of God, he repeatedly stresses the fact that the one God himself originally fashioned the human being, and that same hand will perfect it. Both the fashioning and perfection are described in relation to the image and likeness. In Paragraph 2 he brings greater clarity to the difference between the *imago* created versus *imago* perfected. The unique contribution of the text is the role played by the Word. Irenaeus states with greater clarity the fact that the first man was created after the image of Christ (though he had yet to be revealed), and that what was lost was the likeness to God. This likeness, however, was re-established for humanity with the act of integration and interchange inherent in the Incarnation. The Word not only represents the definitive image of God but through his divinity, indwelt fully by the Spirit (as made clear in earlier chapters), vivifies humanity again in the spiritual terms originally intended.

The combination of stressing the hand of God in both creation and restoration along with the dual role of the Word as both the divine image and likeness performs a crucial function in Irenaeus' thinking. First, it subsumes both stages of *imago* life under

¹¹⁷ It is a curious feature of the second-half of *Haer.* 5 that there is very little mention of the Holy Spirit. There are dozens of references to the Spirit and the spiritual in chapters one through fifteen, but very few in the final twenty chapters.

the single umbrella of the divine economy. Contra the critiques of Wendt, Loofs, and Brown, *Against Heresies* here seeks to demonstrate the fluidity of purpose from creation through restoration. It all concerns the one plan of God, whose hand guides the entire process. Second, the unity of that plan is further emphasized by the role of the Word. Irenaeus integrates Christ into the plan in the same way he did with the hand of God. Christ was the image at the beginning, and he restores the likeness at the end. As Behr expresses it, “The manifestation of God in Jesus Christ is also the revelation of the truth of man; so, to become truly human is to become that as which God has revealed himself.”¹¹⁸

Though the Spirit is not mentioned in these two paragraphs, the text is nevertheless an important conclusion for matters of the spiritual life as well. Irenaeus points out that God was not only present to humanity through formation, but that he is also a part of a person’s preparation for life. He is not only a part of the major creative and restorative moments, but he is always present. Moreover, the purpose of the unfolding of the divine plan is to re-assimilate humanity back to himself, and most of all, that his people would be precious to Him. This presence, re-connection, and preciousness speak to the heart of Irenaean spirituality: it is meant to be the loving communion between the Creator and humanity, the pinnacle of his creation.

Book 5 Conclusion

Book 5 of *Against Heresies* begins with the challenging and mystical teaching of theosis. In so doing, the spiritual themes of the book are given an eschatological vision

¹¹⁸ Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 116.

for human trajectory. Those introductory paragraphs, as well as the final texts from Chapters 15 and 16, both consider the *imago Dei* in terms of its fulfilment in humanity. The sections in between, however, are rooted in the present spiritual reality. It is in *Haer.* 5–12 that Irenaeus provides the most detailed description of what it will look like for a person to actively progress towards a fulfilled experience of the image and likeness of God. These chapters are dedicated to spirituality in its most practical sense: the life lived in the body, with the help of the divine Spirit.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined Irenaeus of Lyons' understanding of the spiritual life as expressed through his utilization of the *imago Dei* motif. There were a number of challenges that were identified at the outset. First, very little has been written on Irenaeus' spirituality. Second, a great deal has been done on his interpretation of the *imago Dei*, resulting in a wide variety of interpretations. Third, scholars agree that the allusions to Gen 1:26 in *Against Heresies* and *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* are difficult at best, and inconsistent and irreconcilable at worst. Fourth, the biblical presentation of the *imago Dei* is shallow, while the early Christian reflections prior to Irenaeus are only slightly less so. Fifth, the manuscript issues—for both Irenaeus and the texts he possessed (most notably the Septuagint)—further complicate the issues. Finally, the Valentinian, Gnostic, and other heretical groups challenged a variety of doctrines held sacred by Irenaeus' tradition, not the least of which was the basic identification of the Creator and what it meant for humanity to share in his image.

The methodology of this dissertation sought to meet these varied challenges with one key strategy: context. This study is unique in that it has not attempted to explain Irenaeus' doctrines of the spiritual life or the *imago Dei* through a thematic or purely historical analysis. Rather, the purpose has been to examine Irenaeus' most important references to Gen 1:26 and to identify how the references function within their larger context. In so doing, the following two observations have become clear.

Situating *Against Heresies*' most explicit references to Gen 1:26 and the *imago Dei* in their larger context, it is clear that Irenaeus' first purpose was not to describe the nature of humanity, but the nature of the intended relationship between humanity and God. That relationship is, strictly speaking, Irenaeus' vision for the spiritual life. The Genesis text speaks of creation *in* the image and likeness *of* God and scholars have therefore carefully studied what it is that makes up or constitutes, the human person. This led to the logical follow-up questions, namely, what was it, exactly, that was *lost* to humanity with sin and what is it that is restored *through* the work of Christ. Such questions are vitally important, but too often the significance of the *imago Dei* is equated with the issue of what it means to be human, *by nature*. Irenaeus makes clear, however, that it is not humanity's *constitution* that gives it its true identity—it is the connection with God that is of central importance.

This study has avoided organizing the *imago* texts into thematic categories, but it has been observed that Irenaeus worked his way through *Against Heresies* with at least broad categories in view. To be sure, there is a great deal of overlap between *Haer.* 3–5. As is the case with most of Irenaeus' teachings, there is significant repetition throughout his writings, as well as an overall structure to *Against Heresies* that does not progress along a linear path. Nevertheless, the larger text-units to which the *imago* texts belong reveal three distinct categories. *Haer.* 3 is identified as laying down the theological foundations of the spiritual life. This follows the three key sections which identify the divine plan for humanity to be in communion with God, the work of the Son and Spirit to bring about the restoration of humanity, which was needed as a result of the brokenness of humankind. These are the basic tenets of the spiritual life and the doctrine

of the *imago Dei*. *Haer.* 4 probes deeper into the divine plan, identifying God's design for humanity to grow. This growth describes a person's journey towards the Creator, but it also refers to the individual's role in the process. Humanity was created with liberty and is thus invited to a dynamic pilgrimage of growth and mutual participation; God with humanity, humanity striving after God. *Haer.* 5 gives attention to the effects of that growth in the life of the believer, both in the material realm and in the eschatological. Growth reaches its heights in the doctrine of theosis, but it is never divorced from either the flesh or the Spirit. In the concluding sections of text, Irenaeus repeats the emphasis on spiritual living as a lifestyle that repudiates the carnal (but not the flesh), and that this life is the "imaged" plan of the divine.

Irenaeus of Lyons received a mixed tradition of ideas concerning the *imago Dei*. His trusted texts and predecessors offered only occasional interpretation, and his opponents leveraged Gen 1:26 to promote ideas wholly inconsistent with his own theology. In response, the bishop incorporated the image and likeness of God motif into his theology in a manner that had not been previously attempted. Irenaeus integrated the *imago Dei* in such a way as to provide more robust theological reflection on the spiritual life. The motif provided the means by which he could critique his opponents' theology on the one hand and offer a compelling "orthodox" vision for the divine-human relationship on the other hand.

This dissertation demonstrates not only Irenaeus' departure from the tradition he received concerning the *imago Dei*, but this thesis also represents a departure from the prevailing scholarly opinion. As noted, studies of Irenaeus and Gen 1:26 typically place the locus of importance upon what the use of the motif reveals about the constitutional

nature of the human being. As such, these studies expend great effort attempting to parse the lexical meaning and theological implications of the key terms: most notably, “image” and “likeness” (εἰκῶν/*imago* and ὁμοίωσις/*similitudo*), with a secondary concern for whether humankind is described by Irenaeus as bipartite or tripartite. This project has not been preoccupied with that task. On the contrary, through the careful examination of eleven lengthy text-units, this dissertation demonstrates a consistent priority and pattern of usage concerning Irenaeus’ employment of the *imago Dei*. His utilization of Gen 1:26 clearly occupies a role within a larger concern; this concern, simply stated, was to articulate the spiritual condition of humanity. Irenaeus is not silent on the issues of ontology and human constitution, but the prevailing interest was to demonstrate that humanity’s intended state is a spiritual state—spiritual not in the sense of being anti-material, but spiritual in that the human life was intended to be lived in close communion with God, by his Spirit. The cumulative testimony of Irenaeus’ many allusions to Gen 1:26 throughout *Against Heresies* reveals the consistent employment of the language of divine image and likeness as a means to express both the kinship between and potential union of humanity with the Triune Creator.

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