

## Irenaeus on Creation

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Life and Language

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# Irenaeus on Creation

The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption

*by*

M.C. Steenberg



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M.C. Steenberg  
*November 2007*



## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AH</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Adversus haereses</i>
<i>Epid.</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Epideixis</i>
<i>Ad Autol.</i>	Theophilus, <i>Ad Autolyicum</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	Justin, <i>Dialogue with Trypho the Jew</i>
<i>1Apol.</i>	Justin, <i>First Apology</i>
<i>2Apol.</i>	Justin, <i>Second Apology</i>
<i>H.ad.Gr.</i>	Ps-Justin, <i>Hortatory Address to the Greeks</i>
<i>Sole Gov.</i>	Ps-Justin, <i>On the Sole Governance of God</i>
<i>1Clem.</i>	Clement of Rome, <i>First Epistle to the Corinthians</i>
<i>Barn.</i>	<i>Epistle of Barnabas</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians</i>
<i>Mart.Pol.</i>	<i>Martyrdom of Polycarp</i>
<i>Ig.Eph.</i>	Ignatius, <i>Epistle to the Ephesians</i>
<i>Ig.Phil.</i>	Ignatius, <i>Epistle to the Philadelphians</i>
<i>Ig.Trall.</i>	Ignatius, <i>Epistle to the Trallians</i>
<i>Ig.Rom.</i>	Ignatius, <i>Epistle to the Romans</i>
<i>Ig.Mag.</i>	Ignatius, <i>Epistle to the Magnesians</i>
<i>De.Op.Mu.</i>	Philo, <i>De opificio mundi</i>
<i>De.Conf.Ling.</i>	Philo, <i>De confusione linguarum</i>
<i>Spec.Leg.</i>	Philo, <i>De specialibus legibus</i>
<i>De.Dec.</i>	Philo, <i>De Decalogo</i>
<i>De.Agric.</i>	Philo, <i>De agricultura</i>
<i>De.Ios.</i>	Philo, <i>De Iosepho</i>
<i>De.Pr.Po.</i>	Philo, <i>De praemiis et poenis</i>
<i>Q.Omn.Pr.</i>	Philo, <i>Quod omnis probus liber sit</i>
<i>Ap.John</i>	<i>Apocryphon of John</i> (NHC II,1; III,1; IV,1 and BG 8502,2)
<i>Or.World</i>	Anonymous treatise <i>On the Origin of the World</i> (NHC II,5 and XIII,2)
<i>Gos.Tr.</i>	<i>Gospel of Truth</i> (NHC I,3 and XII,2)
<i>Gos.Th.</i>	<i>Gospel of Thomas</i> (NHC II,2)
<i>Teach.Silv.</i>	<i>The Teachings of Silvanus</i> (NHC VII,4)
<i>Hyp.Arch.</i>	<i>The Hypostasis of the Archons</i> (NHC II,4)
<i>Trim.Prot.</i>	<i>The Trimorphic Protennoia</i> (NHC XIII,1)
<i>Ex.Theod.</i>	Clement, <i>Extracts from Theodotus</i>

<i>HE</i>	Eusebius, <i>Historia ecclesiae</i>
NHC	Nag Hammadi Codices
PG	Patrologia Graeca (Migne)
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
ANF	Ante Nicene Fathers series
PGL	Lampe, <i>Patristic Greek Lexicon</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
Did	<i>Didaskalia</i>
EcRev	<i>Ecumenical Review</i>
EThL	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ERTh.	<i>Evangelical Review of Theology</i>
GOTR	<i>Greek Orthodox Theological Review</i>
Greg	<i>Gregorianum</i>
HThR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
Interp	<i>Interpretation</i>
JStOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JMP	<i>Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate</i>
JThS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
JTSA	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>
Mus	<i>Muséon</i>
NRTh	<i>Nouvelle revue de Théologie</i>
PE	<i>Pro Ecclesia</i>
RSPhTh	<i>Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques</i>
RSR	<i>Recherches de Science Religieuse</i>
SecCent	<i>Second Century</i>
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
StudPatr	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
ST	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
SVThQ	<i>St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly</i>
Szh	<i>Sourozh</i>
ThStK	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
TS	<i>Theological Studies</i>
VigChr	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

## CITATION CONVENTIONS

### *References to Irenaeus*

(2.22.4) refers to *Adversus haereses* book 2, chapter 22, section 4; (2.22) refers to the whole of chapter 22. (4.praef.2) refers to *Adversus haereses* book 4, preface, paragraph 2. (*Epid.* 15) refers to *Epideixis* chapter 15. All quotations, together with their numeration, are drawn from the *Sources Chrétiennes* critical editions and translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. Block translations of the *AH* note the location of their source in the critical editions, while all block quotations of the *Epid.* are drawn from PO 12. Words in square brackets are the author's additions for clarity.

### *References to the Nag Hammadi Library*

NHC (I,3) 16.31–34 refers to the *Nag Hammadi Codices*, codex I, tractate 3, page 16, lines 31–34 (ed. J.R. Robinson). I have utilised the translations of Robinson unless there was a demonstrable need to alter them; such occasions are cited in the notes.

### *Scripture References*

All Old Testament quotations, references and numerations are taken from the LXX, Rahlfs' 2nd edition.



## INTRODUCTION

### CREATION AND THE LIFE OF THE HUMAN RACE: THE CONTOURS OF IRENAEUS' COSMIC ANTHROPOLOGY

Irenaeus of Lyons has earned the reputation of a theologian of creation. Gustaf Wingren, whose 1947 *Man and the Incarnation* was perhaps the key monograph in the renewal of scholarly appreciation for Irenaeus during the past century, claimed in his opening paragraph that creation must be the starting-point for understanding the whole of Irenaeus' theological reflection.<sup>1</sup> This approach has been followed by many, and it no longer falls within the realm of creative or original scholarship to find in the writings of Irenaeus a creation-based theology and thought. So great is the weight of this point of emphasis that C.R. Smith could write, in a study on chiliasm in Irenaeus, that:

Both the non-literally-chiliasmatic restored paradise of Irenaeus and his understanding of the incarnation arise from a consistent theology of creation, which forms the core of his teaching and the bulwark of his defence against Gnosticism. [...] He is a consistent creationist.<sup>2</sup>

The 'consistent theology of creation' by which his thought is here characterised is nowhere treated by Irenaeus as a distinct element of address, separated or separable from the larger scope of his soteriological reflections. Irenaeus presents no 'chapter on creation', no concise reduction of his protological and cosmological thought to a neat, autonomous unit. To the contrary, Irenaeus' investigation of creation lies everywhere throughout his works as a scattered but consistent story. The *Adversus haereses* opens with a caution against those who turn humanity from 'him who founded and adorned the universe';<sup>3</sup> and closes with a poetic reflection on God's handiwork, his own creation, at length 'confirmed and incorporated with his Son, [and] brought to

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<sup>1</sup> G. Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation: A Study in the Biblical Theology of Irenaeus*, tr. R. Mackenzie (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1959) 3. The 1947 Swedish edition of Wingren's work has been almost universally superseded by the 1959 English translation.

<sup>2</sup> C.R. Smith, 'Chiliasm and recapitulation in the theology of Irenaeus [*sic*]', *Vigiliae Christianae* 48 (1994), 319, 20; italicisation in original.

<sup>3</sup> I.Praef.1.

perfection'.<sup>4</sup> The theme of creation is stationed at each of the poles of Irenaeus' polemical endeavour. So, too, with the *Epideixis*, which likewise begins with a personal exhortation to 'be pleasing to God, your creator' and concludes with a reflection on the incarnation, the fulfilment of God's creative act.<sup>5</sup> In his proof as with his polemic, the idea of creation stands at the centre of Irenaeus' theology. This is a point he makes himself:

He who holds without pride or boasting the right opinion regarding created things and the creator, who is the almighty God of all and who has granted existence to all—this one, continuing in his love, subjection and giving of thanks, shall also receive from him a greater glory, advancing until that time when he shall become like him who died for him. For he, too, 'was made in the likeness of sinful flesh' (cf. Rom 8.3) to condemn sin and to cast it, as a thing condemned, away beyond the flesh, and to call man forth into his own likeness.<sup>6</sup>

What, then, of this 'creation' with which Irenaeus is so enamoured? What is its character, what are its details? Irenaeus may indeed be a 'consistent creationist', but such a statement does little to communicate the manner of creation to which he holds with such consistency. It is well and good to declare that 'Irenaeus is a biblicist', as was done almost a century ago, but this sentiment, similarly, reveals little about a biblical conception of cosmic creation as Irenaeus understood it.<sup>7</sup> Irenaeus is a writer immersed in the scriptures, but his biblical 'method' has for centuries been something of an enigma. Loofs and Harnack criticised him, rather forcibly, on these grounds; there seemed to these scholars little in the way of coherent scriptural exegesis, much less an integral systematics, to Irenaeus' thought. Perhaps he did indeed seem biblical,

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<sup>4</sup> 5.36.3.

<sup>5</sup> *Epideixis* 1; cf. *Epideixis* 97. This following the view that the *Epideixis* concluded originally at chapter 98, with 99 and 100 as later additions. See Y.M. Blanchard, *Aux sources du canon, le témoignage d'Irenée* (Cogitatio fidei.; Paris: Cerf, 1993) 113 n. 2; J. Behr, *On the Apostolic Preaching* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997) 118 n. 229. The matter is discussed in more detail below, Appendix I, pp. 217 ff.

<sup>6</sup> 3.20.2 (SC 211: 390–1).

<sup>7</sup> R. Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (Second Edition edn., I; Leipzig, 1908) 290. Cf. J. Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus* (London: The Epworth Press, 1948) 24, 115. Thornton suggested that Irenaeus follows 'the biblical way of thinking', but provided little investigation to substantiate this. See L.S. Thornton, 'St. Irenaeus and Contemporary Theology', *Studia Patristica* 2 (1957), 318, 20. So also with May, for whom Irenaeus is a 'biblical theologian and a churchman', a proponent of 'a comprehensive biblical theology'; see G. May, *Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994) 164.



but selectively so. Exegesis at times seems fairly random, at others distortative, with Irenaeus selectively focussing on carefully extracted texts—an author who expounds deliberately and omits discreetly. His scriptural quotations, especially in the *Adversus haereses*, are chosen to assist in the proof of various points of doctrine, but of traditional exegesis and systematisation there seems to be precious little. Even the long examinations of the *Epidexis*, itself closer to a ‘study’ of scripture than the *Adversus haereses*, follow such a pattern. Irenaeus quotes those texts he believes will assist in bringing out the true teaching of a specific doctrine. That which does not relate, he does not feel constrained to mention.

So could a generation of systematically-minded scholars find in Irenaeus something of a confused biblicist. Wingren might have opened the door to a new respect for his emphasis on creation, but a methodology popularly perceived as inadequate hampered a fuller understanding of its nature and form. Irenaeus’ vision of creation was and is something of a slippery serpent to would-be interpreters. It is obviously present, readily identifiable, yet seems difficult to define with precision. It is genuinely ‘scriptural’ and owes a great deal—conscientiously as well as contextually—to the protology recounted in Genesis, but even here a clear line of treatment is difficult to ascertain. Given the perceived practice of scriptural selectivity just described, it has seemed to scholars difficult to trace the actual contours by which the Genesis narrative (or any other single scriptural element) figures into the corpus of Irenaeus’ work, and the degree to which it informs, rather than actually comprises, his own protology. This has been read as in some sense symptomatic of his whole approach to creation: that Irenaeus presents no chapter on creation is correlate to the fact that he likewise presents no focussed treatment of the Genesis story proper. His cosmological and anthropological reflections are intermittent throughout his works, condensed at times into passages of extended treatment within a particular context, yet never offering a substantial commentary (in the sense we normally think of this genre) on a proper reading of protological matters and their scriptural groundings.<sup>8</sup> To determine the actual details of Irenaeus’ protological convictions becomes difficult,

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<sup>8</sup> Another feature criticised by such figures as Harnack, Bousset and Loofs; cf. the summary of their views and a note on the shift in appreciation for Irenaeus in K.M. Tortorelli, ‘Some Notes on the Interpretation of St. Irenaeus in the Works of Hans Urs von Balthasar’, *Studia Patristica* 23 (1989), 284.

possible only through a synthesis of his varied comments on creation, cosmology and anthropology as scattered throughout his corpus. Such attempts at synthesis are themselves challenging, given the complex form of Irenaeus' works, and always result in a contrived end product: a reading of Irenaeus made possible only through the kind of synthesis the author himself never employs. There seems in this an insurmountable obstacle, which lies behind that curious phenomenon of Irenaeian scholarship: namely, that it so readily proclaims the detailed biblical creationism of Irenaeus as integral to and pronounced in his theology, yet has never produced a study on the nature of such a doctrine and its textual as well as conceptual foundations.

The difficulty revolves around the question of methodology, and specifically around determining Irenaeus' exegetical method. Models of scriptural exegesis expounded in the last century were seen as absent in Irenaeus' corpus, and thus it was deemed a shambles, gleaning and re-presenting precedent theological concepts in a text that has little coherence in its own right, and which therefore holds little potential for exploring the foundation of the doctrines it relates. One might locate a 'doctrine of creation' in Irenaeus, but little that could explain or establish it securely. This state of affairs has been mirrored in other aspects of Irenaeian study: for decades, Irenaeus' doctrine of 'image and likeness' was lauded as central to his thought, influential in the course of Christian consideration over subsequent centuries, and whole tomes were composed that took for granted a rich theology that lay behind the most notable Irenaeian quotations on this theme. It was only as recently as 1986, however, that a scholar sat down to study the doctrine in detail, and at last disclosed to modern scholarship a real depth to Irenaeus' considerations.<sup>9</sup> This is akin to the present state of affairs regarding creation. Monographs and articles routinely appear, in most cases lauding though in some criticising the centrality of creation to Irenaeus' theology—yet to this day there exists no focussed attempt at reading the author's varied cosmological and anthropological statements within a larger interpretive framework on creation and the human person.

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<sup>9</sup> This the helpful work of J. Fantino, the fruit of his 1984 doctoral research, published as J. Fantino, *L'homme, image de Dieu chez saint Irénée de Lyon* (Paris: Editions du CERF—Thèses, 1986) and still the key volume on the subject.

To meet this want in Irenaean scholarship, we cannot simply turn to cosmology and write up a study on Irenaeus' approach to creation. Such a project would invariably come upon the same challenges met in the past: a lack of sequential exegesis of the Genesis narrative (or, more interestingly, of overt focus on Genesis 1–11 as the primary source for Christian cosmology), the absence of a systematic approach to interpreting scriptural data along the lines of a theological commentary, etc. If we are to understand Irenaeus' vision of creation authentically, the first step must be to question his method, and thus ours. *How* does Irenaeus approach creation? *How* does he read the scriptures which relate it? It is clear that in this project, Irenaeus' engagement with the chief scriptural protology, Genesis 1–11, will be critical—not only do these chapters contain the heart of the creation saga to which he so often makes reference, they are also of significant textual import in his larger polemical and theological designs—but we must not attempt to synthesise Irenaeus' corpus into a commentary on Genesis any more than Irenaeus himself does so. We must first find the method, enabling us to read Irenaeus in his own spirit and turn from this to a reading of scripture authentic to his own approach. It is only then that Irenaeus' heavy utilisation of Genesis, and its creation account in particular (Irenaeus incorporates more references to the first eleven chapters in Genesis than to the remaining thirty-nine, which he takes up almost exclusively for the typological examples found therein of Abraham, Jacob and Lot),<sup>10</sup> will stand out for their truly Irenaean meaning. In coming to discover Irenaeus' method of reading cosmology, and its connection to anthropology, we shall be able to say with Smith that Irenaeus is a 'consistent creationist', gaining from the latter's approach to matters protological the full definition and implication of such a statement. We shall also be able more fully to set Irenaeus into the context of his age, for it will become apparent in what follows that the *how?* and *why?* of his approach to the protological saga are deeply influenced by his familiarity with both contemporary Christian theologians and writers, as well as the so-called 'Gnostics' and other contentious factions of second-century Christendom.

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix II, p. 221.

To say that creation lies at the centre of Irenaeus' thought is in a sense misleading. In the most definitive sense, it is not the cosmos that stands at the heart of his thought, but the human person, and this is among the first principles of Irenaeus' thought that must be identified and retained in a study of his cosmology. Humanity is the thrust by which and towards which all the movements of creation are driven, and the figure of this person stands, in a real way, at the centre of Irenaeus' cosmological universe. Dumitru Staniloae was not far from the thought of Irenaeus when he wrote, the better part of two millennia later,

Creation does not reach its completion until, in humanity, God has revealed to it its meaning. Man appears only at the end because he has need of all the things that have come before him, while all that has gone before man only finds its meaning in him.<sup>11</sup>

As if predicting Staniloae's point, Irenaeus is convinced that the created order was not simply a whimsical project on the part of God, but that it has an aim, a purpose and a specific intentionality behind its every detail. Without equivocation he states:

All such [things as have been made] have been created for the benefit of the man who is saved, ripening for immortality that which is possessed of its own free will and its own power, preparing and rendering it more adapted for eternal subjection to God. On this account creation is ordered for the benefit of man; for man was not made for its sake, but creation for the sake of man.<sup>12</sup>

When Irenaeus speaks of creation, he does so through the lens of human growth and salvation that he sees as its aim. Cosmology is bound up in soteriology, and as soteriology is intrinsically bound up in the life of the human person, so does the whole thrust of creation become, in a word, anthropocentric.<sup>13</sup> 'God made all the things of time for man', writes Irenaeus, 'so that coming to maturity in them, he may produce the fruit of immortality'.<sup>14</sup> This maturity finds its full definition and example in the incarnate Jesus Christ. The first and primary exhortation to be gained from the witness of the apostles is that 'we

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<sup>11</sup> D. Staniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology—Vol. 2. The World: Creation and Deification*, tr. I. Ionita and R. Barringer (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000) 12.

<sup>12</sup> 5.29.1 (SC 153: 362–3).

<sup>13</sup> See E.P. Meijering, 'God, cosmos, history: Christian and neo-Platonic views on divine revelation', *Vigiliae Christianae* 28 no. 4 (1974), 267.

<sup>14</sup> 4.5.1.

have received baptism for the remission of sins, in the name of God the Father, and in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was incarnate and died and was raised, and in the Holy Spirit'.<sup>15</sup> It is into the maturity of the Son that humanity has come through his life, death and resurrection, and thus it is the incarnate Christ as mature Adam and perfect human person who reveals the ultimate end-point and focus of the whole economy. Perfected humanity and the person of Christ are theological synonyms. For Irenaeus, the human person is at the centre of creation because Christ is the Lord of creation. As such, cosmology is not only anthropic in its orientation, but anthropology is seen as cosmic from the perspective of this lordship of the Son. Irenaeus presents a 'cosmic anthropology' in which humanity and the cosmos share a common history of interchange and advancement. As such, it is only in Christ that matters protological find definition. The starting point of protological reflection is, for Irenaeus, located in the person of the Son.

The anthropocentricity of Irenaeus' thought has been acknowledged for some time, yet the full weight of its influence has not always been appreciated. It is not simply that principal aspects of Christian belief can in some way be related back to humankind, rather that *every* element of God's revelation to the world *is*, by its very nature as the working of the philanthropic God, part of humanity's story—a story made fully known only in the incarnation. With attention to the question of cosmology in particular, Irenaeus does not see the creation of the physical cosmos as 'setting the stage' or 'preparing the way' for the onset of the human economy: this *is* the human economy in its initiatory movements. If, for Irenaeus, the history of humankind can be paralleled to the life of a child who grows from infancy to adulthood and perfection in Christ—and we will have more to say on this in due course—then the moment of this child's conception must be found, not in the gathering together of the dust into the frame of Adam, but in the calling forth of the cosmos out of the void. It is here that the salvation of humankind begins, and as Irenaeus will make abundantly clear in the latter chapters of the *AH*, as elsewhere, it is only within the context of such a protology that a genuine eschatology, or vision of 'the end', can be formulated. The *telos* towards which humanity is moving, the adulthood for which the child strives, is nothing other than the

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<sup>15</sup> *Epid.* 3.

completion of the one creative movement of God which commenced ‘in the beginning’, which was revealed in its fullness in the incarnate Christ, and which will find fulfilment in the eternal kingdom.<sup>16</sup>

We will not be surprised, then, to find this anthropocentric character distinctly and conspicuously present right through Irenaeus’ conception of the protology. Throughout this study, it will become apparent time and again that, from the very first, Irenaeus reads the scriptural evidence for creation as the first pages of the human story that finds its heart in the Gospels, in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Every aspect of his treatment of the creation saga, not only in how he exegetes the texts behind it but also in how he selects which passages to quote and which to omit in setting out its implications, is influenced by his anthropocentric and economic worldview. So could one author, characterising Irenaeus’ doctrine of creation by a series of five points of emphasis, note:

This is the fourth emphasis in Irenaeus’s doctrine of creation: that all things are created to be the context of humanity in its acquiring of, and advance in, the knowledge of God, the fulfilment and end of which is immortality in its community of union with God.<sup>17</sup>

This is key to an authentic reading of Irenaeus’ discussions on creation. Unless the story of ‘man and the incarnation’ is kept in view as the framework in which all such discussions are held, the reader will fail to understand Irenaeus’ unique approach to this theme for the full scope of its originality.

It is not enough, however, even to say that Irenaeus is anthropocentric in his reading of the scriptures. He is anthropocentric within the distinct and embracing framework of a potent eschatology. There is one ‘way’ in the Christian life, and this the way that leads forward, upward, to the kingdom—the way revealed by and as Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup> The confession of the Church is not simply that Christ lived and acted, but that he lives and acts continually, that ‘in due time the Son will yield up his work to the Father’.<sup>19</sup> The Christian vision, as Irenaeus sees it, is not contained fully in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. 1.22.1, 5.36.3.

<sup>17</sup> I.M. Mackenzie, *Irenaeus’s Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching: a theological commentary and translation* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002) 93.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Epid.* 1.

<sup>19</sup> 5.36.2.

unless these are seen as finding their completion in the eschaton, in which the ‘handiwork of God, confirmed and incorporated with his Son, is brought to perfection’.<sup>20</sup> Thus Irenaeus’ whole anthropology, in the context of which his protological reflections are set, is in fact an eschatological anthropology. Only in the light of what is coming can that which has already taken place be properly understood; and ‘what is coming’ is the eschatological work of the one who has come and who will return—Christ, the ‘coming one’ (ὁ ἐρχόμενος). This sense of unfolding economy, of progressive development toward and into Christ, is grounded for Irenaeus in the epic of creation as read in light of the revelation of that same Christ. That which awaits humankind at the *telos* of history is that which Christ reveals the protological witness of all scripture to proclaim; namely, the eventual perfection of full participation in the divine life.

To understand fully this unique interrelation of protology and eschatology, anthropology and Christology, only a detailed examination of Irenaeus’ approach to creation will suffice. It is not sufficient simply to say that elements of a ‘creationist thought’ are present in Irenaeus’ work; we must seek also to understand how they are present, and why. More than anywhere else, it is in his use of the themes and events of the inherited creation narrative, primarily set forth in Gen 1–11 but expanded and explained throughout the larger tradition of apostolic, Christological exegesis as Irenaeus understands it, that he reveals the full breadth of these interrelationships. The ‘biblical Irenaeus’, the ‘consistent theologian of creation’, must be mined more carefully for the realities that give rise to these common titles.

#### COMPARATIVE SOURCES

To comprehend the station Irenaeus’ approach to creation holds in the development of Christian protological reflection, such a study as this cannot focus solely on his considerations. This is true as a general rule in the study of any theologian, but especially so of Irenaeus, for he was an engaged bishop, active in the discussions and conflicts

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<sup>20</sup> 5.36.3.

of the Church in his era.<sup>21</sup> That his major work is an encyclopaedic polemic within which he discusses by name an expansive catalogue of ‘Gnostic’ groups, demonstrates a breadth of engagement with those factions, prevalent in his day, that the Church would come to brand as heretical (and which Irenaeus himself does not hesitate to term *haeretici*). His comments throughout that text, as too the *Epideixis*, make clear a reading of Justin<sup>22</sup> and Theophilus,<sup>23</sup> as well as at least a conversational familiarity with Plato, the Stoics, late-temple and possibly also mystic and apocalyptic strands of Judaism. The brief ‘Letter from the Churches in Gaul’, which on the internal evidence of language, vocabulary and style we should ascribe to Irenaeus, manifests this tendency toward dialogue and engagement even in the younger days of his ministerial activity.<sup>24</sup> Irenaeus’ confession of sitting at the feet of Polycarp as a youth reveals a characteristic of his personality that would always remain.<sup>25</sup> As an older bishop, Irenaeus’ developed view of the Church’s universal profession of the one faith proclaimed by the apostles, his belief that ‘the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it’,<sup>26</sup> bears witness to a familiarity, if only passing and to some degree rhetorical, with what was being taught and said in churches other than his own.

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<sup>21</sup> I.e. from c. 178/179, which is our earliest record of his ministerial work, vis-à-vis his recommendation from Gaul, wherein he is introduced as a newcomer to such activity (cf. *HE* 5.4.1–2).

<sup>22</sup> M. Slusser, in a communication at the 2003 International Conference on Patristic Studies entitled ‘How much did Irenaeus learn from Justin?’ (Oxford: 22 August, 2003), suggested rather convincingly that Irenaeus may in fact have known Justin personally and perhaps even studied under him for a time.

<sup>23</sup> The actual influence of Theophilus on Irenaeus has long been disputed. As a side-effect of the research that has gone into the present volume, especially in the cross references indicated throughout in the notes, I am convinced the question of that influence can be more strongly declared in the positive.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Eusebius, *HE* 5.1–2. Irenaeus’ authorship has been posited for some time, due in large part to mention of him at *HE* 5.4.1–2 as the bearer of a letter to Rome; cf. P. Nautin, *Lettres et écrivains chrétiens des II<sup>e</sup> et III<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1961) 54–61. Despite the objections of Deferrari (see R.J. Deferrari, *Eusebius Pamphili—Ecclesiastical History, Books 1–5*, ed. H. Dressler (The Fathers of the Church; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1953) 273), this ascription is not without foundation, as the style and tone of the letter are in conformity with that of the accepted letters of Irenaeus, as with the general tenor of the *Epist.*

<sup>25</sup> See *AH* 3.3.4; *HE* 5.20.4–8; cf. *HE* 5.5.8–9, 5.24.16–17.

<sup>26</sup> 1.10.2.



All this makes clear that a study of Irenaeus' theology must not be carried out in academic isolation from the context of the world around him. An appreciation of the 'how?' and 'why?' behind the protological questions of the era reveals the degree to which Irenaeus' reflection on the same was influenced by the driving discussions of his day, and the degree to which he approached issues in a new and creative manner. In particular, a few broad categories of influence, as well as distinct sources, will warrant comparative attention throughout this study; namely, the so-called 'Gnostics'; Irenaeus' near-contemporaries in the Church, Justin and Theophilus; and certain trends in Jewish thought of the era.

### *The 'Gnostics'*

The historical precision of Irenaeus' interaction with the various groups he identifies in the *Adversus haereses*, broadly though misleadingly termed 'Gnostic' in modern study, need not concern us greatly. Certainly the breadth of his address in *AH* 1 and 2, together with the intricacy of the details he presents there, are ample evidence that his was more than a passing or superficial knowledge of contemporary gnostic/philosophic thought.<sup>27</sup> While Irenaeus has found a strong critic in Elaine Pagels, who considers his approach one of distortion with the goal to 'subvert and destroy' those he considers a threat,<sup>28</sup> the find at Nag Hammadi has provided scholarship with the materials to temper such a reading. Irenaeus may not always know his Sethians from his Barbeliotes, but by and large the Nag Hammadi Codices have shown him to possess a fair and broadly representative knowledge of the groups he chooses to address. It is perhaps one of the great surprises of early Christian studies that Irenaeus' heresiological corpus should treat with such objective fairness the thought of those he means to refute and overthrow. But then, one can distort the teachings of one's opponents only so far before inciting incredulity in his readership, and distortion of doctrine

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<sup>27</sup> van Unnik reminds his readers that Irenaeus was in Rome at the same time not only as Justin and Hermas, but also Valentinus, who was for some time a part of the same Roman Christian community (W.C. Van Unnik, *Newly Discovered Gnostic Writings: A preliminary survey of the Nag Hammadi find* (Studies in Biblical Theology, 30; London: SCM Press, 1960) 62). Indeed, Valentinus' pupils, who include Ptolemy, Heracleon and Marcus, are among those attacked by Irenaeus. The pieces fit together to suggest a close familiarity with the Gnostic community in Rome prior to Irenaeus' move to Gaul.

<sup>28</sup> See E. Pagels, 'Conflicting versions of Valentinian eschatology: Irenaeus' treatise vs. the Excerpts from Theodotus', *Harvard Theological Review* 67 (1974), 53.

is among the catalogue of errors that Irenaeus wishes to attribute to such groups.

Irenaeus' use of the *Apocryphon of John* is a case in point. Some have criticised claims that Irenaeus had read the tractate, troubled by the fact that he alludes only to a single portion of the text near its beginning, never to the later sections.<sup>29</sup> Others, however, rightly note that in his remarks on the contents of this early section, Irenaeus is reliably accurate.<sup>30</sup> At the present state in second-century studies, it is simply not for us to know with conclusiveness whether this reveals a selectivity in Irenaeus' reading of what amounts to our current *Apocryphon*, or rather an earlier source for Valentinian thought upon which both Irenaeus and the author of the tractate drew. The relevant observation is that Irenaeus was intellectually and theologically engaged with the thought of his contemporaries, and was so in at least a suitably informed manner. As a general tendency, he comments (however harshly) upon what he discerned to be the reality—and not the invented substance—of wider second-century systems of belief.<sup>31</sup>

As such, the texts contained in the Nag Hammadi Codices not only justify, on the whole, our allowance of Irenaeus' representations of these various groups to stand to a large degree in their own right, they provide us also with a helpful collection of external, secondary sources by which to compare and contrast Irenaeus' protological considerations with those of the groups in question.<sup>32</sup> In what follows, pride of place is given to the *Apocryphon* and *Gospel of Truth*, long understood as the primary Nag Hammadi correlates to the sources Irenaeus may have

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<sup>29</sup> So Van Unnik, *Newly Discovered* 71–72. Van Unnik also notes the divergence in structure and style between the first and second parts of the tractate, citing this as further evidence that the present NHC text is a compilation of earlier materials.

<sup>30</sup> See T.L. Tiessen, *Irenaeus on the Salvation of the Unevangelized* (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1993) 44.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. M. Edwards, 'Gnostics and Valentinians in the Church Fathers', *Journal of Theological Studies* 40.1 (1989), esp. 26–30, for a strong reaction against the claims of M. Smith, that Irenaeus aims at deliberate confusion through his employment of the term 'Gnostic'.

<sup>32</sup> The reliability of the NHC tractates as primary texts for Valentinian Gnosticism has been questioned: see M. Desjardins, 'The sources for Valentinian Gnosticism: a question of methodology', *Vigiliae Christianae* 40.4 (1986), 343–44. Desjardins' cautionary point taken as valid, the importance of the NHC texts as an external reference point for Irenaeus nonetheless remains, and I will continue throughout this volume to follow the larger pool of scholarship and make reference to these texts as general witnesses to an authentic Valentinianism.

read.<sup>33</sup> Mention has just been made of the questions surrounding the dating and composition (unitive or composite) of the *Apocryphon*, which need not concern us further save for a repetition of others' comments that 'the main teachings of the tractate' surely predate AD 185, around which time Irenaeus was composing the latter sections of the *Adversus haereses*.<sup>34</sup> He clearly knew these teachings, and as such the contents of the *Apocryphon* provide a wider window on the systems of Valentinian speculation with which he was faced than does the *AH* alone. The same is true of the *Gospel of Truth*, though this text may be more firmly dated to c. 140–145, or at least before Valentinus' departure from Rome (c. 160).<sup>35</sup> That Valentinus was the author has only been challenged in a serious way by A. Orbe, based primarily on a comparison of style between the tractate and the Valentinian homily quoted by Clement, but this view has not found widespread support.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the identification of the text in the Nag Hammadi collection with the work Irenaeus cites by name at *AH* 3.11.9 is as widespread among scholars as is the text's attribution to Valentinus.<sup>37</sup> Irenaeus may draw from this text less than he does from the *Apocryphon*, but once again the Nag Hammadi

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<sup>33</sup> Identification of the *Ap. John* as among Irenaeus' sources goes back as far as C. Schmidt, 'Irenaeus und seine Quelle in *Adversus haereses* I 29', in P. Kleinert (ed.), *Philotesia* (Berlin, 1907) 317 ff. *Gos. Tr.* has been posited at least as far back as Van Unnik, *Newly Discovered* 60, who suggests that Irenaeus may in fact have had a copy of the text at hand when writing the *AH*, despite the fact that the bishop never makes direct use of it in his descriptions of Valentinian doctrine in *AH* 1.

<sup>34</sup> F. Wisse, introduction to the *Ap. John* in J.M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991) 104. Van Unnik was unwilling to be more precise on a date than to state that it must have been written after the close of the first century: Van Unnik, *Newly Discovered* 69, 71.

<sup>35</sup> In this we follow Tiessen, *Salvation of Unevangelized* 58; Van Unnik, *Newly Discovered* 63; and R.M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (Revised Edition edn.; New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 128–29. Van Unnik takes the suggestion from H.C. Puech and G. Quispel, *Evangelium Veritatis* (Zurich, 1956) xiv, stating it with more certainty than do those earlier authors.

<sup>36</sup> See A. Orbe, 'Los hombres y el creador según una homilia de Valentin (Clem. Strom IV 13,89,1–91,3)', *Gregorianum* 55.2 (1974), 339–68. Orbe's main statement against Valentinus' authorship of the *Gos. Tr.* comes only in a brief paragraph at the end of his *English Summary*; cf. Tiessen, *Salvation of Unevangelized* 58 n. 67. For an early witness to the more widespread view on Valentinus' authorship, see Quispel's comments in F.L. Cross (ed.), *The Jung Codex: A Newly Rediscovered Gnostic Papyrus* (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co., 1955) 53. But cf. H. Ringgren, 'The Gospel of Truth and Valentinian Gnosticism', *Studia Theologica* 17.2 (1963), 65 for a more cautious view.

<sup>37</sup> See the extensive catalogue of modern scholars cited to this effect in Tiessen, *Salvation of Unevangelized* 44 n. 30.

tractate affords the opportunity to compare Irenaeus' protological reflections with those evidenced in a first-hand source text.

While these two texts will serve naturally as the primary sources of comparison to the Irenaeian corpus, various others are also useful to a lesser degree. These will be cited in the notes as encountered, but two points—one specific and one more general—should be mentioned here. First, our employment of the *Teaching of Silvanus*, which stands out among the Nag Hammadi tracts as being highly Christian and at times surprisingly anti-'Gnostic', requires some justification.<sup>38</sup> It is precisely for its heavy Christian overtones that we have selected this tractate for comparison with Irenaeus, as it represents another means by which a Christian writer might approach his contemporary thought-world. There are, surprisingly to some, notable similarities between its reading and that of Irenaeus, though there are also distinct and dramatic differences. It is worth mentioning that the tractate must certainly post-date Irenaeus, if by only a little (Peel and Zandee would fix it to the late second or early third century), which leads to the more general point: we have allowed for a wide window of dates when making reference to these comparative texts. Thus while the *Apocryphon*, *Gospel of Truth*, *Gospel of Thomas*, *Trimorphic Protennoia* and *Apocalypse of Adam* may predate or rest concurrent with Irenaeus' lifetime, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (c. 3rd century) and so-called *Origin of the World* (c. early 4th century) do not.<sup>39</sup> This is intentional, for our goal is not to examine only those texts which might have been read by Irenaeus (often difficult to establish, even in what might seem the more obvious cases), but rather those which give a representative cross-section of the thought of his era. The wider berth of dates in fact provides for a more comprehensive picture

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<sup>38</sup> On the 'anti-Gnostic' attributes of the *Teach.Silv.*, see the introduction by M.L. Peel and J. Zandee in Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Library* 379–81.

<sup>39</sup> The precise date of Irenaeus' death, like that of his birth, is difficult to ascertain. Early suggestions of AD 98 (Dodwell) or 120 (Lightfoot) for Irenaeus' birth have largely given way to the 'between 130 and 140' of Osborn (E. Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: University Press, 2001) 2) based on Irenaeus' recollections of Polycarp (d. 155/156) whom he saw 'as a young man'. For Grant, this suggests a rather firm date of 'about AD 140' (R.M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, ed. C. Harrison (The Early Church Fathers; London: Routledge, 1997) 2), though for Osborn this makes Irenaeus' too young to take up the episcopacy c. 177/178. On the date of Irenaeus' death, the usually-ascribed date is sometime at the close of the second or beginning of the third century, which is in agreement with the record in Jerome's *Commentary on Isaias* 64, which reports Irenaeus' martyrdom in 202/203 (often discounted as a later interpolation); cf. Grant, *Irenaeus* 2; J. Van Der Straeten, 'Saint-Irénée fut-il martyr?' *Les martyres de Lyons* (Paris, 1978) 145–52.

of cosmological reflection in the period, from which comparisons and contrasts to Irenaeus may be drawn.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, a word must be said on use of the terms ‘Gnostic’ and ‘Gnostics’. Taking on board the significance of such contributions as Williams’ careful warning,<sup>41</sup> and indeed the broader focus of current scholarship in the period, I hesitate to employ what is essentially a misleading and inaccurate title for groups that often have little to say on *gnosis*. It is, generally speaking, their focus on cosmological speculation that gives the voices of the second and third centuries some cohesion as an identifiable group, and which makes them interesting to our study. Throughout, I will tend to speak of specific groups—e.g. Valentinians, Sethians—where possible. However, there are times when broader trends need to be indicated. In those limited instances where I do employ the title ‘Gnostics’, I do so in a general sense as a collective term for those various and diverse groups represented in the NHC and the catalogue of sects compiled in the *AH*.<sup>42</sup> Cogent criticisms of the title notwithstanding, modern scholarship has at present no better alternative.<sup>43</sup>

*Contemporary Christian sources: Justin and Theophilus*

Though Irenaeus was embroiled in the defence of Christian belief against those he saw as professing ‘knowledge falsely so-called’, and though he was positioned in what he describes as the hinterlands of

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<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the *Ox World* in particular demonstrates remarkable similarities to Irenaeus in terms of the general form of the economy, while presenting divergent details at almost every point. The fact that this tractate serves as a sustained exegesis of Gen 1–2 in light of Enoch and Jubilees, among other sources, makes it of immense comparative value for Irenaeus, who likewise employed these same traditions.

<sup>41</sup> See M.A. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”—An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) in its entirety. The problem has been acknowledged for some time; cf. W.C. Van Unnik, *The Relevance of the Study of Gnosticism* (Richmond, VA: Union Theological Seminary, 1964) 8.

<sup>42</sup> For the popular definition of ‘gnostic’, cf. the ‘final document’ of the 1966 Messina conference on Gnostic studies, whose description of ‘Gnosticism’ has come to represent the general definition of this categorisation, despite its limitations. The text may be found in U. Bianchi, *Le Origini Dello Gnosticismo: Colloquio di Messina, 13–18 Aprile 1966* (Studies in the History of Religions (Supplements to *Numen*), 12; Leiden: Brill, 1970) xxvi–xxvii.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”* 3–6, 29–51. While I agree with Williams as to the heart of his criticism, namely that ‘Gnosticism’ as the term is generally used in modern scholarship suffers from a false sense of collectivity and homogeneity, I do not feel his alternative ‘biblical demiurgical traditions’ (pp. 51–3) effectively solves the problems Williams himself poses.

southern Gaul,<sup>44</sup> his reflection was not carried out in isolation from the larger Christian world of which he conscientiously felt himself a part. Reference has already been made to the ‘Letter from the Churches in Gaul’, preserved in Eusebius, which demonstrates in a clear way the interaction of the second-century Gallic Church with the Christian communities of Asia and Phrygia; and his recommendation by the Gallic martyrs betrays his ongoing interaction with the ecclesiastical centre at Rome.<sup>45</sup> It is clear through the tenor of Irenaeus’ references to Polycarp and his deference to the ‘Church throughout the world’<sup>46</sup>—to which Eusebius bears witness to an ongoing correspondence—that he maintained at least a personal or spiritual connection to the life of the Christian faithful outside his immediate geographic bounds.<sup>47</sup> To this end, the theological milieu of first- and second-century Christian thought was one into which he was integrated, despite living among the ‘barbarians’. An understanding of the thought of others in that milieu presents the framework for properly interpreting Irenaeus’ own conceptual vision.

Two writers are chief among the influences on Irenaeus: Justin the philosopher and martyr (c. 100–165) and Theophilus of Antioch (fl. c. 180).<sup>48</sup> Since the days of J.A. Robinson’s introduction to his translation of

<sup>44</sup> See 1.Praef.3.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *HE* 5.4.1. It is also of marked importance that Irenaeus’ involvement with the Quartodeciman controversy between the churches in Rome and Asia Minor is one of the few ecclesiastical engagements for which we have record of his participation. See the Letter to Victor, *HE* 5.24.11–17; cf. Behr, *Apostolic Preaching* 2–3.

<sup>46</sup> 1.10.2, 3.4.1–3.5.3.

<sup>47</sup> See below, n. 60, on Irenaeus’ correspondence with the Roman Church. Grant calls him a ‘missionary’ (Grant, *Irenaeus* 4), but this seems an odd ascription. The ecclesiastical presence in Gaul was, by Irenaeus’ day, more than a missionary outpost (cf. É. Griffé, *La Gaule chrétienne à l’époque romaine—Tome I: Des origines chrétiennes à la fin du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 2 vols. (Vol. 1; Paris: Éditions Picard, 1947) 17, and more largely 13–17). Sesbouë suggests that his move may have been inspired by economic reasons; cf. B. Sesbouë, *Tout récapituler dans le Christ: Christologie et sotériologie d’Irénée de Lyon*, ed. J. Doré (Jésus et Jésus-Christ, 80; Paris: Desclée, 2000) 14–15.

<sup>48</sup> The dates for Theophilus are as difficult as those of Irenaeus. Eusebius’ *Chronicon* sets the start of his episcopacy at AD 169, concurrent with the papacy of Soter. His successor, Maximus, served concurrently with Eleutherus of Rome (177–193), to whom Irenaeus was commended by the church in Lyons. Theophilus lived at least past 180, since he mentions the death of M. Aurelius at *Ad Autol.* 3.28, which took place on 17 March of that year. On the dating of Theophilus, cf. R.M. Grant, *Theophilus of Antioch—Text and Translation*, ed. H. Chadwick (Oxford Early Christian Texts; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970) ix–x; F.W. Norris, ‘Theophilus of Antioch’, in E. Ferguson (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (Second Edition edn.; London: Garland Publishing, 1998) 1122.

the *Epideixis*, the influence of Justin on Irenaeus has been universally acknowledged, beyond the simple mention given of him at a handful of locations in the *Adversus haereses*; though, as already noted, the debate over the extent of this influence remains open.<sup>49</sup> I am inclined to agree with Slusser in his assertion that the dates of Justin's activity in Rome (first c. 140 to c. 151, then again in the years prior to his martyrdom, from c. 155/6 to c. 165), viewed in light of Irenaeus' likely dates in that same city (well before his commission in Lyons c. 177/8; perhaps he followed Polycarp to the city c. 153/4?),<sup>50</sup> raise to a high degree of probability the idea that Irenaeus may have known the martyr personally.<sup>51</sup> It seems unlikely, given the relatively small size of the Christian community in Rome and the renown of Justin in his own lifetime, that Irenaeus would not have endeavoured to meet him if indeed both were there at the same time. Irenaeus' fondness for personal instruction from reputed Christian teachers would certainly have it so. Nonetheless, this must remain conjecture, for Irenaeus never claims to have known Justin, only to have read his since-lost *Against All Heresies*.<sup>52</sup>

As regards the theological influence of Justin on Irenaeus, scholarly consideration here has traditionally centred on the quotation at *AH* 4.6.2, which may or may not (depending on where one believes the quotation to end) evidence a forebear in Justin for Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation.<sup>53</sup> This dispute remains unresolved, and essentially unresolvable, given that Justin's text has been lost and the degree of quotation cannot be verified. Yet concentration on this particular passage, admittedly of importance given that Irenaeus ascribes it directly to him, nonetheless draws scholarly attention away from the large number of less explicit parallels between the two authors. This is particularly

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<sup>49</sup> See above, n. 22. Cf. J.A. Robinson, *St Irenaeus: The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (London: SPCK, 1920) 6–68; R.A. Norris, *God and World in Early Christian Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1965) 71–72.

<sup>50</sup> On the confusion surrounding this period in Irenaeus' life, cf. Osborn, *Irenaeus* 2–7.

<sup>51</sup> The more common assertion is that Irenaeus had simply read or studied Justin; cf. D.J. Constantelos, 'Irenaeos of Lyons and his central views on human nature', *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 33 no. 4 (1989), 353.

<sup>52</sup> On this text and Irenaeus' reading of it, see R.M. Grant, 'Charges of "immorality" against various religious groups in antiquity', in R.M. Grant (ed.), *Christian Beginnings: Apocalypse to History* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981/1983) 166–67.

<sup>53</sup> Eusebius has the quotation end with '...other than the creator' (cf. *HE* 4.18.9), which makes the phrase on recapitulation Irenaeus' own. But the *AH* is vague on the terminus, and Roberts/Donaldson extended it through to the end of the paragraph, thus attributing the recapitulative theme to Justin. Cf. Grant, *Irenaeus* 39.

true when considering our theme of protology: the manner in which Justin and Irenaeus approach the cosmogony and anthropogony, and more specifically the way they interpret certain images and texts from Genesis, is strikingly similar—particularly between the Irenaean corpus and the *Dialogue with Trypho*, but also both *Apologies*.

The same is true with respect to Theophilus. While the similarity of Irenaeus' doctrine of Adam and Eve as children to Theophilus' discussion at *Ad Autolyicum* 2.25 has long been observed, the question of direct influence has never been answered with the same degree of certainty as has been true with regard to Justin.<sup>54</sup> This is due in large part to the fact that Irenaeus never mentions Theophilus by name, and to certain points of divergence in theology and methodology between them. Such uncertainties as to connection must remain. However, it seems to me beyond doubt that Irenaeus is more than passingly familiar with Theophilus: there are simply too many parallels in thought and approach, often with regards to points of relatively unique emphasis, for there not to be a common thread between them. This influence shall become apparent in due course.

While Justin and Theophilus may be the most obvious sources for comparison, the writings of the so-called Apostolic Fathers are also of importance in filling in the picture of Christian thought in its development prior to Irenaeus. He specifically refers to some (Ignatius, Clement, Polycarp, Hermas);<sup>55</sup> but, as with the pool of cosmologically speculative 'Gnostic' texts employed here, I have not restricted my field of comparison solely to those writers with whom Irenaeus may have been directly familiar. The epistle of Barnabas (composed between c. AD 70–79),<sup>56</sup> for example, contains interesting parallels and contrasts

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 40. See R.M. Grant, 'The problem of Theophilus', in R.M. Grant (ed.), *Christian Beginnings: Apocalypse to History* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1950/1983) 196 for an assertion, following the general thought of F. Loofs, simply that Theophilus 'may have been used by Irenaeus'. Cf. F. Loofs, *Theophilus von Antiochien—Adversus Marcionem und die anderen theologischen Quellen bei Irenaeus* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1930) 44–80.

<sup>55</sup> See Grant, *Irenaeus* 1, 38–40. Grant fails to provide any argument in support of his claim, at p. 30 (also in n. 46), that Irenaeus' use of *γραφή* in reference to Hermas and Clement should not be read as 'scripture'. Scripture refers almost exclusively to the OT for Irenaeus; but with regard to a 'canon' of NT materials, Irenaeus treats Clement and especially Hermas in the same manner as he does the epistles of Paul. For further investigation of this question, see my article, 'Scripture, *graphie* and the status of *Hermas* in Irenaeus', forthcoming in *SVThQ* (2008).

<sup>56</sup> On the complex issue of dating the epistle, see J. Lawson, *A Theological and Historical Introduction to the Apostolic Fathers* (New York: MacMillan, 1961) 200–01. In any case it was well before Irenaeus, though he shows no sign of having read it.



to Irenaeus' views on the Sabbath, the creation of animals, the state of concord in the human economy, etc., and from at least 1916 this epistle has been taken up in scholarship for its comparative value with respect to Irenaeus.<sup>57</sup> The whole pool of the Christian writers during this early period bears witness to the theological milieu leading up to Irenaeus' day, and so assists in framing in the context of his thought.

### *Jewish sources*

Finally, the question of Jewish influences. Irenaeus was not engaged in Christian-Jewish dialogue in anything close to the degree of a Justin or a Barnabas. For these, it was the relationship of the 'new' Christian tradition to the history and customs of Jewish heritage that was of pinnacle concern, whether by direct challenge (as with Justin's *Dialogue*) or more general *apologia* (the epistle of Barnabas).<sup>58</sup> For Irenaeus, at least what we retain of him, the principal foe was, bar none, the local purveyors of 'gnosis falsely-so-called'. Jewish polemic is present in the *Adversus haereses*, but it is slight and brought in only to augment more emphatic charges against other groups.<sup>59</sup> There may be an explanation for this in Irenaeus' geography as much as any question of theological substance: Gaul had not the Jewish population of Palestine or Rome, and for the church there the question of Christian interaction with the Jews was of less concern. But geography also meets the timing of history: Valentinus' rise in Rome quickly framed into a position of lesser importance other groups, and Irenaeus, as we have already noted, had come to Gaul from Rome and maintained communications with that centre. It is significant that of the Irenaeian epistles mentioned by Eusebius, not one deals with Jewish-Christian interaction or concerns.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> See A. D'alès, 'La doctrine de la récapitulation en Saint Irénée', *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 6 (1916), 188–89, where Justin is similarly used as a source of comparison.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. T. Rajak, 'Talking at Trypho: Christian Apologetic as Anti-Judaism in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*', in M. Edwards, M. Goodman, and S. Price (eds.), *Apologetics in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: University Press, 1999) 60–61.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. e.g. 3.12.12.

<sup>60</sup> The letters cited at *HE* 5.20.1 comprise *On Schism*, written to a certain Blastus in Rome; *On the Sole Sovereignty* or *That God is Not the Author of Evils* written to Florinus (quoted in large part in *HE* 5.20.4–8); and *On the Ogdoad*, also to Florinus (with a brief extract at *HE* 5.20.2); as well as the previously-mentioned 'Letter from the Churches in Gaul'. A letter to Victor in Rome is quoted at *HE* 5.24.11–17, and mention is made in *HE* 5.26 of a treatise *Concerning Knowledge*, written against the Greeks; and to an unnamed 'little book' on the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Wisdom of Solomon. This latter reference by Eusebius challenges Grant's assertion that Irenaeus did not

Nonetheless, the position of Jewish thought in the first and second centuries will not have been inconsequential to Irenaeus' theological considerations. The demiurgic traditions of which Irenaeus is such an unparalleled early critic have, to some degree, an heritage in the Jewish cosmological thought of the period. This is especially so with respect to two strands or movements within the Jewish tradition at large: on the one hand, the philosophico-historical Judaism of thinkers such as Philo (c. 20 BC–c. AD 50), and on the other the mystical and apocalyptic Judaic movements rife at the turn of the millennium. Each of these variants of non-temple Judaism articulated theological principles which, to varying degrees, found echo in broader cosmogonic discussions. Philo's famous concept of an angelically-mediated creation of the cosmos, of the divine model of the universe and humanity after which the physical reality was based, portends the Valentinian Pleroma and demiurge on several fronts; and Samaritan apocalyptic concerns included notions of mediation in the creative endeavour that can be seen as forebears to the type of thought refuted by Irenaeus. While he never read Philo, and it is nigh impossible that he knew anything of the Samaritans apart from the Gospel evidence and general admission of presence that exists in a multi-sectarian climate, the witness provided by these sources is nonetheless important. It manifests at the very least the existence of multiple cosmological and anthropological doctrines in first- and second-century Judaism, enabling once again a firmer grasp of the wider theological milieu in which the Christianity of Irenaeus' era existed and thought. The project of comparative reading in what follows will concern itself primarily with Philo, though with reference also to mystic/apocalyptic sects and the emerging Aggadic and Halakhic schools. Such comparisons make clear that Irenaeus' articulations of cosmology and anthropology were not formed merely in opposition to eclectic and, to the mind of Irenaeus, flagrantly heretical sects, but also through exposure to wider religious sentiment evidenced in these Jewish traditions.

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know the epistle to the Hebrews (Grant, *Irenaeus* 1), as Eusebius claims the Irenaeian letter mentions and offers quotations from it.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CREATION'S STAGE: THE BACKGROUND TO IRENAEUS' PROTOLOGY

The beginnings of cosmic history form, for Irenaeus, the design and set on which the drama of human history will be played out. Nowhere in his thought will Irenaeus consider the later events of the economy—the incarnation, the passion, the resurrection—without explicit reference back to the first moments of God's creative act. Though Irenaeus may be a chiliast, to the disappointment of some, at least one modern scholar has shown that even his chiliastic eschatology stems from Irenaeus' profound desire to read the end of time through the lens of its beginning, as the beginnings also through the end, in a reciprocal and recapitulative arrangement.<sup>1</sup> The genesis of the cosmos is the picture, painted in unfinished outline yet of significant descriptive value, of its future and, ultimately, of its end.

Irenaeus does not approach the cosmogonic and anthropogonic narrative without bringing with him a certain interpretive background inherited from a tradition of, as Irenaeus would have it, apostolic exegesis, learned in his instance from Polycarp and his fellow churchmen. This background, as it comes to bear on his protological convictions, issues forth most strongly in three areas: the discernment of the motivation or reason behind God's creative act, which is perceived most potently in the incarnation and resurrection of Christ; the conception of creation *ex nihilo*, which Irenaeus both inherits from earlier Christian writers and modifies in important ways; and finally, the chiliastic vision of the eschaton, already mentioned, which completes the stage for Irenaeus' approach to protological discussion. The present chapter shall address each of these three areas as a prerequisite for moving into the detailed examination of the creative drama itself, which we will take up in more detail in chapter three; but this only after an examination is made of the manner in which these three interpretive backdrops combine to form a 'methodology' of exegesis that Irenaeus will apply to scriptural texts on the cosmogony.

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, 'Chiliasm and recapitulation', 313–31.

## THE MOTIVATION AND CAUSE OF CREATION

It is the bane of many a modern exegete, though the delight of curious scholars, that Genesis never directly answers (or even asks) the question ‘why?’ with respect to the creation of the cosmos and subsequently humankind. In light of the suffering and tribulations the world has known since its beginnings, which for many have called into question the intentions and power of its creator, this is a question of especial relevance, and more so if one takes as an assumption the presence and activity of a benevolent and omnipotent God. Marcion’s dramatic answer to the question of motivation demonstrates the intensity of its relevance as deliberated in the early centuries AD, and indicates the extent to which readings of the Genesis narrative in light of the testimony of Christ could inspire responses greatly divergent from those now considered orthodox.

Closer to Irenaeus’ front door were the various second-century groups whose cosmologies were not always so radical as to make the God of Genesis into the deliberate foe of the human race, but whose readings of the scriptures were nonetheless grounded, most often, in the belief that the being or beings responsible for the cosmogony and anthropogony were ignorant, confused, or outright malignant to one degree or another. So Irenaeus’ initial response to such systems, which to some degree remains his pinnacle response and the centre of his theology, was a simple if radical inversion of such sentiment. God the creator is good, the creation itself is good, and the creative act is a manifestation of divine beneficence. Thus the ‘why?’ of creation is bound up in the who: since God is known as creator, since Christ reveals the continued creative impulse of God in the material nature of the incarnation and redemption, it becomes for Irenaeus a part of the confession of God’s creative goodness that God will create in order to bring this goodness to another. It is an act proper to his goodness and love to create, and an absence of creation would deny this aspect of God’s being.<sup>2</sup>

*Contemporary interpretations of creation and motivation*

If Irenaeus’ basic confession of creation as an extension of God’s love is simple, it is so deliberately, articulated in the face of varying systems

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<sup>2</sup> See 4.39.2, and below, p. 26.

of elaborate technicality; and the complexity of these systems—which he seems to know well—frames in the character of Irenaeus' articulation. Lying at its root is a different set of presuppositions: a different hypothesis of interpretation. Kurt Rudolf, in his survey of the fundamental teachings of what he does call Gnosticism, professes that this movement (such as it was a movement) 'traces back the origin of the world to an act of ignorance'.<sup>3</sup> While this does not hold strictly true in all instances of contemporary cosmologies we now possess, it is certainly the case in that of the Ptolemaean Valentinians with whom Irenaeus was most directly occupied, and with whose refutation his polemic is most often associated.<sup>4</sup> This tradition, in accord with Rudolph's assessment, places the motivation for creation in an act of ignorance among the aeonic activities of the greater Pleroma. The so-called 'fall' or 'passion of Sophia' is recounted by Irenaeus in two forms at 1.2.2–3, the first attributing Sophia's act of passion, 'suffered apart from her consort, *Theletos*', to a temeritous state of confidence caused by her distance from the perfect Father. She endeavours to search out his nature and comprehend his greatness. By such an act 'she aimed at an impossibility and thus became involved in an extreme agony of mind' (1.2.2), leading to her over-extension within the Pleroma and risk of dissolution. Only the intervention of Limit (*Horos*) restores her to her proper place and convinces her of the incomprehensibility of the Father. Her passion is thus 'set aside', and, as with so much of Valentinian mythology, that passion is both individualised and materialised into its own subsistent entity, now cast apart from the inner life of the Pleroma.<sup>5</sup> Irenaeus'

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<sup>3</sup> K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: the nature and history of Gnosticism*, tr. R.M. Wilson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983) 71; cf. B.E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1991) 25–26, where the Gnostic cosmogony is described as 'an accidental by-product of a much larger, more complex history'.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Trim.Prot.*, NHC (XIII,1) 45.21–24 and the whole of 42.4–44.29, where the cause of the formation of the cosmos is rooted in the defective formation of the aeonic Time. But even here, ignorance plays the dominant role in the subsequent cosmogonic activities of the defective aeon.

<sup>5</sup> See the more extensive summaries of the Fall of Sophia as expounded in A.H.B. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy—A Study in the History of Gnosticism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) 117–28; H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: the message of the alien God and the beginnings of Christianity* (Third edn.; Boston: Beacon Press, 2001) 181–85; and Rudolph, *Gnosis* 72–81. A full assessment of this theme is beyond the scope of the present study; elements relevant to the investigations of this chapter are drawn primarily from Irenaeus' reports and the source tractates in the NHC. Cf. F.M.M. Sagnard, *La gnose valentinienne et le témoignage de saint Irénée*, ed. É. Gilson (Études de Philosophie Médiévale; Paris: J. Vrin, 1947) 148–71 for a columnar comparison of Irenaeus' and Hippolytus' presentations of the theme.

second version of the Ptolemaean ‘fall’ scheme, contained in 1.2.3, is essentially an expansion of the previous: Sophia’s activities are discussed with an emphasis on being carried out in the absence of her consort, and so her production of an ‘amorphous substance’ is attributed to a defective generation from only half of a syzygetic pair. Contrite at the realisation of her error, Sophia turns in supplication to the Father, and through the intercessions of the other aeons is restored to their communion.<sup>6</sup> Once again, as in the first account, Sophia’s passion attains a state of reality and being external to its agent of generation: ‘The formless entity to which in her striving for the impossible she gave birth is the objectification of her own passion’.<sup>7</sup> And in the second account of the Ptolemaean scheme, Irenaeus offers commentary on this central point:

Hence they declare that the substance of matter had its primary origin in ignorance, grief, fear and bewilderment.<sup>8</sup>

This identification is at the heart of Irenaeus’ cardinal objection to Valentinian cosmologies (as well as others): ignorance or defect are primary among the motivating principles in the creation of the material cosmos. This is true even before the act of creation, for the fall of Sophia and the generation of her substantive passion precede the advent of cosmic materiality, which has its advent through the latter’s continued production and demiurgic activities, themselves a mixture of ignorance with defect, envy and pride.<sup>9</sup>

Whilst it is certain that Irenaeus, like most writers of his era, engaged in a certain level of distortion of his opponents’ views in order to further his own polemic,<sup>10</sup> his presentation of the general model of the Valentinian cosmogony can be verified to a certain degree through a comparison with the primary texts now in our possession. The *Apocryphon of*

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<sup>6</sup> It is unclear with whom the ‘others’ to whom Irenaeus attributes it may be precisely identified.

<sup>7</sup> Jonas, *Gnostic Religion* 183. Cf. *Or. World*, NHC (II,5) 99.2–100.13 for a similar presentation of the substantiation of passions in a non-Valentinian tradition.

<sup>8</sup> 1.2.3 (SC 264: 42–3).

<sup>9</sup> Striking parallels to be found in *Or. World*, NHC (II,5) 100.19–33; 103.8–15; 107.24–33; 112.28–29.

<sup>10</sup> To this end, see the proposition of Pagels, ‘Conflicting versions’, 53. Her argument has been challenged by R.M. Grant, ‘Review of *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis* and *The Gnostic Paul*, by Elaine Pagels’, *Religious Studies Review* 3 (1977) 30–34; and T.C.K. Ferguson, ‘The Rule of Truth and Irenaeus rhetoric in book 1 of *Against Heresies*’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 55.4 (2001), 356–57.

*John* is particularly useful in this regard, and articulates a cosmogonic mythology more elaborate than even Irenaeus' deliberate attempts to portray Valentinian doctrines as the most florid speculations possible. But despite its more elaborate detail, the core cosmogony of the *Apocryphon* is essentially the same as that found at *AH* 1.2.2–3 and following:<sup>11</sup> (a) Sophia's passion is the result of an ignorant attempt at an activity beyond her capabilities, with an emphasis on the lack of wholeness in her endeavours; and (b) the result of this passion is a substantive embodiment of the product of her ignorance. There are certain differences from Irenaeus' account, most notably in the *Apocryphon's* description of Sophia's activity as the attempted production of a self-generated likeness, contrasted with Irenaeus' presentation of her desire to know the unknowable Father; but this does not alter the essential characteristic of her endeavour as rooted in ignorance. This ignorance, Irenaeus suggests, motivates and influences the whole scope of what shall follow in the cosmic economy—including, he notes, the nature of an essentially ignorant saviour figure.<sup>12</sup>

This is, of course, an oversimplification, and modern scholars have been fairer than Irenaeus in assessing the nature and extent of ignorance in the Valentinian Pleroma.<sup>13</sup> Still, his primary criticism remains valid. The ignorant act of the outermost aeon (this spatial conception of the Pleroma is an issue Irenaeus simply ridicules),<sup>14</sup> results in the effects of ignorance spreading through the entire divinity. When one then comes to consider the role of the Demiurge proper, who embodies, for Irenaeus, the full force of ignorance come to bear on the cosmos in which

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<sup>11</sup> 'The Sophia of the Epinoia, being an aeon, conceived a thought from herself and the conception of the invisible Spirit and foreknowledge. She wanted to bring forth a likeness out of herself without the consent of the Spirit—he had not approved—and without her consort, and without his consideration. And though the person of her maleness had not approved, and she had not found her agreement, and she had thought without the consent of the Spirit and the knowledge of her agreement, (yet) she brought forth. And because of the invincible power which is in her, her thought did not remain idle and something came out of her which was imperfect and different from her appearance, because she had created it without her consort. And it was dissimilar to the likeness of its mother for it has another form'; NHC (II,1) 9.25–10.7 (Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Library* 110).

<sup>12</sup> On the question of an ignorant saviour, see 2.5.2 (SC 294: 54–5): 'If, then, they insist that whatever is outside the Pleroma is ignorant of all things, and if the Saviour went forth to give form to their Mother, then he was situated beyond the pale of the knowledge of all things. In other words, he was in ignorance.'

<sup>13</sup> Including on the nature of the Valentinian saviour; see Jonas, *Gnostic Religion* 185–86.

<sup>14</sup> 2.1.1–4; cf. NHC (I,3) 17.36–18.11.

humanity struggles, one cannot see in this being's character a unique foray into nescience. The demiurge is, as Irenaeus is keen to point out, only the substantive manifestation of the ignorance inherent within the Pleroma itself.<sup>15</sup> The demiurge's proclamation, taken from Isaias: 'I am God, and besides me there is none else' is in some sense a summary of the problem.<sup>16</sup> It discloses that the creator of the cosmos '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'.<sup>17</sup> The whole body of his creative acts are thus grounded in this state of flawed knowledge, born of the envy and arrogance to which it eventually gives rise.

Louis Painchaud, building on the work of Søren Giversen and Robert Wilson, has recently offered a summary of modern scholarship on the use of scripture in the cosmogonic literature of the first centuries, expanding the field to embrace a more focused inclusion of allusions to scriptural texts, and not simply direct quotations, in contemporary tracts.<sup>18</sup> Such scholars have been successful in applying a level of academic *rigueur* to the determination of what is ascertainable at ready glance to those who spend time in the source texts of the period; namely, that many (though certainly not all) make ample use of scriptural grounding in their doctrinal and mythological proclamations. In some cases this is more obvious than in others. The *Apocryphon of John* refers explicitly to Genesis in

<sup>15</sup> See 1.4.2, 1.5.3, 6.

<sup>16</sup> See 2.5.4, 2.30.6, gleaned from Is 45.5, 6; 46.9. Cf. NHC (II,5) 103.5–15; 107.30–108.2.

<sup>17</sup> 2.5.3. See Logan, *Gnostic Truth* 126–34; Rudolph, *Gnosis* 77–80. The NHC affirm this general principle in numerous tractates; see, e.g., *Ap. John* (II,1) 12.34–13.13; *Gos. Tr.* (I,3) 17.36–18.11.

<sup>18</sup> See L. Painchaud, 'The use of Scripture in Gnostic literature', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4.2 (1996), 129–46. Before proceeding any further with this section, it should be made clear that a full examination of the relationship between ancient Judaism and Gnosticism lies well outside the scope of our study. The consideration given the question in the present section will focus upon the interaction of these schools of thought only inasmuch as such interaction is revelatory of influences upon or contrasts with Irenaeic reflection. Detailed studies may be found in S. Giversen, 'The Apocryphon of John and Genesis', *Studia Theologica* 17 (1963), 60–76; R.M. Wilson, 'The Gnostics and the Old Testament', *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977) 164–68; and the recent study of P. Bilde, 'Gnosticism, Jewish Apocalypticism, and Early Christianity', in K. Jeppesen, K. Nielsen, and B. Rosendal (eds.), *In the Last Days: On Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic and its Period* (Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1994) 9–32. This latter study is perhaps the most thorough in attempting to analyse the precise nature of the influence of Judaism over Gnostic and Christian systems of thought, which other studies are often content only to acknowledge.



responding to a question about the movement 'to and fro' of the Mother ('Do not think it is as Moses said...');<sup>19</sup> and the *Apocalypse of Adam* is to a large degree an adaptive paraphrase of the Genesis mythologies.<sup>20</sup> With regard to the former of these, Painchaud has shown convincingly how the *Apocryphon's* inclusion of such scriptural references illuminates the presence of more subtle biblical allusions throughout the tractate, concluding that 'these texts presuppose the reader's ability to recognize their scriptural allusions'.<sup>21</sup> Irenaeus, for his part, was well aware of the such use (to his mind, misuse) of scripture, and makes a point of following up his descriptions of their cosmological tenets with a catalogue of those scriptural passages they employ to their own ends.<sup>22</sup> He reads their employment of scripture as deliberately distorted:

By transferring and transforming passages and making one thing out of another, they seduce many through their wicked art, adapting the oracles of the Lord to their own opinions.<sup>23</sup>

In some, indeed many cases, Irenaeus' characterisation is accurate. Commentating on the Marcosian use of Gen 1.1–2, he is certainly correct in accusing this group of 'metamorphosing' the words of Moses to its own ends, for it is hard to take seriously the notion that types of the Marcosian Tetrad, Decad, Duodecad and Triacotad are genuinely present in the opening verses of Genesis.<sup>24</sup> Yet it is also the case that these writers were not always so deliberately distortive as Irenaeus suggests. Jarl Fossum's 1985 article on the 'origin of the Gnostic concept of the Demiurge' presents compelling evidence for a strain of Jewish influence (particularly from the Jewish mystical tradition)

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<sup>19</sup> NHC (II,1) 13.19–20.

<sup>20</sup> NHC (V,5). So also with the *Or. World*, NHC (II,5).

<sup>21</sup> Painchaud, 'Use of Scripture', 136–38 and 145. Cf. B.A. Pearson, 'Jewish Elements in Gnosticism and the Development of Gnostic Self-Definition', in E.P. Sanders (ed.), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition, vol 1: The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries* (1; London: SCM Press, 1980) 152, 55, 59.

<sup>22</sup> See such a catalogue in *AH* 1.8, offering reference to the scriptural passages used in support of the views Irenaeus' has presented in 1.2–7; and a similar catalogue in 1.18–20 in summation of 1.13–17.

<sup>23</sup> 1.8.1 (SC 264: 112–5). Irenaeus more than once characterises them as wolves dressed as sheep: cf. 1.Praef.2, 3.16.8; and also ascribes this title to certain Jewish readers of scripture: cf. 4.15.2. Cf. Y.D. Andia, 'Modèles de l'unité des testaments selon Irénée de Lyon', *Studia Patristica* 21 (1989), 49.

<sup>24</sup> See 1.18.1–2. But see Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"* 54–79, esp. 54, for an argument against over-emphasising the 'inverse exegesis' or 'subversive character' of scriptural usage among such groups.

in the formation of this line of thought,<sup>25</sup> and while this theory still remains the subject of ongoing scholarly dispute, Fossum's demonstration of precursory hints at demiurgic themes in the thought of post-Maccabean and especially Samaritan theologies is important and largely convincing.<sup>26</sup> It remains true that mainstream Judaism continued to deny the activities of 'associates' or 'helpers' in God's creation of the cosmos, but Fossum's quotations disclose the presence of just these sorts of mediating agents in the thought of other Jewish groups outside the mainstream of temple practice. Progressive angelologies, personifying reflections upon the divine Name, and Samaritan considerations of the Logos as independent or mediating agent all give credence to the idea that development of a personified demiurge was not so wholly disparate from previous scripturally-based traditions as modern scholarship, and certainly the heresiologies of Irenaeus and others, have long thought them to be.<sup>27</sup> The writings of Philo, in particular, serve as evidence that

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<sup>25</sup> See J.E. Fossum, 'The origin of the Gnostic concept of the Demiurge', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 61.1 (1985). This article builds upon the important work on the same subject found in G. Quispel, 'The Origins of the Gnostic Demiurge', in P. Granfield and J.A. Jungmann (eds.), *KYRIAKON: Festschrift Johannes Quasten, 1* (1; Münster: Verlag Aschendorff, 1970) 271–76. The study of Per Bilde (Bilde, 'Gnosticism, Jewish Apocalypticism, and Early Christianity', 9–32) offers a detailed study of issue's problematics.

<sup>26</sup> Fossum, 'Origin of Demiurge', 143, 45–48. Bilde's 1994 article (*op. cit.*) represents a more recent look at the same issue, coming to largely the same conclusions as Fossum through an investigation more elaborate in scope. Though Bilde's assertions of the common themes in Judaism, Christianity and Gnosticism may be overstated at times (see e.g. pp. 25, 28, 31), his conviction that 'there can be little doubt about the solid historical connections between these two religious currents [i.e. ancient Judaism and Gnosticism]' (p. 9), along with extensive footnotes to contemporary research into the matter, reinforces Fossum's earlier conclusions. It is interesting to compare these recent studies with the older characterisations in R.M. Grant, *Gnosticism: a source book of heretical writings from the early Christian period* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961) 14–19. Despite over 40 years of advancement in Gnostic studies since Grant's writing, his prediction that 'it is unlikely that the picture of Gnosticism we already possess will require a great deal of revision' (p. 19) has proven largely accurate in this regard.

<sup>27</sup> On angelologies, see Fossum, 'Origin of Demiurge', 143, 45–46; cf. the same author's J.E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1985) 18–19. On personification of the Divine Name, see again Fossum, 'Origin of Demiurge', 142–43, 48–52; cf. G.G. Stroumsa, 'A nameless God: Judaeo-Christian and Gnostic "theologies of the Name"', in P.J. Tomson and D. Lambers-Petry (eds.), *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 263, 40–43. On the independent action of the Logos, see Fossum, 'Origin of Demiurge', 146–48.

the notion of mediated creation could have a place in Jewish thought in the generations immediately preceding Irenaeus.

'Come, let us go down and confuse their tongue there' (cf. Gen 11.7) makes clear that he is conversing with some persons whom he treats as his fellow-workers; and we find the same in an earlier passage of the formation of man. Here we have, 'The Lord God said 'let us make man in our own image and likeness' (Gen 1.26); where the words 'let us make' imply plurality. [...] He delegated the forming of [the lower part of man] to those with him.<sup>28</sup>

This seems straightforward, though the passage should be read with some qualification.<sup>29</sup> Fossum contends that certain strands of Deuteronomistic Judaism promoted a notion of the divine Name (as one example) more emphatically as 'a divine hypostasis'.<sup>30</sup> The situation among modern scholarship on such questions is, to say the least, disputed. Hedrick and Hodgson were not far from the mark in their claim that the discussion on possible Jewish origins to Gnostic thought 'seems to have reached an impasse'.<sup>31</sup> While it is fair to maintain that mainstream Jewish thought could not have produced a philosophical or theosophical system that stood 'against the Jewish God who created the world and gave the Law',<sup>32</sup> it is nonetheless true that mystical and sectarian trends in Judaism of the early and immediately pre-Christian era emphasised a certain 'viceregency' to the Name, angels, Logos, etc., that could

<sup>28</sup> *De. Conf. Ling.* 168–69, 179. In 174–75 Philo makes clear that this refers to angels, and in 176 ff. discusses God's use of the angels to fashion the lower part (or 'unreasonable part', ἡ ἄλογον μοῖρα) of the human formation. Cf. the same in *De. Op. Mu.* 72 ff. On the general issue of demiurgic or pseudo-demiurgic themes in pre-Christian texts, see Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"* 218. Though Williams' observation vis-à-vis Philo is correct, his assertion of a lack of all such themes in a pre-Christian context is unconvincing, and challenged by the sources referenced here.

<sup>29</sup> For example, Masanobu Endo points out in a careful study that 'once each context [of Logos as divine mediator] is carefully examined, it becomes clear that these mediator figures were basically vivid ways of speaking of God's own powers and activities (not as the hypostatic existence of these entities), or the way of solving theological and exegetical problems (in particular against the polytheistic views)'; M. Endo, *Creation and Christology: A Study on the Johannine Prologue in the Light of Early Jewish Creation Accounts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002) 5.

<sup>30</sup> Fossum, 'Origin of Demiurge', 143; cf. R.M. Wilson, 'The Early History of the Exegesis of Gen. 1.26', *Studia Patristica* 1 (1957), 421–22.

<sup>31</sup> C.W. Hedrick and R.J. Hodgson (eds.), *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986) 4.

<sup>32</sup> Quispel, 'Origins', 271; cf. Bilde, 'Gnosticism, Jewish Apocalypticism, and Early Christianity', 25.

well have been of the sort of influence in the demiurgic systems of the second century that modern scholarship is coming to suggest.<sup>33</sup>

One important feature, however, is missing from all Jewish cosmological models of the era: the emphasis on ignorance, the very heart of the Valentinian cosmogonic systems and their proclamation of the demiurge as creator. Judaism had never espoused the notion of ignorance as a motivating factor in Yahweh's creation of the cosmos, and this remained true in Irenaeus' era and beyond. It is in notable contrast to the notion of divine ignorance that Jewish thought, especially after the advent of the Christian establishment, began to reinterpret the Genesis account more directly in terms of an intentional history of progression from divine beginnings to the perfected Israel still to come. Neusner's study on Halakhic and Aggadic interpretive methods brings this point fully to bear:

In Genesis Rabbah [of the Aggadic tradition] the entire narrative of Genesis is so re-formed as to point toward the sacred history of Israel: its slavery and redemption; its coming Temple in Jerusalem; its exile and salvation at the end of time. The powerful message of Genesis in Genesis Rabbah proclaims that the world's Creation commenced a single, straight line of events, leading in the end to the salvation of Israel and through Israel all humanity.<sup>34</sup>

The dominant concept here is intentionality, and this is of special note in our comparison with Irenaeus. Creation is commenced intentionally by God, with the express purpose of its progression toward the eventual salvation of Israel and, through Israel, all humankind. There is a glimmer of an 'economy' of the sort that will be of such importance to Irenaeus.<sup>35</sup> Whatever aspects of later cosmologies may have been gleaned

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<sup>33</sup> See Fossum, 'Origin of Demiurge', 143. Cf. G.A.G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (NHS, 24; Leiden: Brill, 1984) 49: 'It is thus reasonable to see in the Gnostic texts the radicalisation of Jewish conceptions'. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"* 218, as part of his larger aim of dismantling 'Gnosticism' as a 'dubious category' for the classification of variant groups, cautions against too singularly focused an analysis of Jewish influence upon 'biblical demiurgic' thought. Yet those who would argue that Gnostic roots come *solely* from Jewish sources are rare indeed, and the majority of scholarship would already agree with his assertion that multiple sources must be considered.

<sup>34</sup> J. Neusner, *Judaism's Story of Creation: Scripture, Halakhah, Aggadah*, eds A.J. Avery-Peck et al. (Brill Reference Library of Ancient Judaism; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 170; cf. Endo, *Creation and Christology* 5–7; Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"* 219.

<sup>35</sup> On further similarities, see especially 5.36.3, Irenaeus' own summary of the divine economy which, when read together with 3.16.6, spells out a pattern markedly similar to that which Neusner describes.

from Jewish sources, the notion of the creator as himself grounded in ignorance, is not among them.

A lack of emphasis on ignorance, coupled with a confession of intentional economy, generated in first- and second-century Jewish milieus a tendency to focus on the motivation for creation as bound up in the character of God's self-revelation and interactions with humanity after creation and through the law. It is the formation of the people Israel, and only precursory the formation of the cosmos itself, that was of most profound interest; and it is upon this general framework that the later rabbinical traditions would build. Cosmogony as a distinct unit is important primarily as the basis upon which the nation's story is to be told. So Neusner:

In the mythic terms of Rabbinic Judaism, which speaks of the revelation at Sinai of a Torah in writing and a Torah in memory, the written and the oral Torah, we here see how the written Torah and the two components of the Oral Torah [i.e. *Halakhah*, law; and *Aggadah*, lore] join together in a common presentation of the fundamental narrative of Judaism: how things came to be, what they mean, where they are heading.<sup>36</sup>

God's motivation for the creative act can thus be inferred in light of his subsequent interactions with his chosen people, but only to a certain degree. God creates for the goodness and exaltation of Israel, in whom his own glory is manifested. The theoretical question of why God would create an Israel at all remains hidden in the wisdom of the divine mind; the motivation is disclosed primarily in the end, the *telos*, rather than the beginning.

Such lines of thought must already strike us as foretelling Irenaeus' reading on a number of fronts. All the more so when one takes into account the Aggadic interpretive tradition which had roots as far back as the sixth century BC, but which came to flourish in the third and fourth centuries AD. Here the questions of 'why?' were tackled more directly. While mainstream Judaism had long insisted that creation was carried out in accordance with the divine law, it was from within the Aggadic context that the Torah began to be seen as the sourcebook or plan by which God's creative activities were determined. 'Before God began to create [...], he opened the Torah and used it as the plan and design for the world'.<sup>37</sup> This represents a radical manner of looking at

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<sup>36</sup> Neusner, *Judaism's Story of Creation* vii.

<sup>37</sup> Genesis Rabbah I:I, quoted in *Ibid.* 176.

the divine motivations for creation from within the Jewish interpretive context. Neusner extrapolates:

The Aggadah here radically revises the Creation-story by insisting that, in the act of Creation, God consulted the Torah. That claim is systematically amplified in further *parashiyyot* of Genesis Rabbah, where later events in Israel's history are found prefigured in the Creation-narrative itself. [...] Then, the Aggadic theology suggests, in keeping the Torah Israel conforms to the very plan of Creation itself.<sup>38</sup>

In some important ways, Irenaeus' understanding of the divine economy has commonalities with this Aggadic idea, particularly in its sense of intentionality and progression. God's intention for humanity's perfection is declared as pre-eternal (that is, established in the will of God before the initiation of the temporal order) and all phases of creation and history are wrought from within the context of, and with a movement towards, this intended end.<sup>39</sup> An allegory drawn in Genesis Rabbah I exemplifies this manner of interpretation:

When a mortal being builds a palace, he does not build it out of his head, but he follows a work-plan.<sup>40</sup>

God, like the mortal builder, follows a 'work-plan': the Torah. God creates because it is in the eternal order of his will, expressed in the Torah, to do so. The creative act is mandated by the writ of God's very nature and intention for human perfection in Israel.

*Irenaeus on the motivation for creation*

Irenaeus is no Jew, and can hardly be thought of as versed in Jewish thought. Nonetheless, the various trajectories of cosmogonic reflection, both of the Jewish milieu and that of the varied 'Gnostic' groups of the period, are at play in the means by which he articulates his own understanding. We have seen already that Irenaeus expressly rejects the entire notion of ignorance as causative for creation. While he is not always entirely at odds with the theories and systems of the other groups around him, on this question Irenaeus and the followers of

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. A similar line of thought occurs in Philo's *De opificio mundi*, chapter 3. Philo, however, suggests only that creation and the law are in harmony (*συνᾶδοντος*), not that the inspiration of the former was drawn from the latter.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Epid.* 3–5, 42, 98.

<sup>40</sup> Genesis Rabbah I:1,2.D (translation in Neusner, *Judaism's Story of Creation* 175).

Valentinus are entirely in opposition. Irenaeus, in line with Jewish interpreters, understands the creative movements of God recounted in scripture to be sprung from an intentional course and plan on the part of the divine creator. He, however, makes more explicit than Jewish predecessors the reason why God chooses to enact this intentional economy. His chief statement in this regard comes in a commentary on Plato, whom Irenaeus believes is

more religious than these men [i.e. the Marcosians, Gentiles, and others], for he confessed that the same God was both just and good, having power over all things, himself executing judgement. [...] Then, again, he demonstrates that the maker and framer of the universe is good. 'And to the good', he says, 'no envy ever springs up with regard to anything', thus setting forth the goodness of God as the beginning and the cause of the creation of the world; but not ignorance, nor an erring aeon, nor the consequence of a defect, nor the Mother weeping and lamenting, nor another God or Father.<sup>41</sup>

The idea that God's motivation for creation is his own inherent goodness seems, at first reading, an unsatisfying answer to the question at hand. Surely, being 'good' does not of necessity entail creating, for there may be admitted all manner of 'good' entities or beings that do not create. But the incarnational testimony of Christ discloses, for Irenaeus, the consistent engagement of God's salvific design with the material fabric of creation. 'Creation is an aspect of the goodness of God'<sup>42</sup> is a statement most fully borne out not in Genesis, but in the Gospels, which show salvation wrought through God's taking-up of the creation fashioned at the beginning. For Irenaeus, the 'consistent creationist', the idea that God's goodness would *not* lead to the creative act is wholly discordant with the revelation of his relationship to humankind throughout history, and especially in the incarnation. The whole of creation shows forth God as the lover of humankind, which Irenaeus sets into the context of the redeemer and the one who is redeemed:

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<sup>41</sup> 3.25.5 (SC 211: 484–7); see Plato, *Timaeus* 29e (and more broadly 29d–30a), *Laws* 715e–716a. Cf. E.P. Meijering, 'Irenaeus' Relation to Philosophy in the Light of His Concept of Free Will', in W.D. Boer et al. (eds.), *Romanitas et Christianitas: Studia Iano Henrico Waszink oblata* (Amsterdam/London: North Holland, 1973) 222–23.

<sup>42</sup> 4.39.2.

Since he had pre-existence as a saving being, it was necessary that what might be saved should also be called into existence, in order that the being who saves should not exist in vain.<sup>43</sup>

This is perhaps among the more controversial of Irenaeus' statements on God's nature, as it is susceptible to charges of necessitarianism in the divine essence and represents a manifestation of circular logic at which most first-year students of philosophy would balk. Such criticisms ought seriously to be addressed.<sup>44</sup> But Irenaeus' primary point is not that God was restrained by his nature to create the cosmos and humanity (for he points out elsewhere that God as God can, ultimately, do or not do whatever he likes),<sup>45</sup> but that God's good nature leads naturally to the creation of a universe in which such goodness can be fully expressed. Irenaeus employs the language of necessity to describe that which he believes is so fundamental to God's free nature that it could not express itself in any other manner than that described—and, paramountly, that which the nature of the incarnate Christ discloses as the necessary background to his own recapitulative work. *AH* 4.19.2 articulates, in flowing language, the character of this nature and the essence of all creation as extant in what Irenaeus calls the creative heart of God:

The heavenly treasures are truly great. God cannot be measured in the heart, and he is incomprehensible in the mind, he who holds the earth in the hollow of his hand. Who perceives his measure? Who knows his little finger? Or who understands his hand which measures immensity—that hand which, by its own measure, spreads out the measure of the heavens and comprises in its hollow the earth with its abysses; which contains in itself the breadth, the length and the deep below, and the height above the whole creation [...] For his hand grasps hold of all things. It is that which illumines the heavens and the things beneath the heavens, which tries the reins and the heart, which also is present in hidden things, in our secret thoughts, and which openly nourishes and preserves us.<sup>46</sup>

Only this manner of approaching the nature of God, namely, the recognition that the goodness of the divine life is the ultimate expression of the reality creation comes to be, is one able to make sense of Irenaeus' notion that God's reason for creating is first and foremost bound up in

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<sup>43</sup> 3.22.3 (SC 211: 438–9). Cf. Origin, *Commentary on John* 1.20 for a similar line of reasoning.

<sup>44</sup> See Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation* 5–6 and n. 7, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> See 4.38.1.

<sup>46</sup> SC 100: 618–21.



his nature as 'good'. The incarnate Son, as the head (*caput*) of all creation, discloses the necessary bringing-into-being of creation as part of God's intrinsic nature as beneficent self-revealer and redeemer. This is likewise the key to understanding Irenaeus' remarks at 3.22.3 on the redeemer requiring something to redeem: the statement is not intended to describe a lack or want in God, rather the externalising character of his nature which only finds fulfilment in sharing its love with another.

Subsequent Irenaeian considerations of God's formation of the universe in order to bring about in humanity the knowledge of himself, or more specifically for the bringing about of humanity itself and afterward the perfection of this created entity, stem from this root principle of God's self-expressive goodness leading inherently to the generation of a created order bound up in the incarnate Son.<sup>47</sup> As much as it is inherent in man's nature to be made, so it is inherent in the nature of God to make, to create, and to fashion.<sup>48</sup> Irenaeus here offers the same argument that had been used by Philo, who explicitly refers to Plato:

Among [God's powers] is also his cosmos-producing power, which has as its source that which is truly good. For if anyone should wish to examine the reason why this universe was constructed, I think he would not miss the mark if he affirmed, what one of the ancients also said, that the Father and maker was good. For this reason he did not begrudge a share of his own excellent nature to a material which did not possess any beauty of its own but was able to become all things.<sup>49</sup>

The creator will create and the saviour will save: the nature of the good defines the activity of the good, for it is as incongruous to Irenaeus as it is to Philo to assert an ultimate good that does not manifest its goodness beyond itself.<sup>50</sup> And if for the Christian the ultimate paradigm of goodness is the perfected creation of the incarnation, the 'otherness' of this manifestation must be the cosmic realm of matter and economy.

It is important at this stage to separate clearly the underlying idea of God's creative acts as the expression of his goodness, from the proper formation of the universe for the advancement and perfection of the

<sup>47</sup> E.g. 4.7.4; 5.29.1.

<sup>48</sup> An important and often under-appreciated implication of his remarks at 4.11.2.

<sup>49</sup> Philo, *De Op. Mu.* 21; trans. D.T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria: On the Creation of the Cosmos According to Moses—Introduction, translation and commentary*, ed. G.E. Sterling (Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series, 1; Leiden: Brill, 2001) 51. Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 29e.

<sup>50</sup> There are notable parallels in the later thought of Gregory of Nyssa. See E. Ferguson, 'God's infinity and man's mutability: perpetual progress according to Gregory of Nyssa', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 18 (1973), 59–78, esp. 66–68.

human creature. This is so since it is by means of the former that Irenaeus can support the qualitative goodness of the latter. The working out of the human economy is itself a positive undertaking because it is a continued expression—the fullest expression—of the goodness that promotes all God’s creative endeavours. And this is intrinsically the goodness of the incarnate Son, who is the sum of the Father’s will.

Irenaeus speaks of this inherent goodness as the glory immanent from all eternity in the communal relationship of the Father with his Son and Spirit. Behr, who identifies this as the motivation for God’s creative endeavour, calls it the ‘trinitarian life of glory’, noting Irenaeus’ scriptural source for the image in John 17.5.<sup>51</sup> It is only in light of this relational life of mutually expressive glory that one can understand Irenaeus’ claim at 4.20.7: ‘The glory of God is a living man’—for the whole economy is but the extension of this relational life beyond the immediate subjects of the relationship proper, and particularly its manifestation in the created realm, which the Son himself takes up into the divine life.<sup>52</sup> God creates, that creation might participate in his glory, his goodness, which is that shared eternally by Father, Son and Spirit and exemplified by the Son’s incarnate relationship to the Father through the spirit in the economy of salvation. The language of ‘The Trinity’ may well remain inappropriate here, properly the vocabulary of a later age and a title never used by Irenaeus himself; but his emphasis on the relationship of glory and will between the Father, Son and Spirit in the creative endeavour granted perfect headship in the incarnation, is striking. We shall discuss this matter further in chapter two, when we come to consider creation as trinitarian endeavour in Irenaeus’ cosmology. For the present it suffices to note that the glory of the relationship of Father, Son and Spirit is of direct bearing on the motivation for the formation of the cosmos. God creates, that creation might participate in such glory, the glory of the Son expressing the Father’s will through the Spirit.

It is unlikely that Irenaeus’ near-contemporary Christian writers will have thought differently from him on this point. Still, the presence of varied exegetical traditions in the Rhône Valley and larger Italian

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<sup>51</sup> J. Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: The University Press, 2000) 36.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 56–57. This was the subject of a long study as A. Orbe, ‘Gloria Dei vivens homo: Análisis de Ireneo, *adv. haer.* IV,20,1–7’, *Gregorianum* 73.2 (1992), 205–68; Behr rightly points to the heart of Orbe’s contribution at pp. 262–263.

milieu drew out a reflection on the motivation for God's creative activities that is lacking in our extant sources from preceding generations. That creation was called forth for the service of humanity was current as early as the apostolic fathers, as witnessed in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, which shows practical examples of creation functioning in the service of the martyr;<sup>53</sup> and the epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, which contains expressions of creation's intentional didactic value as symbolic of the stages of the human economy.<sup>54</sup> But only Theophilus gives formal consideration to the motivation of God that lies behind the symbolic and practical value of the cosmos, addressing himself, like Irenaeus, to the question of why God created it in the first place. In a passage that foreshadows Irenaeus on a number of levels, Theophilus writes:

First, [the prophets] taught us with one accord that God made all things out of nothing; for nothing was coeval with God. But he, being in his own place, and wanting nothing, and existing before all the ages, willed to make man by whom he might be known; for man, therefore, he prepared the world.<sup>55</sup>

God creates the cosmos for the sake of humanity, specifically so that 'he might be known', and the remainder of the *Ad Autolycum* 2 bears this out in minute detail.

Irenaeus speaks similarly of God's disclosure of the knowledge of himself, but chiefly with reference to the incarnation, rather than the cosmogony. Iain MacKenzie's recent commentary on the *Epideixis*, which surveys Irenaeus' notion of creation more thoroughly than any other current work, identifies five main points of emphasis in Irenaeus' thought on creation, the final of which he frames as follows:

The fifth emphasis, arching over these others, is that creation is an act of the love of God. It is the overflowing love of God bringing into being an entity other than himself which may, in the relation of the respective integrities of that which is made and of him who is the Maker, share his eternal life in a 'community of union' with him. It is this love of God which means that creation and redemption are so closely bound for Irenaeus. Creation and incarnation are but the two sides of the one act of the love of God towards what He makes.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See *Mart.Pol.* 15.

<sup>54</sup> See e.g. *1Clem.* 24.

<sup>55</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.10.

<sup>56</sup> Mackenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration* 94.

God's goodness, which for MacKenzie is embodied in his love, sets forth the context and motivation for his creative history. The 'why' behind creation is, for Irenaeus, this goodness which is of such a character as inherently to 'bring into being an entity other than himself', to give being to that which has none, that it may ultimately find being in himself. To such a notion, the Valentinian 'passion of Sophia' as the ignorant motivation for creation could not be more strongly in opposition. Irenaeus may be seen in this qualified sense to have more in common with the tenets of Aggadic Judaism, which, in its assertion of God's designs of creation inscribed in the Torah, emphasises creation as an aspect of the divine nature itself. God's creative movements are purposeful, intentional, propelled forward by the goodness of a nature that cannot but reach out of itself in creative activity and render perfect the beings it creates—a perfection 'made visible' in the incarnate Christ. With respect to his larger interpretation of the cosmogony and anthropogony, Irenaeus' insistence on this point will serve as a foundational principle for reading the details of the scriptural narrative. From Adam to Christ, from the hexaëmeron to the resurrection, it is the self-revealing and self-communicating goodness of the creator that drives forward every aspect of the economy.

THE CREATOR'S UNTRAMMELLED POWER:  
A DOCTRINE OF CREATION *EX NIHILO*

If it is in God's nature to bring into being an entity other than himself, how are Christian believers to understand the manner by which such a creation is accomplished? In what sense does this 'bringing into being' constitute an actual act of creation, and in what sense a formation, or a modelling? A human builder can be said to 'create' that which he builds, for he has brought into the world a structure that previously did not exist as such. However, at the most foundational level this builder has no creative power over the elemental substance of the materials used in the structure's composition. He may more accurately be said to have arranged and ordered previously existing materials into a new and novel form, to have wrought rather than truly created. His creativity lies in his imagination, his ingenuity; but at the level of bringing-into-being, the human builder is reliant upon the extant potentiality of creation in the matter of already existing substances.

This particular comparison, between a human architect and the divine creator, is provided explicitly by Irenaeus.<sup>57</sup> As the creators are different, so too are their creations. The human 'creator' makes out of something, but God makes out of nothing, *ex nihilo*. The didactic relationship between these two, creator and creation, is reciprocal: the nature of the creator reveals something about the nature of the creation, while the nature of the creation may, in turn, be used to glean knowledge of its creator. The nature of God as one who creates *ex nihilo* reveals to Irenaeus significant details on the character of the physical and spiritual worlds, about the very being of beings. In turn, that a being (or more specifically, all beings) are fashioned *ex nihilo*, is revelatory for him of the character of God as creator of such realities. It is to this end that Irenaeus, who is well known in scholarship for his clear proclamation of a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, takes up the theme, and it is in this context that a proper understanding of the doctrine holds a place of importance in his overall cosmological and anthropological reflections. Misconceptions over the manner of creation—especially those that deny or do not fully express a creation from nothing, from non-existence—ultimately serve to distort the notion of God as good and powerful which, as we have just seen, lies at the heart of Irenaeus' whole theology. It is the goodness of God *as creator* that is revealed in the incarnation; and it is in the continuation of the creative act begun 'of nothing' that Christ's miracles of material redemption find their fullest recapitulative meaning. To understand that 'God himself called into being the substance of creation, when previously it had no existence'<sup>58</sup> is for Irenaeus how creation and the cosmos must be understood, in light of the incarnation of the Son who 'came unto his own'.

While it may long have been accepted that Irenaeus presents an important early witness to the Christian conception of creation *ex nihilo*, it is only relatively recently that scholarship has focused directly on this theme. Orbe was the first to address it in a dedicated study, published in 1978 and to this day available only in Spanish;<sup>59</sup> and J. Fantino elaborated on it in what seems almost exhaustive detail in his 1994

<sup>57</sup> See 2.10.4, as also by Theophilus, *Ad Autol.* 2.4.

<sup>58</sup> 2.10.4.

<sup>59</sup> A. Orbe, 'San Ireneo y la creación de la materia', *Gregorianum* 59.1 (1978), 71–127.

monograph on Irenaeus as trinitarian exegete.<sup>60</sup> The latter study, the fruit of nearly a decade of Irenaean research at the time of its publication, presents several important correctives of Orbe's reading, without eliminating the important position still held in the field by the Spanish scholar's work.<sup>61</sup> Still, given the relative paucity of actual textual deliberation on the notion of creation *ex nihilo* in the Irenaean corpus, and the great length and detail of Fantino's study, one wonders if there is much left to be said about the doctrine in Irenaean thought.<sup>62</sup> It will not be my intention in the present section again to establish the presence of a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in Irenaean theology via textual evidence. This project is today hardly necessary. My goal will be, rather, to set this doctrine into the larger context of creation and growth as Irenaeus reads them incarnationally, given shape through the apostolic testimony of redemption in the human Son.

*Creation ex nihilo in the broader theological milieu*

As with his reflections on God's motivation for creation, Irenaeus' reflections on the precise contours of creation *ex nihilo* were not formed in isolation from the varied considerations of those around him. Fantino has traced out the historical development of the doctrine from its roots in the Hebrew proclamation of Gen 1.1, with its implication that by 'heavens and earth' the text proclaims God's nature as creator of all things with no direct implications of a creation *ex nihilo*,<sup>63</sup> through to post-exilic reflections on the primordial 'chaos' of Gen 1.2 and the first textual proclamation of creation οὐκ ἔξ ὄντων in 2 Macc 7.28.<sup>64</sup> The

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<sup>60</sup> J. Fantino, *La théologie d'Irénée: lecture des Ecritures en réponse à l'exégèse gnostique—une approche trinitaire* (Paris: Editions du CERF, 1994) esp. pp. 265–337. These pages are a refinement of data first published by the same scholar two years earlier as J. Fantino, 'La création *ex nihilo* chez saint Irénée', *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 76.3 (1992), 421–42.

<sup>61</sup> See Fantino, *Théologie d'Irénée* 274, 317. While I am critical of Orbe's methods and conclusions in a number of places throughout the present volume (cf. pp. 13 n. 36; 48 n. 101; 80 n. 59; 118 n. 51; 121 n. 62), I do not wish to downplay the importance this scholar has had on the field of Irenaean studies. So great has his influence been that it is impossible in the present day to pursue serious research in the field without learning enough Spanish at least to read his works.

<sup>62</sup> Fantino would catalogue the relevant passages of direct consideration as *AH* 2.10.2, 2.10.4, 2.30.9, 5.3.2–3 and 5.18.1 (*Ibid.* 310–11). In what follows, I shall augment this listing.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 272.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 273.

same has been the focus of a more recent study on the antiquity of *ex nihilo* as a defined doctrine.<sup>65</sup> In antiquity, Philo had proclaimed a version of such a doctrine, as had Justin and Theophilus, though each with somewhat different characteristics than those found in Irenaeus.<sup>66</sup> While these authors might be said to agree with the basic proclamation of Maccabees, that God created 'out of nothing' or 'out of non-being', the differences between them lie in the perceptions of precisely what it was that he so created. Since the earliest days of reflection on the question, a conception had predominated (termed by Fantino the 'ancient' or 'Jewish' sense)<sup>67</sup> which understood creation 'out of nothing' to have been of the 'chaos' or 'formlessness' (*ἀκατασκεύαστος*) of Gen 1.2, of a 'primordial matter' or 'unformed substance' which then served as the basis for the creative activities of Gen 1.3 and following. It is certainly in this sense that Philo understood creation.<sup>68</sup> Justin is similarly explicit:

We have been taught that [God] in the beginning did of his goodness, for the sake of man, create all things out of unformed matter.<sup>69</sup>

Later in the same book, he links this 'unformed matter' to the formless void of Gen 1.2:

Moses, who [...] was the first prophet [...], spoke through the Spirit of prophecy, signifying how and from what materials God at first formed the world, saying, 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was invisible and unfurnished, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light", and it was so' [...] that by the Word

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<sup>65</sup> See J.C. O'Neill, 'How early is the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*?' *Journal of Theological Studies* 53.2 (2002), 449–65.

<sup>66</sup> For Philo, see *De. Op. Mu.* 8, 21–22, 29–32; cf. Runia, *Philo on creation* 152–53. For Justin, see *IApol.* 10; 59. For Theophilus, see *Ad Autol.* 1.7–8; 2.4; 2.10; 2.13.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Fantino, *Théologie d'Irénée* 272–75.

<sup>68</sup> See Philo, *De. Op. Mu.* 8–9, 21–22, where he refers to the 'passive object' of God's creative activities, specifying this as 'a material which did not possess any beauty of its own, but was able to become all things; of itself unordered, devoid of quality and lacking life, dissimilar, replete with inconsistency, maladjustment and disharmony'. Cf. Runia, *Philo on creation* 152–54, and 22 n. 49. O'Neill, 'How early?' 460) notes the reading of the *Ad Deo* 7–8 (preserved only in Armenian), that God 'found' the matter with which he was to work. Yet O'Neill's larger thesis is that such passages refer to the intelligible world of God's mind and not to the cosmos proper, and as such Philo ultimately does not require a belief in pre-existent matter (cf. 456–62).

<sup>69</sup> *IApol.* 10.

of God the whole world was made out of the substance spoken of before by Moses.<sup>70</sup>

This is not a fully worked out doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* proper, for Justin does not reflect explicitly the details of this creation being ‘out of nothing’. Nonetheless, it is clear that Justin does not believe in the eternal pre-existence of matter, for only God exists always, and all that is not God is thus by default, for Justin, God’s creation. As such, even the matter with which God works must be his handiwork.<sup>71</sup> It is thus only by implication, though a solid enough implication, that we can posit a true sense of *ex nihilo* in Justin. As regards his explicit remarks, these are made only in exegesis of what was done with the substance of matter after its formation. Here, Justin clearly believes that the formless substance of materiality was created by God prior to the formation of the actual cosmic elements of heaven, earth and the whole Genesis catalogue—a point that will be of significance later.<sup>72</sup> It is Justin’s point at *IApol.* 59 that the Greek philosophers, and specifically Plato, learned of this idea from the teachings of Moses and therefore their accuracy in the matter comes from an adherence, intentional or otherwise, to divinely revealed truth.<sup>73</sup> Irenaeus, too, was aware of Plato’s opinion ‘that the creator formed the world out of previously existing matter’,<sup>74</sup> but, unlike Justin, he brings this up not to extol but specifically to refute it.

Theophilus comes closer to what will be Irenaeus’ view and, unlike Justin, speaks explicitly of creation *ex nihilo*. That ‘God made all things

<sup>70</sup> *IApol.* 59. The connection between these passages is drawn by Fantino, *Théologie d’Irénée* 275.

<sup>71</sup> *IApol.* 59 suggests that God made the earth (cf. Gen 1.3f.) out of the ‘heaven and earth’ he created in Gen 1.1; cf. O’Neill, ‘How early?’ 454–55; A.W.F. Blunt, *The Apologies of Justin Martyr* (Cambridge: University Press, 1911) xix–xx.

<sup>72</sup> See also *Dial.* 5 for the specification of this formless matter as a creation of God, and not as a co-eternal entity (or a ‘second unbegotten’) as in Plato. This view is summarised in E. Osborn, *The emergence of Christian theology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993) 122–23. The concept is more thoroughly treated in E.R. Goodenough, *The theology of Justin Martyr: An investigation into the conceptions of early Christian literature and its Hellenistic and Judaistic influences* (1968 reprint of the Edition Jena 1923 edn.; Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1968) 206–11, which, despite its having been first published as far back as 1923, remains a key monograph on the apologist. See also Fantino, ‘Creation *ex nihilo*’, 425 for a specific comparison of Justin and Irenaeus in this regard.

<sup>73</sup> Beyond this, it must be said, Justin does not much venture. Goodenough’s characterisation of Justin as possessing a ‘mild speculative curiosity about the Creation’ (Goodenough, *Theology of Justin Martyr* 206) is apt, for he ceased to ponder—at least on paper—at the point when the refutation of his opponents’ views seemed coherent.

<sup>74</sup> 2.14.4. Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 32b–c. Rousseau notes a similar train of thought in Hippolytus, *Elenchos* i.19 (cf. SC 293: 257–8 n. 137.2).



out of nothing', he says, is the precise and exact teaching of the prophets, and that which these have always proclaimed.<sup>75</sup> This quality of generation is no less true of the cosmos than it is of each human person:

For first God created you out of nothing, and brought you into existence (for if your father was not, nor your mother, much more were you yourself at one time not in being), and formed you out of a small and moist substance, even out of the least drop, which at one time had itself no being; and God introduced you into this life.<sup>76</sup>

While human life has its beginning (according to conceptions then current) wholly in the substance of the male seed, nevertheless this seed itself is a created substance called into being by God from a state of non-existence, and this may be paralleled to God's creation of the cosmos entière. That God is able to create from nothing is, for Theophilus, the prime revelation of his power:

The power of God is shown in this, that, first of all, he created out of nothing, according to his will, the things that are made. 'For the things which are impossible with men are possible with God' (Lk 18.27).<sup>77</sup>

Such power is most dramatically manifested in the creation of the cosmos itself. Like Justin, Theophilus offers a reflection upon the opening verses of the scriptural narrative:

In order, therefore, that the living God might be known by his works, and that it might be known that by his Word God created the heavens and the earth and all that is therein, Moses said, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. Then, having spoken of their creation, he explains to us: 'And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the water'. Sacred scripture teaches this at the outset, to show that matter, from which God made and fashioned the world, was in some manner created, being produced by God.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> See *Ad Autol.* 2.10.

<sup>76</sup> *Ad Autol.* 1.8.

<sup>77</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.13. On the use of Lk 18.27 in early reflections on the notion of creation *ex nihilo*, see Fantino, *Théologie d'Irénée* 276–77. Cf. May, *Creatio ex Nihilo* 160–61 for further considerations on creation *ex nihilo* as demonstrative of God's power according to Theophilus. It must be said, however, that May's speculations on the character of the doctrine as expounded in Theophilus' lost works (pp. 157–159), go rather beyond the supportable evidence.

<sup>78</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.10.

Theophilus has gone further than Justin in setting out an explicit doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Nonetheless, his consideration does not delve further into the question of the character of the matter originally created. He still shares the belief that the initial creation was of a formless material substance later worked by God into the actual features of the cosmos. Theophilus remains, to this degree, within the context of Fantino's 'older sense' and does not yet represent 'la doctrine de la création *ex nihilo* au sens strict'.<sup>79</sup> His view is congruent, as Fantino has shown, with the polemical aims that prompted Theophilus' work: the Pagan thought against which he inveighed did not doubt the concept of a pre-extant matter from which the creator might fashion the universe, but insisted in most cases on the nature of that matter as co-eternal with God.<sup>80</sup> It is in response to such a claim that Theophilus emphasises the notion of the *ex nihilo* creation of such a material substance, 'since nothing was coeval with God',<sup>81</sup> and thus that which is created must, by necessity, come into being from a state of non-being. The creation of unformed matter and the 'creation' of the world, however, remain distinct activities. 'La production du monde est clairement distinguée de la création *sensu stricto*, c'est-à-dire de la production de la matière informe'.<sup>82</sup>

*Irenaeus' developments: creation ex nihilo clarified in Christ*

Does Irenaeus agree? The answer here must be 'in part'. He follows Theophilus in the assertion that God is the sole pre-eternal being and therefore all other entities, including the substance of matter itself, must come into existence from a state of non-existence, and so writes in the opening chapters of the *Epideixis*:

It is necessary that things that have come into being have received the origin of their being from some great cause; and the origin of all is God, for he himself was not made by anyone, but everything was made by

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<sup>79</sup> Fantino, *Théologie d'Irénée* 274. Terminologically, this is arguable. By the 'sens strict' of the doctrine, Fantino means the reader to understand its later orthodox definition, free from any notion of primordial, unformed matter, whether itself created *ex nihilo* or otherwise. Whether or not this ought to be the case is debatable, though I am inclined to agree with Fantino that the lack of a pre-existent material was integral to the final conception of creation *ex nihilo* that would prevail in Christian tradition.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 278.

<sup>81</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.10.

<sup>82</sup> Fantino, *Théologie d'Irénée* 277.

him [...] who made that which was not to be, who contains all and is alone uncontainable.<sup>83</sup>

This passage is itself no explicit definition of creation *ex nihilo*, but it provides Irenaeus' framework for the same. His explicit definition comes in the shape of his famous reference to the *Shepherd of Hermas*, which declares that God 'established and disposed all things, having caused that from what had no being (ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος), all things should come into existence'.<sup>84</sup> All things—and by this Irenaeus specifically includes the substance of matter itself<sup>85</sup>—have come into being by the creative power of God; there can be no other source.<sup>86</sup> More precisely, Irenaeus specifies that it is the will and the power of God which, in combination, form the substance of the created world.<sup>87</sup> Fantino is perhaps right to call attention to these statements which, taken in extraction, seem to present a puzzling confusion of the nature of created matter as having its essence in the divine will, and Irenaeus' thesis elsewhere that created beings and God are entirely distinct and different.<sup>88</sup> But his main point in such statements is critical. In stating that 'God's will is the substance of all things', he speaks not of a definition of ontological essence, but of formative generation by the one thus capable of redemption.<sup>89</sup>

For to attribute the substance of created things to the power and will of him who is God of all is credible, acceptable and coherent. [...] He called into being the substance of his creation, when previously it had no existence.<sup>90</sup>

This passage comes from one of Irenaeus' sustained invectives against aeonic cosmology, the ultimate focus of which is the unified work of

<sup>83</sup> *Epid.* 4.

<sup>84</sup> *Hermas*, Mand. 1 (SC 53: 144); quoted at *AH* 4.20.2, where the Latin translation of Irenaeus presents the passage from *Hermas* as: *Primo omnium crede quoniam unus est Deus, qui omnia constituit et consummavit et fecit ex eo quod non erat ut essent omnia, omnium capax et qui a nemine capiatur* (SC 100: 628). O'Neill argues that *Hermas* offers evidence of a 'creedal status' of creation *ex nihilo* at the time of that text's composition. This seems to overstate the situation; a belief widely held is not necessarily creedal (cf. O'Neill, 'How early?' 455, 63). See M.C. Steenberg, 'Scripture, *graphie*, and the status of *Hermas* in Irenaeus', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* (forthcoming, 2008).

<sup>85</sup> See 2.28.7.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Irenaeus' rejection of material creation as the product of the passions of Sophia Achamoth, 2.10.3.

<sup>87</sup> See 2.10.2, 2.30.9.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Fantino, *Théologie d'Irénée* 311–12.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. 2.30.9.

<sup>90</sup> 2.10.4 (SC 294: 90–1).

redemption revealed in Christ, rather than a cosmogony *per se*. Two paragraphs further on he makes this explicit: the chief testimony against alternative readings is that of the saviour Christ, who ‘acknowledges one Father and creator of the world, the fashioner of man’.<sup>91</sup> It is this same God’s will, his power, and not any passion, need, or necessity caused by a coeval entity, that enables the creation of the matter this Son takes up recapitulatively.

Thus far Irenaeus is, at least in his explicit terminology, in line with Theophilus as much as with Justin. But we have already seen Irenaeus explicitly reject the idea that ‘the creator formed the world out of previously existing matter’,<sup>92</sup> a notion which, carefully qualified to preclude the concept of *eternally existing* primordial matter, Theophilus himself directly adopts. For Irenaeus, this smacks too strongly of Valentinian influence; or if not of such contemporaries, at least of the older Stoics.<sup>93</sup> His argument at times is based in his larger suspicion of abstract cosmological speculation:

We shall not err if we affirm the same thing concerning the substance of matter—namely, that God produced it—for we have learned from the scriptures that God holds the supremacy over all things. But whence or in what manner he produced it, scripture has nowhere declared, nor is it for us to conjecture, forming from our own opinions endless speculations concerning God. Such knowledge should be left to God.<sup>94</sup>

This comment ought first and foremost remind us that Irenaeus’ interest in cosmogony and creation *ex nihilo* cannot be purely protological, for this strikes him as essentially a speculative waste of effort. Only in the redemptive witness of the incarnation does it have value. In this light the above comment needs to be qualified, for Irenaeus maintains a distinction between ‘material substance’ and the ‘substance of matter’ (*substantia materiae*). To speak of a primordial material substance, as Irenaeus’ Christian predecessors as well others had done, was to speak of an actual created entity, however substrate and formless, which subse-

<sup>91</sup> 2.11.1.

<sup>92</sup> 2.14.4, cf. p. 42, above.

<sup>93</sup> 2.14.4. Also mentioned by Irenaeus in this context are the pre-Socratic Anaxagoras (cf. Frg 1, Simplicius *in Phys* 155.26; Frg 4, *ibid.* 34.21 and esp. Frg 17, *ibid.* 163.20) and Empedocles (cf. Frg 17.1–13, Simplicius *in Phys* 158.1; Frg 21, *ibid.* 159.13; Frg 35, Simplicius *de caelo* 529.1). On the thought of these two sources, set helpfully into the context of larger pre-Socratic cosmological deliberations, see G.S. Kirk, J.S. Raven, and J.E. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History With A Selection of Texts* (Second Edition edn.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 280–321 and 52–84.

<sup>94</sup> 2.28.7 (SC 294: 284–5). Cf. Orbe, ‘Creación de la materia’, 72.

quently constituted the true essence of 'creation'. All to come thereafter is more properly a 'formation' than a 'creation'.<sup>95</sup> This is not implied (or not necessarily implied) in the discussion of the 'substance of matter', which Irenaeus presents as the divinely crafted essence of created entities, rather than a self-extant substance from which they are formed. This distinction is evident in his discussion at 2.10.2:

That they ['the heretics'] may be seen as capable of informing us as to whence comes the substance of matter, while they do not believe that God, of his pleasure and in the exercise of his own will and power, formed all things from nothing (in order that these things should have an existence), they have collected many vain discourses.<sup>96</sup>

Here an especially careful reading of the text is necessary. God forms all *things* (*omnia fecit*) 'out of what did not previously exist'. Irenaeus is speaking specifically of the individual entities present in the physical cosmos, the actual beings and physical objects present in the universe.<sup>97</sup> That these 'things' created by God are, indeed, actual entities of an individual nature and not a material substratum, is made clear midway through 2.28.7, the passage we have quoted above. Here the 'things' made by God are examined in light of those that fall and those that remain faithful to their maker, and it is with respect to these same beings that Irenaeus' comment on the creation of the 'substance of their matter' is made.<sup>98</sup> There is no question but that what are created are the actual entities (*πράγματα*), and not a material fabric.<sup>99</sup> And this is tied into Irenaeus' incarnational focus by the positioning of such a proclamation in the context of a comment on the Son's redemptive nature, preambulatory to a discussion on the soul and body redeemed in the incarnation, and just after one of his most famous single statements on

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<sup>95</sup> A distinction in functional terminology that ps-Justin would attribute to Plato; see *H.ad.Gr.* 22.

<sup>96</sup> SC 294: 88–9.

<sup>97</sup> Also in the spiritual realms, as later in the chapter, though the notion of materiality clearly does not apply in that context.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Meijering, 'God cosmos history', 262, for a contrasting view which equates the 'substance of creation' precisely to matter itself. Meijering refers here to *AH* 5.36.1, Irenaeus' explanation of the statement in 1 Cor 7.31, that the 'fashion of the world' (*τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου*) will pass away, as referring neither to the *ὑπόστασις* nor the *οὐσία*, but to the fallen state of existence of these. In the context of distinguishing between the 'form' and the 'essence' of creation, with regard to what shall continue in the eschaton, Meijering's comment holds true; but in Irenaeus' protological discussions such as are of address here, the distinction presently offered better fits the context of Irenaeus' vocabulary.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. a similar discussion one generation later in Origen, *De principiis* 4.4.6–8.

recapitulative soteriology (2.22.3–4). In this anthropological context, each human nature is created *ex nihilo*, since each is the direct handiwork of the creator, thus directly the object of the redeemer's perfection of creation.

This represents a substantial development in the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* as expressed in the early Christian world. For God to create out of nothing is for him to create the actual, individualised entities of the cosmos from a state of non-existence. It is specifically to say that the substance of the being of each existing entity has been called into existence from a state of nothingness, of non-being. There can be no question of a primordial matter: such would exactly preclude the type of statements Irenaeus is making. Rather, as in the text already once mentioned above,

It is necessary that all *things* that have come into being have received the origin of their being from some great cause; and the origin of all is God, for he himself was not made by anyone, but every *thing* was made by him.<sup>100</sup>

Each being has an origin, for Irenaeus, in the creative act wrought by God. This is significant inasmuch as Christ's unique humanness is thus cosmic: he is able to become 'Adam', and thus all humanity in the form of each human person, inasmuch as each human person *is* 'Adam', since each is directly wrought by God. There are as many unique creations *ex nihilo* as there are persons brought into existence; the creation of 'materiality' cannot be said to have been a one-off event at the start of the cosmic genesis, with the product of which God then worked in moulding the accidentals of the universe.<sup>101</sup> Fundamentally, such a conception robs Christ of the power to be an infant for all infants, a youth for all youths, an adult for adults, as Irenaeus has stated a few paragraphs before. *Unique* creation *ex nihilo* establishes the cosmic connection of the incarnate Christ to each created being, rather than simply to a generic substance somehow underlying all.

Irenaeus' perception of creation *ex nihilo* is thus an extension of his basic insistence on the absolute goodness and power of God expressed

<sup>100</sup> *Epid.* 4, emphasis mine.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Orbe, 'Creación de la materia', 83–87 for a discussion on the demiurgic activities of God in a manner that substantially confuses this issue. Orbe himself seems unclear as to the precise relationship between the 'substance of matter' and the actual 'beings' or 'things' of the cosmos.

intentionally as creative economy, the nature of which has its clarification in incarnational redemption. Only if God truly creates *from nothing* is his creation not only formative but generative, and only thus can his will—the will that is Christ the Word of the Father—genuinely be said to be the substance of all created reality. Only a God who is able to create *ex nihilo*, and not according to human manners of formation, demonstrates the absolute power associated with his ultimate goodness—and thus the ability to realise and actualise the self-communication that goodness implies.<sup>102</sup> And further, only in a creation of beings *as beings* does the significance of Christ's incarnation have anthropological bearing in a direct manner on each and every living person. Creation *ex nihilo* of concrete *pragmata*, rather than generic substances of being, grounds Christ's consummation of 'Adam' in a cosmically significant manner.

These two foundation stones of Irenaeus' approach to creation, namely God's self-communicating goodness (revealed through a recapitulative redemption as the motivation for creation) and cosmic power (demonstrated through the creation from nothing), are thus expressly economical considerations, demonstrating and establishing protology as part of a larger economy whose character is consistently revealed in the scriptural text explored through the testimony of the incarnation. As such, this protology must reciprocally clarify the reality of the economy in its entirety, centred in this incarnation. To this end the third foundational element in Irenaeus' reading comes into view: the recapitulative relationship of beginnings to ends, of protology and eschatology.

#### CHILIASM: READING THE BEGINNING THROUGH THE END AND THE END THROUGH THE BEGINNING

While a chiliastic eschatology may at first seem to have little to do with an approach to protology, in the works of Irenaeus it is clear that these are perceived as two aspects to a single story. His chiliastic reflections are in their own right expansive, comprising the better part of *Adversus haereses* 5, though are found also in passages of shorter length but equal

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<sup>102</sup> A similar reading of Irenaeus' emphasis on *ex nihilo* as Benvivegna offers for Theophilus: see J. Benvivegna, 'A Christianity without Christ by Theophilus of Antioch', *Studia Patristica* 13 (1971), 109–10. Cf. Meijering, 'Irenaeus' Relation to Philosophy', 224.

potency throughout the corpus as a whole, and almost always in discussions that have distinct protological elements.

The question of chiliasm itself is one that has long plagued Irenaean scholars. Not only does the theme comprise one of the relatively few points at which Irenaeus' doctrine departs in a notable way from what would be approved in later councils of the ecumenical Church, but it in fact represents a critical component of his overall economic vision, and thus has, for some, thrown into question the validity of his theological discernment in other areas.<sup>103</sup> It has become usual in Irenaean scholarship to treat *AH* 1.1–5.24 (and also usually 5.36) as the central body of the his thought, approaching 5.25–35 as a sort of 'chiliastic appendage' that may well have been an afterthought on Irenaeus' part, and which many readers would happily do without. In any case, treatment given to the chiliastic discussions of the latter half of *AH* 5 is most often brief, critical, and has a tendency to separate this line of thought from the larger scheme of Irenaean doctrine.<sup>104</sup>

This is, however, to underestimate the power that the chiliastic conception, or at least Irenaeus' modified version of it, has over his entire grasp of the economy, reaching back as far as the creation of the cosmos and especially of humankind. It is precisely because the Son is both creator and redeemer, the alpha and omega, the foundation and the perfection of creation, that Irenaeus' chiliasm and his protology are inextricably woven together, each influencing the other. He may rightly be considered a theologian of economy, of history, as so many have termed him; but his is history read Christocentrically—not simply taking Christ to be significant to all phases of history, but to be in his person the grounding of all history. In the chapters to follow, which shall treat in specific detail Irenaeus' perception of creation, we shall see time and again that a chiliastic eschatology, with Christ consummating the beginnings in their renewal at the 'end', dictates the manner of his interpretation, and that Irenaeus more than once takes up seemingly non-eschatological passages from the scriptures, and in particular Genesis, as relating directly to the millennial kingdom. Regrettably, past scholar-

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<sup>103</sup> See e.g. E. Schwartz, 'Johannes und Kerinthos', *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 15 (1914), 210–11; D'alès, 'Doctrine de la récapitulation', 199; A. Benoît, *Saint Irénée; introduction à l'étude de sa théologie* ([1. éd.] edn., Strasbourg, Université Faculté de théologie protestante. Études d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses, no. 52; Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1960) 195. Cf. Smith, 'Chiliasm and recapitulation', 314–15.

<sup>104</sup> This was the basic approach of Schwartz, 'Johannes und Kerinthos', 210–19.



ship on Irenaeus has, by and large, failed to recognise the need for such contextualisation of Irenaeus' cosmological reflections, leading to the division of his thought into the false pro- and non-chiliasmatic categories previously mentioned.

C.R. Smith's 1994 study on chiliasm and recapitulation in Irenaeus has gone some distance to breaking this trend, and ought to be considered as among the more important articles in the field of Irenaean studies produced during the last fifteen years.<sup>105</sup> It is his overarching thesis that Irenaeus presents

an insistence on the essential harmony of the true soteriological task, that of bringing humanity from its Edenic state of infancy to the true maturity of God-likeness<sup>106</sup>

and that in this project, in order that the earth may be 'repristinized' and all things brought to their intended fulfilment, Irenaeus 'qualifies and even transforms the main lines of the chiliasmatic tradition in radical ways'.<sup>107</sup> This notion of a qualified or transformed chiliasm is not always appreciated by other scholars. E. Ferguson, writing only four years before Smith, comments in an article on Barnabas that Irenaeus presents the first full exposition of a standard chiliasmatic scheme,<sup>108</sup> and later speaks of the 'chiliasmatic tradition' running through Justin, Irenaeus and Hippolytus.<sup>109</sup> Such a comment betrays a lack of close scrutiny as to the details of millenarian reflection in these authors, which are in fact diverse and represent not a single, defined 'chiliasmatic tradition', but rather multiple traditions in various stages of development, taken up by these authors in differing degrees and for different ends. Such scrutiny can, on the other hand, be found in Daniélou's extensive treatment of chiliasm in early 'Jewish Christianity', in which Irenaeus figures prominently and which is fairer to the uniqueness of his thought as a mixture of previous traditions with interpretive twists and turns of his own.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> See Smith, 'Chiliasm and recapitulation', 313–31.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>108</sup> E. Ferguson, 'Was Barnabas a Chiliast? An Example of Hellenistic Number Symbolism in *Barnabas* and Clement of Alexandria', in D.L. Balch, E. Ferguson, and W.A. Meeke (eds.), *Greeks, Romans, and Christians—Essays in honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 158.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* 165.

<sup>110</sup> See J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, tr. J.A. Baker (The Development of Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea, 1; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964) 377–404. Daniélou does, however, tend towards a maintenance of the

But it remains only Smith who offers a sustained effort at discovering the integral use Irenaeus makes of chiliastic perceptions of the eschaton in the larger body of his thought, attempting to associate the seemingly disjointed chiliastic references of *Adversus haereses* 5 with all aspects of Irenaeus' doctrine, especially recapitulation.

How is it that chiliastic references inform Irenaeus' understanding of creation? We have already noted the connected manner in which he considers the things of the beginning and the things of the end in a kind of presupposed aesthetic parallelism common to writers of his age (e.g. Origen's insistence that 'the ends must be like the beginnings'). But his Christological focus more clearly defines the contours of this relationship, informing Irenaeus' overall sense of economy and progress. That there is a definable, discernible *telos* toward which the creation is moving, establishes, on the one hand, the purposefulness of creation as focused and coherently aimed toward a definable goal—thus the means by which Irenaeus can, as we have seen, ground his reflections on the motivation for the cosmogony in the salvation wrought by Christ. And on the other hand, such a view establishes the specific function and value of each particular element of creation, such that through its uniqueness the larger goal of growth into this eschatological *telos* is advanced. Each element of creation thus has a purpose and place in an economy designed to foster specific ends, and a knowledge of those ends discloses the true character of creation itself.

Similarly, that creation has a *telos* suggests that it is an entity in motion, in advancement. Creation is not stagnant, but ever maturing and advancing towards that *telos* which since the genesis has been its intended point of fulfilment, and which is fully revealed in the incarnate Christ's promise of an eternal kingdom. This theme of growth is widely appreciated in Irenaeus' studies, though its connection to the author's chiliasm has received less attention. Irenaeus follows others of the so-called Asiatic chiliastic tradition in asserting a relationship between the timing or chronology of the Genesis creation narrative (read through the interpretive lens of Apoc. 19.11–21.27) and the chronology of the whole economy. He stops short of ever pronouncing an actual thou-

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distinction between Irenaeus' chiliastic chapters and the larger body of his theology, admitting only that 'It was primarily in order to combat [...] Gnostic exegesis, and only secondarily to defend Asiatic millenarianism, that Irenaeus devoted to the question those chapters of the *Adversus haereses* in which he recounts and confirms the Asiatic tradition of millenarianism' (p. 386).

sand-year duration to the earthly kingdom (and for this reason Smith rightly declares that Irenaeus ‘cannot be styled a “millennialist” or “chiliast” in the strict [literal] sense’),<sup>111</sup> but takes the general notion of ages and years to define eras of growth related to the six days of creation in Gen 1–2, finding their pinnacle in the cosmic ‘Sabbath’ in which the economy, like God after the work of genesis, will behold its fulfilment and rest in its perfection. It is this cosmic Sabbath for which Christ’s incarnate life and offering were the final preparation:

Christ came to his passion in order to proclaim to Abraham and those with him the good news of the inauguration of their inheritance. Thus he gave thanks over the cup and drank [...]. He will renew the inheritance of the earth and restore the mystery of the glory of the sons of God [...]: the inheritance of the earth in which the new fruit of the vine is drunk [...] for the flesh that rises anew is the one that receives this new cup.<sup>112</sup>

This passage might well be taken as a summary of Irenaeus’ chiliastic vision. The earth will be renewed, purified and perfected in the redemption wrought by the incarnate Son. In all the detail into which Irenaeus will go in expanding on this basic premise, he will never wander far from it. It is the salvific mission of the incarnate Christ to ‘renew the inheritance of the earth’, made for Adam and Eve at the outset, yet lost as an inheritance through the tragedy of sin. Irenaeus’ presentation in the present passage shows the degree to which his millennial doctrine is interwoven with his understanding of all eras of the economy: in this paragraph alone it is connected to the historical ‘present’ in the passion of Christ; to the future era ‘in which the new fruit of the vine’ shall be drunk (i.e. the eschaton); and to the past through a connection to the ‘inauguration of the inheritance of Abraham’. Even in God’s dealings with the patriarch the future chiliastic kingdom is foretold—a message not fully perceived until Christ pronounces that children of Abraham can be called up from the stones God has fashioned (cf. Matt 3.9). It is the reality of this coming kingdom that Irenaeus sees as informing the manner of divine interaction and revelation given to Abraham in times long past. Such is the case also with Isaias, whom Irenaeus quotes as,

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<sup>111</sup> Smith, ‘Chiliasm and recapitulation’, 315. Cf. Justin, *Dial.* 30, where a thousand-year duration is made explicit, expounded at *Dial.* 81 by references to and quotations from Is 65.17–25; Ps 90.4; 2 Pe 3.8 (where a day is defined as 1,000 years); Apoc 20.4–5 (Christ shall dwell 1,000 years); and Lk 20.35.

<sup>112</sup> 5.33.1 (SC 153: 404–7).

together with Ezekiel, among the chief proclaimants of the chiliastic kingdom in the old covenant:

When prophesying of these times, therefore, Isaias says: ‘The wolf shall feed together with the lamb, and the leopard shall take his rest with the kid; the calf also, and the bull and the lion shall eat together; and a young boy shall lead them. The ox and the bear shall feed together, and their young ones shall be together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The young boy shall thrust his hand into the den of asps, into the nest also of the adder’s brood; and they shall do no harm, nor have power to hurt anything in my holy mountain’ (Is 11.6–9). And in recapitulation he says again, ‘Wolves and lambs shall then browse together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the serpent earth as if it were bread; and they shall neither hurt nor annoy anything in my holy mountain, saith the Lord’ (Is 65.25).<sup>113</sup>

Irenaeus clearly reads these classic millennial verses as indicating the future kingdom, and like Papias before him interprets Isaias as implying an earthly kingdom, one of this same earth, in which creation reaches new heights of harmony and perfection.<sup>114</sup> Emphasis on this earthly reality to the millennial kingdom—that it will be a restoration and renewal of the present earth and not a fecund new material reality—seems in fact to have entered into the Asiatic tradition through Papias and, to some degree, Irenaeus, for there is little evidence of its place in that tradition previous to these writers.<sup>115</sup> It soon becomes widespread: Methodius of Olympus takes it up, as do others, and it is largely due to a later exaggeration of this concept that chiliasm as whole would be thrown into suspicion and eventually condemned by conciliar mandate.<sup>116</sup> But for Irenaeus, the importance of this fact of earthly renewal, and not recreation, is grounded not in a desire for future material fecundity, but in the cosmic significance of Christ, who is human person yet nonetheless *creator*, and the one who at the first wrought the earth from nothing. In an important passage later in *Adversus haereses* 5 he writes:

<sup>113</sup> 5.33.4 (SC 153: 418–9); cf. 5.34.1.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Eusebius’ account of Papias at *HE* 3.39.11, 12. Irenaeus refers to him at *AH* 5.33.4. See also D’alès, ‘Doctrine de la récapitulation’, 187.

<sup>115</sup> See Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity* 382.

<sup>116</sup> On Methodius’ chiliastic vision, see *Ibid.* 382–3; cf. Methodius, *Conv.* 9.5. On the suspicion of chiliasm in its materialistic emphasis, see e.g. *1 Enoch* 10.17 on sexual license in the eschaton, and the same in Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 7.24. Daniélou gives general treatment to this theme: Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity* 390–96. We should note that Methodius deliberately combats the excesses to which others of his era were to take this materialistic conception of the millennium.

Neither is the substance nor the material of the creation annihilated (for faithful and true is he who established it), but 'the fashion (*figura*) of the world shall pass away' (cf. 1 Cor 7.31); that is, those things among which transgression has occurred, since man has grown old in them. [...] But when this fashion of things passes away, and man has been renewed and strengthened for incorruptibility, so as to preclude the possibility of becoming old, there shall be a new heaven and a new earth.<sup>117</sup>

Or, as he had expressed the idea a few chapters earlier:

The kingdom of the just [...] is the beginning of imperishability, by means of which kingdom those who are worthy gradually become accustomed to receive God. [...] It is necessary that the just, when they rise at the Lord's appearance, first receive the inheritance, promised by God to the forefathers, in this creation which is being renewed, and to reign in it. After that will be the judgement of all men. For it is just that they receive the fruits of their suffering in the creation in which they laboured [...], to be brought to life in the creation in which they were killed for the sake of God; and to reign in the creation in which they endured servitude. [...] It is proper that the creation itself, after being restored to its pristine state, be of unhindered service to the just.<sup>118</sup>

The chiliastic kingdom is perceived not as a destruction of the current economy and initiation of a new, but the fulfilment, restoration and renewal of that which God originally began in creating 'the heavens and the earth' (Gen 1.1). The eschaton is explored in a relationship of continuity with present reality and past economy. The history begun *ex nihilo* of God's goodness and power is one and the same with that of which chiliastic reflections speak eschatologically, precisely since it is one and the same Christ who works the first and the second. Descriptions of the fecundity of the earth are taken as indications of the state in which the earth was always meant to exist, but has not due to the ravishments of sin. Still, Irenaeus can see in those qualities the full intention of the divine will in creation: when he speaks at 5.33.4 of the characteristics of the wheat which shall feed lions in the kingdom ('for if that animal, the lion, shall feed on straw, of what quality must be the wheat whose straw shall serve as suitable food for lions!'), he gleams a picture both of what was intended in the creation of plants in Gen 1.11–12 and animals in

<sup>117</sup> 5.36.1 (SC 153: 452–5).

<sup>118</sup> 5.32.1 (SC 153: 396–9); cf. 5.35.2.

Gen 1.24–25, even as much as he sees there a vision of the peace and order granted by Christ.<sup>119</sup>

Irenaeus' emphasis on the renewal of the earth is not only of cosmological significance: we have already seen him relate the idea in an anthropological sense to the promise given to Abraham (cf. 5.33.1). In Irenaeus' view, God's promise to the patriarchs requires such restoration for its fulfilment, a point he makes at *AH* 5.32.1 by connecting the renewed kingdom directly with 'the inheritance which God promised to the fathers'.<sup>120</sup> As such, Irenaeus establishes his chiliasm as not only cosmic, but also anthropic in its scope: it is not the earth alone that will find fulfilment in the kingdom, but so too the human person; and by means of such interrelation Irenaeus can find in the end-times both exposition and definition of the creation of humanity as recorded in the scriptures. Here the incarnational focus of Irenaeus' reading is even more apparent: the ends of humanity bear on its beginnings because the human race is, from beginning to end, bound up in the image of the incarnate Son.

Irenaeus engages most explicitly in this manner of exegesis at 5.36.3, the closing passage of his magnum opus, where he declares that the human person, through the increase and growth provided in the kingdom, shall thus 'be made after the image and likeness of God'. His ultimate eschatological profession is tied directly to the anthropogenic narrative of Gen 1.26–27.<sup>121</sup> The 'image and likeness' into which humanity was created is fulfilled and brought to full fruition in the kingdom, and thus through the imagery of the kingdom the nature and character of that image and likeness can be determined. Importantly, Irenaeus gleans from this imagery the specific notion that the 'image and likeness' is eschatologically orientated, that humanity is to be 'disciplined for imperishability' as the image comes to be realised through humanity's increased receptivity to the Father's glory. The nature of humanity as created in the image and likeness is thus prevented, through Irenaeus' chiliastic emphasis, from being read as a static or completed reality: bearing God's image and living in his likeness is as dynamic as the his-

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<sup>119</sup> For Irenaeus' reading of these events, including the relevance of chiliasm to his reading, see below p. 93.

<sup>120</sup> See A. Houssiau, *La christologie de saint Irénée* (Louvain: Publications universitaires de Louvain, 1955) 129–34; cf. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity* 287.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. also *Epid.* 97.

tory leading to the millennial kingdom. So will Irenaeus write, in a commentary on John's description of the new Jerusalem in Apoc 21.1–4, together with Isaias' description of the same in Is 65.17–18:

This is God's tabernacle, in which God dwells (*tabernaculum*) together with men. The image of this Jerusalem is that Jerusalem on the former earth, in which the righteous are disciplined beforehand for imperishability, and prepared for salvation [...]. As man truly rises [from the dead], so also is he truly disciplined beforehand for imperishability and will grow and flourish in the times of the [millennial] kingdom, that he might become capable of receiving the Father's glory. Then, when all things have been renewed, he will in truth dwell in the city of God.<sup>122</sup>

Irenaeus here draws together multiple implications from a general reflection on the new Jerusalem. First, the future Jerusalem is connected to that known in the present life: 'the image of this [future] Jerusalem is that Jerusalem on the former [i.e. present] earth'.<sup>123</sup> More specifically, and in second place, the connection is one of functionality, for the Jerusalem of this world is one 'in which the righteous are disciplined beforehand for imperishability' and 'prepared for salvation'. Thus, says Irenaeus, the new Jerusalem will be of similar function, gradually rendering the human person 'capable of receiving the Father's glory'.<sup>124</sup> Thirdly, the common function of both the old and new Jerusalem is to foster growth toward a time when humankind shall be fully renewed, together with all things, thus to dwell in the 'city of God', a place of full union with the Father's glory.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>122</sup> 5.35.2 (SC 153: 448–51).

<sup>123</sup> It should be noted that Irenaeus demonstrates here a lack of terminological consistency in his reference to the 'old' and 'new' earth as implied by Apoc 21.1. Such inconsistency recurs throughout his discussions on the theme. Yet Irenaeus makes clear, in a passage we have already addressed (5.36.1, see above) that the 'new earth' refers to a newness of form (i.e. restoration, renewal), and not a new creation *ex nihilo*.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Irenaeus' discussion of the earthly Jerusalem in 4.1.1–3: it is here that he fully draws out his understanding of the city as established not for its own sake, but for the purpose of causing humankind to 'come to maturity', just as a vine does its fruit. Once the fruit has come to maturity, the vine itself—and thus the earthly Jerusalem—is no longer required (thus Irenaeus' defends the city's title as given by Christ in Mt 5.35, 'City of the Great King', despite its subsequent destruction in AD 70 and razing in 135). Irenaeus goes on to relate the destruction of Jerusalem to Paul's 'the fashion of the earth must pass away' (1 Cor 7.31), which we have already seen that he shall employ at 5.36.1 for specifically chiliastic ends.

<sup>125</sup> See R. Tremblay, *La manifestation et la vision de Dieu selon saint Irénée de Lyon* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1978) 126–28, 50–52; cf. Houssiau, *Christologie* 133–36.

This is a telling example of the manner in which Irenaeus integrates his chiliastic vision with anthropological and cosmological considerations. The character of the new Jerusalem foretold by John and Isaias reveals the nature of the human person formed from the dust. The attributes of the new earth proclaimed in the Apocalypse shed light on the attributes of the earth whose creation is recounted in the Genesis narrative. And the dynamic, maturing character of the divine economy as a whole, of which we see only the first moments in the scriptural chronicle of creation, is given form and scope through the images of fulfillment, renewal and growth suggested by the future kingdom revealed in Christ.

The created earth is moving towards a divinely appointed end, which in Christ its creator and redeemer is one with the blessedness of its beginning: this is the crux and purpose of Irenaeus' chiliastic focus. This end is the perfection of humanity, which the creator becomes human to ensure.<sup>126</sup> Irenaeus finds inspiration for connecting this perfection and the character of the kingdom in the eschatological imagery of Jeremiah 31, which speaks in rich and materialistic terms of the future era:

They shall come and sing in the height of Sion [...] for wheat and new wine and oil, for the young of the flock and the herd [...] then shall the virgins rejoice and dance, and the young men and the old together [...] I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and I will make them rejoice rather than sorrow.<sup>127</sup>

Irenaeus reads these words as a description of the 'feasting of the creation' in the future kingdom—a feast at which God himself will preside.<sup>128</sup> In such scriptural passages he finds the source from which he allows a certain level of materialistic imagery to work its way into his own views (see, e.g., 5.35.1 on earthly companionship with the spiritual beings), though he never extends such imagery to the level of physical and even carnal speculations that would become current in future generations.<sup>129</sup> We may concur with Smith when he observes that 'the period of the restored earthly paradise is not, for [Irenaeus], a time whose essential purpose is to reward the faithful for their sufferings [...] but the focus is on preparation for future glory even more than on rec-

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<sup>126</sup> See above, pp. 7, 60.

<sup>127</sup> From Jer 31.12–14, quoted by Irenaeus at *AH* 5.34.3.

<sup>128</sup> See 5.34.3.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. above, n. 116.



ompense for past sacrifices'.<sup>130</sup> Thus does Irenaeus take up at *AH* 5.34.4 Isaias' descriptions of the new Jerusalem (cf. Is 32.1, 54.11–14, 65.18–23), as a description of those particular characteristics (beautiful paving, crystal gates, extreme longevity, etc.) by which humanity will be further 'disciplined for perfection'. The notion of material reward is subordinate to the concept of increased material gifts granted for further growth and perfection. This seems to be Irenaeus' implication in his exegesis of 3 Ki 19.11–12 (Elias' encounter with the 'still, small voice'), which appears in an otherwise non-chilistic passage from the *Adversus haereses*. The fact that the prophet does not see God, but hears him in a scarcely audible voice, suggests that

the mild and peaceful repose of his kingdom was thereby indicated. For, after the wind which rends the mountains, and after the earthquake and the fire, come the tranquil and peaceful times of his kingdom, in which the Spirit of God does, with all tranquillity, vivify and increase humankind.<sup>131</sup>

Irenaeus goes on immediately to paraphrase Ezekiel's vision of God and the cherubim (cf. Ez 1–2), drawing this reflection into a definitively apocalyptic context. The peace of the end, the peace of the millennial kingdom, is a peace given not merely as a reward for righteousness, but as a gift enabling the continued and more personalised work of the Spirit. And that the work of the Spirit may be individually rendered to each in accord with his or her receptive potential, Irenaeus goes so far as to declare that there are gradations (*gradus modi*) in the arrangement of persons in the kingdom: one place for those who produce an hundred fold, another for those who produce sixty, and so on.<sup>132</sup> But even here, in what seems a declaration of differing rewards for different levels of righteousness, Irenaeus makes clear that these gradations, while based on the past character of personal lives, are so arranged

that [the human persons] advance through the steps of this nature; that they ascend through the Spirit to the Son, and through the Son to the Father, and that in due time the Son will yield up his work to the Father [...] and the righteous man who is upon the earth shall then forget to die.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Smith, 'Chiliasm and recapitulation', 318.

<sup>131</sup> 4.20.10 (SC 100: 458–9).

<sup>132</sup> See 5.36.1–2.

<sup>133</sup> 5.36.2 (SC 153: 460–1).

The gradations of the millennial kingdom are designed to foster growth from one level to the next, such that all humankind progresses through the various stages of proximity to God as they are made able, until at last the Son commits the whole of creation to the Father.

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In the context of a study on Irenaeus' perception of creation we have the following to glean from his chiliastic eschatology, which has not traditionally been integrated coherently with his protology: First, that the purposefulness of God's creative task is aimed directly at the *telos* of human and cosmic perfection described in the revealed images of the millennial kingdom, as in Jeremias, Isaias, Ezekiel and John's Apocalypse. Second, that this imagery of the kingdom declares and gives evidence of a process of maturation, refinement and development that Irenaeus will read back into the whole of his theological consideration, and most especially his exegesis of the biblical creation narratives, where this process of growth is seen to begin. Third, that Irenaeus' persistent connection of protology and eschatology serves him 'bi-directionally'. As much as he gleans images of the eschaton from the Old Testament prophets as well as Genesis (*vis-à-vis* the defeat of the Edenic serpent in the kingdom; the character of the Antichrist as a continuation of the serpent at the tree; etc.), so does Irenaeus' chiliasm inform his reading of creation itself, through the retrospective testimony of the incarnation. The connection of symbolism and meaning works both ways. This latter point shall become clearer in the chapters to follow, where Irenaeus' exposition of the creation saga is routinely connected to the chiliastic system we have described above.

One thus observes that the three interpretive foundations upon which Irenaeus' approach to creation rests—its motivation in God's self-expressive goodness, its formation solely of his power *ex nihilo*, and its initiation of a coherent, unified economy that shall advance to the eschaton—provide him with a substantial framework upon which to build his reading of the creation narrative proper, each point grounded squarely in the testimony of the incarnation. It is the incarnate life of the Son that clarifies the Father's motivation in creation, the nature of creation *ex nihilo* in cosmic yet personal, soteriological terms, and the interconnection of beginnings and ends. These themes shall resound throughout his reading of creation and, as we shall see in the next chapter, substantially inform the emphasis on Father, Son and Spirit that he shall use to describe the creative actions of God in fashioning the cosmos.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ‘THE WORK OF HIS HANDS’: THE CREATION OF THE COSMOS

With the formation of the cosmos it is possible to begin an examination of Irenaeus’ reading of the creation saga itself. His approach to the scriptural texts that underlie it always assumes the interpretive framework treated in the previous chapter, namely, the Christocentric motivation for creation in God’s eternal and generative goodness, and creation worked from this goodness as having occurred *ex nihilo* as a real and genuine creation establishing Christ as its centre, and not a mere formation or ordering. The overarching vision of a chiliastic eschatology then sets the tenor of Irenaeus’ investigation: the ends and the beginnings are intimately interwoven, revelatory one of the other through direct typologies and correlations bound up in the incarnate Son.<sup>1</sup> With these two initial facts—God’s goodness and creation *ex nihilo*—and this larger chiliastic framework as the lens through which he will focus his examination, Irenaeus is able to reflect upon the protological narrative with considerable depth of meaning.

The text of Genesis 1–11, while hardly the sole testimony to creation contained in the scriptures, nonetheless captures Irenaeus’ interest inasmuch as its elements proved critical in so many of his contemporaries’ cosmogonic systems. The narrative, which he takes up in bits and pieces throughout his works, itself begins with the formation of the cosmos, and Irenaeus looks back to this great cosmic event as the initiating movement of the economy fulfilled in the incarnate Christ (it is notable that Genesis itself does not consider God’s activities prior to the cosmogony, and Irenaeus is insistent—certainly in reaction to Valentinian speculation—that not to follow the text’s example is to depart from scriptural authenticity).<sup>2</sup> The encounter with the incarnate redeemer, who redeems in and by his creation, gives meaning to the first moments of cosmic genesis, and Irenaeus’ reading of Gen 1.1–2.3—a text in heavy

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<sup>1</sup> On this tendency toward a unitive reading of ends and beginnings in Irenaeus, see Daley, *Hope* 28–29.

<sup>2</sup> So his argumentation at 2.27.2, 3.

use in the second century—forms the basis of a cosmological consideration grounded in this testimony. Our subject in the present chapter is Irenaeus' understanding of the cosmogony, specifically as that understanding is influenced and shaped by scriptural material taken up in response to counter-usage amongst other groups. The creation of the human person will not be dealt with specifically here, but addressed in the subsequent chapter. In the present, the creation of humanity will be considered as one among the diverse elements of the cosmos as a whole, yet that which comes most directly to bear on the nature of creation as pointing toward the incarnation.

#### 'TRINITY'? CREATION AS AN ACT OF FATHER, SON AND SPIRIT

As much as Irenaeus is certain that God's goodness is the motivation for the instigation of the creative process, as unequivocally as he asserts the creation *ex nihilo* and denies a formless material substratum that God manipulated, so we have seen him already ground this insistence in the incarnate life of the Son that is the framework for his chiliastic eschatology. But Irenaeus goes beyond this, directly stating that the whole movement and scope of creation is the unified work of Father, Son and Spirit. His confession of Christ raised to the Father by the Spirit, who thus is the 'cosmic Christ' inasmuch as he raises with himself the cosmos of his formation, is the bedrock of his whole theological vision, and this tri-personal reality stands as the foundation on which rest Irenaeus' views regarding every aspect of Christian theology. Baptism, redemption, divinisation, resurrection, eternal life—all are triune events wrought in a cosmos formed and fashioned by that this triad. But unlike the three interpretive themes treated in the previous chapter, which Irenaeus brings to the creation saga more than gleans directly from it (since nowhere do the protological texts of scripture explicitly define a chiliastic eschaton, a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, etc.), the doctrine of creation as an act of these three is understood by Irenaeus as proclaimed directly in the pages of the narrative. Gen 1.1–4, together with 1.26 and 27, provide Irenaeus with the textual evidence for his insistence that the Father, Son and Spirit, together and in unified act created the universe, though these verses require careful consideration and qualification in order to retain what Irenaeus considers their proper meaning (it was these same verses, after all, that the Valentinians would use to defend their Pleroma, Philo his mediated creation). But if they

are read according to the 'rule of truth' and tradition of the apostles through the vision of Christ resurrected, Irenaeus is convinced that they make clear not only the fact of a trinitarian creation, but the more precise delineations of the roles played by each of the divine persons. Through such delineations, the broader principle of God's goodness as self-expressive is explained through recourse to the triadic relationship of Son to his Father in the Spirit: the communion of trinitarian life is perceived as the quickening principle of the whole cosmos. In terms of the larger economy, this principle can be proclaimed as the very source and life of creation's greatest boast: the human person.

But how proper is it to use the language of 'trinity' in description of the thought of a second-century author? We noted above that Irenaeus never employs the term, nor does it become current in wider theological discourse until the century after his death (though it had made its celebrated first appearance in Greek, if not as 'trinity' then at least as 'triad', in the pages of Theophilus). Given such a chronology, even the vocabulary of 'persons' in reference to the Father, Son and Spirit, if read in light of third- and fourth-century debates on Trinitarianism, risks framing Irenaeus' discussion into the precisions of a more developed, nuanced conversation than that in which he actually took part. It will become clear in the following pages that precision and terminological (as well as conceptual) consistency is not always found in Irenaeus' articulation of the Father, Son and Spirit in their relationship one to another and to the cosmos. Nonetheless, Irenaeus' perception of the eternal life in relationship of the three is indicative of the kind of trinitarian language and vision that would be expounded more fully in the debates following Arius; and though we must not overestimate his trinitarian articulation, we must not underestimate it either.

The matter of terminology is always of particular difficulty in any discussion in this realm, and this is especially the case when addressing the thought of those writers who pre-date the major debates of the centuries to follow. Nearly every term suitable to the description of a triune God carries with it the baggage of those delicate debates: 'person', 'nature', 'ousia', 'hypostasis'. I shall be attentive in the following pages not to make Irenaeus into a fourth-century trinitarian exegete, but a degree of overlapping vocabulary is inevitable. I have elected to use the term 'person' to refer to the individual realities of the Father, Son and Spirit, in order to provide some manner of describing them as individuals-in-relation in the manner that Irenaeus considered them. Later discussions on *prosopon* and *hypostasis* must not be inferred back into the terminology

as employed here. Irenaeus' own language of Father, Son and Spirit in relation, with the concepts that lie beneath it, is varied and often terminologically-contradictory—yet it is in precisely this lack of definitive terminological, conceptual distinction that one can find Irenaeus' prolepsis of future trinitarian thought (of one-in-three and three-in-one; of one *ousia* and three *hypostases*—none of which concepts, it might be argued, are 'logically consistent').

*A triune act—three roles in creation*

As much as Irenaeus insists on creation as the work of the one God, so does he insist that the creation of the cosmos was the communal act of Father, Son and Spirit, working in harmony and with singular purpose. The explicitness of this perception is evinced in multiple passages throughout both extant works; yet it is often the case that these passages, while establishing the activity of all three in the creative endeavour, provide what to a modern reader seems an inconclusive description of their individual roles. From the outset, then, we see evidence of the fact that Irenaeus at once anticipates the trinitarian articulation of later centuries, yet does not work it out in all its details. *Epideixis* 5, among the more celebrated Irenaean passages on the triune nature of creation, provides a notable example of this sort of presentation and, though lengthy, warrants full reproduction:

In this way, then, it is demonstrated that there is one God, the Father, uncreated, invisible, creator of all, above whom there is no other God, and after whom there is no other God. And as God is verbal (*λογικός*), therefore he made created things by the Word; and as God is Spirit, so he adorned all things by the Spirit, as the prophet also says, 'By the Word of the Lord were the heavens established, and all their power by his Spirit' (Ps 32.6). Thus, since the Word 'establishes', that is, works bodily and confers existence, while the Spirit arranges and forms the various 'powers', so rightly is the Son called Word and the Spirit the Wisdom of God. Hence, his apostle Paul also well says, 'One God, the Father, who is above all and through all and in us all' (Eph 4.6)—because 'above all' is the Father, and 'through all' is the Word—since through him everything was made by the Father—while 'in us all' is the Spirit, who cries 'Abba, Father' (cf. Gal 4.6; Rom 8.15) and forms man to the likeness of God. Thus, the Spirit demonstrates the Word, and, because of this, the prophets announced the Son of God, while the Word articulates the Spirit, and therefore it is he himself who interprets the prophets and brings man to the Father.

In this passage Irenaeus presents his standard delineation of the roles of the three persons: the Father is creator, the Word the means by

which the Father creates, and the Spirit is the adorer of that creation wrought by the Father through the Word. This is the same vision presented more pithily at 4.20.4: 'There is therefore one God, who by the Word and Wisdom created and arranged all things'. Here, as in *Epid.* 5, one encounters 'God' (in this text, as often but not exclusively in Irenaeus, identical to the person of the Father) portrayed as creator, who works his creation through the Word and 'arranges' (*ἀρμόσας/ aptavit*) it through his Spirit/Wisdom.<sup>3</sup> A few chapters later, in a passage focused more specifically on the relationship of the creator to humanity, Irenaeus expounds this model in largely the same terms:

For to him [who has a full faith in God] all things are consistent: he has a full faith in one God Almighty, of whom are all things (*ex quo omnia*); and in the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, by whom are all things (*per quem omnia*), and in the dispensations connected with him, by which the Son of God became man; and a firm belief in the Spirit of God, who furnishes (*praestat*) us with a knowledge of the truth, and has set forth the dispensations of the Father and the Son, in virtue of which he dwells with every generation of men, according to the will of the Father.<sup>4</sup>

The Father is he 'of whom' are all things, the Son he 'by whom' are all things, and the Spirit the 'furnisher' of all creation. There is but a single creation wrought by the three, worked differently by each yet unitedly as the one God the Father initiating the one economy through his two hands. Irenaeus wishes not only to emphasise the generally triune nature of God's creative activity, but also clearly to distinguish the individual roles played in that activity by each of the divine persons.

He is able to locate grounding for this method in the text of Gen 1.1–2. It is perhaps interesting that Irenaeus' use of Gen 1.1 itself is quite limited: for all his larger polemical emphasis on the fact that it was God and God alone who created at the beginning of the economy (in opposition to a belief in multiple creative beings, or a mediated creation), only twice does he quote directly the verse in Genesis which states this most plainly: once at 1.18.1 and again at 2.2.5.<sup>5</sup> While this rather

<sup>3</sup> On identification of the Spirit with Wisdom in Irenaeus' thought, see the brief summary 'L'Esprit et la Sagesse' in Fantino, *Théologie d'Irénée* 287–91.

<sup>4</sup> 4.33.7 (SC 100: 818–9); cf. 1 Cor 8.6.

<sup>5</sup> The first passage comprises a refutation of Marcossian readings of scripture, which interpreted the words 'God', 'beginning', 'heaven' and 'earth' as indicative of the divine Tetrads (in the course of the refutation in this chapter, Irenaeus goes on to make his only direct quotation of Gen 1.2, again in characterisation of Marcossian use; and also to make allusive reference to 1.3–27). The quotation of Gen 1.1 at *AH* 2.2.5 comes again in response to perceived misinterpretations of the text this time in the

minimal use of the text may at first seem surprising in light of the general fact of Irenaeus' writings being deeply grounded in the Genesis creation scheme, it is not in the end extraordinary that Irenaeus would lay slight emphasis on a verse vague enough to allow for the rise of such radically different interpretations as those against which he writes. That 'God created' is, in the context of multiple creative theologies, a statement to which almost all would agree, be it suitably qualified.

One catches here a glimpse of the manner in which 'Gnostic' proclivities influenced Irenaeus' own scriptural emphasis, connected to his broader dedication to reading the protology Christologically. He limits his direct use of Gen 1.1–2, yet is deliberate in his extrapolation of their contents by various other scriptural passages. All three of his positive references to Gen 1.1 (excluding here the reference at *AH* 1.18.1, which is a paraphrased quotation of Marcosian usage) are marked out by links made to other texts, and in the selectivity of these Irenaeus is markedly consistent. 1.22.1, 2.2.5 and *Epid.* 43 all contain quotations of John 1.3: 'All things were made by him [the Word], and without him nothing was made'. Similarly, both 1.22.1 and 2.2.5 quote from Ps 32: *AH* 1.22.1 from verse 6 ('By the Word of the Lord were the heavens established, and all the might of them, by the Spirit of his mouth') and 2.2.5 from verse 9 ('For he spoke and they were made; he commanded and they were created').<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Eph 4.6 is used at 2.2.5 (as at *Epid.* 5) as proof that creation was the common work of the Father, Son and Spirit,

because 'above all' is the Father, and 'through all' is the Word—since through him everything was made by the Father—while 'in us all' is the Spirit, who cries 'Abba, Father' (Gal 4.6, Rom 8.15) and forms man to the likeness of God.<sup>7</sup>

Irenaeus has thus moved from a unitive reading of Gen 1.1 (i.e. 'God created' demonstrating one actor, one creator, who is God himself),

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proclamation of angelic mediation in creation, and here it is Irenaeus who puts forth the scriptural verse, stating that 'neither gods nor angels had any share in the work'. Additionally, there is an evident allusion to Gen 1.1. at *Epid.* 43, and *AH* 1.22.1 may be read as having partial grounding in this verse; but these four references (the last rather tenuous) form the entirety of Irenaeus' use of Gen 1.1 in a polemical corpus that aims largely to address the problem of the verse's misinterpretation.

<sup>6</sup> Verse six is also quoted in a similar context at *Epid.* 5, which with chapter 6 forms a presentation of the 'rule of truth' similar to that of *AH* 1.22.1.

<sup>7</sup> *Epid.* 5; cf. J. Driscoll, 'Uncovering the dynamic *lex orandi—lex credendi* in the baptismal theology of Irenaeus', *Pro Ecclesia* 12.2 (2003), 218.



offered as a counter to various pleromatic and demiurgic traditions, to a triune reading of the same (that God's creating was an act of God as Father with his Son and Spirit). His grounding here is the witness of the Gospel, of the risen Christ, in the light of which the words of the psalmist and the text of Genesis are made clear: 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 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.

Despite such emphasis on the triune character of the creative act, there is a vagueness to Irenaeus' poetic delineations of activity that requires fleshing out. What does it mean for Irenaeus that the Father is the 'creator of all', set alongside the notion that all things are created 'through' the Word? The two ideas may indeed be compatible, but how do they co-inhere in his descriptions of the proper work of creation? How is the reader to distinguish between the establishment of the 'form' of creation by the Son, and the establishment of its 'power' by the Spirit? In the end, with all the proper creative movements attributed to the Son and the Spirit, what actual role does the Father himself play in creation?

Such vagaries appear, at first, only to be reinforced by the numerous occurrences in the corpus in which Irenaeus speaks exclusively of one or another of the persons in relation to God's creative action. By far the most voluminous of these are passages that refer creation to the Father without mention of either Spirit or Son in the context of creative actors. It is not worth an attempt at enumerating these; such statements are scattered everywhere throughout his writings and form the bedrock on which the core of his polemic is built. Irenaeus' second-century heritage is pronounced: it is the common stock of the age to reserve, in most usage, the titles 'God' and 'Creator', for the Father. Chief among his complaints against his contemporaries is the assertion that there is another maker than the Father; Irenaeus sees this claim common to the Marcosians, the Valentinians, the Marcionites and others.<sup>8</sup> In a passage against the Valentinians in particular, he asserts that

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<sup>8</sup> For his assessment of the Marcosians in this regard, see 1.20.3. For the Valentinians, see 4.18.4. For the Marcionites, see 4.27.4; 5.15.2.

their impiety is not only against the creator, calling him the fruit of a defect, but also against Christ and the Holy Spirit, claiming that these were produced on account of that defect.<sup>9</sup>

Irenaeus here distinguishes the Spirit and the Son from the ‘creator’, who can thus only be understood as the Father. While this might be expected with respect to his consideration of the role of the Spirit (given the Spirit’s usual title of ‘furnisher’ rather than ‘creator’ elsewhere in his writing), the distinction between ‘Son’ and ‘creator’ seems to go against the delineation of roles we have seen him set out at *Epid.* 5 and *AH* 4.33.7. But the attribution of the title ‘creator’ to the Father, in specific distinction to the Son, is made elsewhere by Irenaeus. Importantly, it is in this manner that he usually reads the words of the incarnate Jesus. Irenaeus at least once refers to Christ as ‘the Son of the creator of the world’,<sup>10</sup> and concludes the third book of the *Adversus haereses* in the hope that the heretics will ‘cease from blaspheming their creator, who is both God alone, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’.<sup>11</sup> Here he stresses not only that the Father alone is creator, but that the Father alone is ‘God’. ‘God’, ‘creator’ and ‘Father’ are treated as synonyms.<sup>12</sup> The words of Christ are explicit in this regard, as Irenaeus characterises them:

The words of the Lord are numerous and all proclaim one and the same Father, the creator of this world.<sup>13</sup>

He had earlier provided an example of the kind of proclamation to which he refers:

[The heretics] do not receive from the Father the knowledge of the Son, nor do they learn the knowledge of the Father from the Son, who teaches clearly and without parables of him who truly is God. He says, ‘Swear not at all, neither by heaven since it is God’s throne, nor by the earth for it is his footstool, nor by Jerusalem for it is the city of the great King’ (Mt 5.34). For these words are evidently spoken with reference to

<sup>9</sup> 2.19.9 (SC 294: 198).

<sup>10</sup> 4.18.4.

<sup>11</sup> 3.25.7.

<sup>12</sup> While this may be seen as common to the general usage of second-century sources, Irenaeus does not restrict the Greek θεός to the Father. At 3.6.1 he unequivocally calls the Son θεός in the same manner as the Father is θεός; though here he, like the later creed of Nicaea, speaks in terms of relational divinity, rather than in categories of proper titles.

<sup>13</sup> 4.41.4 (SC 100: 992–3).

the creator, as Isaias also says: 'Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool' (Is 66.1).<sup>14</sup>

Irenaeus takes Christ's words at their apparent face value: the Lord speaks of an other, his own Father, who is creator. Earlier in this same chapter, Irenaeus had made clear that the Father to whom Christ addresses himself in prayer is 'the maker of heaven and earth, whom the prophets proclaimed',<sup>15</sup> and there remain numerous passages in which Irenaeus similarly brings out the distinction between the person of the Son and the role of the Father as creator, drawn from the words of Jesus.<sup>16</sup>

But for all these instances in which the Father, distinct from the Son, is alone called creator, it is nevertheless true that no single verse of New Testament writing is of stronger influence on Irenaeus' cosmological considerations than John 1.3, in which the evangelist's memorable proclamation, 'All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was brought into being', is put forth in explicit reference to the divine Word. Irenaeus quotes this passage extensively, but the scope of its influence on his thought extends far beyond those passages of direct quotation.<sup>17</sup> Its proclamation is at the heart of his confession of Christ, which forms his canon or rule of truth and, as we have seen, the centrepiece and framework for his cosmology. Nearly as great in number in the Irenaeian corpus as references to the Father as creator are statements of the Son's activity as the same. 'The Word is the artificer of all things' is a consistent refrain in Irenaeus' polemic.<sup>18</sup> The heretics err in failing to realise that this Word 'is sufficient for the formation of all things', that he is indeed the one who must be found in Christian reflections on beginnings.<sup>19</sup> Irenaeus is perhaps nowhere more explicit on this theme than at 5.18.3:

<sup>14</sup> 4.2.5 (SC 100: 404–7).

<sup>15</sup> 4.2.2; cf. Mt 11.25, Lk 10.21.

<sup>16</sup> Among these 4.1.2, 4.6.4, 4.36.1, 4.36.6. Similar in implication are those passages in which Irenaeus makes broader observations on the person of Christ, without recourse to Jesus' own words; cf. e.g. 3.1.2, 3.11.7, 3.12.11, 4.9.2, 4.10.2.

<sup>17</sup> See *Epid.* 43; *AH* 1.8.5 (quoting Valentinian misuse), 1.9.2, 1.22.1, 2.2.5, 3.8.2–3, 3.11.1–2, 8; etc. Irenaeus nowhere quotes Heb 1.2, which proclaims the same, and this perhaps lies behind Grant's claim that Irenaeus did not know the epistle. But see again our comment above, p. 19 n. 60.

<sup>18</sup> 3.11.8.

<sup>19</sup> 2.2.5; one among the many passages in which Irenaeus expounds this notion with direct reference to Jn 1.3.

The creator of the world is truly the Word of God, and this is our Lord, who in the last times was made man, existing in this world, who invisibly contains all created things, who is inherent in the entire creation, since the Word of God governs and arranges all things.<sup>20</sup>

Examining the text in terms of categorical attributions, the ambiguity between the roles of the Father and Son as ‘creators’ seems to grow stronger, and is further confounded by the surprising insertion in *Adversus haereses* 4 of a description of the Spirit, too, as ‘creator’. In referring to ‘the Spirit of God, by whom all things were made’,<sup>21</sup> Irenaeus follows up his earlier discussion on the eternity of the Son and the Spirit as attested in Prov 3.19, 20; 8.22–25 and 8.27–31.<sup>22</sup> He does so, however, in a manner that appears to conflate his more coherent statements on the distinct roles of the three persons in creation (as in *Epid.* 5 and *AH* 4.33.7). This is the only time in the entirety of his corpus that Irenaeus directly claims that the Spirit ‘made’ (ἐγένετο/*facta*) the created things of the cosmos, however often he may otherwise claim that the Spirit participated in the creative work of the Father and the Son. In all other passages on the Spirit’s role in creation, he speaks of ‘adornment’, ‘increase’, ‘ordering’. The neat picture of ‘Father of, Son by, and Spirit as furnisher’ seems to lose its clarity and precision in Irenaeus’ elaborations on their individual creative activities.

Before exploring whether this apparent confusion is a valid reading of the passages thus far cited, it should be noted that Irenaeus finds support for his delineation of the roles of Father, Son and Spirit through the mention of God ‘speaking’ in Gen 1.3. Irenaeus’ only quotation of this verse, located at *AH* 4.32.1, is set in the context of a discussion on the creation of the cosmos by the Father through the Word, framed into an insistence upon the common divine source of the old and new covenants. John 1.3 is used to show that the ‘God said...’ of Gen 1.3 refers to the activity of the divine Word—again emphasising Irenaeus’ method of reading creation through Christ, taking the Gospels as the keys to Genesis and other creation narratives. It is this Christ whom the apostles confess, who also fashioned the universe. This emphasis should not surprise: we have already seen Irenaeus use this verse from John in application to Gen 1.1, and to exactly the same end. Irenaeus

<sup>20</sup> SC 153: 244–5.

<sup>21</sup> 4.31.2.

<sup>22</sup> See 4.20.3.

will later follow the same pattern in his the discussion on the Sabbath, which, though defined in Gen 2.1–3, he interprets primarily through Lk 14.12–14, Mt 19.29 and Lk 18.29–30 to refer to the chiliastic kingdom and the inner state of humanity’s rest in Christ.<sup>23</sup> The testimony of the Genesis narrative is foundationally—and indeed, exclusively—trine in Irenaeus’ reading.<sup>24</sup>

*Distinguishing the creative work*

What to make of Irenaeus’ apparent fluctuations in delineating the distinct roles to the Father, Son and Spirit in the creative endeavour? This question has been the subject of recent work by Fantino and MacKenzie, the former broaching the subject more extensively than the latter.<sup>25</sup> Yet despite Fantino’s detailed and informative investigation into contemporary influences on the formation of Irenaeus’ trinitarian theology, and MacKenzie’s well-grounded presentation of the mutual interaction of the three persons of Father, Son and Spirit in the act of creation, the matter of reading this question in light of Irenaeus’ broader theological convictions still remains. It is not enough simply

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<sup>23</sup> On the chiliastic kingdom, see 5.33.2. On the person’s rest in Christ, see *Epid.* 96; cf. below, p. 99.

<sup>24</sup> One element of Irenaeus’ employment of Gen 1.3 that may surprise is his complete lack of discussion on the issue of light, the creation of which is the proper subject of the verse itself. Philo’s commentary on Gen 1 spent considerable time on the character of light, which appears in Gen 1.3 before the creation of the sun and thus gives him occasion to speak of the symbolism of the ‘unintelligible’ light created as part of God’s prototypical heavenly model of earthly creation (see *De Op. Mu.* 29–31; cf. 32–33). Theophilus similarly (see *Ad Autol.* 2.13; cf. 1.6), who describes the role of the Word in the establishment of light in the cosmos, and interestingly describes the Spirit, who ‘resembles light’ (or more properly, stands in its place: τὸ πνεῦμα φωτὸς τόπον ἐπέχον), as providing a mediating separation between God and the darkness of Gen 1.2, prior to the advent of light itself as a created entity. Cf. the parallel in the pre-Christian *Paraphrase of Shem*: ‘There was [in the beginning] Light and Darkness, and there was Spirit between them’ (NHC [VII,1] 1.25–26; 10.31–32). It is not surprising that this kind of extrapolation, drawn in part from the ‘God divided the light from the darkness’ of Gen 1.4 (nowhere used in the corpus), does not find like expression in Irenaeus. The spatiality of Theophilus’ conception of God in respect to the nascent cosmos is precisely the sort of model against which Irenaeus argues in *AH* 2.1 and 2.4. Nonetheless, that Irenaeus’ use of Gen 1.3 should be solely in defence of the trine nature of God’s creativity, and ignore altogether the specific narrative contents of the verse, indicates the degree to which he feels that John, the psalms and other scriptural contextualisations bring out the deeper meaning of the Genesis text as pointing towards the mystery of the economy of salvation.

<sup>25</sup> Fantino, *Théologie d’Irénée* 279–300 and following; Mackenzie, *Irenaeus’s Demonstration* 81–99.

to make a protological claim; for Irenaeus the protology speaks from, and in turn to, the Christological testimony of salvation. As such, the distinction of creative roles is bound up, fundamentally, in the distinction of salvific actions wrought by the Father, Son and Spirit in the one economy of redemption, and it is here that one must look in order to understand their delineation in the protology.

MacKenzie summarises Irenaeus' view of God as creator in the following terms:

God creates directly by himself alone; there is neither an agent of creation called into being, nor does anything that is called into being go on to create outside the will and purpose of God that which is in addition to itself. God, as Father, Word and Wisdom, exists and creates. Creation, and the ordering of it all, are his by his will and action alone.<sup>26</sup>

This comment is set in the context of a discussion on mediated creation, centred round the activities of angels busy in carrying out God's creative plan. Irenaeus refutes such an idea on numerous occasions, his refrain consistently that 'God was in no want of angels' for his creative endeavours.<sup>27</sup> In his insistence on such a position, he confronted not only the cosmologies of a variety of groups, but also, as we have seen above, the emerging positions of various Jewish sects.<sup>28</sup> Apocalypticism, as a growing trend in Jewish society, tended toward the 'separation of God, on the one hand, and the world and actual history, on the other'<sup>29</sup>—a tendency that enabled if it did not directly encourage a growth of support for notions of angelically mediated creativity in the more mystical strands of Judaic theology. This was true also for the rational/philosophical schools of Judaic thought, exemplified in Philo, who found in such notions a coherent means of separating the transcendent God from the flaws of his handiwork.<sup>30</sup> Yet Irenaeus opposes this concept at every turn. He is happy to allow that there should be multiple 'who's' involved in the process of creation, but there is no option but for these 'who's' to be somehow of God himself. Were Irenaeus writing a century later, we might be justified in applying the language of persons 'internal to the godhead'; Irenaeus himself shows more simply—though to the

<sup>26</sup> Mackenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration* 93.

<sup>27</sup> See 4.7.4; cf. 1.22.1, 2.2.1–3, 4.41.1.

<sup>28</sup> Above, p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Bilde, 'Gnosticism, Jewish Apocalypticism, and Early Christianity', 22.

<sup>30</sup> See again Fossum, 'Origin of Demiurge', 143–46 ff. On the influence of the philosophical, see once more the hearkening to Plato; cf. above p. 28.

same end—that multiple ‘who’s’ cannot refer to anything or anyone *apart* from the divine creator. God must be self-sufficient in the accomplishment of his own creative designs, even as God is self-sufficient as sole saviour. As was originally noted over fifty years ago, ‘Irenaeus maintained that if God is held to be powerless in any respect, then that before which He is powerless is in point of fact *God*.’<sup>31</sup> Irenaeus presents this concept a number of ways: spatially, in that any substance ‘outside’ God would in fact be greater than God;<sup>32</sup> temporally, in that any being or activity ‘before’ God would be greater than he;<sup>33</sup> and cooperatively, in that any being or beings ‘creating with’ God would, by their activity, reveal a want in God himself and thereby set up a situation of his inferiority. Creation, at its most essential level, must be the act only of God, for it is the property only of God to create (for all created things to be created and made)<sup>34</sup> and any other creating being would be, quite simply, another god. Irenaeus may not speak in the precise terms of ‘godhead’ or activities ‘internal’ to God’s being, but by eliminating all possibility of an external, prior, subsequent or co-eternal alternative, he essentially spells out precisely this.

The question of multiple ‘who’s’ in creation returns Irenaeus to the heart of his delineation between the roles of the persons of Father, Son and Spirit. The images of Genesis make clear a plurality: verse 1.2 speaks of God’s Spirit moving over the waters, indicating a distinct subject; and we have seen above that the ‘God said’ of 1.3 implies, for Irenaeus, that God (the Father) has someone with whom to speak (i.e. the Word, together with the Spirit). But nowhere in Genesis is the plurality of persons made more explicit than at 1.26–27. Irenaeus mines these verses, especially the former, deeply; and though they speak most directly to the creation of humankind, Irenaeus will find in them clarification of the plurality evidenced less directly in Gen 1.1–4.

Gen 1.26–27 are in fact among the most-utilised of all Old Testament verses in the Irenaeus corpus. Within the scope of his commentary on Genesis in particular, they are quoted or alluded to more often than any other section of the text, with some thirty passages in the *Adversus*

<sup>31</sup> Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation* 3.

<sup>32</sup> See 2.1.2–3.

<sup>33</sup> See 1.8.3, cf. 2.22.4. That the Gnostics proclaim a divine Pleroma or other entity existing prior to the demiurge is a consistent point of criticism throughout *AH* 1.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. 4.11.2.

*haereses* and *Epideixis* that come to bear directly upon them.<sup>35</sup> So frequent are his reflections on these verses that Wingren would subset all but two chapters of his classic Irenaean study, *Man and the Incarnation*, with sections called after their principal terms, ‘*Imago* and *Similitudo*’.<sup>36</sup> It is certainly the ‘image and likeness’ (εἰκὼν καὶ ὁμοίωσις) of Gen 1.26 that is the chief focus of Irenaeus’ treatment of these verses, and while much of our discussion on them will come later, in our chapter on human creation, there is a notable degree to which they come to bear on his triune reflections. An important point is made even in this. The frequency with which Gen 1.26–27 is quoted in the corpus reinforces our assertion that Irenaeus’ approach to cosmology is grounded in his anthropocentric notion of a divine economy whose focal point is the perfection of the human person Christ. One may compare, for example, the thirty quotations/allusions to these verses, with the counts of four for Gen 1.1; only one for Gen 1.2 and 1.5; and none at all for Gen 1.6–25. The anthropological focus of 1.26–27 gives these verses an importance for Irenaeus which none of their predecessors in the narrative possess, and he dwells on them accordingly.

Outside of his particularly anthropological reflections, Irenaeus’ treatment of Gen 1.26–27 is aimed predominantly at our present concern of establishing and expounding the triadic relationship of the divine persons in the creative process. In this context, it is not the ‘Let us *make man*’ so much as the ‘Let us *make man*’ (ποιήσωμεν in the plural) that draws his attention.

Now man is a mixture (*temperatio*/κρᾶσις) of soul and flesh, formed after the likeness of God and moulded by his hands, that is, by the Son and Holy Spirit, to whom also he said, ‘Let us *make man*’.<sup>37</sup>

Irenaeus raises this point as a challenge to the claim he decries as put forth by the various groups around him, namely that such evidence of plurality in the creative act establishes the presence and function of the pleromatic aeons, or more particularly of ‘angels’ brought forth at the behest of one or more of these aeons for the purpose of establishing and ruling creation. The claim for such angelically mediated creation is recounted multiple times in the corpus, perhaps most succinctly in

<sup>35</sup> On the particular difficulty of enumerating direct references to Gen 1.26 in Irenaeus, see Appendix 1, p. 217.

<sup>36</sup> See Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation* 14–26, 90–100, 47–59, 201–13.

<sup>37</sup> 4.Praef.4 (SC 100: 390–1).



reference to the teaching of Menander the Samaritan,<sup>38</sup> followed in the next chapter with a discussion of the views of Saturninus.<sup>39</sup> Irenaeus' investigation then turns to the teachings of Basilides, who expands the angelic forum from the seven of Saturninus to a more robust 365,<sup>40</sup> then onward to Carpocrates, whose followers 'again maintain that the world and the things which are therein were created by angels greatly inferior to the unbegotten Father'.<sup>41</sup> There is ample affirmation in the extant second-century corpus to reinforce Irenaeus' claims that angelic mediation was a common thread among its varied schools of thought. The *Apocryphon of John* speaks of the creation of archons and powers by the 'first archon', Ialdabaoth, and the subsequent interaction of these powers in the formation of the material cosmos.<sup>42</sup> The *Gospel of Truth* reflects on the interactions of (often ignorant) substantive passions, not so definitively defined as to be called precisely 'angels', but some would see in these passions actual spiritual beings.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the whole of 'Gnostic cosmology' has been summarised as the work of 'the angels that made the world'.<sup>44</sup>

It is in opposition to this kind of interpretation that Irenaeus' reflections on the 'us' of Gen 1.26 are focused. He cannot be more emphatic than at *AH* 4.20.1:

It was not angels, therefore, who made or formed us, nor had angels power to make an image of God, nor any one else except the true God—nor any power remotely distant from the Father of all things. For God did not stand in need of these [beings], 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

<sup>38</sup> 1.23.5 (SC 264: 320); cf. 1.23.3 for the reference to Simon.

<sup>39</sup> 1.24.1, 2 (SC 264: 320–5).

<sup>40</sup> See 1.24.3, 4.

<sup>41</sup> 1.25.1.

<sup>42</sup> NHC (II,1) 10.19–13.32, as also in the Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 27.1–36.15; 39.4–44.18 (ed. W. Till, *die gnostischen Schriften des koptischen Papyrus Berolinensis 8502* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1955)). See Rudolph, *Gnosis* 76–77. The details of the angelic activities in *Ap. John* are extensively treated in Logan, *Gnostic Truth* 129–35.

<sup>43</sup> See NHC (I,3) 16.31–21.1; cf. Rudolph, *Gnosis* 83–4. Similar activities of such beings are found throughout the later anonymous treatise, *Or. World*, NHC (II,5) 109.1–115.30 ff.

<sup>44</sup> Jonas, *Gnostic Religion* 130–36.

substance of the creatures formed and the pattern of things made, and the type of all the adornments of the world.<sup>45</sup>

Not only is the notion of angelically mediated creation directly contravened, it is so by explicit Christocentric reference to the text of Gen 1.26. This is telling, since thrice more will Irenaeus use the verse in precisely this way (at 5.1.3, 5.15.4 and *Epid.* 55; see below), these four passages in fact forming the extent of his use of the text outside the scope of a specifically anthropological framework. It is only Christ, the Word who rose from death to life and healed others through the fabric of the cosmos (cf. Irenaeus' use of the miracles in John, below) who has the power to fashion it. His commentary against the idea of angelic mediation in the formation of the cosmos takes other forms as well, but Irenaeus is most concerned with the presence of a plurality in the creative process as presented in the scriptural narrative, as read in any other way than in reference to the triune salvation offered by the Father through his Son in the Spirit.<sup>46</sup> It is this kind of mis-apprehended plurality that most frustrates him in the thought of the Valentinians:

All the followers of Valentinus fall into error when they say that man was not fashioned from this earth, but from a fluid and diffused substance. For, from the earth out of which the Lord formed eyes for that man, from the same earth it is evident that man was also fashioned in the beginning. For it is illogical that the eyes should be formed from one source and the rest of the body from another; nor is it logical that one being fashioned the body and another the eyes. But he, the same one who formed Adam at the beginning, with whom also the Father spoke, saying, 'Let us make man after our image and likeness', revealing himself in these last times to men, formed visual organs (*visionem*) for him who had been blind [in that body which he had derived] from Adam.<sup>47</sup>

Irenaeus' emphasis on the triune nature of salvation, bound up in the perfected creative act of God, here comes full bore upon his cosmology. The unity of God is defended precisely from within the context of

<sup>45</sup> SC 100: 624–7.

<sup>46</sup> His arguments against such an idea may be broken down into three general categories: angelic mediation suggests the activities of agents able to act in opposition to the will of God (see 2.2.1); God himself creates the angels and establishes their function, thus even if they be involved in creation, he is more properly called 'Creator' than are they (2.2.3, 3.8.3, *Epid.* 10); God needs no aids in creation, since he has his Son and Spirit, his two 'hands' (2.2.5, 4.7.4, 4.20.1; this latter verse, quoted above, also makes important mention of the inability of the angels to create an image of God).

<sup>47</sup> 5.15.4 (SC 153: 210–11). On the formation of the differentiated human organs by distinct spiritual or pleromatic powers, see *Ap. John*, NHC (II,1) 15.1–19.1.

his triune character: that ‘one and the same’ being formed Adam and healed the blind man (cf. John 9.7) is justified via recourse to the first-person plural reference in Gen 1.26, for just as God in unified plurality acted when the Father spoke and the Son formed Adam at the beginning, so in the miracle of healing does the Son act within the materiality of the economy in concord with the Father who transcends it. As such, the ‘let us’ is the absolute textual proof for the concept of the ‘hands’ of God:

For at no time did Adam escape the hands of God to whom the Father, speaking, said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’. For this reason in the last times (*fine*), neither by 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, so that Adam might be created [again] after the image and likeness of God.<sup>48</sup>

Irenaeus is not the first to put forth an interpretation of Gen 1.26 as referring to a multiplicity of divine actors. Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* had already done so with some degree of emphasis, going as far as to imply that this reading was so familiar to Jewish teachers that it warranted their criticism of it in his day. So he frames his defense:

And that you may not change the force of the words just quoted [i.e. Gen 1.26–28], and repeat what your teachers assert—either that God said to himself, ‘Let us make’, just as we, when about to do something, oftentimes say to ourselves, ‘Let us make’, or that God spoke to the elements, that is, the earth and other similar substances of which we believe man was formed, ‘Let us make’—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, and also a rational being.<sup>49</sup>

That this numerically distinct and rational being was not a mere angel, but *the* Angel, that is, the Word, is made clear later in the text.<sup>50</sup> Though

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<sup>48</sup> 5.1.3 (SC 153: 26–9) On the ‘hands’ of God, see below, p. 80. *Epid.* 55 contains the remaining passage of direct quotation of Gen 1.26 in the context of an intra-Trinitarian dialogue, interestingly relating the passage to the Son’s internal role as ‘Counsellor’ to the Father, reading here from Is 9.5.

<sup>49</sup> *Dial.* 62. There follows a quotation of Gen 3.22.

<sup>50</sup> See *Dial.* 128; cf. also *Dial.* 55–58 on the notion of a δεύτερος Θεός evinced specifically in Genesis, again in substantiation of the divine character of the second person inferred from Gen 1.26. On Justin’s discussion of the Word as ‘Angel’, see Goodenough, *Theology of Justin Martyr* 156–57; cf. *1Apol.* 6.2, *2Apol.* 7.5. Justin gets this idea from Philo: cf. *De somniis* i.239 (noted by Goodenough, *Theology of Justin Martyr* 157).

Justin presents a fairly well developed angelology, he is equally as insistent as Irenaeus that it is God alone who creates, and thus the plurality of subjects in Gen 1.26 must be read as revelatory of some manner of relational being within the godhead itself.<sup>51</sup> Theophilus, too, makes this point explicit.<sup>52</sup>

Irenaeus' purpose in drawing out this point is multifaceted. Beyond his initial desire to deny the mediatorial activities of the angels, he desires also to uphold the authenticity of the Genesis text as it is written, complete with its confusing plural reference. The scripture cannot be modified in order to produce a more coherent theology.<sup>53</sup> But more

<sup>51</sup> Cf. ps-Justin, *Sole Gov.* 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.18. Cf. Philo, *De Conf.Ling.* 168–79, as discussed above. Theophilus refers the 'us' of the text to both the 'Word and the Wisdom' of the Father, suggesting the full implications of a genuine Trinitarianism. Justin, as above and as is widely understood, speaks in this context only of the Word (his reference to 'he whom Solomon calls Wisdom' in *Dial.* 62 can be misleading; by it he continues his reference to the Word, not the Spirit, as is made clear in 63 when the discussion continues on to the incarnation of this same Wisdom/Word. For Justin, at least here, 'Word' and 'Wisdom' are titles for the same being; cf. Justin, *De Ebrietate* 30, 31; Goodenough, *Theology of Justin Martyr* 171. This usage is old, based on Prov 8.22). Irenaeus himself alternates in his attributions of 'us': in 4.20.1 and 5.1.3 he speaks of both the Word and the Wisdom; in 5.15.4 and *Epid.* 55 he refers solely to the Word. The variance is dependant upon the larger context of the current argument; in the final analysis, Irenaeus clearly believes all acts of God to be the acts of the triune Father, Son and Spirit in perfect concord.

There is naught in the way of direct parallel between Justin, Theophilus and Irenaeus on the one hand, and the collected pool of the Apostolic Fathers on the other. Clement of Rome, in treating of these verses, skips entirely over the question of the vague first-person plural, and there is no substantial mention of it in the writing of the majority of his contemporaries (see *IClem.* 33; cf. Wilson, 'Early History', 426–27). The notable exception is the *Epistle of Barnabas*. Here Gen 1.26 is addressed on two occasions (*Barn.* 5, 6.), each time to the effect that the 'us' refers to the Father and the Son, the latter being 'Lord of all the world, to whom God said at the foundation of the world, "Let us make man after our image and after our likeness" [...] [who] endured to suffer at the hand of men'. The author seems substantially to predict the interpretation of Justin, Theophilus and Irenaeus. These latter authors, however, raise the identification of the Father and Son (and in Irenaeus' case, also the Spirit) with the 'us' in the context of distinctly different arguments: for these, such identification serves primarily to reaffirm the notion of creation as the work solely of God, in the face of a potential for expanding the creative endeavour to include the functioning of other beings (cf. e.g. Justin, *Dial.* 62). There is one creator God: if scripture at times seems to speak of more, it is in these instances describing God's multi-personal nature (see A. D'Alès, 'Le doctrine de l'Esprit en Saint Irénée', *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 14 (1924), 498–500). For the author of *Barnabas*, however, the primary function of such an identification is the establishment of the divinity of the Christ who suffered, 'in order that he might fulfil the promise made to the fathers'. The argument is for the divinity of Christ, not the unity or trinity of God.

<sup>53</sup> Scripture must be accepted or rejected, but not modified; see 2.27.1, 5.30.1.

importantly, by so upholding the text, he wishes to stress the unique characteristics of God it reveals, namely the immediacy of God to his creation through the specific roles and workings of the Father with his two hands. MacKenzie's statement, that there is 'a deliberate transference of emphasis away from cosmology and to the nature of the God who has created the cosmos',<sup>54</sup> is borne out here. The cosmological implications of Irenaeus' reading of Gen 1.26 are not to be wrested from the theological reflections on the triadic nature of the salvific God, which this reading also contains. The nature of the creator is shown forth in the nature of his creating, and likewise what can be known from the scriptures of the creator's nature reveals to humanity the realities of the cosmos in which it dwells.<sup>55</sup>

In all this, one must recall that Irenaeus' discussion, especially in the *Adversus haereses*, are essentially response and not spontaneously motivated theological reflection. Recent works have taken pains to show all manner of direct relationship between precedent 'Gnostic' models and Irenaeus' trinitarian emphasis, often to intriguing results.<sup>56</sup> Yet paramount in all these is the assertion that the divine Father creates. The dominance of the Father as the source and cause of the creative process is clarified in those passages, to which we have already given considerable mention above, in which the Son is referred to as 'creator'. These reveal, to Irenaeus' mind, the Son's creative role as the formative actualisation of the creative will of the Father, and not as the activity of a substantially individual and independent creative being. Thus *AH* 2.30.9:

Since I have shown by numerous arguments of the very clearest nature that he [the Creator] made all things freely and by his own power, and arranged and finished (*perfectit*) them, and that his will is the substance of all things, then he is discovered to be the sole God who created all things, who alone is omnipotent and the only Father, founding and forming all things, visible and invisible, such as may be perceived by our senses and such as can not, heavenly and earthly, 'by the Word of his power' (Heb 1.3).<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Mackenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration* 96.

<sup>55</sup> See 2.9.1.

<sup>56</sup> See Fantino, *Théologie d'Irénée* 282–91 and following for an extended treatment of a theorised 'trinity' in various Gnostic systems, which the scholar uniquely believes may have influenced Irenaeus' considerations.

<sup>57</sup> SC 294: 318.

Irenaeus' Father-Son-Spirit presentation of God as creator establishes within the community of persons a distinctive dependency of the latter two upon the first, such that the Word, whom Irenaeus learns from John 1.3 is 'he through whom all things were made', is characterised strongly by the 'through whom' of that proclamation. It is the Father who creates 'by the Word of his power' (Heb 1.3; cf. *AH* 2.30.9, above), who 'establishes and creates all things [...] through his Word, as John has thus pointed out'.<sup>58</sup> The Son's creative activities, as the means of actualisation of the Father's creative will, are thus set in the context of *agent réalisateur* of that will.<sup>59</sup> It is the Son who 'administers all things for the Father', and in relation to the Father, 'his Son was his Word, by whom he founded all things'.<sup>60</sup> Irenaeus formalises his conception of this relationship in 5.18.2, in a brief commentary on the opening verses of John's Gospel:

He [John the evangelist] thus clearly points out to those willing to hear, that is, to those having ears, that there is one God, the Father over all, and one Word of God, who is through all, by whom all things have been made, and that this world belongs to him, and was made by him, according to the Father's will.<sup>61</sup>

'This One', Irenaeus will later say, in reference to the Father, 'established the whole world by the Word'.<sup>62</sup>

The witness of the apostles contained in the Gospels emphasises, Irenaeus believes, the creative work of the Father *through his Word and Wisdom*. It is in this context that Irenaeus develops his language of the Spirit and Son as the 'hands' of the Father, which is the means by which he directly relates this triune relationship to the economic work of creation.

#### *The 'hands' of the Father*

Fantino points out that Irenaeus' references to the 'hands' of the Father, which we have already encountered several times in the preceding,

<sup>58</sup> 3.8.3.

<sup>59</sup> To this end, see Orbe, 'Creación de la materia', 74–75 for a presentation of the Word as 'instrumento del Padre en la creación'. Orbe's reflections, later in the same study, on the Word as 'demiurgo' but only the Father as the creator of matter itself (p. 83), exceeds the evidence in Irenaeus' writings for any such distinction.

<sup>60</sup> 4.6.7; 4.24.1.

<sup>61</sup> SC 153: 242–3.

<sup>62</sup> *Epid.* 10.

comprise the author's only anthropomorphic expressions for God,<sup>63</sup> and the French scholar's commanding study on the place of this imagery in the thought of Irenaeus is fairly exhaustive.<sup>64</sup> It is due largely to Fantino's influence that this line of discussion has become widely appreciated as chief among Irenaeus' contributions to the theological, and particularly trinitarian, deliberations in the early patristic era, and most modern scholars make mention of his teaching in this regard in some manner or another. Our interest in the present section is simply to note that Irenaeus' use of this hands-imagery forms the natural conclusion or culmination to his working out of the relationships of Father, Son and Spirit as they come to bear on the creation of the cosmos. In this regard, it becomes clear that this bearing rests in a definition of the Father's immediacy to the creation through his Son and Spirit, as borne testimony to in the intimacy of the Son to the cosmos in the incarnation, and of the Spirit to humanity in the Pentecostal indwelling. With creation itself as the act by which the economy is initiated, God's immediacy to and direct contact with the creation—established by this image of the Father with his two hands—becomes the basis by which it can be declared a reality established in and moving towards his goodness in his work of redemption.

The image of an individual and his hands encapsulates with clarity the type of dependent-yet-unique relationship of the Son and Spirit with the Father that we have seen Irenaeus set forth in opposition to the various schools of cosmological thought around him. An individual's hands are dependent upon the will and being of that individual in order to function; and, conversely, all the activities of the hands can be said accurately to be directly the activities of the whole individual and not the hands alone. Whilst the three entities may remain individual or conceptually separable, there is an inherent unity among them that makes into a single, concrete being the reality they comprise. There is an immediately-involved relationship of each in every activity of the others. Just as one can say that a man's hands fashioned a tool, and by that statement imply that the man himself was the maker of the tool, and as the statement that a man made a tool implies the involvement

<sup>63</sup> Fantino, *Théologie d'Irénée* 306.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 306–09. See his exhaustive listing of all Irenaeic references to God's 'hands' in p. 306 n. 82. Cf. E. Klebba, *Die Anthropologie des hl. Irenaeus*, ed. D. Knöpfler (Kirchengeschichtliche Studien, 2.3; Münster: Verlag von Heinrich Schönigh, 1894) 17–18 for a brief overview, with parallels to Justin.

in that fashioning of his hands, so can Irenaeus, through the imagery of the divine hands of God, relate the Son and the Spirit to the Father in creation in precisely the manner that he believes best suited to the refutation of Valentinian and other cosmologies.

This said, there is a remarkable parallel to Irenaeus' 'hands' imagery in the pseudo-Gnostic *Teaching of Silvanus*, which to my knowledge has never come under the scrutiny of Irenaeian scholarship. In the Nag Hammadi tractate the anonymous author writes:

Only the hand of the Lord has created all these things [i.e. the cosmos, etc.]. For this hand of the Father is Christ, and forms it all. Through it, all has come into being, since it became the mother of all. For he is always Son of the Father.<sup>65</sup>

No precise dating of this tractate is possible, though internal evidence suggests either the late second or early third century ad. The former seems improbable, given evidence of the author's familiarity with a well developed form of so-called Alexandrine theology, and it seems reasonable to place its composition in the early third century.<sup>66</sup> In either case, and as noted in our introduction, it must be posterior to Irenaeus' composition of the *Adversus haereses* circa 170–180/5 and as such not a source from which he might have gleaned this imagery of the divine hands. It may well be that the opposite situation is the case that the *Teaching of Silvanus* represents an example of a more widespread hands analogy taken up by a later author, and one who uses it for polemical ends similar to those of Irenaeus. The Egyptian provenance of the tract and its author (suggested by its Alexandrine influence) certainly precludes any possibility that reference to the Son as the 'hand' of the Father was a device inherited directly from Irenaeus. Had Irenaeus' analogy already spread so far as Egypt by the third century? There is little evidence to support a conclusion one way or another. It may be the case either that the *Teaching* demonstrates the rapid spread of an image that Irenaeus himself developed, or that it offers evidence that the hands analogy was not the creative property of Irenaeus that he had learned it elsewhere.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> NHC (VII,4) 115.3–10.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. M. Peel and J. Zandee's introduction to the tractate in Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Library* 380–81.

<sup>67</sup> Though it is not entirely far-fetched to posit so quick a spread of Irenaeus' views to Egypt. The *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 3.405, dating from before the close of the second century and of Egyptian provenance (thus contemporary with Irenaeus' own lifetime), contains the earliest known fragment of the *AH* (3.9.2–3). See Grant, *Irenaeus* 6–7.



It certainly has a strong element of scriptural grounding (see Ps 119.73: 'Your hands have made me and fashioned me'; Ps 80.14–15: 'Look down [...] upon this vineyard which your right hand has planted'; Job 10.8–9: 'Your hands have made me and fashioned me [...] you have made my like clay'),<sup>68</sup> though none of these passages personalises or personifies the hands in the way Irenaeus does. They are anthropomorphic images only, not explanations of the triune relations of Father, Son and Spirit.<sup>69</sup> The *Teaching of Silvanus* gives evidence that such personalisation occurred in the exegesis of an author of nearly the same dates as Irenaeus but in a distant locale. It must, for the time being, remain a mystery as to whether this suggests a widespread interpretive tradition of which both Irenaeus and the author of the tractate are witnesses (but of which we have little other evidence), or whether it shows that Irenaeus established an analogy that quickly spread throughout the Christian world.<sup>70</sup>

The preceding makes clear the remarkable degree to which the trinitarian implications of Gen 1.1–4 and 26–7 are expanded in Irenaeus' developed protology, precisely through his incarnational focus on the redemptive Christ working in the Spirit. The plural references of the scriptural verses are expounded to reveal not only that God acts as a trinity of Father with Son and Spirit, but further, how these three persons interrelate and interact with the cosmos. But what is the importance of this detailed elaboration for Irenaeus' reading of Genesis broader cosmogonic interests? Here three points must be stressed. First, Irenaeus' elaborations on the nature of God make clear his belief, which becomes

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<sup>68</sup> Fantino notes the allusions in Ps 119 and Job, but not that located in Ps 80; cf. Fantino, *Théologie d'Irénée* 308. Fantino (p. 308 n. 88) enumerates several careful studies of the hands imagery in Irenaeus: Y.D. Andia, *Homo vivens: Incorruptibilité et divinisation de l'homme selon Irénée de Lyon* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1986) 64; J. Birrer, *Der Mensch als Medium und Adressat der Schöpfungsoffenbarung* (Basler und Berner Studien zur Historischen und Systematischen Theologie, 59; Berne, 1989) 139–42. Mambrino's section on scriptural background misses these passages altogether; cf. J. Mambrino, "'Les Deux Mains de Dieu" dans l'oeuvre de S. Irénée', *Nouvelle revue de Théologie* 79 (1957), 357–58.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. also *1 Clem.* 33, who comments that God fashioned the creation with his 'holy and undefiled hands'. It is worth noting that Origen (cf. *Contra Celsum* 4.37) takes up the hands imagery as stemming from Job and the Psalms, as cited in the preceding note, and not from Genesis. Cf. Wilson, 'Early History', 432.

<sup>70</sup> Grant does not directly ascribe the hands imagery in Irenaeus to his reading of Theophilus, but does read *Ad Autol.* 2.18 as presenting the same; see Grant, 'The problem of Theophilus', 188. Theophilus' text does not, however, proffer this mention of God's 'hands' in direct correlation to the Son and Spirit, as Irenaeus explicitly puts forward.

his interpretive textual hypothesis, that this text, like all other texts, speaks explicitly of God in this tri-personal manner. In making the connection of the 'let us' statements to the Father, Son and Spirit, Irenaeus establishes scripturally the whole of his reading of creation as grounded in the belief that the unfolding cosmogony and anthropogony are the actions of this triune God. Second, and as a connected point, Irenaeus' elaborations on the text of Genesis 1 in this triune light, confirm and expand what we earlier defined as his foundational conception regarding creation: that it is God's goodness which is its motivation and cause. Through his specific delineation of the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit in creation, Irenaeus shows that this goodness is one of mutual will and activity—Father speaking to Son in Spirit, drawing forth the cosmos with his own hands toward the redemption wrought of the same. Thirdly, this interaction establishes a pattern or model by which all the 'particulars' of creation will be explored. God shall fashion the earth, then the human person, and indeed the whole of the ordered cosmos, through the work of his divine hands. Every created thing shall thus be formed in relationship to God, immediately by God, for a purpose revealed in God's own tri-personal life. This will be shown forth in the economy of the protology itself the pattern of days which leads, step by step, from the darkness of chaos to the light of paradise and the fashioning of the human race. Then, more clearly still, it shall be shown in the advance of that race from infancy to adulthood, where at the end it will come to partake fully of the glory of the Father with his two hands, which originally called him into being.

#### A 'TIMELINE' OF CREATION

Reading the beginnings of creation from the perspective of perfection incarnate in Christ, sets the whole saga into an orientation of motion. As such, it is significant for Irenaeus that the inherited creation narrative speaks in terms of a 'timeline' of days and weeks, of progression and development, all of which foretell the advent of the 'coming one' to whom this creation points. Here the text of the narrative is critical, even if primarily through context rather than quotation. Like 1.3, Gen 1.5 is used only once in the Irenaeian corpus, at *AH* 5.23.2; yet this verse is essential in informing an overall understanding of his reading of the creation of the cosmos through the lens of a Christocentric focus. The passage forms a portion of Irenaeus' lengthy chiliastic reflections

in the latter half of *Adversus haereses* book five, and dwells specifically on the ‘timing’ of the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden:

Thus, on the very day that they ate, on the same did they die and become death’s debtors, since it was one day of the creation. For it is said, ‘There was made the evening and the morning, one day’ (Gen 1.5). On the same day that they ate, therefore, on that day also did they die. But according to the cycle and course of the days, in which one is termed first, another second and another third, if anybody seeks diligently to learn upon which day out of the seven it was that Adam died, he will find it by examining the economy of the Lord. For by recapitulating in himself the whole human race from the beginning to the end, he has also recapitulated its death. From this it is clear that the Lord suffered death, in obedience to his Father, on that day on which Adam died when he disobeyed God. And again, Adam died on the same day on which he ate, for God said, ‘On the day that you shall eat of it, you shall surely die’ (Gen 2.17). The Lord, therefore, recapitulating in himself this day, underwent his sufferings upon the day preceding the Sabbath, that is, the sixth day of the creation, on which day man was created.<sup>71</sup>

Irenaeus has here transposed the wording of Gen 1.5, which refers to the close of God’s creative activities on the first day, upon the creation of humanity on the sixth (cf. Gen 1.26–31), taking the scriptural wording «καὶ ἐγένετο ἑσπέρα καὶ ἐγένετο πρωί, ἡμέρα μία» to establish the distinctiveness of a day of creation as a stable, consistent unit of time. Whether or not it be in deliberate contrast to the general (though not complete) lack of temporal specificity in the cosmogonies of the Valentinians and Marcosians, Irenaeus wishes to establish a coherent timeline to the creation of the cosmos. God’s creative activity began at a specific moment (Irenaeus follows Luke’s genealogy and figures a count of 72 generations between Adam and Christ)<sup>72</sup> and, with respect to the initial formation of the cosmos, progressed in a series of distinct stages defined as ‘days’. But this insistence is not simply historical. As the above

<sup>71</sup> SC 153: 290–3.

<sup>72</sup> 3.22.3; cf. Lk 3.23–38. Theophilus likewise considers it both possible and reasonable to count backwards to the creation of the world, and he does so in far more detail than Irenaeus. *Ad Autol.* 3.24–28 represents a detailed chronology of human history from Adam to the reign of Aurelius Verus, through which Theophilus concludes that ‘all the years from the creation of the world amount to a total of 5,698 years, with the odd months and days’ (3.28). Irenaeus’ enumeration of generations is never computed into years. Cf. K.E. McVey, ‘The Use of Stoic Cosmogony in Theophilus of Antioch’s *Hexaemeron*’, in M.S. Burrows and P. Rorem (eds.), *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective—Studies in Honor of Karlfried Froehlich on His Sixtieth Birthday* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991) 42.

passage makes clear, the precise division of the creative formation into the seven days of Gen 1–2 is predictive—in the days’ duration and content—of the soteriological centrality of the human economy. *AH* 5.23.2 is a clear demonstration of this interpretive connection between the ‘days’ of creation and the phases in the economy of salvation through to the chiliastic kingdom and eschatological perfection of the human race.<sup>73</sup>

On the precisions of this textual interconnection, Irenaeus insists on Adam’s death on the ‘same day’ that he ate from the tree, and Christ’s recapitulation of human death on the ‘same’ sixth day. He goes on to reflect:

There are some who relegate the death of Adam to the thousandth year, for since ‘a day of the Lord is as a thousand years’ (2 Pe 3.8), he did not surpass a thousand years, but died within this number, thus fulfilling the sentence of his sin. Whether, therefore, with respect to the disobedience which is death, we consider that on account of it they were delivered over to death and made its debtors, with respect to the fact that on the same day on which they ate they also died (for it is one day of the creation); whether we consider that with respect to the cycle of days, they died on the same day on which they also ate, that is, the Day of Preparation, which is called ‘the pure supper’, that is, the sixth day of the feast, which the Lord also exhibited when he suffered on that day; or whether we reflect that Adam did not surpass a thousand years but died within their limit—it follows that, in regard to all these significations, God is indeed true.<sup>74</sup>

Here Irenaeus wishes to maintain the literal, that is, textually precise, *reading* of Genesis’ reference to the ‘same day’ (Gen 2.17), but he is open to the idea that the interpretation of that precise reading may support multiple conclusions (‘all these significations’), so long as these are grounded in the incarnational testimony of Christ.<sup>75</sup> For Adam to die on the ‘very day’ that he ate of the tree may mean that he died on the sixth day of the week, or it may mean that he died within a thousand-year span from his birth, which period of time is as ‘one day’ unto the Lord. Irenaeus finds value in both readings but is insistent on neither, given

<sup>73</sup> See Smith, ‘Chiliasm and recapitulation’, 16–18 for an analysis of Irenaeus’ use of the seven days in establishing his chiliastic predilections, and also his lack of use of the ‘seventh day’ to establish a precise 1,000-year duration to the future kingdom.

<sup>74</sup> 5.23.2 (SC 153: 292–5).

<sup>75</sup> On this emphasis upon the precise reading of the text, as written, see D. Ramos-Lissón, ‘La rôle de la femme dans la théologie de saint Irénée’, *Studia Patristica* 21 (1989), 165, 72. On this passage in particular, cf. A. Orbe, ‘Cinco exegesis ireneas de Gen 2,17b: adv. haer. V,23,1–2’, *Gregorianum* 62 (1981), 75–113.

that each informs the larger symbolism of the salvation economy. The former interpretation predicts Christ’s passion on the sixth day of the week; the latter predicts the timeline of his reign in the chiliastic kingdom. What is important in Irenaeus’ reading is the emphasis on textual, rather than conceptual, literality to the timeline of creation; that is, the text must be approached for what it really says, and not itself allegorised to mere fable or story. He is explicit on this general approach to holy writ in a comment on the writings of the apostles, where it is made clear that the allegorisation to which Irenaeus objects is that which dismisses the text itself as but legend.<sup>76</sup> For Irenaeus, the text must be read as intentional and accurate, even if it may be exegeted in various manners.<sup>77</sup> The Christocentric, apostolic reading of the texts, evidenced in the preaching / teaching (κήρυγμα) of the apostles themselves, shall enable proper exegesis. It is the Gospel message of Christ that is the absolute of the Christian faith; all meaning to be drawn from Genesis finds the canon of its relevance in this witness.<sup>78</sup>

With respect again to the days of Gen 1 and a timeline of creation, Irenaeus’ allusion to Gen 1.16–17 in *AH* 1.18.2 is of a similar flavour to his discussion at 5.33.2. Here he presents the Marcosians as attempting to establish an alternative meaning to this timeline, once again reading predictions of the Tetrads into the narrative—this time with reference to the creation of the sun on the fourth day. Irenaeus shows a cautious wariness of over-analysing the numerical significance of the details of the narrative (not a surprising caution in a reaction to the Marcosian numerologies); but his comments on the Marcosian ambiguities with respect to the day on which man was created show that the due importance of the timeline of days is not to be thrown out with their distorted overuse. There is demonstrated in Gen 1 chiefly a chronology of salvation, framed in a timeline of creation, significant both historically and eschatologically. It is the concrete textual articulation of the incarnational witness of creation as an economy of progress and growth into eschatological perfection.

<sup>76</sup> 3.12.11: ‘If anyone, “doting about questions” (1 Tim 6.4), imagines that what the apostles have declared about God should be allegorised, let him consider my previous statements [...]’.

<sup>77</sup> He is explicit on this matter at 5.28.3, where the notion of the six days of creation is addressed as ‘an account of things formerly created, as also it is a prophecy of what is to come’; cf. also 4.16.1; and below, p. 98.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Driscoll, ‘*Lex orandi—lex credendi*’, 214–15.

## THE DAYS OF CREATION AND THE BEGINNING OF REDEMPTION

The events of the chronology are laid out in precise detail in the scriptural narrative subsequent to Gen 1.5. But here a telling observation: Gen 1.6–25, which deals with days two through five and the first half of the sixth day, is, apart from allusions present in the refutation of the Marcossians at *AH* 1.18, never utilised by Irenaeus. This is particularly remarkable in light of his apparent awareness of (and likely dependence on) Theophilus, who made extensive use of the minutiae of these verses. This earlier author, as some might expect of his Antiochene heritage, presents an interpretation of the days of creation that is essentially a focused recounting of these details, though with notable interpretive segues and elaborations. Characterisations of Theophilus as ‘the first [Christian] to produce a continuous interpretation of the creation story’ are certainly borne out in an examination of his methodology.<sup>79</sup> *Ad Autolyicum* 2.11–19 consists of what is essentially a patristic ‘play-by-play’ of Gen 1.1–2.8, progressing through the successive days of creation and setting them into what Theophilus considers their proper Christian context. His is an extremely textual study of Genesis, requiring that each statement in the narrative be addressed as it is written and set into the context of the narrative framework as a whole; but his investigation of the account is also a classic example of how ‘literal’ textual readings could, in his and Irenaeus’ era, give rise to heavy symbolism and exegesis that the modern age would consider largely allegorical or interpretive.

It is worth spending a moment to examine Theophilus’ understanding of the days of creation, as a revealing example of the manner in which Irenaeus both stood within and departed from the interpretive tradition of his contemporaries. What becomes clear is the degree to which early Christian visions of the creation saga honed in on particular themes and points of emphasis; points echoed and expanded in Irenaeus, even in contexts wherein he does not specifically address the text. Theophilus is of particular relevance here, for we know that Irenaeus read him and was sympathetic to his views. Moreover, we know that

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<sup>79</sup> R.M. Grant, *Early Christians and Animals* (London: Routledge, 1999) 74. Cf. May, *Creatio ex Nihilo* 156; A.J. Droge, *Homer or Moses? Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1989) 102.

he paid particular attention to *Ad Autolyicum* 2, where Theophilus’ commentary on Gen 1.1–25 is located.<sup>80</sup>

Theophilus’ approach is fairly systematic. Reflections on the first three days of creation, as in Gen 1.1–13, are combined in *Ad Autol.* 2.13–14; days four and five in 2.15 and 2.16 respectively; and day six in 2.17 followed by several chapters of expansion on the creation and subsequent history of primal humanity. The methodology employed throughout is summed up by the Greek *τουτέστιν*: ‘he means ...’ or ‘that is to say ...’, preceding an exposition of each passage of the scriptural text. Theophilus intends to draw out the meaning of each detail, presenting thereby a Christian picture of God’s creative activity set along side those of others—perhaps most notably, Hesiod.<sup>81</sup> This latter, according to Theophilus, puts forth a ‘human, mean and rather feeble conception regarding God’, presenting the creative economy of the maker after the manner of ‘men who build houses’.<sup>82</sup> Men lay first the foundation, then the supports, then the roof.

But the power of God is shown in this: firstly that, according to his will, he makes existent things out of nothing (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων), ‘for things not possible for men are possible for God’ (Lk 18.27). For this reason the prophet [Moses] spoke first of the creation of the heavens, fashioned as a kind of roof, saying, ‘In the beginning God made heaven’ (Gen 1.1)—that is to say that by means of the Beginning (ἀρχή) the heavens were made, as we have already shown. What he calls ‘earth’ is equivalent to a base and foundation; what he calls ‘abyss’ is the multitude of waters; and ‘darkness’ is mentioned because the heaven which God made covered, like a lid, the waters with the earth. The ‘Spirit borne over the waters’ is that which God gave for granting life (ζωογόνησις) to the creation, as he gave life to man,<sup>83</sup> mixing fine with fine (for the Spirit is fine and the water is fine),<sup>84</sup> that the Spirit might nourish the water and the water,

<sup>80</sup> See further evidence for Irenaeus’ familiarity with this section of the *Ad Autol.*, offered below, p. 145 n. 148.

<sup>81</sup> See Hesiod, *Theogony* lns. 108–115; cf. *Ad Autol.* 2.5, 6, 8, 13.

<sup>82</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.13.

<sup>83</sup> Here Grant translates ‘like the soul in man’ from the Greek *καθάπερ ἀνθρώπου ψυχῆν*: see Grant, *Theophilus of Antioch* 49. While this reading is possible, it seems better to take *ψυχῆν* as a repeated object for *ἔδωκεν* earlier in the phrase, as I have done in the present translation. Theophilus nowhere speaks of man’s soul as that which actively engages in creating life, but rather as the means by which God gives life to man’s frame; cf. *Ad Autol.* 2.19.

<sup>84</sup> I here depart once more from Grant’s translation, where the term *λεπτόν* in this passage is consistently translated by him as ‘tenuous’ (thus reading: ‘he mingled tenuous elements together [...] for the spirit is tenuous and the water is tenuous’, p. 49). *λεπτόν* can indeed mean ‘tenuous, weak, etc.’, but to adopt this reading seems to go

together with the Spirit, might nourish the creation, penetrating it from all sides.<sup>85</sup>

Theophilus has traced out the precise order of God's creative movements in Gen 1.1–2, emphasising the exact arrangement of each as intentional and revelatory of the unique power of God, who alone can build a house by establishing the roof first of all and only then laying the foundations. Theophilus thus produces an image of the initial state of the world as consisting in its lowermost region of earth covered entirely by water, above which is 'darkness', separated from the higher 'heaven' by God's Spirit. Noteworthy too is his comment on the Spirit as given for the 'nourishing' (τρέφω) and 'animation' (ζωογόνησις) of creation. Irenaeus will later speak in strikingly similar terms, though he will not do so in the context of the days of creation.<sup>86</sup>

Theophilus continues in 2.13 with the dramatic change that occurs in the cosmos with the divine command that there be light (cf. Gen 1.3), this command being the activity of the Word who both creates and gives names ('night and day') to what he has created. Light being thus established, and the mediating agency of the Spirit as a division between the darkness of the world and God no longer required (cf. Gen 1.2), the Word continues the creative process in the particular formation of the earth.

Therefore at the beginning of the narrative of the genesis of the world, the holy scripture spoke not about this firmament [i.e. the one seen in the present era of existence], but about another heaven which is invisible to us, after which this heaven that we do see has been called 'firmament', to which half the water was taken up in order that it might serve for rains, showers and dews for mankind. The other half of the water was left on the earth for rivers and springs and seas. While the water, then, still surrounded the earth, and especially its lower places, God through his Word caused the waters to be gathered together into one assembly, making visible the dry land which previously had been invisible. The earth thus becoming visible, it was still formless (ἀκατασκέυαστος, cf. Gen 1.2). God therefore formed it and adorned it with all kinds of herbs, seeds and plants.<sup>87</sup>

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against Theophilus' statements on the power of the Spirit elsewhere in the text (e.g. *Ad Autol.* 2.10, 18, 19).

<sup>85</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.13.

<sup>86</sup> See *AH* 4.38, 39; *Epid.* 5, 12. Cf. also *Epid.* 8 for similar language applied to the Father, and *Epid.* 33 for its application to the Son.

<sup>87</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.13; cf. 1.7.



In his exposition of Gen 1.3–13, Theophilus is in classic form. The text of the scriptural narrative itself is followed precisely, but his reflections go well beyond the details of the text itself. The proclamation of Gen 1.7, that 'God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament', is expanded by Theophilus to include the precise division of the waters into two halves, one above and one below, that above serving as the source for precipitation while that remaining on the earth to become the source of seas, rivers and lakes. The separating firmament, called 'heaven' in the scriptural account (Gen 1.8), is expounded by Theophilus not as the same 'heaven' described in Gen 1.1, but as an invisible, higher heaven after which the visible heavenly firmament of Gen 1.8 is fashioned. This latter, lower, firmament is then populated by the heavenly luminaries made on the fourth day, and the varied animal species of days five and six are added to the mix of the now thriving cosmos.<sup>88</sup>

Throughout, Theophilus has maintained a strict fidelity to the text of Genesis. Every detail is examined, though he has felt little constraint to limit his exposition solely to what he reads there. This methodology becomes clearer still in his reflections on the deeper, symbolic meanings of the precise elements of the account itself. After his elaboration of the details regarding the fashioning of the earth and the seas, Theophilus dedicates an entire chapter to differentiating the symbolism behind each of these entities: the production of a tree from its seed symbolises the future resurrection of humankind; the role of the prophets and the divine law in 'sweetening' the earth is predicted by the fact that the saltiness of the sea would cause it to become 'parched' if the influx of rivers did not refresh it; the future presence of the Church as a refuge for the tempest-tossed members of the human race is foreshadowed in the islands of the sea, which are themselves refuges from violent ocean storms.<sup>89</sup> With respect to the fourth day, the fact that the luminaries were created after plant life (which in the natural order requires light to live) was meant intentionally by God as a guard against future generations believing the world to have come about by natural processes, for 'that which is posterior cannot produce that which is prior'.<sup>90</sup> The three

<sup>88</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.15–17; cf. Gen 1.14–19.

<sup>89</sup> See *Ad Autol.* 2.14.

<sup>90</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.15. Cf. Philo, *De Op. Mu.* 41, 46. This usage is taken up by a host of later patristic authors: see e.g. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 5.1, 6.2–3; Ambrose of Milan, *Hexaemeron* 3.6, 4.1.

days that passed before the creation of these luminaries are symbolic of God's nature as trinity.<sup>91</sup> The differing luminous intensities of the stars, too, predict the varying dispositions of men, as do the different types of animals created on the fifth and sixth days; and baptism is foreshadowed in the blessing of the creatures of the sea.<sup>92</sup> There is nary a phrase in Gen 1.1–25 that Theophilus does not take to be functionally symbolic of the later dispensations of God when read in the light of the Gospel of Christ, and it is for this reason that he is emphatically, textually precise in his reading of the book itself, willing to dedicate such space to the discussion of its particulars.<sup>93</sup>

By contrast, Irenaeus seems unmotivated to dwell long upon the details of the pre-anthropological movements of creation. As we have noted above, the *Epideixis* and *Adversus haereses* are wholly devoid of direct quotation or allusion to Gen 1.6–25, the very verses we have seen make up the bulk of Theophilus' cosmological discussion. Here again, Irenaeus' anthropological focus inspires a selectivity in his address of the creation saga: his principal interest in this regard is to establish God's authority as sole creator in an economy of redemption, and from that to address the particular creation of humankind who is the focal point of that redemption. God who makes, and the human creature who is made in this God's image, are the chief characters in this economy. The intervening formation of the particular attributes and characteristics of the world are relevant only in that they prepare the way for humanity's arrival, and in *AH* 5 that they typify and foreshadow the future chiliastic kingdom, thus foretelling the orientation toward progression in which all of creation is fashioned. Apart from such a context, they do not attract Irenaeus' interest. Too much focus on such details, Irenaeus points out, is a characteristic of heretical mythologizing.

Nevertheless, some aspects of Irenaeus' silence over the days of Gen 1.6–25 are surprising. With respect to the cosmogonic statements contained in verses 6–19 in particular, replete with assertions of God's direct, creative activity (e.g. 'God made', 'God brought forth'), Irenaeus' lack of textual recourse to these passages is intriguing, as they provide a solid scriptural basis for the refutation of the very type of speculations encountered in *AH* 1.4.2–3 (the cosmogony from Sophia's subsistent

<sup>91</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.15.

<sup>92</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.16, 17; cf. Gen 1.22.

<sup>93</sup> Philo, *De.Op.Mu.* 36–66, presents another treatment of the text in a point-by-point expansion.

passions). In this instance, at least, Irenaeus seems more prone to tease than seriously to respond.<sup>94</sup> When he does attempt a scriptural refutation, his recourse is predominantly to the Gospels and Pauline epistles, which the Valentinians themselves employed but which Irenaeus felt were of a nature specific enough to enable more effective refutation.<sup>95</sup>

As a subset of the above verses, Gen 1.20–25, which discusses the creation of plants and animals, is of special interest and provides evidence to show that a lack of textual commentary does not equate to a lack of developed reflection. Though among the Genesis verses never directly employed by Irenaeus, it is obvious that the initial state of plant and animal life in the cosmos which these verses discuss, was an issue to which he had given substantial consideration, precisely inasmuch as they frame in a portrait of the eschatological, and specifically chiliastic, landscape. In his reflections on the state in which the cosmos will exist in the purified and restored context of the perfected kingdom of Christ, Irenaeus refers back to an original, 'pristine state' (τὸ ἀνεμποδίστως πρότερον/*conditionem pristinum*) in which the world had first been created.<sup>96</sup> This was a state in which the 'form of the Cross' was imprinted on all creation, in which the Word of God was active and inherent in all (these attributes remaining true in subsequent generations, though with diminished transparency); and it was a state in which the life of the animal kingdom existed with a set of attributes different from those of the present day.<sup>97</sup> Notably, all animals were vegetarian.<sup>98</sup> This concept is implicit in the text of Gen 1.29–30 (another text which Irenaeus never employs),<sup>99</sup> but his interest in the nature of animals is primarily

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<sup>94</sup> See 1.4.4 for a classic example of early patristic mockery. A more famous example of the same manner of sarcastic retort is found at 1.11.4 (this latter may be a deliberate parody of the Naasene *Hymn to Attis*, found in Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.9.8; in this assertion I follow Grant, *Gnosticism* 105). Osborne has recently made a careful study of Irenaeus' use of parody, which he sees as built into a larger scheme of argumentation that also incorporates logical consistency via aesthetic reasoning: see E. Osborn, 'Irenaeus on God—Argument and Parody', *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001), 270–81. Cf. Norris, *God and World* 81.

<sup>95</sup> See 1.8–9 ff.

<sup>96</sup> 5.32.1.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. *Epid.* 34; 5.18.3.

<sup>98</sup> Stated clearly at 5.33.4.

<sup>99</sup> It might be suggested that 1.29 informs Irenaeus' catalogue of the good things of Eden in *Epid.* 12, but this is more properly inspired by Gen 2.9. There is little, in fact, in the final three verses of Gen 1 that Irenaeus finds particularly useful to his overall polemic. The reaffirmation in Gen 1.31 that 'God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good', seems relevant in light of the fact that was has just been made is, indeed, humanity in all its raw materiality; but 'indeed it was very

eschatological, not dominantly orientated towards an explanation of the present or original state of things.<sup>100</sup> It is in such an eschatological commentary that Irenaeus writes,

it is right that when the creation is restored, all the animals should obey and be subject to man, and should revert to the food originally given by God (as they had been subject to Adam before the disobedience), that is, the productions of the earth. But some other occasion, and not the present, is to be sought for showing that the lion shall feed on straw, for this indicates the large size and rich quality of the fruits. For if that animal, the lion, shall feed on straw, of what quality must be the wheat whose straw shall serve as suitable food for lions!<sup>101</sup>

The herbivorous state of animal life at creation is assumed, and there is no reason to suppose that Irenaeus did not draw his reflections here from Gen 1.30 ('To every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food'). Irenaeus is clearly familiar with the chapter as a whole. Yet here, as elsewhere, his focus is properly on eschatological prophecy (in this case gleaned from Isaiah), rather than Genesis.

The assumption of an originally vegetarian state to animal life is not unique to Irenaeus, and thus his reflections to this end are informed not only by Genesis but also by a general familiarity with other sources and traditions. There is evidence of a trend among Jewish Christians of the period to emphasise the originally vegetarian aspect of creation in its proper state.<sup>102</sup> Theophilus viewed the carnivorous nature of some animals to be the direct result of creation's following humankind into a state of sin, these animals going against their God-given nature via that act.<sup>103</sup> *Barnabas* contains similar reflections on the nature of certain

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good' has by now become the refrain of Gen 1 and Irenaeus does not seem inclined to draw any special attention to it with respect to these verses.

<sup>100</sup> See Grant, *Early Christians and Animals* 11–13, 76; also Grant, *Irenaeus* 179–80.

<sup>101</sup> 5.33.4 (SC 153: 420–1).

<sup>102</sup> Thus a tendency towards revisionist history that saw Jesus as vegetarian, along with James and Matthew; and even rid itself of the disappointingly non-vegetarian diet of John the Forerunner. See Grant, *Early Christians and Animals* 11–12 (nn. 81–3), where he gives as examples the citations of Epiphanius, *Heresies* 3.22.4, 30.13.4–5; Eusebius, *HE* 2.23.5; Clement, *Pedagogue* 2.15.1–2; among others.

<sup>103</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.16: 'As fish and fowl are of one nature, and some indeed abide in their natural state, not harming those weaker than themselves but keeping the law of God and eating of the seeds of the earth; while some of them transgress the law of God, eating flesh and harming those weaker than themselves [...so also with the righteous and the unrighteous among humankind]'. Cf. Grant, 12.

animals as fallen or, as one scholar has presented it, 'immoral';<sup>104</sup> but there is no discussion in this text on whether that condition was inherent in their nature at creation or somehow later came to be a part of their internal composition. The consideration in *Barnabas* likewise does not itself address the issue of vegetarianism.<sup>105</sup>

There is thus a history of Christian focus on the implications of the vegetarian description of animals at creation. The peace and concord to come in the eschaton are evidence of the peace and concord in existence in the original formation. Irenaeus, however, presents one notable exception to this formula:

Concerning the concord and peace of the animals of different species, who are opposed by nature and enemies of one another, the elders say that it will truly be so at the advent of Christ, when he is going to reign over all. For this makes known, in a figurative manner, how men of different races and dissimilar customs are gathered in one place in a peaceful concord by the name of Christ [...] Those men and women who, at an earlier time, because of greed, had become bestial, until some of them bore the likeness of wolves or lions, ravaging the weaker and waging war on their kind, and the women resembled leopards and vipers, who used deadly poison to kill perhaps even loved ones because of desire [...] gathered in one place in one name, they acquire, by the grace of God, righteous conduct, changing their wild and untamed nature.<sup>106</sup>

Here Irenaeus wishes specifically to establish the *disharmonious* and combative relationship of certain animals, 'who are opposed *by nature* and enemies of one another', such that through a comparison with the eventual harmony predicted by Isaias and Papias the communion and harmony of all mankind in Christ may be foreshadowed.<sup>107</sup> This seems at first to contradict the notion of the 'pristine state' of creation mentioned at 5.21.1, as well as the idea of divine harmony repeated multiple times in the Irenaeian corpus.<sup>108</sup> It is unclear, however, whether Irenaeus intends this 'natural state' of opposition to refer to the nature of animals in their pristine state, or in their state of 'natural being' after the fall of humanity and its influences upon the created order. *Epid.* 61 is not

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 45–46.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. *Barn.* 10.

<sup>106</sup> *Epid.* 61; cf. 72.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Is 65.19–25. The reference to Papias is from *AH* 5.33.4; cf. Papias, *Fragments*, IV (U.H.J. Körtner and M. Leutzsch, *Papiasfragmente. Hirt des Hermas*, ed. D. Teil (Schriften des Urchristentums; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998) 54–55).

<sup>108</sup> See 2.15.3, 3.11.9.

specifically a commentary on the nature of animals, but on the possibility of harmonious coexistence among redeemed humanity. The example of naturally combative animals made peaceful is didactic, meant to parallel the consideration of ‘men of different races’ (and thus historically in conflict with one another) who come to live ‘in a peaceful concord by the name of Christ’, and this is Irenaeus’ principal point. It is unlikely that this passage presents a real departure from Irenaeus’ underlying conception of the concordant co-existence of all creation, including the animal kingdom, at its beginnings.<sup>109</sup> What is telling is the manner in which the Christological focus of eschatological reflection can draw out these variant readings of cosmological particulars.

#### DAYS THAT LEAD TO GROWTH: ‘INCREASE AND MULTIPLY’

It ought not surprise that, in a Christocentric reading of creation grounded in a movement toward the perfection of the eschaton, Irenaeus would choose to dwell on Gen 1.28, with its charge to ‘increase and multiply’—both developmental terms. His recourse to this text is more limited than to 1.26–27, both with regard to frequency of reference and scope of interpretation. Irenaeus quotes the verse only once (at 4.11.1), alluding to it on one additional occasion (3.22.4). In both cases his intention is the same: to establish the necessity for the course of humanity’s growth via the implication of a temporal ascendancy in the command. The whole context of *AH* 4.11 is this theme of growth and increase:

And how do the scriptures testify of him, unless all things have always been revealed and shown to believers by one and the same God through the Word—he at one time conferring with his handiwork, at another giving his law, at yet another reproofing, at another exhorting, and then setting free his servant and adopting him as a son; and then, at the proper time, bestowing an incorruptible inheritance for the purpose of bringing man to perfection? For he formed him for growth and increase, as the scripture says: ‘Increase and multiply’.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>109</sup> See 2.2.4, 2.15.3, and his references to all creation living in harmony as an orchestra of various instruments produces a united, harmonious melody: 2.25.2. Cf. Osborn, *Irenaeus* 160–61.

<sup>110</sup> 4.11.1 (SC 100: 498–9).

Various scholars have addressed this passage in the context of its temporal/chronological implications grounded in the text of Gen 1.28.<sup>111</sup> The gradually revealed economy, in which God moves and acts in different ways at different times, is typified and foreshadowed in the developmental command uttered in Eden. The nature of the human person as a being of growth and maturation (or 'growth and increase', to use Irenaeus' usual terminology) is established through the first words uttered by the creator to his new creation: 'Be fruitful and multiply'. Irenaeus will move from this to his famous text on the nature of God as maker and human creature as made, the latter requiring ages of growth (cf. *AH* 4.11.2); for one must, according to the command, have occasion to be fruitful before the time is reached to multiply. It is possible to read Irenaeus' interpretation of 'and multiply' as implicating a developing sexuality in newly-formed man, and some scholars have indeed done so.<sup>112</sup> Such readings fall in line with Irenaeus' argument at 3.22.4, where he states unequivocally that Adam and Eve had no knowledge of procreation in Eden, since 'they had been created only a short time previously [...] and it was necessary that they should come first to adult age'. Nevertheless, Irenaeus' comment in that regard is only incidental. His focus is on Eve's virginal state at the transgression, such that a succinct parallel can be drawn to Mary's virginal state at the Annunciation. His only direct consideration of Gen 1.28, located at *AH* 4.11.1, is, as we have seen, centred upon that verse's suggestion of a maturing course of human growth and divine economy, wholly orientated toward the Word's continual salvific agency in creation. In this instance he makes no mention of reproductivity or procreation—it is the 'increase' and not the 'multiply' that is the focus of his attention. This term will deeply influence Irenaeus' reading of human nature, which we shall consider in the next chapter. Indeed, it seems to be at least partially from this commandment in the scriptural narrative that Irenaeus draws his reflections on anthropological themes later known as uniquely or especially his.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> See P. Bacq, *De l'ancienne à la nouvelle alliance selon s. Irénée: unité du livre IV de l'Adversus Haereses* (Paris: Editions Lethielleux, 1978) 96 n. 2; Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 37 n. 12.

<sup>112</sup> See J. Behr, 'Irenaeus *AH* 3.23.5 and the Ascetic Ideal', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37.4 (1993), 305–13, esp. 309–10.

<sup>113</sup> Interestingly, such a sequential reading of Gen 1.28 it is not found in either Justin or Theophilus. The latter quotes the verse at *Ad Autol.* 2.11, which is itself simply a lengthy block-quotation of Gen 1.3–2.3. He alludes to it again at 2.18 in his reflection on the creation of the human person; but in neither case does Theophilus discuss a

## RECAPITULATION, AND A DEFINITION OF HISTORY

The narrative of the days of creation, presented in the first account of Genesis, comes to a close with the first three verses of chapter two, which present the capstone of all that has come before: the vision of God resting on the seventh day, blessing and sanctifying it, noting the completion of the work ('the heavens and the earth and all the host of them were finished'). The whole of the narrative has been moving toward this moment, when the nothingness of the beginning is at last seen to have been transformed wholly by God into the full splendour of the cosmos. The cosmogony, in the sense of the initial formation of the universe in its full scope, is now complete. A certain and distinctly important milestone has been reached. Interesting, then, though by now wholly predictable, that Irenaeus never utilises Gen 2.1–3 in the context of a distinctly protological discussion. In his reading these verses are chiefly eschatological, and stand as among the most important ancient testimony to the incarnational confession of a chiliastic kingdom. In this instance, Irenaeus' connection of the beginning to the end is unidirectional: the only connection drawn is that of the eschaton's definition through the protological witness, not the opposite.

Gen 2.2 is the only of these three verses directly quoted in the corpus, and here but once, at 5.28.3. Irenaeus is deep into his chiliastic reflections, and the chapter at hand is his defence of a six-thousand year lifespan to the created world.

For in as many days as this world was made, in so many thousand years shall it be concluded. On this account the book of Genesis says: 'Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and all their adornment. And God brought to a conclusion upon the sixth day the works that he had made; and God rested upon the seventh day from all his works'. This is an account of the things formerly created, even as it is a prophecy of what is to come. For the day of the Lord is as a thousand years (cf. 2 Pe 3.8), and in six days created things were completed. It is evident, therefore, that they will come to an end at the sixth thousandth year.<sup>114</sup>

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temporal aspect to the command, nor does he relate it to the growth of the human creature. Neither Justin, whose quotation of the verse is aimed at other ends; cf. *Dial.* 62. Ps-Justin's foray into the question of temporality (cf. *H.ad.Gr.* 33) does not aim to investigate a link between it and a need for the gradual development of human nature. While this author mentions Gen 1.1–2 in the context of his discussion on time, he does not there include reference to 1.28.

<sup>114</sup> SC 153: 358–9.



Two things are noteworthy, and these the two sides of the important phrase: 'this is an account of the things formerly created, even as it is a prophecy of what is to come'. First, the initial remark clarifies Irenaeus' reading of the Genesis narrative with a definitive attitude of historicity. These are events that actually occurred, a history of creation as it truly unfolded. But second, it is history with an eschatological bent, a 'prophecy of what is to come'. The manner in which the beginnings were played out is a type and direct foreshadowing of the manner in which they shall come to their end, for this is history read in the light of Christ, who is both originator and perfecter. It is only in maintaining the reality of both aspects of the narrative, the symbolical as well as the historical, that Irenaeus can weave them together in such a way as to give substantial justification to his thoughts on the end-times. God is proved consistent in his dealings with humanity from the first moments of cosmic reality to the final consummation in Christ's return. 'Therefore, throughout all time, man, having been moulded in the beginning by the hands of God, that is of the Son and of the Spirit, is made after the image and likeness of God'.<sup>115</sup>

Having thus established the six days as predicting a six-thousand year period between creation and consummation, Irenaeus goes on to parallel the seventh to the chiliastic kingdom.<sup>116</sup> While he never quotes Gen 2.1–3 directly outside the single reference cited above, *AH* 5.33.2 presents an obvious allusion to both Gen 2.2 and 2.3, as does *AH* 4.16.1. The Sabbath, the day 'in which God rested from all the works which he created', is the typological witness to the full and complete Sabbath that is the chiliastic kingdom.<sup>117</sup> It is usual for Irenaeus to describe this full Sabbath as referring to man's rest in the kingdom (thus it is the 'true Sabbath of the righteous, wherein they shall not be engaged in any earthly occupation, but shall have a table at hand prepared for them by God', etc.); but at 4.16.1 he describes the kingdom as the complete Sabbath both of the human race and of God:

The Sabbath of God, that is, the kingdom, was as it were indicated by created things—in which kingdom the man who shall have persevered in serving God shall, in a state of rest, partake of God's table.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>115</sup> 5.28.4.

<sup>116</sup> Though see Smith's comment on the lack of a concordant thousand-year attribution to this seventh day: Smith, 'Chiliasm and recapitulation', 315–18.

<sup>117</sup> 5.33.2.

<sup>118</sup> *SC* 100: 562–3.

Here Irenaeus reads God's rest, described in Gen 2.2–3, as itself only a foreshadowing of God's fuller rest in the kingdom. The true Sabbath is not the seventh day of creation, but the kingdom which that seventh day indicates. God awaits his ultimate rest, and humankind moves towards it. This notion lies behind Irenaeus' claims, at *Epid.* 96, that the law is the pedagogue by which humanity is instructed to 'keep the Sabbath constantly', that is, accomplish in the temple of the body the perfect, ongoing service of God that leads to perfect human 'rest' as fulfilled creature. Justin had made the same point at *Dial.* 12, there scolding such Jewish believers as considered a single day's devotion to God's will sufficient for genuine piety. For Irenaeus, God's rest comes only in the perfect completion of his cosmogonic work. When God's nature as creator had been actualised fully in the formation of the cosmos, he was able to rest. So humankind shall find rest only in the perfection of its own nature, for the character of 'Sabbath' is a reality both for God and humankind. Irenaeus' reading of Gen 1, his whole approach to the cosmogony, is aimed at presenting the details of God calling forth from nothing a cosmos that shall foster the human creature in its gradual increase to perfection. This human creature will, in turn, one day reach the rest of the kingdom and join in the Sabbath of God. All that is encountered in the general cosmogony is anticipatory of the anthropogony proper: the story of dust that comes to life by the breath of God and struggles towards the kingdom.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DUST AND LIFE: THE CREATION OF THE HUMAN PERSON

If Irenaeus presents the thrust of the creation saga as moving forward along a definite trajectory, aimed toward a specific purpose, it is certain that each of these has its definition in the formation of the human creature, image-bearer of the incarnate Son. From the darkness of Genesis 1.2 to the dust of 2.7, the cosmos is developed by the hands of God in such a manner that the light, the wet and dry portions of the planet, the vegetation, the animals and even the raw material of the soil itself, all find fulfilment and purpose in this creature who culminates the beginnings in foretelling the ends. ‘Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness’ are words spoken at the pinnacle moment of God’s formative activity, not because they complete creation, but they initiate the history of creation’s chief actor, whose perfection is the perfection of the whole created realm. All else that has been fashioned is formed to be a servant, a support. It is now time, to take up Irenaeus’ language, to fashion the king—a king supported by the created order, but also leading and guiding it into the perfected eschaton.<sup>1</sup> In this act, as in none that has gone before, God creates a being with which he can hold fellowship, whom eventually he will come to be, taking on the very nature he has fashioned.<sup>2</sup>

It is for this reason, namely the unique and special character of humanity, that its creation is singled out by Irenaeus as being, even more emphatically than the rest of the cosmos, the unified work of the Father, Son and Spirit. In a text on the relationship of God and the human creature, J. Behr writes,

Irenaeus frequently uses the word *plasma*, ‘handiwork’, to denote man, particularly Adam. This word has the advantage of emphasizing the immediacy of the fashioning of man by God: it is, quite literally, a ‘hands-on affair’.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Or ‘lord’ (κύριος), as Irenaeus terms Adam at *Epid.* 12.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 2.32.5; 4.34.4.

<sup>3</sup> Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 38.

This ‘hands-on affair’ of the creator, in which ‘each person of the Trinity has a particular role’, constitutes the chief self-expression of that triune reality in the created order, such that in the finished product, the human *plasma*, the image of God himself is beheld. Irenaeus sees the human in such elevated terms that the only being which might be called greater than this handiwork is the Son himself:

Who is superior to and more eminent than that man who was made after the likeness of God, except the Son of God, after whose image man was created?<sup>4</sup>

Degrees of created significance reach a pinnacle in the human handiwork: the height of creation above which is only the uncreated creator. For humanity to bear the image and attain to the likeness of God is not, as some interpreters suggest, merely for it to have been gifted with rationality, or even freedom, though both are attributes emphasised by Irenaeus.<sup>5</sup> To call the human creature the ‘image of God’ is primarily to declare that its creation is bound up in the Son’s life in the Father, with the Spirit, and that, as much as is possible in any created being, God has manifested himself in the nature of this finite creation. God’s chief creative work is that in which his own life may be seen.

The clear centre-piece for this vision is the incarnation of the Son. The connection with the protological text of Gen 1.26–27, ‘Let us create man in our image, according to our likeness’, is for Irenaeus obvious in its implications of the Father working with his two hands, as we examined in the preceding chapter. We will take up this passage again in what follows, this time for its distinctly anthropological elements. But looking more broadly, one finds in the whole scope of Gen 2—especially vv. 4–25 with their implications of dust, of breath, of spirit, of life—the extrapolation and expansion of 1.26 that reflect the testimony of the incarnation. Irenaeus, like Theophilus before him, treats the ‘second creation account’ of Gen 2 as an expanded reflection on creation’s most potent event: the formation of humankind. There are not, for him, two accounts in scripture, but a general narrative followed by a more focused treatment of its main particular—an emphasis that bears out the centrality of human nature as bound up in the salvific work of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 4.33.4 (SC 100: 812–3).

<sup>5</sup> On human rationality, cf. 4.4.4; on freedom, cf. *Epid.* 11.

<sup>6</sup> Evidenced in Irenaeus’ commingling of details from both accounts in the course of *Epid.* 10–14, as throughout the *AH*; cf. Theophilus, *Ad Autol.* 2.17–19, where the

In this reading, Irenaeus first takes care to relate the creative formation of humanity to the unified-yet-distinct working of the Father, Son and Spirit, much as we have seen him do already in his more general cosmological considerations. He then comes to consider the human person's nature as fashioned dust, and thus as intrinsically material being. This, in turn, leads Irenaeus to reflect on the relationship between the material and the immaterial, the mortal and immortal in the human person, with an eye specifically toward the immortal aspect of human life and the Holy Spirit of God, which he reads as the testimony of Christ's human life in union with the Spirit. These considerations combine, for Irenaeus, in the vision of humanity developing from 'raw materiality', the dust of the first creation, to the full life of the Spirit and participation in the glory of God for which the Son became flesh.

#### THE TRIUNE CREATION OF HUMANITY

Returning to the key passage from Gen 1, the chief implication of 1.26–27 even in its anthropological context remains for Irenaeus trinitarian. The creation of humankind in the image and likeness of God only has meaning and relevance if it is the full communion of the Father with his Word and Wisdom who thus creates. To quote again from Behr, in the activity of the fashioning of the human creature,

each person of the Trinity has a particular role: the Father plans and orders, the Son executes these orders and performs the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishes and increases, while man makes continual progress. The Father is the origin of all creation, expressed by the prepositions ἐκ and ἀπό, but he created everything through (διὰ) the Son and in (ἐν) the Spirit, making the creation of man into a Trinitarian activity of the one God.<sup>7</sup>

We have already seen how this sort of individuation of creative roles figures into Irenaeus' conception of the formation of the cosmos: in all acts of creation the Father is the principal creative source, but, as analogised

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anthropogenic elements of Gen 2.1–15 are seamlessly interwoven with those of Gen 1.26–31. Cf. Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 78 n. 137 (which cites A. Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo: Comentario al libro V del Adversus Haereses*, vol. iii (Madrid: Biblioteca des Autores Cristianos, 1988) 192); Ramos-Lissón, 'La rôle de la femme', 164; Andia, 'Modèles de l'unité', 50.

<sup>7</sup> Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 38. Fantino draws out the significance of this ἀπό/ἐκ distinction in much the same manner; cf. Fantino, *Théologie d'Irénée* 312.

in the image of an individual with his two hands, never is the source separated from the Word and Wisdom who are the realising agents of the Father's will.<sup>8</sup> Thus can Irenaeus state explicitly, 'throughout all time, man, having been moulded at the beginning by the hands of God, that is, of the Son and of the Spirit, is made after the image and likeness of God'.<sup>9</sup>

The work of the Father in this tripartite act of human creation is, as elsewhere in the creation saga, presented by Irenaeus as establishing the will, power and source of creation itself. In generating and manifesting this creative will, the goodness of the creator is revealed in his handiwork:

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 demonstrated in his having made created things parts of one harmonious and consistent whole; and those things which, through his eminent kindness, receive growth and a long period of existence, do reflect the glory of the uncreated One, of that God who ungrudgingly bestows what is good.<sup>10</sup>

Among the list of 'things created through his Word and his Wisdom', which 'receive growth and a long period of existence', Irenaeus explicitly mentions the human race (3.5.3).

Thus, with the Father as the will bringing about humanity's creation, and the character of that will as the substance of the fashioned handiwork, the Son and the Spirit are presented as the 'workers' who carry out the particulars of the anthropogony. In this, Irenaeus does not depart in any notable manner from his view on the distinct roles of the three in the cosmic creation, already treated in some detail. It is only with respect to his emphatic insistence upon the point that Irenaeus can be seen to associate humanity's formation, as opposed to that of the whole natural order, with the trinity.<sup>11</sup> Yet this insistence reveals the tone by which

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<sup>8</sup> See above, p. 62; cf. Orbe, 'Creación de la materia', 74–75.

<sup>9</sup> 5.28.4; cf. A. Orbe, 'El hombre ideal en la teología de s. Ireneo', *Gregorianum* 43 no 3 (1962), 456.

<sup>10</sup> 4.38.3 (SC 100: 952–3).

<sup>11</sup> I cannot agree here with MacKenzie (Mackenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration* 101), that 'the creation of humanity is singled out as that which is accomplished, in contradistinction to all the other creative activity of God, in a particular way by 'the hands of God'. There is little contradistinction to be found, for both the Son and the Spirit are presented as active in the formation of the whole cosmos from the initial moments of

Irenaeus will characterise humanity's creation as the capstone to God's work of genesis—a tone evidenced clearly in his exposition of Ephesians 4.26, with its assertion that there is 'One God, the Father, who is above all and through all and in us all'. On this, Irenaeus writes:

Because 'above all' is the Father, and 'through all' is the Word—since through him everything was made by the Father—while 'in us all' is the Spirit, who cries 'Abba, Father', and forms man to the likeness of God. Thus, the Spirit demonstrates the Word, and, because of this, the prophets announced the Son of God, while the Word articulates the Spirit, and therefore it is he himself who interprets the prophets and brings man to the Father.<sup>12</sup>

The particular way in which the Father, Son and Spirit are each involved in humanity's formation, in comparison to the rest of the material order, is notable for its directness, its closeness, its immediacy. God calls forth light, waters, stars by his voice and will, but only for the human person does he take up dust and fashion with his own hands.<sup>13</sup> Only for this creature does God himself plant a garden. Only in the newly-fashioned Adam is the image of God shown forth.<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus' trinitarianism injects his anthropology with a poignant sense of immediacy and presence near at hand—an immediacy grounded in the testimony of the incarnate Son, the realised Image, who is at once both divine and creaturely. All creation is God's, but in humanity God himself is manifest. Thus while trees and mountains will pass away, God has given this race the ability to exist eternally.<sup>15</sup> The creator is 'a God near at hand, and not a God afar off' (Jer 23.23, cf. AH 4.19.2), who 'fills the heavens and views the abysses'; but it is specifically—and only—with regard to human-kind that Irenaeus can add, 'who is also present with every one of us'.<sup>16</sup> God as transcendent fills and pervades the whole of creation, but only the work fashioned by his two hands exists in the relational proximity

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its beginnings. We here echo the criticism once levelled against P. Beuzart by Lawson (Lawson, *Biblical Theology* 17–18), who claimed that the French scholar had placed too much emphasis upon the divine 'hands' relating only to the creation of the human person. Cf. P. Beuzart, *Essai sur la Théologie d'Irénée* (Paris, 1908).

<sup>12</sup> *Epid.* 5.

<sup>13</sup> See 5.1.3.

<sup>14</sup> See Orbe, 'El hombre ideal', 453.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. 4.3.1, with quotations of Ps 101.26–29 and Is 51.6. Cf. Irenaeus' analysis of 1 Cor 7.31 at AH 5.36.1 (see also herein, pp. 60, 208) for clarification of his view on the eternity of the earth.

<sup>16</sup> 4.19.2.

that such a formation engenders. Only the human person can be called God's 'friend'.<sup>17</sup>

Humanity's character, as a creation of the triune reality of the Father with his two hands, is, then, primarily understood as related to the actual process of formation: these three were active in the pronouncement of the creation (Gen 1.26), as well as in the motions of its actualisation into human form (Gen 2.7). Irenaeus does not assign distinct features of the human constitution (e.g. organs, emotions, strengths) to one or another of the three, as the Barbeliotes and Valentinians were to do with the various spiritual powers, though he is not wholly without some such attributions:<sup>18</sup> thus it is the Holy Spirit who forms the human creature after the divine likeness, while the *imago* is the image of the Word, and the freedom possessed by humanity is a reflection of the freedom of the Father.<sup>19</sup> Yet these characteristics are not so assigned to the individual persons in any hard-and-fast manner. At 4.37.4 the *imago* is indicated as being of the Father, rather than the Son; and at 3.20.2 it is Christ, and not the Spirit, who 'calls man forth into his own likeness'.<sup>20</sup> It is easy enough to say that Irenaeus is 'inconsistent' in his efforts to relate human nature to the distinct working of the Father, Son and Spirit, but what might be taken as inconsistency ought, in fact, be understood as a deliberate interconnection of the varied aspects of the human formation to the indivisible unity of these three. The human formation is ultimately a work of the Father together with his two hands, and not of one or another of these.<sup>21</sup> Thus, in a passage already examined above, and which will be of no small importance later in the present chapter, Irenaeus writes: 'Man is a mixture of soul and flesh, who was formed after the likeness of God and moulded by his hands, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit, to whom he also said, "Let us make man".'<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in concluding the *Epideixis*, Irenaeus once more makes specific mention of each of the three persons, in each case connecting humanity to God:

<sup>17</sup> An image of frequent recurrence in Irenaeus; see 3.18.7, 4.13.4, 4.16.3–4, 4.18.3, 5.14.2.

<sup>18</sup> See *Ap. John*, NHC (II,1) 15.1–17.29; *Or. World*, NHC (II,5) 114.27–115.3.

<sup>19</sup> See *Epid.* 5 on the Holy Spirit forming the likeness. On the image of the Word, see 5.1.1 and 4.33.4; in *Epid.* 22 the image is explicitly the Son. For the freedom of the Father as the freedom of humanity, see 4.37.4.

<sup>20</sup> See also 3.18.1.

<sup>21</sup> See again *Epid.* 1, 5. Cf. Fantino, 'Création *ex nihilo*', 433–38.

<sup>22</sup> 4.Praef.4.



[We must not think that] there is another God the Father besides our creator, as the heretics think [...]. And some, again, despise the advent of the Son of God and the economy of his incarnation, which the apostles handed over and the prophets foretold would be the recapitulation of humankind [...]. And others do not admit the gifts of the Holy Spirit [...] being watered by which, man bears as fruit the life of God.<sup>23</sup>

The Father is called creator, but not so without the Son shown forth as recapitulator (who thus completes creation) and the Spirit as the one who ‘waters’ humankind and offers it development. It is a cardinal point for Irenaeus that the whole triune God was involved in the formation of the whole human person. In no aspect of the formation did the Son work without the Spirit, or the Spirit without the Father, and likewise there is no portion of the human person that does not bear the imprint of the entire godhead.<sup>24</sup> It is God in his fullness that bestows life.<sup>25</sup> This is of the utmost importance when Irenaeus comes to consider the perfection of this human creation, which is ultimately the perfected communion of the human being created by the triune God, with the life and glory of the Father, Son and Spirit. As one scholar has noted, ‘man’s participation in the glory of God [is] the inspiration for creation’,<sup>26</sup> and indeed, when Irenaeus writes his famous phrase, ‘The glory of God is a living man, and the life of man is the vision of God’, his point is precisely that God’s glory is manifested in the created being who has come to participate in his own life, and that this being reaches such participation through the divine vision that illuminates and transforms.<sup>27</sup> Since God’s glory is always the glory of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so too it is this which the human creature must behold and in which he must partake if that participation is to be made a reality. As such, Irenaeus never presents humanity’s perfection as its integration into only one of these—the incarnation is not simply Christ’s act for humanity, but is also the act of the Spirit and the Father.<sup>28</sup> The receipt of the Holy Spirit

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<sup>23</sup> *Epid.* 99.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. 4.20.1; Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 38.

<sup>25</sup> See 2.34.4.

<sup>26</sup> Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 37. See above, p. 36.

<sup>27</sup> 4.20.5, 7. Cf. Tremblay, *Manifestation* 150–52; M.A. Donovan, ‘Irenaeus: At the Heart of Life, Glory’, in A. Callahan (ed.), *Spiritualities of the Heart: Approaches to Personal Wholeness in Christian Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990) 13, 20–21.

<sup>28</sup> As made clear at 3.17.2, 4.28.2.

is the work of the Son, and without these two, an approach to the Father would be impossible for the human handiwork.<sup>29</sup>

In this consists Irenaeus' vision of the trinitarian nature of the creation of humanity: it is from the glory of the triune creator that the human person is formed, toward the glory of the trinity that he matures, and in the vision of the trinity that he comes to participate in that trinitarian life which is his destiny. 'For the glory of man is God, but his works are the glory of God; and the receptacle of all his wisdom and power is man.'<sup>30</sup> The emphasis Irenaeus places on the trinitarian implications of Gen 1 discovers its justification here. Humanity is created of the Father, Son and Spirit, saved by this trinity, brought to eternal life in the same. This becomes clearer still in Irenaeus' reading of humanity's particular formation.

#### THE UNTILLED EARTH AND THE CONSTITUTION OF THE HUMAN PERSON

When Irenaeus comes to consider the actual creation of the human person, he does so with explicit reference to the Genesis narrative. In this, he makes considerable use of Gen 2.5, and this use is typical of his anthropological and soteriological focus as a whole. Twice he quotes directly one phrase: 'For God had not yet sent rain, and there was no one to till the ground' (in both cases he leaves off the first portion of the verse, the conclusion to the sentence begun in 2.4), and in each instance the context of his discussion is the virginal birth of Christ. From 3.21.10:

And as the protoplast himself, Adam, had his substance and formation from untilled and as yet virgin soil—'for God had not yet sent rain, and man had not tilled the ground'—and was formed by the hand of God, that is, by the Word of God, for 'all things were made by him' (Jn 1.3), and the Lord took dust from the earth and formed man, so did he who is the Word, recapitulating Adam in himself, rightly receive a birth from Mary, who was as yet a virgin, enabling him to gather up Adam into himself.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See 4.13.1, 5.9.1–2, *Epid.* 47.

<sup>30</sup> 3.20.2.

<sup>31</sup> SC 211: 428–9.

This is exactly paralleled at *Epid.* 32:

But whence, then, was the substance of the first formed? From the will and wisdom of God and from virgin earth—‘for God had not caused it to rain’, says scripture, before man was made, ‘and there was no man to till the ground’. So from this earth, while it was still virgin, God ‘took mud from the earth and fashioned man’ (Gen 2.7), the beginning of humankind. Thus the Lord, recapitulating this man, received the same arrangement of embodiment as this one, being born from the Virgin by the will and wisdom of God, that he might also demonstrate the likeness of embodiment to Adam, and might become the man, written in the beginning, ‘according to the image and likeness of God’ (cf. Gen 1.26).

Two things are immediately of note in Irenaeus’ reading of the scriptural phrase. First, there is the lack of any commentary on the verse’s implication that the earth requires the human person to till it, or whether humanity is in some sense beholden to this duty. Irenaeus will, in fact, consider extensively the relationship of humanity to the world around it, and especially to the plants and animals, but the subtle implication of this verse is not one on which he chooses to focus.<sup>32</sup>

Second, the fact that the earth was untilled and un-sown when Adam was brought into being is understood as having a directly Christological foundation, and as such it is only from this Christological perspective that the verse has meaning. In this there is a glimmer of *AH* 5.16.2, Irenaeus’ famous passage on the image of God proclaimed in former times but not shown forth or fully made known until the human advent of the Son.<sup>33</sup> So too, for Irenaeus, with the meaning of this detail of creation. From the beginning its contents have been known to the human race, but only by the light of the incarnation can they be understood for the full depth of their message. It is Christ, as the full and complete human person (cf. *Epid.* 32), who shows forth the anthropological focus of the scriptures.

And what is the anthropological focus demonstrated in Gen 2.5? Namely, that humanity’s genesis is ‘from the will and wisdom of God and from virgin earth’, disclosing the virginal birth of the Saviour, with its implications for his divinity and humanity, as natural to the whole

<sup>32</sup> See below, p. 145.

<sup>33</sup> ‘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.’ A strikingly similar line of thought may be found in the Nag Hammadi tractate *Teach. Silo.*, NHC (VII,4) 100.23–31. Cf. above, p. 14.

testimony of creation. This dual origination stands for Irenaeus as the ἀρχή of human nature: there is both the divine and the material in the constitution of the human person, and if either is lacking, the person is neither truly nor fully human. Thus does Irenaeus expound the necessity that the incarnate Son, too, have an ‘earthy nature’, and more, that this be a nature of the same sort as Adam’s—one of bare createdness. Looking to Eden, the soil of the earth has not yet been furrowed, has not been tilled, has not been planted, and from precisely this raw stuff of the earth does God create human life. So in the incarnation, the person of Mary is the pure representation of ‘raw humanity’, equally as ‘untilled’ and virginal as the soil from which Adam’s frame was drawn (there is no sense in Irenaeus of any divine status to Mary, as in a small number of the ‘Gnostics’, nor of an exemption from the usual character of human nature, however qualified, as in some later traditions).<sup>34</sup> Scholars have long noted the manner in which Irenaeus’ concept of recapitulation is both forward- and backward-reaching—earlier events read by the latter and the latter by the former—and in his interpretation of Gen 2.5 this could not be more clear.<sup>35</sup> Christ must be born of a virgin because Adam was wrought from virgin soil; but equally, and perhaps more significantly, must it be said that Adam’s formation from the untilled dust is worked out in accordance with Christ’s incarnational economy.<sup>36</sup> For humanity to be created in the image of God means, as we have already suggested and as others have convincingly shown, that it was created in the image of the Son, and more precisely the incarnate Son.<sup>37</sup> It is in this framework that Irenaeus can insist that the virgin birth and the incarnation were in the divine foreknowledge of the ‘will and power’ of God at the creation of primal man. Adam is drawn from untilled dust because Mary will be a virgin at her birth-giving, even as much as her virginal state is a reflection of Adam’s creation. Gen 2.5 ultimately shows the interconnectedness of the beginning and the end of the human economy, and the relationship of each stage of creation to the Word which abides in every era.<sup>38</sup> This focus shall con-

<sup>34</sup> On a divine status to Mary in Gnostic exegesis, see 1.15.3.

<sup>35</sup> See Smith, ‘Chiliasm and recapitulation’, 321–26, esp. 323.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. 3.22.3, discussed above. If the Saviour shall indeed save humanity, humanity must first be created.

<sup>37</sup> See J. Fantino, ‘Le passage du premier Adam au second Adam comme expression du salut chez Irénée de Lyon’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 52.4 (1998), 424, based on *AH* 5.16.2; and cf. again *Epid.* 22.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. 3.16.3.

tinue throughout his treatment of humanity's creation in its entirety, as it does in some sense for his treatment of the entire body of scripture. Recapitulation is the key by which the inner and deepest meanings of the revealed word are unlocked.

No mention is made in the corpus of Gen 2.6, which completes the thought of 2.5 with a reference to the mist that went up from the earth to water the ground before the advent of rain. This is in distinction to Theophilus, who employs the verse to show that the newly created earth was self-sufficient before the advent of humanity: at God's command it produced spontaneously, even watering itself as the need arose.<sup>39</sup> But the very fact, noticed by Theophilus, that this verse is in some sense an explanation of how the earth existed before its completion and handing over to humanity, explains Irenaeus' lack of draw to it. His whole thrust is toward the earth's *need* for its king, the human creature, which is at once drawn forth from it (from the dust, as Irenaeus reads primarily from the healing of the man born blind), yet deigned to rule over it.

THE CREATURE WROUGHT OF DUST AND BREATH:  
THE COMPOSITION OF THE HUMAN FORMATION

The thrust toward the earth's culmination in the creation of humanity, as a being of its fabric (dust) yet ultimately its lord, grounds Irenaeus' attention to Gen 2.7, which occurs in direct quotation five times in the *Adversus haereses* and twice in the *Epideixis*; and by allusion three additional times in the shorter work, four in the longer. This is an essential text in any treatment of biblical anthropology, and it is little surprise to find Irenaeus employing it as often as he does, absorbing it into his thought in so foundational a manner that it becomes influential even in such of his reflections as do not give it any specific reference. Not only does the verse itself speak of humanity being drawn from the earth, but also of the 'breath of life' that God breathed into this material handiwork, causing it to become a living being. What this passage, in combination with the text of Gen 1.26, has to say about the composition of human nature, is of the utmost interest to Irenaeus, specifically in the extrapolation he is able to draw therefrom on the relationship of the material body, the immortal human soul and the divine Spirit in the

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<sup>39</sup> See *Ad Autol.* 2.19.

individual person—and it is so because it seems to Irenaeus so directly to bear on the nature and work of the incarnate Christ: a being of dust who healed by dust, who breathed the breath of life and sent the Spirit into the heart of man. The anthropological reality we have seen Irenaeus glean from Gen 2.5, namely that humanity has material as well as divine originations, is clarified through the relationship of dust and breath this verse discloses.

*Four categories of incarnational reading*

Irenaeus' use of Gen 2.7 may be classed into four categories, each of which is Christological in focus and incarnational in its exegesis: references used (1) to show that God and not angels created humanity, drawing out the working of the Father with his hands; (2) to emphasise the character of Christ's birth and his human nature; (3) to emphasise and characterise the material aspect of humanity's being as a creature of flesh; and (4) to characterise the immortal element in the human person, the soul, in its relation to the divine Spirit of God. Additionally, two passages in the corpus are a deliberate combination of what I have called categories three and four, and exemplify the synthesis Irenaeus sees as existing between the three elements constitutive of the fully human person. From this broad range of uses, one sees that Gen 2.7, perhaps more than any other single verse in the First Testament, discloses to Irenaeus the incarnational nature of God's creative endeavour.

*God and not angels created the human handiwork*

In our first category, that of the text's use to show God and not angels or any other beings as the creator of the human formation, there exists one passage in the extant corpus. It is, however, of special importance in that it represents Irenaeus' own drawing together of Gen 1.26 and 2.7:

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—and among the 'all things', are both this world of ours and our own selves. We also, then, were made, along with those things contained by him. 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' (cf. Gen 2.7). It was not angels, therefore, who made or formed us, nor had angels power to make an image of God, nor any one else except the true God—nor any power remotely distant from the

Father of all things. For God did not stand in need of these [beings], 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.<sup>40</sup>

Irenaeus' desire to refute angelologies and demiurgic interpretations of creation has by now been established. *AH* 4.20.1 is the extension of this belief and interpretation into the specific realm of anthropology. Just as it was God as Father with Son and Spirit who created the cosmos, so it is this triune God, the Father with his two hands, who creates humanity. Irenaeus' constant retort is against those 'who conjure into existence another god beyond the creator and maker of all existing things'.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps his fullest and most poetic discussion to this effect comes in his expanded interpretation of Christ's parable of the vineyard (cf. Mt 21.33–44), which shows the one God's presence throughout the whole human economy, from Adam to the incarnation.<sup>42</sup> Here it is 'God [who] planted the vineyard of the human race when at the first he formed Adam and chose the fathers'; the participation of any others in the genesis of the human story is fundamentally excluded, chiefly because it is a story that culminates in Christ himself.

Justin implies a similar doctrine at *Dial.* 29, stating simply that 'God has created us' (speaking on the justification for circumcision), but makes the point more explicit at *Dial.* 62—a passage already examined for its trinitarian significance.<sup>43</sup> Both Irenaeus and Justin follow what was already a standard point of Christian interpretation. Clement of Rome, who otherwise is not overly concerned with commenting on the creation saga, makes a point of emphasising this particular notion. Terminating his catalogue of God's creative works, he concludes:

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<sup>40</sup> 4.20.1 (SC 100: 624–7). This represents a more substantial quotation of the passage, already reproduced in briefer extraction above, p. 75.

<sup>41</sup> 3.3.3. Cf. Orbe, 'El hombre ideal', 452–53.

<sup>42</sup> 4.36.2. Cf. 2.26.3, 2.30.9, 3.20.2.

<sup>43</sup> See above, p. 77.

Above all, with his holy and undefiled hands he formed man, the most excellent of his creatures and truly great through the understanding given him—the express likeness of his own image.<sup>44</sup>

Clement's use of the imagery of 'hands' is meant to demonstrate immediacy and directness, not to extrapolate coherently on the relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit as it is in Irenaeus—but Clement, Irenaeus and Justin together demonstrate what appears to be a common and widespread reaction to the notion of mediated human creation.

We must not overlook the importance of Irenaeus' systematisation, in this passage, of Gen 1.26 and 2.7. He states that the God who acted in forming Adam from the dust (2.7) was identical to the God who deliberated in the decision to 'make man in our own image, according to our likeness' (1.26), whom he has already articulated as Father *with Son and Spirit*. Here the 'decision' to create 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. It may be the Father who speaks to the Word and the Wisdom in Gen 1.26, but he does so within the eternal nature of the triadic relationship. Father, Son and Spirit mutually will and work the creation, but it is the 'one God' who acts. This is, it seems to me, a striking articulation of the mutual interrelatedness of the trinitarian persons, set forth in the context of an anti-Valentinian polemic composed some 150 years before Nicaea, and several centuries prior to the more robust clarification that would come about in the era of the Cappadocians—to which period we would most often date the kind of comments it seems Irenaeus is making. He has, at least to this degree and in this limited scope, broken out of the subordinationist conception of the Son and Spirit that found some evidence in the Apostolic Fathers and Justin, which would continue to be put forward in various forms through the course of the Arian and larger trinitarian controversies. While he does not expound upon the triadic relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit with the type of linguistic or theological precision that would become necessary after Nicaea, his conception of the Father as the divine ἀρχή in which the co-equal divinity of the three persons is grounded, and of the interre-

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<sup>44</sup> *1Clem.* 33.



lated activities of those persons in both action and will, is a remarkable prolepsis of the discussion of future generations.

Equally as important as the systematisation of Gen 1.26 and 2.7 is the thought offered in the last phrase of *AH* 4.20.1: God created through his Word and Wisdom, ‘taking from himself the substance of the creatures formed, the pattern of things made, and the type of all the adornments of the world’. It was mentioned in our chapter on the motivation for creation that Irenaeus perceives God’s will as establishing the essence and continuance of all created beings, and in this phrase the concept receives further clarification. 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. This is surely the meaning intended by Irenaeus placing this clause at the end of a phrase on the interaction of the Father and his hands in humanity’s particular formation. When God the creator fashions Adam from the dust, the resulting *plasma*, the created handiwork, 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.

This is to go further than the implications of our discussion in the preceding sections, where it was the creative involvement of the Father, Son and Spirit that was stressed. Here Irenaeus emphasises 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. If it was not angels or any other mediating power that fashioned man, then it must have been God solely and directly; and since ‘with him always were present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and Spirit’, then it is only as trinity that God can and will have fashioned this handiwork. Irenaeus’ stress on the activity of the whole trinity in the formation of the cosmos has here been expanded into the creation of the human creature, and to profound effect in the realms of redemption, salvation and creative perfection.

#### *Christ’s birth and human nature*

Irenaeus’ second mode of reading Gen 2.7 is that of emphasis upon the character of Christ’s birth and his human nature. In each of the three passages in which this type of usage of the text is encountered, Irenaeus employs the reciprocal understanding of recapitulation we have

already encountered in his treatment of earlier themes. His emphasis is on reading the text in light of the apostolic confession that Christ was born of a Virgin, and that the flesh he received from this virginal, yet human birth, was that same flesh Adam received and which all his ancestors inherit. What begin, then, as purely Christological reflections end up suggesting anthropological truths of influence in Irenaeus' larger doctrinal considerations.

Two of the passages that fit in this category, *AH* 3.21.10 and *Epid.* 32, have already been examined in the preceding section, inasmuch as each employs texts from Gen 2.5 as well as 2.7. These are in fact the only two locations at which Gen 2.7 is quoted directly in the present context. The third passage of interest is an allusion to the Genesis text, but one clear in its reference:

If the Lord became incarnate for the reason of any other economy, or took flesh of any other substance, then he has not summed up human nature in himself, nor indeed can he even be called 'flesh'. For flesh has been truly made to consist in a transmission of that thing moulded originally from the dust.<sup>45</sup>

Several elements in this passage are worthy of note. First is the absolute realism with which Irenaeus approaches the notion of Christ's becoming human in the incarnation. That 'the Word was made flesh' (Jn 1.14) must be understood to mean that the Word was made *this* flesh, human flesh, which can be different in no way from that had by Adam and through him the whole lineage of the human race. Docetism, whether Valentinian or of any other class, may be attacked on several grounds, but none is more succinct to Irenaeus than the charge that a Christ of any other substance (or appearance) than that of Adam, 'has not summed up human nature in his own person'.

Irenaeus' continuation of this incarnational idea in the passage is relevant to the question. It is not enough to say that Christ, had he his substance from something other than human nature, would not have been truly human: he would not even have been flesh in any proper sense, 'for flesh has been truly made to consist in a transmission of that thing moulded originally from the dust'.<sup>46</sup> There is, Irenaeus declares, a lineage to humanity's material element. God 'made from one blood the

<sup>45</sup> 5.14.2 (SC 153: 186–7).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. D'Alès, 'Doctrine de la récapitulation', 193: 'Il fallait que Jésus-Christ fût non seulement homme, mais chair de notre chair [...]'

whole race of men to dwell upon the face of the whole earth', he writes elsewhere, and the present passage is the Christological summation of this idea.<sup>47</sup> Since its beginning in Adam, humanity as fleshly creature has passed along that material nature from one generation to the next, as do the majority of animal species, through the lineage of blood. There is a new creation in the conception and birth of each human individual, and God is involved in the coming into being of each new life; but Irenaeus is in line with Theophilus in recognising the significance of the natural course of human reproduction in the transmission of the human substance and nature. Irenaeus nowhere offers a commentary similar to Theophilus' description of the biological intricacies of seminal generation,<sup>48</sup> but his note on the 'one blood' of all humanity in Adam, and his mention here of the 'transmission' (*διαδοχή/successio*) of human fleshly nature throughout the generations, combined with his insistence upon the need for Christ to be born of this human lineage through the person of Mary if indeed he is to be human in a genuine way, all point to such an understanding of the proliferation of humanity's fleshly element. The continuation of human nature itself is the resultant work, albeit only in part, of the command in Gen 1.28 to 'be fruitful and multiply'.<sup>49</sup>

*The material aspect of humanity's being as a creature of flesh*

What is the nature of the 'fleshly element' in the composition of the human person? This is the subject of Irenaeus' third mode of usage of Gen 2.7, that of an emphasis on the material aspect of humanity's being as a creature of flesh. Only once, at 5.15.2, does Irenaeus directly quote the verse in such a context, but three allusions are made to it in important passages of a similar character. In each, he wishes to emphasise that the human person is, in part, a being of matter drawn up from the material of the cosmos that God had created *ex nihilo*, and which finds its perfection in the material working of the incarnate Son. Thus, in a discussion on Christ's healing of the man born blind (cf. Jn 9), to which we have made reference above, Irenaeus expounds:

<sup>47</sup> See 3.12.9.

<sup>48</sup> At *Ad Autol.* 1.8; quoted above, p. 43.

<sup>49</sup> Behr's study on Irenaeus and Clementine anthropology has more to say on the question of sexuality and reproduction than any other monograph on Irenaeus; see esp. Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 111–13. On the transmission of the *imago* to all generations, cf. G. Wittenberg, 'The Image of God: Demythologization and Democratization in the Old Testament', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 13.1 (1975), 18.

The work of God is the fashioning of man. For, as scripture says, he made man by a kind of process: ‘And the Lord took clay from the earth, and formed man’ (cf. Gen 2.7). Wherefore also the Lord spat on the ground and made clay, and rubbed it upon the eyes (cf. Jn 9.6), indicating the original fashioning of man—how it was effected—and manifesting the hand of God to those who can understand by what hand man was formed out of the dust.<sup>50</sup>

The Word incarnate as Jesus Christ is the same ‘hand’ that took up the dust of Gen 2.7. Irenaeus is keen to point out the importance of materiality in the Son’s workmanship of the human creation, through the connection of the dust of that verse with the dust used in forming the mud of Jn 9.6. This discussion is a deliberate counter to the proliferation of anti-materialistic, dualistic views in the groups against which Irenaeus writes, not only through the reaffirmation of humanity’s material nature, but also of God’s continued use of the material order to effect human salvation. This is among the chief incarnational clarifications of creation: God redeems through matter, demonstrating the value of matter. Earlier, at 4.Praef.4, Irenaeus had spoken out against those who ‘disallow the salvation of God’s workmanship, which the flesh truly is’, and it is this characterisation of God’s handiwork as humanity’s fleshliness to which Irenaeus returns at 5.15.2. Behr notes this while commenting on the term *plasma*, used often in the corpus of the human formation:

It [...] emphasizes the materiality of man, the fact that man is made from the earth, from mud. Human beings are, for Irenaeus, essentially and profoundly fleshy or earthy: they are skilfully fashioned mud [...].<sup>51</sup>

Others, reading Irenaeus, have called the human person (and thus Christ as human) ‘earth creature’ as a means of emphasising exactly this.<sup>52</sup> This earthiness is itself something valued as sacred by Irenaeus. At *Epid.* 96 it is the body, following the thought of 1 Cor 3.16, that is the

<sup>50</sup> 5.15.2 (SC 153: 204–7).

<sup>51</sup> Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 38; cf. the same in D. Minns, *Irenaeus*, ed. B. Davies (Outstanding Christian Thinkers; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994) 57–58. See also the important passage in A. Orbe, *Antropología de San Ireneo* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1969) 527–28, referenced by Behr in his n. 14. Orbe’s terminology of ‘sarcología’ for the anthropological thought of Irenaeus is to some degree misleading (see the following pages of the present study on the soul/spirit in human nature); but as a counter to his definitions of Gnostic and Origenist conceptions, it provides a useful emphasis. Cf. Orbe, ‘El hombre ideal’, 454. For the frequency of *plasma* in the corpus, cf. 3.10.4, 3.18.6, 3.19.3, 3.22.1, 4.24.1; *Epid.* 11, 14, 97, etc.

<sup>52</sup> See Minns, *Irenaeus* 57–59.

temple of God, and the whole first half of *Adversus haereses* 5 (5.3–5.15) is dedicated to the defence of the fleshly body's resurrection into the eternal life of the kingdom.<sup>53</sup> It is the whole person, body and soul, that bears God's image. The fact that the human individual is in some sense living earth is, for Irenaeus, the most emphatic evidence of God's true power.<sup>54</sup>

In the second passage that fits within the present mode usage of Gen 2.7, Irenaeus emphasises the reality of humanity's material nature by presenting the creation of Adam from the dust as more incredible and miraculous than the resurrection from the dead:

If he does not vivify what is mortal and does not call back the corruptible to incorruption, then he is not a God of power. But that he is powerful in all these respects we ought to perceive from our origin, since God, taking dust from the earth, formed man (cf. Gen 2.7). Surely it is more difficult and incredible, from non-existent bones, nerves, veins, and the rest of man's organisation, to bring it about that all this should be, and to make man an animated and rational creature, than to re-integrate again that which had been created and then afterwards had decomposed into earth.<sup>55</sup>

This text, which alludes to rather than quotes from Gen 2.7, begins Irenaeus' long argument in *Adversus haereses* book 5 that flesh is capable of salvation, offered in response to what he considers the Gnostics' radical misinterpretation of 1 Cor 15.50: 'Flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God'.<sup>56</sup> Among other arguments and evidence requiring that there is more to this verse than a face-value reading (such evidence including the resurrected flesh of Christ, etc.), the argument of the *impossibility* of flesh being raised to eternal life is incredulous to Irenaeus through the evidence of humanity's present material being. The flesh formed of dust must be able to receive life not inherent in its bare materiality, for it does so at present in the earthly life of the human race, and has ever since Adam was first wrought from the dust. In another moment of Irenaeus' satire, he writes, 'It is just as if someone

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. 5.6.2. The notion of the body as the temple of God is treated also in Ignatius, *Ig.Eph.* 15 (shorter recension), *Ig.Phil.* 7 (shorter recension); and *Barn.* 16.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. T.G. Weinandy, 'St. Irenaeus and the *Imago Dei*: The Importance of Being Human', *Logos* 6.4 (2003), 17–19.

<sup>55</sup> 5.3.2 (SC 153: 44–7).

<sup>56</sup> See 5.9.1. Cf. M.J. Olson, *Irenaeus, the Valentinian Gnostics, and the Kingdom of God (A.H. Book V): The Debate About 1 Corinthians 15:50* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1992) 11–12.

were to take up a sponge full of water, or a torch on fire, and declare that the sponge could not possibly partake of the water, or the torch of the fire'.<sup>57</sup> And for those who continue obstinately to deny such a possibility, Irenaeus' ultimate evidence is the resurrection of Christ, which was a fleshly, bodily resurrection such that he could show the prints of the nails to his disciples.<sup>58</sup>

If, then, the human person as a creature of flesh wrought from the dust is capable of *receiving* life, both in his initial formation and again at the resurrection, it follows that there is some sense in which this 'flesh', or material nature proper, is not itself the fullness of the life-giving essence of his being—else why the requirement to 'receive' above and beyond the material fashioning? The question is begged by *Epid.* 15, the next passage in our third category of Irenaeus' use of Gen 2.7:

God placed certain limits upon man, so that, if he should keep the commandment of God, he would remain always as he was, that is, immortal. If, however, he should not keep it, he would become mortal, dissolving into the earth whence his frame was taken.<sup>59</sup>

It is the natural mortality of humanity's earthly frame that is of special interest here, and especially so inasmuch as the same passage also presents the possibility that the human person will 'remain always as he was, that is, immortal'. Whence this parity of a natural immortality and an earth-borne body that shall dissolve into the earth if the commandment of God is not kept? The answer to this question, which forms the heart of Irenaeus' anthropology of the Holy Spirit, shall be addressed in detail below. At the present moment, it is Irenaeus' allusion to the dust of Gen 2.7, as a reminder of human mortality, not immortality, that attracts our attention. This mortality is drawn out elsewhere in the corpus with considerable emphasis. 5.4.1 scoffs at what must either be powerlessness or simply malignancy and envy in the Gnostic father who 'does not quicken our mortal bodies'. Irenaeus expands:

He feigns to be the quickener of those things which are immortal by nature [here Irenaeus means the soul], to which things life is always present by their very nature; but he does not benevolently quicken those things which required his assistance, that they might live, but leaves them carelessly to fall under the power of death.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> 5.3.3.

<sup>58</sup> See 5.31.2, cf. Jn 20.20, 27.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Justin, *Dial.* 124, where the same thing is stated.

<sup>60</sup> SC 153: 56–9.

At *AH* 5.3.1 he makes his point absolutely clear:

For how could man have learned that he is an infirm being, mortal by nature, but that God is immortal and powerful, unless he had learned by experience what is in both?<sup>61</sup>

Thus while Irenaeus can affirm at *Epid.* 15 that humanity has the ability to remain ‘always as it was, that is, immortal’, he can equally affirm in various other locations that humanity’s natural condition, at least as regards its nature of flesh, is one of mortality.<sup>62</sup> He is an ‘infirm being, mortal by nature’. There is, importantly, no connection of this concept to the station of sin; Irenaeus is speaking here solely of humanity’s natural status as a created being.<sup>63</sup> Daniélou, in a study on Christian views of history, analyses created mortality in terms with which Irenaeus would entirely have agreed: ‘Everything that belongs to the temporal order must be imperfect at first’.<sup>64</sup> What Daniélou characterises as the ‘imperfection’ of created beings stems from the fact of their mortality, which connection he explicitly draws from Irenaeus and which the latter will have encountered in his Christian predecessors and contemporaries. Among these, the epistle of Ignatius to the Romans plainly states that ‘the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal’,<sup>65</sup> and in both the shorter and longer recensions of his epistle to the Magnesians, Ignatius notes simply that ‘all things have an end’.<sup>66</sup> Clement of Rome is more verbose:

What can a mortal man do? Or what strength is there in one made out of the dust? (cf. Gen 2.7). For it is written, ‘There was no shape before mine eyes, only I heard a sound, and a voice saying, What then? Shall a

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<sup>61</sup> SC 153: 42–3.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Orbe, ‘El hombre ideal’, 455. Orbe, however, terms this mortality ‘la imperfección inherente’, which is slightly to distort Irenaeus’ view on the ‘imperfection’ of the newly-formed human creature. See our own investigation, p. 123.

<sup>63</sup> A point noted by F. Altermath, ‘The Purpose of the Incarnation according to Irenaeus’, *Studia Patristica* 13 (1971), 65.

<sup>64</sup> J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History*, tr. N. Abercrombie (English Translation edn.; London: Longmans, 1958) 5. Cf. *AH* 4.38, 39. See also the passage referenced in Daniélou’s footnote: *AH* 4.11.2, containing Irenaeus’ classic phrase, ‘God indeed makes, but man is made’. Brown’s entire article is dedicated to the exploration of this theme (R.F. Brown, ‘On the necessary imperfection of creation: Irenaeus’ *Adversus haereses* IV, 38’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 no. 1 (1975), 17–25). Aubineau’s earlier study is still important: see M. Aubineau, ‘Incorruptibilité et divinisation selon saint Irénée’, *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 44.1 (1956), esp. 30–32.

<sup>65</sup> *Ig.Rom.* 3; cf. 2 Cor 4.18; Altermath, ‘Purpose of the Incarnation’, 64.

<sup>66</sup> *Ig.Mag.* 5.

man be pure before the Lord? Or shall such a one be counted blameless in his deeds, seeing he does not confide in his servants, and has charged even his angels with perversity? The heaven is not clean in his sight: how much less they that dwell in houses of clay, of which also we ourselves were made!<sup>67</sup>

That ‘strength’ is lacking in one ‘made of dust’ is the key element in the passage. The extension of this lack of strength into an impurity or lack of blamelessness is not an area into which Irenaeus follows Clement, and where the earlier writer sees mortality as wholly the result of sin, Irenaeus makes no such claim.<sup>68</sup> He is, however, in line with Clement, as with Ignatius, in noting as a general observance that ‘all the generations from Adam even unto this day have passed away’, and explains that any immortality in humankind must therefore be a gift given of God.<sup>69</sup>

Theophilus of Antioch is more nuanced in his comments on the question of humanity’s mortality than were the Apostolic Fathers:

Man had been made a middle nature, neither wholly mortal, nor altogether immortal, but capable of either.<sup>70</sup>

Theophilus’ focus is primarily on the garden of paradise in which Adam was made to dwell, and we shall have more to say on this passage in that regard, below. But the notion of humanity as possessing a ‘middle nature’, one capable either of ascent or descent, death or life, mortality or immortality, must be considered here. It seems easy to parallel this passage to the thought expressed by Irenaeus at *AH* 4.4.3:

Man, being endowed with reason and therefore like unto God, having been made free in his will and with power over himself, is indeed the cause to himself, that sometimes he becomes wheat and sometimes chaff. Wherefore also he shall be justly condemned, since, having been created a rational being, he lost true rationality and, living irrationally, opposed the righteousness of God, giving himself over to every earthly spirit and serving all lusts.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> *IClem.* 39; cf. Job 4.18–19.

<sup>68</sup> Certainly they are in agreement on the final point, that all human beings are sinful in point of fact; but Irenaeus will specify that this is not itself the product of their material creation.

<sup>69</sup> See *IClem.* 50 and 35. With the idea of immortality as a gift of God, and therefore something extraneous to the inherent properties of human nature, Irenaeus is in agreement with the thought of Ignatius; cf. 3.5.3, 3.20.2, 4.13.4, 4.36.6.

<sup>70</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.24.

<sup>71</sup> SC 100: 424–5.



But are Irenaeus and Theophilus really saying the same thing? It is hard to be certain to what precisely Theophilus is referring when he comments on the ‘nature’ of humankind, whether it be nature as ontological essence, rational capability, physical composition or otherwise. Irenaeus, on the other hand, is straightforward. The element in the human person to which the ‘sometimes wheat and sometimes chaff’ analogy applies is his free will, his endowment with reason like unto God. There are thus two ways open to the free individual: the upward way of adherence to the ‘true rationality’ he has been given, and thus the ascent to God, or the downward way of ‘living irrationally’, increasing the separation from all things divine.<sup>72</sup> But this passage is itself no commentary on the mortal character of human corporeality. It is the examination of humanity’s potential to exercise its rational freedom for or against the will of God, and does not speak to the question of the material nature of the person. In this latter regard, Irenaeus again and again reiterates his view on the corruptibility and natural finitude of human flesh, calling it ‘weak’ and ‘passible’, and all this without reference to sin or a misuse of human moral freedom.<sup>73</sup> It is the human person, merely as fleshly creature and not for the cause of any wrongdoing or transgression, that will naturally come to a mortal end.<sup>74</sup>

This raises the question of the manner in which Irenaeus views materiality itself. His presentation of the limiting effects of human materiality poses a certain potential for misinterpretation, especially with respect to the propensity for this kind of statement to imply a negative character to materiality. Irenaeus obviously wished to combat the assertion that

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<sup>72</sup> The general notion of the ‘two ways’ in Christian thought stems from Jesus’ teaching on the narrow and wide ways (cf. Mt 7.13–14, Lk 13.24, though Irenaeus never employs these texts), and in post-biblical thought is at least as old as the *Didache* (cf. 1.1–5.2), notably present also in the epistle of Barnabas (18–20). Irenaeus, however, is drawing here from neither source. His other reference to upward and downward paths is at *Epid.* 1, where there is presented one upward path in contrast to ‘many, dark and divergent’ downward ways.

<sup>73</sup> See 5.9.2; *Epid.* 71.

<sup>74</sup> See Brown, ‘Necessary Imperfection’, 21: ‘Death is not a punishment, but the natural end of imperfect creatures. Immortality is not something they lost, for it was never possessed’. We shall presently come to consider ‘imperfection’ as a term and concept in Irenaeus. For his part, Brown later refers to this lack of perfection in humanity as providing an ‘instability in its constitution’, initiated by its contingency in time (p. 22). While humanity’s time-bound contingency is certainly a theme present throughout both the *AH* and *Epid.*, there is little evidence in the corpus to show that ‘Irenaeus is mainly concerned with the instability of humans’ (*ibid.*), and the precise details of this ‘instability’ remain somewhat unclear in Brown’s article. Cf. Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 58. See below, p. 161.

matter is inherently evil, yet there seems to be room in his claims of materiality's restrictive effects on the capabilities of created humanity for a view of material substance as in some sense disadvantageous to man.<sup>75</sup> Such a reading would, however, fail to take into account the larger sense of Irenaeus' understanding of matter, and more particularly of corporeal substance in the human person, as transformable through the activities of the energies of God, and specifically the Holy Spirit. Materiality may be a limiting factor in the state of humanity's existence at its creation, but such will not always be the case. And, somewhat paradoxically, it is the same materiality that limits the human person, which offers him the opportunity for growth and development that not even the angels or the devil possess.<sup>76</sup>

That materiality is negative *as materiality*, is a postulation explicitly rejected by Irenaeus.<sup>77</sup> This is asserted in his discussion of humanity's creation in the image of God, largely equal to the physical form of man.<sup>78</sup> Image as form requires matter, as form can only exist in the realm of the material.<sup>79</sup> Irenaeus' declaration of humanity as bearing the image of God thereby requires, at its most basic level, a positive affirmation of materiality. Such an affirmation is more directly posited

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<sup>75</sup> E.g. 2.2.3, 4; 2.10; 2.25; cf. Justin, *Dial.* 5. A typical example of the kind of anti-materiality that Irenaeus attempts to refute is located in *Teach.Silv.*, NHC (VII,4) 104.31–105.1: 'It is a great and good thing not to love fornication and not even to think of wretched matter at all, for to think of it is death'. The text goes on to explain that it is better not to live at all than to acquire 'an animal life' (105.6–7). That this dualism is found in the ascetic theology of the *Teach.Silv.* is evidence of its widespread adoption outside of purely Gnostic circles, for the tractate is not Gnostic in any discernible sense.

<sup>76</sup> See Andia, *Homo vivens* 93–101; A. Orbe, 'Homo nuper factus: En torno a s. Ireneo, *Adv. haer.* IV,38,1', *Gregorianum* 46 (1965), 481–84; M.C. Steenberg, 'Children in Paradise: Adam and Eve as "infants" in Irenaeus of Lyons', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12.1 (2004), 20.

<sup>77</sup> See 1.22.1. Boersma summarises Irenaeus' view: 'Irenaeus wants to maintain that God created the world good, and that time and matter are not to be despised'; H. Boersma, 'Redemptive hospitality in Irenaeus: a model for ecumenicity in a violent world', *Pro Ecclesia* 11.2 (2002), 211.

<sup>78</sup> Fantino, *L'homme* 83. 'Largely' equal inasmuch as certain non-physical elements, e.g. the freedom of the will, are also part of the image.

<sup>79</sup> See *AH* 2.7. Cf. M.A. Donovan, 'Alive to the glory of God: a key insight in St. Irenaeus', *Theological Studies* 49.2 (1988), 294: 'image as form requires a material substratum'. The Stoic influence upon such a line of thought is not addressed by Donovan in her study, but is apparent throughout Irenaeus' discussion on the *imago* in this sense. Cf. Fantino, 'Passage', 423–24; Fantino, *L'homme* 82–89; and Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 89. Bentivegna treats of the issue more generally, claiming the material creation is simply a necessary aspect of God's *providential*: G. Bentivegna, *Economia di salvezza e creazione nel pensiero di S. Ireneo* (Rome: Herder, 1973) 123–24.

in Irenaeus' discussion of the resurrection of the dead, which he specifically explicates as a resurrection of the flesh as well as the soul.<sup>80</sup> Not only is the existence of humanity as material not a deficiency in its formation, since this existence is reflective of the image of God (whose full revelation came in the material existence of the incarnate Christ),<sup>81</sup> but neither is it preventative of the eventual perfection of the person, since the resurrection and future kingdom will be partaken of by physical persons in material bodies of an identical (physical) nature to those in the present realm of human existence.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the very fact that God makes Adam from the dust, from matter, is ample affirmation for Irenaeus of the positive character of such a creation and its attributes. Such a reading is demanded by his guiding principle of goodness as God's motivation, which was the subject of our investigation earlier in this volume.

What, then, of the limitation that Irenaeus insists *is* placed upon humanity by its material existence? Despite the fact that he claims corporeality as essential to the *imago*, Irenaeus nonetheless believes that this same corporeality is the source of humanity's finitude and corruptibility.<sup>83</sup> But such influences of the material are eventually to be overcome if indeed the perfect *imago*, the material Christ, exists eternally and incorruptibly, and if resurrected humanity is likewise to partake of such

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<sup>80</sup> See 5.4.1, 2; 5.6.1; 5.7.1, 2; etc. Cf. F. Altermath, *Du corps psychique au corps spirituel: interprétation de 1 Cor. 15, 35–49 par les auteurs chrétiens des quatre premiers siècles* (1. Aufl edn., Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese; 18; Tübingen: Mohr, 1977) 84; A.S. Wood, 'Eschatology of Irenaeus', *Evangelical Quarterly* 41 (1969), 33.

<sup>81</sup> See 1.9.3, 3.9.1, 4.6.6, and esp. 5.16.2. Fantino adduces, 'le Fils, en tant que Fils, n'est pas image de Dieu. L'image de Dieu dans l'être humain est le Fils incarné en qui voit le Père' (Fantino, 'Passage', 424), reinforcing the notion that only within the realm of the material is the divine *imago* borne. Donovan relays the Son's corporeality as a demonstration of God being 'immersed to the elbows in our materiality': Donovan, 'Heart of Life', 12.

<sup>82</sup> See 5.7.1, 2. Cf. Meijering, 'God cosmos history', 262, where this theme is expounded in comparison with the dissimilar views of Plotinus. Meijering's assertion that the material nature will continue to subsist eternally at the power only of God's will and not by any inherent natural condition, is reflective of his larger goal of showing a certain element of neo-Platonic influence in Irenaeus (cf. Minns, *Irenaeus* 79). His idea should be qualified to include the role of the Spirit as the active will of God in the life of man, as I will describe below.

<sup>83</sup> See 5.3.1; 5.12.2. To this end, see Altermath, *Du corps psychique au corps spirituel* 84–92, esp. 86–88; and Fantino, 'Passage', 421–22. Minns' question, 'What sense does it make to say that a cat is not a perfect cat because it is not an uncreated cat?' (Minns, *Irenaeus* 74), find its answer in this context, namely that what is created must of its own essence have dissolution and an end, while that which is uncreated is naturally infinite.

attributes. Hence Irenaeus' assertions of the varied types of material existence declare that some manner of change can be effected in materiality, and he goes on to describe this change as the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>84</sup> This whole question has been addressed most usefully in the study of F. Altermath, who offers a summary of his interpretation:

Par lui-même, tel qu'il a été créé, l'homme n'est pas immortel. Son sort est de retourner à la terre d'où il vient; ce n'est par la puissance de Dieu qu'il a part à l'incorruptibilité. Créé faible, parce que créé à partir de la terre, l'homme est aussi créé corps «physique». [...] Ce n'est que par l'action de l'Esprit qu'il aura part à l'incorruptibilité. Dès lors, il ne sera plus, comme lors de la création, «corps physique», mais il sera «corps spirituel». La fonction de l'Esprit est double: d'une part, il est l'agent de la résurrection, d'autre part il assure au corps l'incorruptibilité.<sup>85</sup>

The materiality of humanity is, by this analysis, itself naturally mortal and corruptible, but through the sustaining power of the Spirit is made to partake of the incorruptibility and eternity that is the natural lot only of God.<sup>86</sup> This is the heart of what Irenaeus means in distinguishing between the 'physical man' and the 'spiritual man', as he makes explicit at *AH* 5.8.1–4.<sup>87</sup> Through the reception of the Spirit, the limitations of corporeality are overcome by the power of the divinity, and what is material comes, without losing its nature as material, to a participation in divine attributes distinct from those of its own essence. The material aspects of humanity 'are inherited by the Spirit when they are translated into the kingdom of heaven'.<sup>88</sup> Such transformation is workable only by the might and power of God, which Irenaeus suggests would be proven

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<sup>84</sup> See 2.19.6. Behr's chapter on the 'The Human Formation' includes an important discussion on the role of the Spirit in the life of humanity: see Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 86–115. His is perhaps the most thorough overall examination to date on the relationship of the Spirit to human nature in Irenaeus thought. A far briefer but still useful treatment is offered in Donovan, 'Alive to the glory of God', 295.

<sup>85</sup> Altermath, *Du corps psychique au corps spirituel* 86.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. 4.14.2, 4.38.4. So also Fantino, 'Passage', 420–22 and Fantino, *L'homme* 128–34.

<sup>87</sup> This passage from 'physical' to 'spiritual' is extensively treated in Fantino, 'Passage', 418–29, as well as in Altermath's research on the same point (*op. cit.*).

<sup>88</sup> 5.9.4. It is in this context that Irenaeus speaks of flesh not as inheriting the kingdom of God (following 1 Cor 15.50), but as being inherited into the kingdom; for the active *possidet* (κληρονομεῖ) implies a capability inherent in the subject, which possibility Irenaeus denies, while the passive *possidetur* (κληρονομεῖται) suggests the ability of the subject to receive transformation from a power external to its own being (cf. *AH* 5.9.4).

limited were he unable to accomplish such things.<sup>89</sup> The fact that the economy will end in resurrection demonstrates the potential inherent in its material creation.

*The human-shaped soul: man's immortal element in relation to the Holy Spirit*

Prior to addressing fully the interaction of the Holy Spirit with the physical nature of man, which Irenaeus suggests enables its transformation, we must turn to the nature of the second of humanity's constitutive elements: the soul, which Irenaeus equates to the breath of life mentioned in Gen 2.7. This is the subject of what I have termed the fourth mode of his usage of that verse, namely, the discussion of the soul and Spirit and their relationship to humanity's fleshly element. Irenaeus has made clear, at *Epid.* 15, that despite the natural mortality of humanity's fleshly being, it is nonetheless naturally *immortal*. Without disobedience, death would not be its natural lot.<sup>90</sup> His ability to pair together these two outwardly contradictory ideas is centred in a most important text, *AH* 2.34.4, which sets out the framework of Irenaeus' view in an assertion that, while the soul and the body are obviously not the same thing, so too are the soul and the Spirit not identical elements in the human person:

As the body animated by the soul is certainly not itself the soul, but has fellowship with the soul as long as God desires, so also the soul herself is not life, but partakes in the life bestowed on her by God. Wherefore also the prophetic word declares of the protoplast, 'He became a living soul', teaching us that by participation in life the soul became alive. Thus the soul and the life which it possesses must be understood as separate existences.<sup>91</sup>

Here Irenaeus' language is close to that of Justin at *Dial.* 5:

The soul assuredly is or has life. If, then, it is life, it would cause something else, and not itself, to live, even as motion would move something else than itself. Now, that the soul lives no one would deny. But if it lives, it lives not as being life, but as the partaker of life; but that which partakes of anything is different from that of which it partakes. Now the soul partakes of life, since God wills it to live.

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<sup>89</sup> See 5.3.2; cf. Wood, 'Eschatology', 33.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. *Epid.* 31; Justin, *Dial.* 124.

<sup>91</sup> SC 294: 360.

Irenaeus is following the same reading as Justin, to several important ends. The soul that gives life to the human person is an animating principle—Justin uses the analogy of the power of movement, which causes an otherwise motionless entity to realise kinesis. Through the soul, the inanimate flesh of humanity's formation comes to live. Yet this life which the soul grants to the body is not the soul's own life: Justin and Irenaeus both note that the soul 'partakes of life'—a life not its own—and in Irenaeus this life is defined as that of the Holy Spirit.<sup>92</sup> The animation and vivification of the human formation thus becomes the working of the human soul which partakes of the life of the Spirit and appropriates it for the human individual. Soul and Spirit together bring the person to life, the latter coming through the former to vivify the human creation.<sup>93</sup>

Irenaeus' reading here is informed by other aspects of his conception of creation. In relating the soul to the fleshly body, he writes:

The body is not stronger than the soul, since indeed the former is inspired, vivified, increased and held together by the latter; but the soul possess and rules over the body. It is retarded in its velocity in exactly the proportion that the body shares in its motion, but it never loses the knowledge which is its own. For the body should be compared to an instrument, while the soul possesses the reason of an artist.<sup>94</sup>

Just following this, at 2.34.4 (examined above), Irenaeus writes that the body 'has fellowship with the soul' at the pleasure of God, and that small phrase is the refined summary of the ideas Irenaeus here works out in fuller measure. God has taken up the dust from the earth, and after its fashioning by the divine hands this dust itself is, at least in part, the image of God. But is not made the moving, animated, living image until it is constituted both of this earthly element and a soul; thus the logic that lies behind Irenaeus' insistence that 'man is a living being composed of a soul and a body'.<sup>95</sup> Without the soul, the body is simply matter, however 'like' the image of the incarnate Christ it may be in outward form. Only when the two are united together is there revealed a

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<sup>92</sup> Cf. H.W. Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man* (Third Edition edn.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1926) 169–70 for a comparison of this view with that of 'immortality as an inalienable and natural possession of the soul' among the larger body of patristic thought. But cf. Origen, *De principiis* 4.4.5 for a similar view to that of Irenaeus.

<sup>93</sup> The most thorough study of Irenaeus' interrelation of soul and Spirit is in Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 74–109, esp. 105–108.

<sup>94</sup> 2.33.4 (SC 294: 350).

<sup>95</sup> *Epid.* 2; cf. D'Alès, 'Doctrine de l'Esprit', 502–03.

living creature bearing the true likeness of the incarnate Son. There is in this parallelism with Theophilus' treatment of the same verse from Genesis: 'God breathed into man's face the breath of life, and man became a living soul; whence also by most persons the soul is called immortal'.<sup>96</sup> While Mueller may be correct in asserting that in Jewish thought 'flesh' (*basar*) and 'spirit' (*nephesh*) are used largely interchangeably to refer to the being of the human person, for Irenaeus and Theophilus alike they represent distinct and independently definable elements within the human constitution.<sup>97</sup> They may be defined as 'parts' of the person, but there is the greater whole to which they belong, and they may not be used interchangeably for that whole.<sup>98</sup> The soul and the body each have their own attributes, distinct from the other, though in the single existence of the human individual they come to exist in harmony and are identifiable one through the other. Thus for Theophilus, 'the soul in man is not seen, being invisible to men, but is perceived through the motion of the body'.<sup>99</sup> Irenaeus goes further:

Souls themselves possess the figure of the body in which they dwell, for they have been adapted to the vessel in which they exist.<sup>100</sup>

Irenaeus compares the soul's taking-on of the physical form of the body in which it dwells, to water poured into a mould and frozen, which thereafter possess the shape of its mould. Even after death the soul shall 'possess the form of a man'.<sup>101</sup> There is here perhaps a rather staunch literalism to Irenaeus' reading of Gen 2.7. God has given shape to the human creature through his modelling of the dust, and into this form, this shape, God breathes the breath of life, which quite literally fills its

<sup>96</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.19.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. H. Mueller, 'The ideal man as portrayed by the Talmud and St. Paul', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 28.3 (1966), 281–82. Cf. J. Barr, 'The image of God in the book of Genesis—A study of terminology', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 51.1 (1968), 14–17, 24–26.

<sup>98</sup> Irenaeus is most specific in this regard at 5.6.1: 'Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a part of the man, but not the man'.

<sup>99</sup> *Ad Autol.* 1.5.

<sup>100</sup> 2.19.6 (SC 294: 192–4).

<sup>101</sup> 2.34.1. For a similar assertion of a bodily shape to the soul, see Tertullian, *De anima* 5–9, esp. 7.1, 9.4. For Tertullian, the soul is both spiritual and physical (cf. *De anima* 5.1): the conception of a non-physical soul is firmly rejected (cf. *De anima* 8.1) All this is treated in brief in Osborn, *Emergence* 235 (more in J.H. Waszink, *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, De Anima* (Amsterdam: J.M. Meulenhoff, 1947) 127–28, 31–34, 54–55, 71), though Osborn never draws the parallel to Irenaeus. For his part, Justin Martyr suggests only that souls retain sensation after death (cf. *1Apol.* 18, 20).

frame or mould. Irenaeus' evidence for the fact that souls maintain the shape of their physical bodies after death is drawn from Lk 16.19–31, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. If indeed the rich man was able to recognise his servant in the bosom of Abraham, as Christ says, then there must be visibly identifiable characteristics of each soul in the afterlife, which the soul 'remembers' from its existence in its earthly body.

Whether or not Irenaeus has taken too corporeal a view of the human soul is an issue over which scholars have debated for some time.<sup>102</sup> It must be remembered, however, that his remarks in this regard are not made as independent commentary on the soul's form: *AH* 2.19.6 is a refutation of the belief that psychical beings 'fell into' the souls of angels, which Irenaeus argues as absurd on grounds of the soul's shape: possessing the form of their material hosts, such beings would bear the image of angels, not of spiritual human persons. 2.34.1 is dedicated to proving that souls are immortal, even though created and thus with a specific beginning in time (the issue of the soul's form after physical death being offered primarily as evidence that the soul *does* continue to exist after such death). The breath breathed into the dust in Gen 2.7 will continue in existence beyond the disintegration of that dust, for it, unlike the flesh, is not material and thus not bound to dissolution. It is in this sense that Theophilus writes, as above, that 'the soul is called immortal'. Irenaeus says the same a little further on in 2.34.4: 'When God then bestows life and perpetual duration, it comes to pass that even souls which did not previously exist should henceforth endure forever, since God has both willed that they should exist, and should continue in existence'. This thought is echoed and made more emphatic at 5.4.1, where it is 'manifest to all' that the soul remains immortal. In this latter passage, Irenaeus specifies that while the body may come to participate in immortality through the grace of God, this is a gift of transformation of the natural character of flesh, while the immortality of the soul is inherent in its essence.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>102</sup> See the footnote exchange between Coxe, Grabe and Massuet, *ANF* vol. i, 411 n. 2. Cf. *AH* 2.33.4, quoted above, on the body 'slowing the velocity' of the soul. But see 5.7.1 for Irenaeus' clear statement that souls are not corporeal in the sense of being material entities.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. p. 122 n. 69, above, on the nature of the immortality of the flesh as gift in Clement and Irenaeus. On the notion of the inherent immortality of the soul, see Behr's valuable point on the difference between 'immortality' and 'life' (Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 94–96). While the soul may be immortal, i.e. possess an eternal continu-



Irenaeus is thus able, through his reflection on Gen 2.7, to give further refinement to the two elements of contrasting temporal potential to which we mentioned above: it is the flesh that is ‘naturally mortal’, and the soul ‘naturally immortal’. The scriptural account is predominantly about the miracle of God’s bringing together these two inherently disparate elements. This is yet clearer in the next passage to allude to the text, where Irenaeus states that those who reject the virginal birth and the true humanity of Christ, remain in the old Adam,

not considering that, as from the beginning of our formation in Adam, that breath of life which proceeded from God, having been united to the thing fashioned, animated the man and showed him forth as a reasoning creature; 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, will render man living and perfect, receptive of the perfect Father [...].<sup>104</sup>

Again Irenaeus declares that the body without the soul is inanimate, and here demonstrates the Christological foundation for this approach to the text. It is in the incarnate Christ, who as Adam’s flesh was fully united to the Spirit, that the meaning of ‘breath’ (soul) and its relation to ‘dust’ (body) is disclosed. Only in the receipt of the breath of life does the fleshly creation has motion and exists as ‘a living being’ (Gen 2.7) who truly images the life of the Son.

Clement had earlier spoken of the animating aspect of the divine breath, not simply protologically but continually: ‘Let us reflect how near [God] is [...] His breath is in us, and when he pleases, he will take it away’.<sup>105</sup> If God’s breath animates, then the withdrawal of his breath means death. Theophilus expands:

God’s breath gives life to the whole [creation], who, if he withdraw his breath, the whole will utterly fail. By him you speak, O man; his breath you breathe, yet him you know not.<sup>106</sup>

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ance, this is not the same thing as possessing eternal *life*, for such life is only found in God. It is the soul’s receptivity to the Spirit, and thus its participation in God’s life (cf. *AH* 2.34.4), that enables man’s eternal existence to be an existence of eternal life. Behr’s statement that ‘it is possible for the soul to endure without life’ (p. 95) is a good encapsulation of one of the more intricate points in Irenaeus’ pneumato-anthropology. Cf. Fantino, ‘Passage’, 420; Aubineau, ‘Incorruptibilité et divinisation’, 34–38.

<sup>104</sup> 5.1.3 (SC 153: 26–7).

<sup>105</sup> *IClem.* 21.

<sup>106</sup> *Ad Autol.* 1.7. For this and the above passage from Clement, cf. Ps 103.29.

The mortality of the fleshly frame is animated by the breath of life, the soul, which is in some sense even more directly ‘from God’ than was the fashioning of the dust. This is not so with respect to the divine actions of creation (for, as Irenaeus has explained, the hands of God were directly involved in working the earthly material), but with respect to the continuance of that action in the ongoing existence of the human person. Where dust is once created and thereafter continues to exist until its natural disintegration, the human soul as God’s breath must continually be breathed (since the moment that the soul ceases to receive the Spirit of God, at the same moment it loses its power to transmit the Spirit’s life to the body); and this breath and its breathing can never come but from God (since the animating power is the Father’s own Spirit).<sup>107</sup> Lawson could therefore sum up Irenaeus’ insistence: “‘Breath’ signifies humanity’s dependence upon God”.<sup>108</sup>

The soul, as the breath breathed into humanity’s corporeal frame, thus animates it via the direct power of God, and thereby initiates its utter dependency on God for continued existence. God’s will, the substance of the human person’s being, is literally ‘breathed into’ his frame, and for this reason the human/divine relationship becomes a constitutive element of man’s being. On this account, i.e. since God’s being is wrapped up in man’s, he is due worship and thanks at all times. This Irenaeus points out at *Epid.* 8, the third passage in our present category of discussion:

God brought [Israel] into slavery by means of the law, that they might learn that they have as Lord the Maker and Fashioner, who also bestows the breath of life, and to him we must offer worship by day and by night.

It is the one God who gave breath to Adam and initiated the living element in human nature, who also gave the law to Moses in order to reveal this to the chosen people. Irenaeus could look to the Valentinians and others around him for contemporary examples of what things a people could come to believe who had forgotten this cardinal truth regarding the human person: all manner of thought could abound in a

<sup>107</sup> Cf. D’Alès, ‘Doctrine de l’Esprit’, 512–13.

<sup>108</sup> Lawson, *Biblical Theology* 200. A statement by Daniélou, not specifically about Irenaeus, sums up his view perfectly: ‘Son existence [i.e. de l’homme] est suspendue au souffle de Dieu. [...] Il n’existe qu’autant qu’il est proféré par le souffle de Dieu. Exister pour lui, c’est être en relation avec Dieu. Cette relation est constitutive de son être’; see J. Daniélou, *Au Commencement: Genèse 1–11* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962) 44–45.

belief system that proclaimed itself to be rooted in the true proclamation of reality as taught by the Old Testament scriptures.<sup>109</sup> But for Irenaeus, the fact that the human soul consists in the gift of God's own breath implies that it cannot have its natural portion with anything debased, much less anything sinful.

In another passage that fits within the scope of the interrelationship of soul and Spirit, Irenaeus sets forth the same vision in the context of a discussion on Adam and Eve's relationship in the Garden:

Adam and Eve [...] thought or understood nothing whatsoever of those things which are wickedly born in the soul through lust and shameful desires, because at that time 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.<sup>110</sup>

Since the human soul is God's breath, it possesses of itself those attributes consistent with the revealed nature of the godhead; in this passage, namely the 'lack of comprehension or understanding of what is evil'. We have already seen that elsewhere the soul is ascribed another divine attribute: immortality. Additionally, as God is life-giving (this also being a property solely of the divine), so the soul animates the body and causes it to become a 'living being' (cf. Gen 2.7).<sup>111</sup> In a combination of what I have termed categories three (materiality in man) and four (soul and Holy Spirit) in an analysis of his use of Gen 2.7, Irenaeus writes:

What, then, are mortal bodies [which Rom 8.11 says will be raised]? Can they be souls? But souls are incorporeal when compared to mortal bodies, for God 'breathed into the face of man the breath of life, and man became a living soul (*animam viventem*)'. Now the breath of life is an incorporeal thing; but certainly they cannot maintain that the very breath of life is mortal. [...] What, therefore, is there left to which we may apply the term 'mortal body', unless it be the thing that was moulded, that is, the flesh, of which it is also said that God will vivify it?<sup>112</sup>

The pure soul gives life to the body, which in turn manifests the incorporeal soul in the created cosmos—and this is chiefly borne-out in the duality of human constitution that was being challenged in questions of

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Irenaeus' report, at 1.25.4–6, of the Carpocratian practice of 'experiencing all things', including 'ungodly, unlawful and forbidden actions'.

<sup>110</sup> *Epid.* 14.

<sup>111</sup> See 2.33.4. Cf. Altermath, 'Purpose of the Incarnation', 64.

<sup>112</sup> 5.7.1 (SC 153: 84–7).

resurrection.<sup>113</sup> Irenaeus points out at *AH* 1.5.5 that the Valentinians err in suggesting that the breath God breathes into his formation is not his own breath, not from the substance (which for Irenaeus is the will) of God. Human persons are, by this analysis, *only* ‘earth creatures’. But Irenaeus has by now well established his position against such a reading. His sustained treatment of the creation saga in the *Epideixis* reaches a capstone in chapter 11, where he adduces:

He fashioned man with his own hands, taking the purest, the finest and the most delicate elements of the earth, mixing with the earth, in due measure, his own power; and because he sketched upon the handiwork his own form—in order that what would be seen should be godlike, for man was placed upon the earth fashioned in the image of God—and that he might be alive, ‘he breathed into his face a breath of life’, so that both according to the inspiration and according to the formation, man was like God.

The breath of life animates the fleshly body that God has formed, and it does so with the breath of God’s own life. The soul partakes of the life which is the Spirit of God, imparting this Spirit to the fleshly frame which thereby comes alive and advances into glory.<sup>114</sup> Adam is ‘godlike’ in both his physical form which is the Son’s, and in his soul which brings that form to living existence through the life which is the Holy Spirit, just as the incarnate Christ lived in human union with the Spirit who descended upon him at baptism. The fashioned dust is God’s artistry and the breath his own.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 92. Fantino somewhat confuses the immortality of the soul with the mortality of the flesh: Fantino, ‘Passage’, 421.

<sup>114</sup> See here the discussion in A.-C.L. Jacobsen, ‘The philosophical argument in the teaching of Irenaeus on the resurrection of the flesh’, *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001), 256–58, where the author parallels this relationship between the divine and the human attributes in man to the Stoic-comme-Platonic notion of unchanging substance vis-à-vis transformable qualities. That the substance of man’s flesh is not changed, yet its existence is transformed through the partaking of the qualities of the divine transcendence, is a reasonable method of describing Irenaeus’ discussion in philosophical terminology.

<sup>115</sup> It is with respect to the above that 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.

*From dust and breath to living image*

Irenaeus' reflection on Gen 2.7 is remarkably robust. It has here been classified into four categories that are admittedly external delineations not set out by Irenaeus himself, but which help to show the multiple Christocentric approaches he employs toward the text. The creation of humanity from the dust and its reception of the breath of God shows, first of all, that it was God and not any mediating power—whether angels or otherwise—that fashioned humankind, through the Son and Spirit. Secondly, the reality of Christ *incarnate* is connected to the verse in order to emphasise the solidarity of the whole race of persons thus wrought from the dust, united in the New Adam as much as in the first. Thirdly, the dust itself makes clear the human person's nature as earthly, material creature, which due to its materiality is naturally imbued with the limitations of matter (i.e. physical corruptibility and mortality, together with an existence bound to time), but a matter which is nonetheless positive and transfigurable, as shown in Christ's miracles. And in the fourth and final place, the 'breath' of Gen 2.7 reveals that while humanity may be earthly as regards its physical frame, it is also a being animated by a soul which brings to it the life of the Holy Spirit, in which it directly partakes.

The human person is thus a being fashioned by God's hands from his own material work, even as much as it is a being in which God's own life is the animating principle. These two concepts together make the human person the 'image' of God: not only physically (though this is important), but also as regards his life being God's life. Adam is God's image because he has been fashioned after the physical form of the Son's future incarnation, and because the life visible in his person is the life of God.

Earlier in the present chapter it was shown that the proclamation of the human person as in the divine image fosters the trinitarian emphasis Irenaeus lays upon the creation of humankind: the human being as created, fashioned and animated entity is directly the production of Father who creates, the Son who fashions and the Holy Spirit who animates. Its image is thus of the triune existence and will of these three, whose handiwork it is and whose being it reflects in the cosmos. We have also had occasion to examine how, for Irenaeus, the image reflects both the physical aspect of human nature (its material aspect drawn from the dust and modelled after the incarnate Son) as well as the spiritual, for through the human soul the very life of the Spirit is made real and effective in the human individual.

This notion of humankind coming to *partake in the life of this God* in whose image it was fashioned, runs straight through Irenaeus' reflections on the scriptural proclamation of 'image' and 'likeness', even when these reflections take on different tones and points of focus at various points in the corpus. As such, Irenaeus' discussion at *Adversus haereses* 3, which is aimed primarily at expounding the reasons for a divine incarnation, accomplishes this aim by pronouncing that only in this manner could the lost image and likeness be restored. *AH* 3.18.1 announces that what was lost in Adam was precisely the *imago*, and Christ becomes incarnate that it might be recovered. Such a dwelling on the image/likeness also assists Irenaeus in explaining the necessity for the Word to become *physical* man, for it is only in becoming this image and revealing this likeness that these can be restored, if recapitulation is to be maintained as a coherent doctrine.<sup>116</sup> Here the connection of creation, sin, redemption and perfection are bound up in the conception of 'image' in perhaps their clearest form. The human person has lost his life; but further, since he was created in the image and likeness of the Son, the Son has a 'vested interest' in saving him.<sup>117</sup> This could only be done, Irenaeus argues at 5.2.1, if Christ actually became that which he was to save, 'restoring to his handiwork what was said [of it] in the beginning, that man was made after the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1.26)'.

Such references to the image and likeness are grounded in specific soteriological convictions, and behind these lies the fundamental notion of participation in the triune reality of Father, Son and Spirit. The image is a trinitarian image. This becomes clear when Irenaeus speaks of what precisely causes redeemed humankind to live *as* the image and likeness—comments that come most potently in the context of his discourse on the interrelationship of physical body, soul and divine Spirit in the human formation, the subject of the preceding pages. At *AH* 5.6.1, Irenaeus argued that only in the commixing of all three of these elements is the human person truly human, and he continues on to suggest:

When the Spirit here mixed with (*commixtus*) the soul is united to [God's] handiwork, on account of this outpouring of the Spirit man is rendered

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<sup>116</sup> See 3.22.1.

<sup>117</sup> Explained in detail at 3.23.1; cf. 3.23.2, where Gen 1.26 is quoted in such a context.

spiritual and perfect, and this is he who was made in the image and likeness of God.<sup>118</sup>

Without the Spirit of the Father, given by the Son (cf. Jn 16.7, 8), the human person is but animal. He is the production of the Father by the Word, but does not yet partake actively of the life of the second divine ‘hand’. Irenaeus echoes this sentiment at 5.8.1, where again it is specifically the Spirit who enables humanity to exist according to the image and likeness. More explicit still is 5.10.1, where Irenaeus notes that those who receive both the Spirit and the Word ‘as a graft’ partake of the ‘fatness of the olive tree’ (cf. Rom 11.17), thereby arriving at the ‘pristine nature of man—that which was created after the image and likeness of God’.<sup>119</sup> Here Irenaeus harks back to his central belief in creation as the work of the trinity *in toto*, for the implication is that humankind as originally created was in unity with this full triune reality, if restoration of its ‘pristine nature’ equates to precisely this.

Irenaeus is most clear on the nature of ‘image and likeness’ as relating to humanity’s life in the Father, Son and Spirit at the close of *Epideixis* 97:

[Christ] appeared on earth [...] mixing and blending the Spirit of God the Father with the handiwork of God, that man might be according to the image and likeness of God.

For humanity to be ‘according to the image and likeness of God’ is here explicitly referred to its participation in the life of the Holy Spirit, as made possible by the incarnation of the Word. Irenaeus at times speaks of this as the effect of Satan’s defeat, whereby the captivated image and likeness are liberated and restored; but ultimately this is so because Satan’s attempts at dividing humanity from the wholeness of God are thwarted when God himself becomes man—that act of union toward which creation had been orientated since its first formation.<sup>120</sup>

This notion of ‘image and likeness’, centred in the observation that humanity’s proper life is one expressive of and participatory in the life of the triune Father, Son and Spirit, is the cardinal point to be gleaned

<sup>118</sup> SC 153: 76–7.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. 5.36.3, where it is only in containing the Word to whom the person has grown accustomed through the Spirit, that the human formation exists in the image and likeness.

<sup>120</sup> See 5.21.2.

from Irenaeus' reading of the scriptural terminology in light of the testimony of the incarnation. Dedicated studies on the image/likeness doctrine in Irenaeus, to which we may defer for exhaustive references and comparisons with antecedent traditions, are helpful in sorting out the details of his employment of the vocabulary; however, attempts such as those of Wingren, to systematise what he classified as Irenaeus' use of the terms as a hendiadys from his distinction between them, tends to lead to a disregard for this more central concern.<sup>121</sup> Irenaeus may indeed be 'inconsistent' in his terminological usage of 'image' and 'likeness', which at times are synonyms and at others unique terms correlating to the ontological formation of the human person (image) and the actualisation of human nature in an individual's lived life (likeness), but he never makes an attempt to be systematic here. Irenaeus' only absolute is that the human creation was born of the trinity of Father, Son and Spirit, brought to life in this trinity, and ultimately shall be perfected in the same. He can break the terms apart in their most basic sense: rational beings formed after an image shall, of their will and of divine grace, come one day to live 'like' that being whose image they are, but this tends to be the end of his distinction.<sup>122</sup> More important than conceptual distinction are the consequences of the basic confession: the human person is in some sense 'like' God at the very first, created after the prototype of the Son. The *full* likeness, however, shall come only in the participation in trinitarian glory which is the promise of the eschaton. And so a proper reading of 'image and likeness' summarises the whole thrust of the divine economy of salvation.

#### THE PARADISE OF HUMANKIND

With regard to the divine economy, that creation which bears God's image and is meant to attain wholly to his likeness is, as Irenaeus perceives the Word's working in creation, provided with a physical context in which this likeness may be reached. That God will redeem

<sup>121</sup> The most thorough study is of course Fantino's; see esp. Fantino, *L'homme* 4–44. On Wingren's comment, see above, p. 82.

<sup>122</sup> See V. Palashovsky, 'La Théologie Eucharistique de S. Irénée, Évêque de Lyon', *Studia Patristica* 2 (1957), 278. Cf. the elaborate investigation of the Hebrew behind 'image' and 'likeness' in Barr, 'Image of God', 24–26, which attributes the choice of terms to an elaborate lexicographical history of Mosaic interpretation. There is no parallel to this methodology in Irenaeus.



the creation wrought by the Son, through the Son, indicates the Son's activity in each phase of this process, including the initial stages of preparation and nurturing. In this light, Irenaeus sees this preparatory work and presence spelled out in scripture: Gen 2.8–15 speaks of God's planting of the garden of paradise, Eden, and placement of newly fashioned humankind therein, which is the dwelling-place also of the Son. The message of these verses, and of Gen 2.9 in particular, exerts a strong influence on his conception of Edenic life, tied in to his view of the millennial kingdom and the eschaton. They are directly quoted in the corpus at *AH* 5.5.1:

Where, then, was the first man placed? In paradise certainly, as the scripture declares: 'And God planted a paradise eastward in Eden, and there he placed the man whom he had formed'. And then afterwards, when man was disobedient, he was cast out into this world.<sup>123</sup>

The context of this passage is a discussion on the possibility of the resurrection of the human body by Christ after death (the focus of *AH* 5.3–15 at large), and specifically of the lengthy lifespan of the ancients of scripture ('our predecessors advanced beyond seven hundred, eight hundred, even nine hundred years of age, and their bodies kept pace with the protracted length of their days'); but it also focuses on the bodily translation of Enoch and Elias, which Irenaeus reads through Paul (cf. 2 Cor 12.4) as having consisted in their translation into the paradise of Gen 2.9 ('there shall they who have been translated remain until the consummation of all things, as a prelude to immortality').<sup>124</sup> That paradise would be such a prelude, and that it is bound up in the movement toward the eschaton, indicates for Irenaeus that it must be of a character different from the present world which, rather than working towards immortality, is 'passing away'. This different character of paradise is most clearly described at *Epid.* 12 which, while it does not quote from Genesis, is clearly drawn from it and comprises Irenaeus' most detailed account of Eden:

And that [man's] nourishment and growth might take place in luxury, a place was prepared for him, better than this earth—excelling in air, beauty, light, food, plants, fruit, waters and every other thing needful for life—and its name was Paradise. And so beautiful and good was paradise that the Word of God was always walking in it: he would walk and talk

<sup>123</sup> SC 153: 64–5.

<sup>124</sup> For a further treatment of this idea, see below, p. 200.

with the man, prefiguring the future that would come to pass, that he would dwell with him and speak with him, and would be with mankind, teaching him righteousness.

We note again a marked similarity with the thought of Theophilus, who at *Ad Autol.* 2.19–24 had written something similar. It is clear that Irenaeus was familiar with this portion of the Antiochene’s work.<sup>125</sup> Both authors comment on the quality of the light, the air and the plants in paradise, and both note that it was formed specifically for the newly created human creature.<sup>126</sup> Both similarly indicate that the garden was a place ‘better than this earth’—for Theophilus it was formed ‘that man might be in a better and distinctly superior place’,<sup>127</sup> while for Irenaeus the garden was fashioned ‘so that his nourishment and growth might take place in luxury [...] better than this earth’. Of importance is the explicit comment made by each author, that the Son of God was he who walked with Adam and Eve in the garden (cf. Gen 3.8).<sup>128</sup> While the text of Genesis describes the divine being only as ‘the Lord’ (κύριος in the Greek version Theophilus and Irenaeus read; *Yhwh* in the Hebrew), we have here the evidence of two sources for an early Christological reading of the text, taking from the confession of the Son as creator and redeemer the understanding that the Son is also he who guides the created in its early stages of existence, as elsewhere.<sup>129</sup> For Irenaeus in particular, the active presence of the Son in paradise forms an scriptural testimony to the recapitulative nature of creation from its beginnings. He does not pass up the opportunity to emphasise that the Word’s activities in the garden were to ‘prefigure the future’, namely the incarnation, by walking among Adam and Eve as the incarnate Jesus would walk among the human race, and by talking with the primal parents, prefiguring the teaching of righteousness that would come in Jesus’ ministry and the witness of his life.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>125</sup> These sections of the *Ad Autol.* also form the context of Theophilus’ discussion on the childhood of Adam and Eve in 2.25, which is almost universally accepted to have been influential on Irenaeus’ deliberations at *AH* 4.38.

<sup>126</sup> See *Ad Autol.* 2.19. Cf. *Or. World*, NHC (II,5) 110.2–111.27 ff.

<sup>127</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.23

<sup>128</sup> Cf. *Ad Autol.* 2.22.

<sup>129</sup> An understanding not exhibited prior to Irenaeus/Theophilus. There is no distinctive discussion of the garden of Eden in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers.

<sup>130</sup> Theophilus characteristically goes much further than Irenaeus in his speculations on the minutiae of the passage: the plants possess a ‘superior loveliness and beauty’ since they were planted by God himself. Here humanity was set to ‘till’, which Theophilus allegorises to mean an active and continuous observance of God’s command (Irenaeus

What of the potential for growth that Irenaeus, like Theophilus, declares was the reason God created this paradise in which he placed newly-created Adam? Daniélou found, in the *topos* of paradise, a place where

L'homme est introduit dans la sphère de Dieu. Il est appelé à vivre dans le rayonnement de sa présence.<sup>131</sup>

The presence of the Word in the garden shows that for both Irenaeus and Theophilus, this idea holds true; as such we have MacKenzie's characterisation of the garden in Irenaeus as the 'trysting place of the Word of God with humanity'.<sup>132</sup> But in each of these authors, the divine presence with which humanity was set in communion in the garden was manifested there for the specific purpose of human *development*. Theophilus writes that Adam was moved 'into paradise, giving him 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'.<sup>133</sup> Irenaeus has declared a chapter earlier in the *Epideixis* that 'according to the inspiration and according to the formation, man was like God', but at *Epid.* 15 notes that 'it was necessary for him to reach full development by growing', and for this reason was he placed in paradise.<sup>134</sup> The theme of maturation found in Theophilus (at *Ad Autol.* 2.24

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likewise comments on the excellence of the plants in Eden, cf. *Epid.* 12, but does not follow Theophilus in allegorising the command to till the Garden). He further specifies that the garden must be under the same heaven as the rest of the planet, 'which is where "the east" and "the earth" are'. In this he makes use of Gen 2.10–14—which Irenaeus nowhere employs—and exegetes Gen 2.15 ('Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden...') to imply that the 'earth' from which humanity was created in 2.7 was outside of paradise (for thus was the human creature taken after his creation and put into the garden). Irenaeus' words at *Epid.* 12 and *AH* 5.5.1 might be read in such a way as to imply the same thing, but there is no requirement therein that this be so. Irenaeus never explicitly states, as does Theophilus, that Adam existed on the earth anywhere outside of paradise prior to his placement there, and it is probable that for Irenaeus this 'placement' will have been equivalent to the act of creation itself. Cf. Mackenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration* 114: '[Irenaeus] is not interested in *place* as a primary concern, and certainly here, in the issue of the siting [*sic*] of Paradise, there is little that can be concluded as to his views'.

<sup>131</sup> Daniélou, *Au Commencement* 56. See also pp. 54–56 on his larger interpretation of Paradise.

<sup>132</sup> Mackenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration* 96.

<sup>133</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.24.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. *Epid.* 11. For Fantino it can be said therefore that, from the beginning, 'l'économie a pour but la perfection de l'être humain et de toute la création' (Fantino, 'Passage', 418), an observation borne out at *AH* 5.36.3, and discussed extensively at 4.38–9.

already quoted; but more potently at 2.25) is taken up by Irenaeus to a remarkable degree, encapsulated in his discussion of Adam and Eve as ‘children’ in the garden.

The characterisation of Adam and Eve as ‘infants’ by Irenaeus has long been a source of interest to scholars. Perhaps because it offers a perspective on human anthropology and Edenic existence that differs so markedly from what would become, within less than two centuries after Irenaeus’ death, a more widespread view of Adam and Eve as mature adults in the perfected state of paradise, Irenaeus’ notion of these primal humans as ‘children’ or ‘infants’ (his preferred terminology is *νήπιοι*) stands out as a point of curiosity for modern readers. To a large degree, discussions on his precise meaning must remain speculative.<sup>135</sup> It is safe to say that the larger theme of childhood as indicative of growth and maturation in the human person in general is taken up with more directness by Irenaeus than the childhood-status of Adam and Even in particular. Of this latter notion, only five passages in his corpus give evidence, while there are many more that present the notion of all humankind as ‘children’ advancing into perfection.<sup>136</sup> Yet it is certain that Irenaeus understood Adam and Eve, as historical individuals, to be some manner of youths:

Therefore, having made the man lord of the earth and of everything that is in it, [God] secretly appointed him as lord over those [angels] who were servants in it. They, however, were in their full development, while the lord, that is, the man, was very little, for he was an infant, and it was necessary for him to reach full development by growing.<sup>137</sup>

And so again:

For she [Eve], having a husband, Adam, nevertheless was still a virgin—for ‘they were both naked’ in paradise, ‘and were not ashamed’, since they had been created only a short time before and possessed no understand-

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<sup>135</sup> I have, in another study, investigated the question of what Irenaeus meant by calling Adam and Eve ‘children’ as far as the evidence of his corpus will allow. See Steenberg, ‘Children in Paradise’, 1–35.

<sup>136</sup> The principal passages are 3.22.4, 3.23.5, 4.38.1–2, *Epid.* 12, 14. Of these, the latter three are of primary importance and comprise what Lawson considered the three ‘proof-texts for the doctrine of the childhood of Adam’ (Lawson, *Biblical Theology* 211). See Steenberg, ‘Children in Paradise’, 7–16. Cf. J.Z. Smith, ‘The Garments of Shame’, in J.Z. Smith (ed.), *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978) 18–21 for other early discussions on childhood imagery vid. Adam and Eve prior to the transgression.

<sup>137</sup> *Epid.* 12.

ing of the procreation of children. For it was necessary for them first to grow (*adolescere*), and only thereafter to multiply (*multiplicari*).<sup>138</sup>

Through many decades of Irenaean scholarship, the mentality of a generation exemplified by Coxe argued that Irenaeus simply could not have meant this.<sup>139</sup> Modern scholars have, however, come to appreciate that Irenaeus' language need not of necessity be read as metaphorical, and may indeed be meant to suggest that Adam and Eve actually were children—or 'prepubescents', to quote one author.<sup>140</sup> It seems prudent to leave the question open, for Irenaeus never defines precisely what he means by his use of the term *νήπιοι* as it comes to bear on the primal humans; though I am inclined to agree with Smith that Irenaeus meant what he said to be taken at face value.<sup>141</sup>

What is of importance to the present consideration is that, in his eschatologically-orientated reading of creation, which affixes the image of perfected humanity to the *telos* rather than the commencement of the divine economy, Irenaeus interprets the scriptural material wholly in conformity to this Christological orientation. As 'adulthood'—that is, human perfection—is that toward which the race is striving and which the incarnation makes attainable to the human person in the eschaton, the protology of human existence cannot start from such a point of perfected adulthood. It must begin with the other terminus of human growth, that of the babe, the infant, who needs be suckled on milk before it can graduate to firmer food, which Irenaeus calls the 'bread of immortality—the Spirit of the Father'.<sup>142</sup> As such, Irenaeus finds in Genesis 1–3 not the story of perfection/fall leading to redemption, but of imperfection, growing and maturing into the fullness of life, which is ultimately the life of Christ.

A recent article by Lyn Bechtel on the Jewish reading of Gen 2.4–3.24, interpreting it as a 'myth about human maturation', allows us to discern the degree to which Irenaeus' reading of human protology agrees with that of various Hebrew interpreters with regard to these concepts of development and growth (though clearly not on his Christological

<sup>138</sup> *AH* 3.22.4; cf. Gen 2.25 (SC 211: 440–1).

<sup>139</sup> See *ANF* 2, p. 104 n. 4.

<sup>140</sup> Smith, 'Chiliasm and recapitulation', 318, 22.

<sup>141</sup> See my arguments to this effect in Steenberg, 'Children in Paradise', 16–22.

<sup>142</sup> 4.38.1. Cf. an interesting parallel in Hesiod, *Works and Days* lns. 106–31.

motivations for the same).<sup>143</sup> It is Bechtel's assertion that the widespread 'sin-and-fall' reading of Genesis is not true to the text, but the result of a gradual shift from a group- to an individual-orientated reading of scripture, which must be abandoned if the true meaning of the narrative is to be appreciated. This meaning is to show forth the 'paradigm for human life', the 'life-process that each human goes through' which also shows forth the life-process of the society as a whole.<sup>144</sup> This is, moreover, distinctly a process from infancy to adulthood. Bechtel reads Adam as being an infant, indicating that he is not specifically called by this term in the text in order to preserve the significance of his proper name 'adam in relation to *a'dama* (earth); yet the whole course of events in the Genesis narrative relates to his maturation. The garden is given to him as a place of 'pure enjoyment for the growing child'; the tree of knowledge is forbidden since it represents a knowledge for which young Adam is not yet ready, though he will one day receive it; Adam's lack of shame at his nakedness reveals his youthful innocence; and so on.<sup>145</sup> We have already seen that Irenaeus' reading of paradise is very much in accordance with what Bechtel here finds to be the original meaning of the Genesis text as Hebrew social commentary, and we shall see in what follows that Irenaeus' reading of the tree, of nakedness, and other details of creation narrative will parallel in a remarkable way that which Bechtel considers to be the proper Jewish interpretation, bound up in Irenaeus' case in the testimony of the incarnate Son.<sup>146</sup>

This should not suggest to us that Irenaeus was in any sense familiar with or current in Jewish exegetical readings of the creation narrative *per se*, for there is little to no evidence that this is the case.<sup>147</sup> It does, however, make clear an important fact: strands of interpretive tradition have long existed in which there is played no part by what is now, in

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<sup>143</sup> See L.M. Bechtel, 'Genesis 2.4b–3.24: A Myth about Human Maturation', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 67.1 (1995), 3–26.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 14–26.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. B.D. Naidoff, 'A man to work the soil: a new interpretation of Genesis 2–3' *Ibid.* 5 (1978), 2–14, which draws several of the same conclusions as Bechtel though via a different approach. Though for Naidoff it is humanity's relationship to the earth that is ultimately the focus of Gen 2–3, he is in harmony with Bechtel in his assertion that the text puts forth 'successive stages of [man's] coming to self-awareness' (p. 6) and that the 'real issue' of the narrative is not one of sin, but of relationship (cf. p. 2).

<sup>147</sup> This does not mean it has not been argued by some. See D.R. Schutz, 'The origin of sin in Irenaeus and Jewish pseudepigraphical literature', *Vigiliae Christianae* 32.3 (1978), 161–90, where it is explicitly argued that 'Irenaeus depended on an earlier Jewish tradition for the final formulation of his own ideas on sin and its origin' (p. 161).

widespread Christian theology, the usual reading of Genesis 1–3 as the story of ‘paradise lost’ and the corruption of primitive human perfection. Irenaeus seems to stand out for his proclamation of Adam and Eve as children in Eden; but this is so primarily because readers examine his protology through the lens of subsequent centuries of alternative exegesis. Irenaeus himself presents the concept without a word of *apologia*, without feeling the need for justification or explanation. Perhaps he considered such a reading common enough for defence to be unnecessary. We have seen that it was current to some degree in Jewish thought, and Irenaeus certainly encountered it in Theophilus.<sup>148</sup> There is no question but that he considered the concept integral to understanding the nature of humanity and the course of the economy as orientated towards a maturation into the full life of the triune God, made manifest in the world through the incarnation and realised fully in the human person at the eschaton.<sup>149</sup>

#### HUMANITY’S RELATIONSHIP TO THE COSMOS

That salvation comes through community, through ‘the race’ of humankind in communal act and not simply as isolated personal event, is borne out for Irenaeus chiefly in the community of discipleship surrounding Christ, and above all in the communal relationship between Christ and his mother. Like so many other elements, this testimony of the incarnate Son shapes Irenaeus’ perception of scriptural meaning. With respect of creation, this understanding of humanity as companioned creature is apparent to Irenaeus through the scripture’s attention to newly-created humanity’s relatedness to the cosmos around it. Gen 2.18–20 presents the first phase in God’s provision of proper companions for Adam, namely the creation of animals in response to the divine observation that ‘it is not good that man should be alone’ (2.18). This matter of the relationship between the animals and the human creature, consumes Irenaeus’ interest in the latter half of Genesis 2: he develops extensively the theme of creation’s existence for and in support of these newly-fashioned creatures. This is true not only specifically of the animals,

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<sup>148</sup> See *Ad Autol.* 2.25, the celebrated passage in evidence of Irenaeus’ dependence on Theophilus.

<sup>149</sup> See S. Heine, ‘“Hanging” between Heaven and Earth: Remarks on Biblical Anthropology’, *Ecumenical Review* 45.3 (1993), 311.

as recounted in Gen 2.18–19, but also of the whole created order. His reading is close in sense to that of the Jewish Talmud:

Yahweh revealed himself in a word, has created the sensible and the visible by a word. And therefore the sensible is meaningful. It is itself a language, waiting to be understood by someone.<sup>150</sup>

Irenaeus does not directly connect the act of creation through the Word (*λόγος* here in its full sense of ‘word, reason, logic’) to the revelatory (i.e. rational, logical) character of the cosmos, though he does insist that the Word is ‘inherent in the entire creation’ since he is its fashioner and it is contained in him.<sup>151</sup> But while Irenaeus does not draw out this connection, his corpus is replete with passages that emphasise the revelatory character of the cosmos. Three consecutive chapters of *Adversus haereses* 2 ascribe the diversity of various aspects of creation to the witness of God’s manifold goodness.<sup>152</sup> The fact that human persons are diverse goes to show that the one God is supremely diverse in his powers.<sup>153</sup> The various natures of created things, from the spiritual nature of the angels to the material nature of humankind, show the power of God who ‘adapts his works to the natures and tendencies of the materials dealt with’.<sup>154</sup> Such revelatory messages in creation culminate for Irenaeus in a proclamation laid against the Valentinian disparity between creation and its fashioner:

For creation reveals him who formed it, and the work made suggests him who made it, and the world manifests him who ordered it.<sup>155</sup>

Beyond simply manifesting God, the created order manifests particularly the love and activity of God for humanity. ‘God made all the things of time for man, so that coming to maturity in them, he may produce the fruit of immortality’.<sup>156</sup> This aim has been the intention of God from the first moments of creation, as is particularly attested in the incarnate witness of the creator-Son:

<sup>150</sup> Mueller, ‘Ideal man’, 280; cf. 281.

<sup>151</sup> 5.18.3.

<sup>152</sup> 2.24.4, 2.25.2, 2.26.3.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. 4.36.6.

<sup>154</sup> 2.35.4.

<sup>155</sup> 2.9.1 (SC 294: 84).

<sup>156</sup> 4.5.1.



For the Son, who is the Word of God, arranged these things beforehand from the beginning, the Father being in no want of angels for the fashioning of the creation and the formation of man, for whom the creation was made; nor, again, standing in need of any instrumentality for the framing of created things, nor for the ordering of those things which had reference to man.<sup>157</sup>

One could compose no more anthropocentric a view of creation than this, nor one more centred in the revelation of the incarnate Christ. Such a view cannot be missed in Irenaeus, by simple virtue of the fact that he repeats it so often.<sup>158</sup> So could one scholar characterise Irenaeus' view with a quotation from the *Adversus haereses*:

God's goodness establishes humanity as the centrepiece of creation, "...for man was not made for its sake, but creation for the sake of man" (V, 29/1).<sup>159</sup>

The precise manner in which Irenaeus links this anthropocentricity of creation to the specific concept of *helpmeet*, or community of aid and support, comes in his comments at *Epid.* 13 on the garden as nursery for the newly-fashioned human race:

So, while man was walking about paradise, God brought before him all the animals and commanded him to give names to them all, and 'whatever Adam called each living being, this was its name' (Gen 2.19). And God decided also to make a helper for the man, for, in this manner, 'God said, "It is not good for man to be alone, let us make him a helper fit for him"' (Gen 2.18), since among all the other living things no helper was found equal and like to Adam (cf. Gen 2.20).

The chapter continues with a discussion on the creation of Eve as the fulfilment of this need for a 'helper', and thus Irenaeus' emphasis, in terms of the provision of a *helpmeet* for Adam, comes to rest primarily upon her person. It is noteworthy that he presents first the naming of the animals (cf. Gen 2.19), and only afterwards raises the 'it is not

<sup>157</sup> 4.7.4 (SC 100: 462–5).

<sup>158</sup> In addition to the above quotations and references, cf. also 4.19.1, 5.14.2.

<sup>159</sup> W.P. Loewe, 'Myth and Counter-Myth: Irenaeus' Story of Salvation', in J. Kopas (ed.), *Interpreting Tradition—The Art of Theological Reflection* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1984) 45. See also Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 35–36, with a reference therein to *AH* 1.10.3, where Irenaeus speaks of the 'operation and economy of God, which is for the sake of man' (cf. Rousseau's note on the text, SC 263: 227). Cf. Mackenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration* 93, 96; Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation* 185; Daniélou, *Au Commencement* 46.

good...’, which in fact comes earlier in the passage (Gen 2.18). The observation in Gen 2.20 that ‘there was not found a helper comparable to him’, is extracted from the event of the naming and attached directly to the creation of Eve. Irenaeus has re-ordered the verses of the account in such a manner as to stress, even more strongly than the text of Genesis already does, the human-orientated thrust of the narrative. The whole of creation as helpmeet for humanity culminates in the creation of *human community* as an aid to human growth—a reality which, as we shall see, is tied in directly to Irenaeus’ perception of the recapitulative relationship of Christ and Mary his mother.

For all his adjustment of the passage, the notion of creation in general and the animals in particular as established by God to serve humankind finds extensive elaboration in the corpus among passages that do not directly associate the theme with the scriptural text. These passages occur primarily in those portions of the *Adversus haereses* that deal with the end-times or the chiliastic kingdom, which for Irenaeus are fundamentally discussions on the fulfilled vision of Eden.<sup>160</sup> AH 5.33.4, already explored for its witness to the vegetarian state of animals at their creation, makes that observation in light of their position subservient to humanity, which shall be restored in the future kingdom (‘for it is right that when the creation is restored, all the animals should obey and be in subjection to man [...] for they had been originally subjected in obedience to Adam’). Irenaeus makes this point most clearly a few chapters earlier, at 5.29.1:

All things have been created for the benefit of that human nature which is saved, ripening (lit. ‘maturing’, *maturantia*) for immortality that which is possessed of its own free will and its own power, and preparing and rendering it more adapted for eternal submission to God. Therefore the creation is suited to the benefit of man; for man was not made for its sake, but creation for the sake of man.<sup>161</sup>

This follows naturally from the thought of Gen 2.18–19, with its notion of the aid to humankind as the purpose for which the animal creation was brought forth, even as it is clearly a protological comment framed from the testimony of Christ’s comments on the Sabbath (cf. Mark 2.27). It is noteworthy that Irenaeus here stresses the fact of humanity’s

<sup>160</sup> See Smith, ‘Chiliasm and recapitulation’, 316, 27.

<sup>161</sup> SC 153: 362–3. Cf. again AH 1.10.3, excerpted above; and 3.5.3, 4.4.1, where creation nourishes the human creature as a vine its fruit.

free will and ‘own power’ (ἀυτεξούσιον/*sui arbitrium*) as being of consequence in its relationship to the animals, a point he makes more explicitly at *Epid.* 11:

[Man was made like God.] Accordingly he was free and master of himself (ἀυτεξούσιος), having been made by God in this way, in order that he should rule over everything upon earth. And this great created world, prepared by God before the fashioning of man, was given to the man as his domain, having everything in it.

The human person’s unique power as image-bearing, rational being sets him in a position of lordship over the created order (see again his being called κύριος over the earth at *Epid.* 12); yet this is a lordship in which he shall have dominion over the realm that will in turn foster him in his growth and maturation. This is the message at the core of 5.29.1, and its misapprehension by a whole variety of interpreters is the subject of Irenaeus’ criticism at 3.24.1. Humanity and the cosmos are to exist in mutual interaction and exchange, through which both come to exist fully according to the intention revealed by God at creation, who himself manifests divine glory on both the cosmos and humankind in this harmonious exchange. The most poignant example of such interaction is, for Irenaeus, found in the eucharistic offering, through which humanity is ‘nourished by means of the creation’. In the Eucharist, the work of human hands brings forth bread from the earth, which in turn ‘receives the Word of God’, thereby becoming the body and blood of Christ and manifesting the Son in the physical cosmos.<sup>162</sup> Creation is at the service of its human lord—it is subservient; but this is a service of growth, not a slavery of submission. The service of creation to the human race is to advance both parties fully into their *teloi* at the fulfilment of the economy.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>162</sup> 5.2.2, 3.

<sup>163</sup> Similarities in all the to the reading of Theophilus are notable. Cf. his clearest single text: ‘God, being in his own place and wanting nothing, and existing before the ages, willed to make man by whom he might be known; for him, therefore, he prepared the world. For he that is created is also needy; but he that is uncreated stands in need of nothing’ (*Ad Autol.* 2.10. Cf. *AH* 2.34.2, and esp. 3.8.3). The human person is a created being and is therefore ‘needy’ and requires aid and support in his growth. He shall eventually come to ‘know God’, even to be called ‘god’ by relation; and in order for this knowledge to be attained, all the elements of the universe shall come to his assistance. Theophilus is, not surprisingly, more symbolical in his interpretation than Irenaeus: the sun, the moon and stars, in their setting forth of the patterns of days, years and seasons, exist ‘that they may serve and be slaves to man’, through which the greatness of God ‘may be known and understood’ (*Ad Autol.* 1.4. Cf. above, p. 91).

Irenaeus' picture of creation is one in which the very fabric of the cosmos, and most specifically the creatures fashioned and placed therein, all exist in positive, supportive subservience to humankind. In this, he is not wholly unique. That the natural world exists for the benefit of humanity is a notion at least as old as the writer of Genesis. Yet Irenaeus expands it—perhaps in some measure through the influence of Theophilus—in specifying that the 'service' rendered to the human race by animals and the natural order is one of advancement in the saga of growth into the Christological perfection of the eschaton. These exist to help the human child in maturing from infant to adult—the adult met in the incarnate Son. But they are not enough, for even after their creation, as we have already intimated, 'there was found for Adam no helper comparable for him' (Gen 2.20).

*Humanity's social context: the relationship of Adam and Eve*

The Christological testimony of salvation coming *through man* is foretold in creation in Adam's chief helpmeet coming of his own bone. Despite the plethora of animal companions provided for him, the ontological solitude of Adam remains until God calls forth a companion from his own side, of his own nature:

So God himself caused a deep rapture to come upon Adam and put him to sleep, and, that a work might be accomplished out of a work, sleep not being in paradise, it came upon Adam by the will of God. And God took one of Adam's ribs and replaced it with flesh, and he built up the rib which he took into a woman, and in this way he brought her before Adam. And he, seeing her, said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman", for she was taken from her man' (cf. Gen 2.23).<sup>164</sup>

We are reminded of Irenaeus' reordering of the verses of Genesis 2.17–20 in order to emphasise the nature of this creation; and it is paramount to note that Irenaeus attributes the creation of this second human person, thus of human society, to the requirement for Adam to have a 'helper' (*adiutor*). His repetition of the term no less than three times in *Epid.* 13—once in quotation of scripture and twice of his own design—signals its

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Animals in particular are given to reproduce and rear offspring, 'not for their own profit, but for the use of man. And consider the providence with which God provides nourishment for all flesh, or the subjection in which he has ordained that all things subserve mankind' (*Ad Autol.* 1.6).

<sup>164</sup> *Epid.* 13.

importance.<sup>165</sup> It is because ‘no helper was found equal and like unto Adam’ that God designs to fashion woman, and Irenaeus’ repetition of Gen 2.18 at the beginning of his discourse on the creation of Eve serves to emphasise this fact. The youthful, immature Adam requires assistance in his growth into perfection. It is for this reason that he was established in paradise, for this reason that the Word of God walked therein as his pedagogue, for this reason that animals and the whole created order were arranged as they were by the divine hands. Now, to the degree of most intimate companionship, Adam is provided with a helpmeet in a being of his own likeness, drawn from his own flesh.

This is in notable contrast to the vision of Eve espoused by various of Irenaeus’ contemporaries, most directly the Ophites as described by Irenaeus at *Adversus haereses* 1.30. For these, Eve’s creation by the demiurge is once more an attempt at preventing Adam’s growth and perfection, of ‘again emptying man by means of woman’.<sup>166</sup> Sophia might be able to use Eve for good in the end, ‘cunningly devising a scheme to seduce her’ to transgress the oppressive command of the demiurge; but Eve’s initial formation is intended for the opposite end. In light of this, Irenaeus’ insistence on Eve as ‘helper’ stands out in an even more pronounced way. As with so much of his approach, Irenaeus speaks in response, and his attention to certain details is built from this method.<sup>167</sup>

Yet the emphasis on Eve as Adam’s helper is not solely a reaction to his opposition: it has been clear from the beginning that it finds its principal warrant in Irenaeus’ soteriological focus on Christ as recapitulator. The ‘Mariology’ (such as we can use this term) that will be elaborated in Irenaeus’ doctrine of recapitulation is largely dependent on the conception of Eve’s role as helpmeet, of woman helping man in the economy of maturation and perfection. When this function is distorted and largely destroyed in the transgression, it shall come to require restoration even as every other aspect of fallen human life requires such restoration.<sup>168</sup> To the meeting of such a need, Mary will interact with Christ in a manner to counteract Eve’s interaction with Adam, becoming the means to life where Eve had been the means of death. Irenaeus’ reading of Gen

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<sup>165</sup> Cf. Gen 2.18, which he quotes at the beginning of the chapter. The LXX employs  $\beta\omicron\eta\theta\acute{o}\varsigma$ , which we may assume was also used by Irenaeus.

<sup>166</sup> 1.30.7.

<sup>167</sup> It is here worth noting the reading of *Or. World*, NHC (II,5) 113.21–114.15, where Eve is created by Sophia specifically to aid humanity in resisting the provocations of the Powers by producing the ‘instructor’, or saviour.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. 2.22.4.

2.20–25 is shaped by his vision of the recapitulation offered by Christ in concert with Mary. That the latter recapitulates the former discloses Eve's initial nature, the purpose of her creation, and the true nature of human society and relationship.<sup>169</sup>

The question of sexuality in the human formation, and specifically of what, if any, place it had in the relationship had by Adam and Eve, shall be treated more fully in the pages to come.<sup>170</sup> Suffice it to note here only that Irenaeus reads Gen 2.25 ('and they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed') to imply that the originally-fashioned Adam and Eve, as children, did not engage in or even have knowledge of sexual activity.<sup>171</sup> The implication of his phrasing is that they one day would (it is 'as children' that they do not, and these children are meant to grow to adults); but what might have happened in an uninterrupted life in the garden is not a subject on which Irenaeus reflects. Whatever the details of the economy might have looked like had they progressed forward without interference, the reality was to be something else entirely. After the creation of the cosmos, of man and of woman and the establishment of a course of growth for these human persons into the triune life of the Father's will perfected in the Son through the Spirit, the saga of creation goes on immediately to describe the series of events by which this course would be drastically altered by sin. The economy will advance still, and its course shall continue to be the perfection of that which was first called forth from the void. Henceforth, however, it shall make this advance in and through the context of the obstacles caused by human transgression.

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<sup>169</sup> For further exploration of this idea, see M.C. Steenberg, 'The role of Mary as co-recapitulator in St Irenaeus of Lyons', *Vigiliae Christianae* (58, 2004), 1–27. Cf. V. Kesich, 'The Biblical understanding of man', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 20 (1975), 11. More shall be said on the change in Eve and Adam's relationship in our chapters on the transgression and life after Eden, below.

<sup>170</sup> See p. 177.

<sup>171</sup> See 3.22.4.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### HISTORY TRANSFORMED: HUMANITY'S TRANSGRESSION

At the high point of creation comes its disruption. Adam and Eve have been fashioned from the dust and for one another, lords over a creation that will support them as they aid one another in the growth toward perfection—a growth fostered by the Word who himself walks with them in the garden. Yet the course this growth will take shall soon change. We cannot simply say that the story of creation here becomes one of a ‘fall’, for there is an important sense in which Irenaeus’ view of the human economy cannot be paired with what has long since become the traditional conception of such a fall; or certainly of ‘The Fall’ with its consequent division of human nature into pre- and post-lapsidic states. Attempts are still made to read Irenaeus in this way, but by and large scholarship knows better.<sup>1</sup> In his reading of creation’s interruption, Irenaeus shares much in common with the Jewish readers of Genesis 3, and at times surprisingly little with his near-contemporaries in the early Christian Church. Starting from the conception of Christ as one who saves by re-heading human nature as well as the human history of growth and stunted growth, he is able to read the story of the prohibition on the tree of life, humanity’s subsequent deception and transgression, and the end-results of the whole affair as largely a misdirection of the course of such growth, and only in a very qualified way as a ‘fall’ from some previously held position or ‘state’.<sup>2</sup> As one scholar has written,

L'économie est alors passage de l'imperfection à la perfection, de l'inachèvement à l'achèvement, passage d'un commencement à une fin. Ce passage commande toute la compréhension irrévérent de l'économie et, en particulier, la place du péché au sein de cette économie.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For one example of reading Irenaeus in terms of pre- and post-fallen states, see V.K. Downing, ‘The doctrine of regeneration in the second century’, *Evangelical Review of Theology* 14.2 (1990), 109–10.

<sup>2</sup> Wingren noted early on that talk of pre- and post-fall ‘states’ is a concept foreign to Irenaeus’ anthropology (Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation* 28–29). But is there so complete an absence of this notion in Irenaeus as Wingren suggests? This shall be the subject of our treatment below, p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> Fantino, ‘Passage’, 418.

This being true, the misdirection of the divine economy is nonetheless a departure from the pathway on which Adam and Eve were originally set, and there is in this departure a genuine loss of the possessions held there. Such is the message put forward in Genesis' proclamation of the transgression, which, given the centrality of a perception of sin to the nature of salvation encountered in a redeemer, Irenaeus takes up in great detail. But, in a methodological approach that should by now not surprise the reader, Irenaeus does not turn to these texts so much to learn the nature of sin, but to read them Christologically, and by means of the revelation of sin and redemption found in Christ to demonstrate the consistent recapitulative work of God for the human creature.

#### THE TREE AND THE PROHIBITION

##### *The nature of the prohibition: protection from knowledge misused*

Before the advent of the transgression proper, the context of the transgression is established. Between creation and sin stands a prohibition. In a reading of the Genesis narrative, the opening verses describe paradise and humanity's placement therein, including the various details of the garden; while the contents of 2.16–17 represent the first words, the first commands, given by God since his pronouncement of a blessing upon the completed six days' work (cf. Gen 2.3). 'And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."' Irenaeus extrapolates, from the insertion of this prohibition into the very heart of the creation saga in its anthropogonic element, that the commandment itself forms part of the formative work of the creator upon his creation. The prohibition is an active manoeuvre of God in fashioning his human formation, even as were the drawing up from the dust and the breathing of the divine breath. It is not merely a negative proscription, but a positive affirmation of the proper limits of human knowing in its present stage of development. It is in this sense that Irenaeus utilises the text of the prohibition at *Epideixis* 15, where it is placed at the end of his long treatment of the creation saga, in some sense completing all that has gone before:

But, in order that the man should not entertain thoughts of grandeur nor be exalted, as if he had no Lord, and, because of the authority given to the man and the boldness towards God his creator, sin, passing beyond his



own measure, and adopt an attitude of self-conceited arrogance against God, a law was given to him from God, that he might know that he had as lord the Lord of all. And he placed certain limits upon him, so that, if he should keep the commandment of God, he would remain always as he was, that is, immortal; if, however, he should not keep it, he would become mortal, dissolving into the earth whence his frame was taken. And the commandment was this: 'You may eat freely from every tree of paradise, but of that tree alone, whence is the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat; for on the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die' (Gen 2.16–17).

This chapter of the *Epideixis* has already been mined in part, above, for its intimation of the immortal-yet-mortal duality in the human person; but in its fullness as reproduced here it goes further, demonstrating Irenaeus' understanding of the prohibition against the tree of knowledge as God's active work in forming humanity's character. Even as the physical limitations of the flesh provide the boundaries within which the person's carnal nature is meant to be expressed, so does the divinely imposed limitation of the Edenic 'law' provide the boundary within which his intellect and free will shall properly function.

The prohibition against eating from the tree of knowledge is, for Irenaeus, God's establishment of the proper realm within which the human creature's intellect and reason may be employed in the course of its growth. This is a unique observation on his part. Through it, Irenaeus puts forth the idea that knowledge itself, as an element within the composite being of humankind, must have reign only within the proper scope of its capabilities and preparedness at any given point in its development. Knowledge must not 'exalt' humanity to a state of self-professed grandeur that exceeds 'its own measure'. To do so is to use improperly the 'authority', the rational faculty given to the race by God, for a purpose beyond that for which it is intended. The prohibition of 2.16–17 is a 'safety' provided to guard against a potential danger inherent in humanity's possession of a free and self-determining will.<sup>4</sup>

It is only possible to understand fully the manner of Irenaeus' analysis if one reads *Epid.* 15 in the light of *AH* 5.20.2, where he employs Gen 2.16 in an *ad hominem* manner against 'the heretics':

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<sup>4</sup> See S. Korolyov, 'Heavenly Life on Earth', *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* 3 (1983), 74 for a modern writer's assertion of the same point: 'The commandment not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was given in order to train man's will through obedience to Goodness'.

It behoves us [...] to avoid their doctrines, and to take careful heed lest we suffer any injury from them; but to flee to the Church and be brought up (*educari*) in her bosom, and be nourished with the Lord's scriptures. For the Church has been planted as a garden (*paradisus*) in this world; therefore the Spirit of God says, 'You may freely eat from every tree of the garden', that is, you may eat from every scripture of the Lord, but you shall not eat with an uplifted mind, nor touch any heretical discord. For these men profess that they themselves have the knowledge of good and evil, and they set their own impious minds above God who made them. On this account they form opinions on what is beyond the limits of understanding. Wherefore also the apostle says, 'Do not be wise beyond what it is fitting to be wise, but be wise prudently' (cf. Rom 12.3), that we not be cast forth from the paradise of life by eating of the 'knowledge' of these men—that knowledge which 'knows' more than it should.<sup>5</sup>

If we accept the common dating of Irenaeus' two works and place the composition of the *Epideixis* after the completion of the *Adversus haereses* (and there is no convincing reason to doubt this),<sup>6</sup> it seems hard not to conclude that *Epid.* 15 is a refined and generalised summation of what Irenaeus had written within a narrower context at *AH* 5.20.2. Both passages take as their grounding Gen 2.16–17 (*Epid.* 15 directly quotes both verses; *AH* 5.20.2 quotes only 2.16 but makes obvious allusion to 17), and both treat the prohibition as dealing with the fitting and proper limitations to be placed on humanity's use of its intellect and reason. 'The heretics' profess a full knowledge of good and evil, 'and set their own impious minds above the God who made them'—precisely the state of affairs against which, Irenaeus argues at *Epid.* 15, God had originally invoked the prohibition as a guard. Irenaeus' use of Paul, via Rom 12.3, in his argument in the *Adversus haereses* clarifies that he does not regard the wisdom of the tree itself as problematic, or even the genuine subject of God's prohibition; rather, the commandment guards against the misuse of such knowledge as the tree represents and grants, against the act of 'being wise beyond what is fitting'.<sup>7</sup> Should human

<sup>5</sup> SC 153: 258–61. This is the sole instance in the corpus where Irenaeus relates the garden of paradise to the Church. The theme holds no important place in his thought apart from the present passage.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. my comments on the dating in the introduction and in Appendix I, pp. 217 ff.

<sup>7</sup> This in distinction, for example, to the *Ap. John*, where in 21.21–36 the tree is described as 'godlessness', whose fruit is deadly poison and its promise death: NHC (II,1) 21.21–36. Yet cf. *Or. World*, NHC (II,5) 110.8–111.1 on the tree of *gnosis* which shall open the mind of the human creature. For one of the few scholarly reflections on the prohibition as protection, see Ramos-Lissón, 'La rôle de la femme', 167–68.

knowledge be kept within appropriate bounds (not ‘passing beyond its own measure’), then it is a knowledge that ‘eats freely from every tree of the garden’ and nourishes humanity in its growth.<sup>8</sup>

The notion that specific proscriptions of the law are meant to prevent the overreaching of nature, or of the bounds imposed on one’s relationship to the cosmos through his or her own nature, is found well antecedent to Irenaeus. Philo had interpreted several of the regulations of the Old Testament in such a manner: proscriptions against covetousness mitigate more deeply against uncontrolled desire, which leads to such antisocial activities as plunderings, robberies, false accusations, adulteries, even murders;<sup>9</sup> the Decalogue’s commandment against covetousness and desire strives to prevent injustice and warfare;<sup>10</sup> and the proscription of murder is handed down for the benefit of ‘public utility’ (σφόδρα κοινωφελῆς).<sup>11</sup>

H. Maier’s study on the ancient reading of legal traditions through such an interpretive methodology—which in Philo he rightly attributes to Stoic influences—sheds some creative light on the matter. By his analysis both of Philo and of similar interpretations of metaphysical proscriptions in the philosophical tradition, Maier conceives primarily of social motivations for such readings.<sup>12</sup> His brief survey of Sirach concludes with the declaration that regulations on wealth and riches are meant, ultimately, to protect the social structure of the Israelite community. Maier notes, ‘For this writer [i.e. the author of Sirach],

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<sup>8</sup> William Wordsworth demonstrated a certain popularity—if not predominance—of this concept in later history. The poet discerned in life the need for a limitation on knowledge and freedom, as an aid required to prevent men from becoming those ‘who have felt the weight of too much liberty’ (Wordsworth, ‘The Sonnet’, *i*). His ‘Ode to Duty’ spells out a view of divine law rather similar to that Irenaeus takes from Genesis: ‘Stern Lawgiver! yet thou dost wear / The Godhead’s most benignant grace; / Now know we anything so fair / As is the smile upon thy face: / Flowers laugh before thee on their beds, / And fragrance in thy footing treads; / Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong; / And the most ancient heavens, through Thee, are fresh and strong’ (‘Ode to Duty’, stanza 7). It is precisely this sense of ‘preserving from wrong’ that Irenaeus detects in the prohibition against partaking of the tree of knowledge before the appointed time.

<sup>9</sup> See *Spec. Leg.* 4.80–94.

<sup>10</sup> See *De. Dec.* 152–53.

<sup>11</sup> *De. Dec.* 170. Cf. similar readings in *Dec.* 142; *De agric.* 43; *Spec. leg.* 1.173–74, 2.190; *De praem. et poen.* 15; *Quod omn. prob.* 20, 79; *De Joseph* 29 ff. These and others mentioned with discussion in H.O. Maier, ‘Purity and danger in Polycarp’s Epistle to the Philippians: The sin of Valens in social perspective’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993), 240 n. 40.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 239–41.

then, the proper use of riches indicates an allegiance to the ideals of the community of Israel'.<sup>13</sup> This pattern is traced through apocalyptic Judaism, where 'the abusers of wealth [...] certainly bring social ills, but more importantly they symbolize an unredeemed realm of sin awaiting destruction', indicating primarily that they are excluded from the true community of Israel.<sup>14</sup> All this is the preamble to the centrepiece of Maier's argument, namely that the brief reference to the sin of Valens in the epistle of Polycarp (cf. *Pol.* 11) reveals a similar social context through which Polycarp understood the proscriptions of the law. Maier's thesis here is straightforward:

In the case of Polycarp, to connect avarice with defilement is to establish a group boundary and to relegate greed to the space outside the community; the primary danger of avarice is that it leads one away to a dangerous state of idolatry.<sup>15</sup>

Maier may be reading a bit much into what is, after all, a brief and almost passing reference to Valens in Polycarp's epistle, but his analysis of the tradition of legal interpretation through the philosophical schools, into Judaism through Philo and the apocalyptic era, right into the apostolic age, is of interest. Throughout, he discovers an awareness on the part of ancient authors that the divine commandments are to some degree protective. They do not simply establish boundaries based on God's authority or regal intent for his people, but based also on what is best for that people in light of the natural limitations or weaknesses of its character.

To this end, Maier's conclusions have bearing on our present look at Irenaeus' reading of the prohibition on the tree of knowledge. Just as Philo could say that prohibitions against greed of money were meant to prevent warfare and general immorality, and as Polycarp could imply that avariciousness leads to the destruction of communal or societal order, so can Irenaeus come to regard the prohibition of Gen 2.16–17 as God's control against a weakness in humanity's immature character. And even as wealth may be good when used wisely, so, too, can the knowledge of the tree one day come to be of good to humankind.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 240–41.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

*The relationship of knowledge and obedience*

All this is in stark contrast to the broadly Valentinian view on knowledge, which Irenaeus has been attacking throughout the *Adversus haereses* and to which our above text, 5.20.2, refers in summation. For these, a ‘knowledge that knows more than it should’ is, provided that the knowledge in question is true and genuine, hardly a possibility. It is only false knowledge—deception or ignorant belief—that is harmful; the restoration of true knowledge and true knowing is indeed the primary aim of ‘Gnostic’ praxis. The second-century *Gospel of Thomas* presents Jesus as speaking a number of sayings to this effect:

The kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realise that it is you who are the sons of the living father.<sup>16</sup>

Jesus said, ‘Recognise what is in your sight, and that which is hidden from you will become plain to you. For there is nothing hidden which will not become manifest.’<sup>17</sup>

The esoteric nature of Jesus’ sayings only becomes more abstract as the text goes on, but throughout the tractate there is a general insistence on the redeeming nature of ultimate knowledge—a knowledge readily available to and meant for the appropriation of the enlightened human individual.<sup>18</sup>

Irenaeus, however, insists that at humanity’s creation, even true and genuine knowledge, be it in too full a measure for the limited status of the newly-formed creature, can be harmful to the race. Here he follows Theophilus precisely, from a text in the *Ad Autolyicum* commonly accepted as having been an important source for Irenaeus’ exegesis:

The tree of knowledge was itself good, and its fruit was good. For the tree did not contain death, as some suppose; death was the result of disobedience. For there was nothing in the fruit but knowledge, and knowledge is good when one uses it properly.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> NHC (II,2) 32.25–33.2.

<sup>17</sup> NHC (II,2) 33.11–14.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. H.B. Timothy, *The Early Christian Apologists and Greek Philosophy—exemplified by Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria* (Assen: Van Gorcum & Co., 1973) 24–25 on Irenaeus’ conception of knowledge vis-à-vis these Gnostic views.

<sup>19</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.25. Cf. the above reference to the *Ap. John*, NHC (II,1) 21.21–36, for an example of one Gnostic tradition (of Valentinian descent) that fits the caricature of Theophilus’ anonymous ‘some’. A similar sentiment is expressed at *Gos.Tr.*, NHC (I,3) 17.18–20. Grant puts forward Apelles, of Marcionite background, as the ‘some’ to which Theophilus may have been referring (cf. Grant, *Theophilus of Antioch* 67 n. 1).

There is for Theophilus nothing iniquitous in the knowledge the tree contains, which will be passed along to the human creature who partakes of its fruit. Yet in eating of this fruit, evil does come to the partaker—though the source of the evil is, by this reading, in the disobedience of the one who has eaten in contradiction to God’s commandment not so to do. ‘Death’, he reminds Autolykus, ‘was the result of disobedience.’

Irenaeus does not disagree. There are passages throughout both his works that explicitly identify the sin of the tree with the disobedience of God’s command, and more generally link together ‘sin’ and ‘disobedience’ as theological synonyms. Disobedience is certainly the chief sin in Irenaeus’ thought. *Epid.* 2 opens with a brief definition of sin as not keeping the commandments of God; *AH* 4.41.3 relates the effects of disobedience to the disinheritance one would receive from parents at a similar act. As disobedience to family brings, eventually, disinheritance from family, so does disobedience to God bring divine disinheritance. At 3.18.6, Irenaeus spells out that such disobedience—which he specifically equates to sin—renders humanity weak, open to the devil’s captivating power. Irenaeus is nowhere clearer in his identification of disobedience and sin than in his discussions on the parallelism between Eve/Mary and Adam/Christ. He shows that Christ comes to dissolve the old disobedience of Adam, and Mary the knot of Eve, with specific attention drawn to the fact that the ‘transgression which occurred through the tree was undone by the obedience of the tree’ and virginal disobedience rectified by virginal obedience.<sup>20</sup> Christ’s obedience in the passion and Mary’s obedience to the word of the angel are both corrections of the sin in paradise, thus explicitly a sin of disobedience. In addition to bearing out the nature of the prohibition as protective, this also demonstrates Irenaeus’ reading of the commandment as grounded in the redemptive work of the saviour: Christ’s obedience on the tree discloses the sin of eating from that first tree as an act not of engagement with an intrinsic wrong, but an act flawed precisely in the failure to be obedient to the protective (i.e. redemptive) commandment of God.

This is spelled out emphatically, and more pithily, in an important text from the opening section of the *Epideixis*:

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<sup>20</sup> *Epid.* 33. On Christ dissolving the old disobedience of Adam, see 3.18.6, *Epid.* 37. For Mary untying the knot of Eve, see 3.22.4.

‘Sinners’ are those who have the knowledge of God, but do not keep his commandments—that is, the disdainful.<sup>21</sup>

This passage must be qualified in the present context, lest the identification of sinners with those who ‘have the knowledge of God’ be taken in some sense to disqualify Adam and Eve from such a title, given the fact that the tree of knowledge was precisely that of which they were forbidden to eat. Does this fact free them from the qualification required by *Epid.* 2 for ‘sinners’? Irenaeus’ most basic answer is clearly no. Disobedience comes in defiance of such knowledge as humanity has of God, and though Adam and Eve had not partaken of the ‘knowledge of good and evil’, they nonetheless had a direct knowledge of the God who walked with them in the garden and himself spoke in their hearing ‘the law of life’.<sup>22</sup> Irenaeus can say elsewhere that ‘the disobedient do not consent to his doctrine’—and there was but one ‘doctrine’, one teaching, to which the first humans had been bound—reminding his readers that ‘the law is the commandment of God’.<sup>23</sup> This latter comment is offered in reference to the devil’s activities in the garden, summarised by Irenaeus:

In the beginning he enticed man to transgress his maker’s law, and thereby got him into his power; yet his power consists in transgression and apostasy, and with these he bound man to himself.<sup>24</sup>

Despite their limited knowledge, Adam and Eve yet possessed a knowledge of ‘their maker’s law’, that is, God’s commandment, sufficient unto either obedience or disobedience. Their exercise of the latter was therefore an act of those ‘who have the knowledge of God, but do not keep his commandments’—an act of disobedience, and thus of sin.

*The dynamic of maturing knowledge and responsibility*

At the same time, the knowledge of God possessed by Adam and Eve was weak and basic. It was sufficient for the generation in humanity of the ability to heed or depart from the will of God, yet minimal enough to make understandable (if not excusable) Adam and Eve’s susceptibility to a provoked disobedience. Disobedience, suggests Irenaeus, may be

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<sup>21</sup> *Epid.* 2; cf. Ps 1.1.

<sup>22</sup> Behr’s sectional title for *Epid.* 15 (see Behr, *Apostolic Preaching* 49); cf. *Epid.* 6.

<sup>23</sup> 5.21.3. The first quotation is from 5.27.1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* (SC 153: 274–5).

exercised at any level of knowledge. While the Israelites after Moses may have had laws by the hundreds bound up in the covenant by which they were directed to live, Adam and Eve had only one—yet even this one was sufficient for obedience. Nonetheless, Israel's detailed law was based on a deeper and more substantially revealed knowledge of God, was in some sense a portion of the 'knowledge of good and evil' greater than that to which Adam and Eve had been privy in paradise.<sup>25</sup> To be disobedient in such a state is, for Irenaeus, less understandable than was the disobedience in Eden, for humanity as a whole had been given to mature in its knowledge of God since the era of paradise. To be disobedient when in communion with the Church and the new covenant of Christ is less understandable still, for therein has humanity's knowledge of God been brought to yet a higher level. This knowledge makes one stronger in his or her discernment of the right and the wrong, of good and of evil, and thus makes ever less pardonable any disobedience from the right. Just as a child, when maturing through her years, grows more accountable for her actions and less able to attribute her falls to the influence of others, so Irenaeus sees humanity as coming to 'know better' than to sin as the economy unfolds. Adam and Eve, however, were young, inexperienced, immature. They knew enough to be obedient when tempted otherwise, but not enough fully to comprehend the nature of temptation, of deceit, of wickedness.

Thus in Irenaeus' reading, the scriptures present the story, not of Adam and Eve spontaneously or for reasons of self-generated desire transgressing God's commandment, but so sinning *at the provocation of a deceiver*. On this account, Irenaeus speaks of the first humans predominantly as being 'involved in' the transgression prompted by the devil. They maintain personal responsibility throughout for the fact that the decision to disobey is ultimately one made by Adam and Eve as freely acting, self-determining individuals; but their decision is motivated by the actions of a deceiver they were little prepared to combat.<sup>26</sup> Irenaeus here makes use of Jesus' parable of the sower to prove his point:

The Lord, indeed, sowed good seed in his own field. Thus he says, 'The field is the world' (Mt 13.38). But while man slept, the enemy came and 'sowed tares in the midst of the wheat, and went on his way' (Mt 13.25). Hence we learn that this was the apostate angel and enemy, because he

<sup>25</sup> Cf. 2.11.1, 2.30.9, 3.10.2.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Weinandy, 'Imago Dei', 24–26.



was envious of God's workmanship (*plasma*), and took up the task of rendering this workmanship an enmity with God. For this cause God has banished from his presence him who did of his own accord stealthily sow the tares, that is, him who brought about the transgression; but he took compassion upon man, who, through want of care (*neglenter*) no doubt, but still wickedly, on the part of another became involved in the disobedience.<sup>27</sup>

This passage is dense and speaks predominantly of the devil, who is of pre-eminent fault in the sin, for it is he who actively, in a deliberate and deceitful way acts against God and the human race (as later in the same passage: 'the devil had designed to make man the enemy of God'). Humanity's deception by such a force is to Irenaeus understandable, and God himself takes compassion on his deceived creature. Irenaeus' notion of knowledge in degree of maturity bears directly upon his conviction of guilt and responsibility.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, there remains a definite culpability in Adam and Eve following their actions. These may have sinned at the provocation of a great foe, and through 'want of care' (Irenaeus here implies a certain 'neglect' [*neglegenter*] in Adam and Eve, promoted by the lack of need and anxiety in the garden), but 'still wickedly'. One may condemn the devil for his role in the transgression, but responsibility for the act of disobedience itself must rest with the man and woman who themselves contravened the divine command.<sup>29</sup>

*A prohibition but not a test*

In all this, Irenaeus is markedly in line with Theophilus in his reading of the same Genesis text. God sets forth the prohibition, and the departure from obedience to this commandment brings consequences not through the tree itself or the knowledge it presents, but from the disobedience of the eater. Yet Irenaeus goes further than Theophilus, and while he does place emphasis on Adam and Eve's disobedience as at fault in the transgression of God's prohibition against the tree

<sup>27</sup> 4.40.3 (SC 100: 978–81).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Downing, 'Doctrine of regeneration', 110, where Adam's sin, according to Irenaeus, is not a 'radical infraction of the Law' but a 'moral mistake attributable to the spiritual and intellectual immaturity of Adam and Eve'. In this light, it is hard to accept Klebba's terminology of 'die Katastrophe' vis-à-vis the transgression (cf. Klebba, *Anthropologie* 45).

<sup>29</sup> On Irenaeus' belief that responsibility/guilt for disobedience cannot be imputed to another, see 4.27.2–3, 4.33.2, 5.15.2.

of knowledge, he refrains from any implication that a test of obedience was the primary reason for it. Rather, the commandment is an important and integral element in the economy of human maturation, preventing the newly-fashioned creature from laying hold of that which it is unable to bear, preserving the fullness of knowledge for a time—and there will be a time—when humanity shall be ready and able to partake of the full knowledge God offers.<sup>30</sup> This race will be ‘like God’ just as the serpent had predicted, however flawed may have been the latter’s intentions and understandings. Theophilus, however, adds at *Ad Autol.* 2.25:

Furthermore, God wanted to test [Adam], to see whether he would be obedient to his command. At the same time, he also wanted the man to remain simple and sincere for a longer time, remaining in infancy. For this is a holy duty not only before God but before men, to obey one’s parents in simplicity and without malice. And if children must obey their parents, how much more must they obey the God and Father of the universe!

Irenaeus does not follow the Antiochene with respect to either of the two reasons the latter here puts forth for the prohibition. There is no question in Irenaeus’ treatment of God wishing to test Adam and Eve. Their disobedience becomes apparent in the transgression, but God is not presented as having provoked the incident as an investigation of their response. Similarly, Irenaeus does not take up Theophilus’ comment on God wishing for Adam and Eve to ‘remain in infancy’ for a longer period, but suggests simply that their infancy required such a time of expectant growth. Irenaeus extols the beauty and virtue of a simple and loving faith, but never suggests that this faith and its connected obedience are constrained to infancy and not to maturity.<sup>31</sup> To the contrary, he makes a point of showing that such faith and obedience are perfected with the maturation of humankind, made stronger and more binding in the ‘perfect man’ than they were in the infant Adam and Eve.<sup>32</sup> Faith becomes friendship only in maturity.

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<sup>30</sup> See 4.39.1, where Irenaeus suggests that the knowledge of good and evil will, at a later stage in human development, become the foundation by which the individual will be able to chose the one over the other. At 4.38.4, a knowledge of good and evil is considered part-and-parcel of the image and likeness.

<sup>31</sup> See 2.26.1 (‘It is better [...] that one should have no knowledge whatever [...] but should believe in God and continue in his love’); 4.12.2.

<sup>32</sup> See 4.38.4.

Theophilus intimates this idea in describing knowledge as ‘good when one uses it properly’, suggesting therefore that there may at some point be a time when such discretion shall lie within man’s power; but Irenaeus is explicit in his assertion that humanity one day will partake of the full measure of true knowledge.<sup>33</sup> This is the subject of his celebrated discussion at *AH* 4.38–39, where he speaks most openly of the growth and development of the human creature ‘into perfection’. Humanity shall, indeed, ‘make progress day by day and ascend toward the perfect; that is, be approximated to the Uncreated One’, but this only after it has ‘become accustomed to eat and drink the Word of God’ through ‘this arrangement [...] and these harmonies, and a sequence of this nature’—i.e., the divine economy of salvation.<sup>34</sup> This growth into the receptivity of ever increasing knowledge is an essential part of Irenaeus’ larger belief in the growth of the whole person and of human nature itself, over the course of the economy, into that which one day shall behold in divine vision its creator and partake of the life of God.<sup>35</sup> It is a chief confession, too, of his perception of the centrality of the incarnate Christ to human history and life: in Christ the full image, including full human knowing, is revealed. Humanity becomes physically able to bear such life through the accustomisation of the Spirit to this Son, made possible in turn by the incarnation of the latter. Even as the body grows in its receptive capabilities, so too does the intellect. But all such growth must be maintained within its ‘due measure’, and with respect to the intellectual aspect in particular, God thus prohibits the free eating of the tree of knowledge in paradise.

*The fall of knowledge and knowing*

Irenaeus employs the prohibition, at *Epid.* 15 and *AH* 5.20.2, to considerable effect, and its importance may be encapsulated in the observance that the divine commandment of those verses, the sole prohibition of

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<sup>33</sup> See Theophilus, *Ad Autol.* 2.25, which generally reinforces this view, offering the allegory of the newborn child unable to eat solid food and thus nourished by its mother’s milk, but which, ‘with increasing age, comes to solid food’. Irenaeus employs the same analogy, drawn from this text in Theophilus, at *AH* 4.38–39. See also *Ad Autol.* 2.26. In 2.24, Theophilus specifically indicates that God intends Adam to grow into perfection and ascend to heaven, ‘having been declared a God’. Cf. Droge, *Homer or Moses?* 104.

<sup>34</sup> 4.38.3, 1.

<sup>35</sup> See 4.38.4, 4.39.1.

Eden, is interpreted anthropocentrically by Irenaeus as pertaining to the life and growth of the human creature in Christ, and not primarily to the sovereignty or otherwise independent will of God who therein tests his new creation. It is not the exertion of God's authority, but his dedication to the perfection of his handiwork. A third passage in which Irenaeus makes use of Gen 2.16–17 (and where he in fact makes more extensive and contextualised use of these verses than he does in those addressed previously) demonstrates this same characteristic of interpretation, though it does so by addressing the prohibition from a different angle: the devil's deception of Adam and Eve with regard to the command. Irenaeus' intention at *AH* 5.23 is primarily to demonstrate the character of the devil as deceiver, as opposed to the Word as truth, and in this regard the primary example of such deception is found in his manoeuvre regarding the fruit of the tree of knowledge.<sup>36</sup> Irenaeus sets up the situation with a complete quotation of the present verses, then proceeds to explicate the devil's actions, along with Eve's responses, through quotations of Gen 3.1–5 interspersed with his own commentary. In this dialogue, pride of place is given to Gen 3.4–5, the devil's response to Eve's reassertion of the divine prohibition, and the promised consequence that on the day one eats of the fruit, on that day he will surely die:

Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'.<sup>37</sup>

Irenaeus goes on to explain the content of the deception wrapped up in the devil's words. First, he speaks of God as absent, as if the creator were not present in the garden with him and Eve; and then he lies, since the promise of death was indeed true.<sup>38</sup> Irenaeus is again careful to explain that this death was not caused by the fruit but by human disobedience, for 'disobedience to God entails death'.<sup>39</sup> His wording at the close of 5.23.1 is especially interesting:

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<sup>36</sup> Irenaeus' vision of the devil as deceiver will be treated more fully in what follows; see below, pp. 172–176.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted at *AH* 5.23.1 (SC 153: 288–9).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. 5.23.1. The subsequent section constitutes Irenaeus' principal defence of the notion that the 'on the same day you eat of it' of Gen 2.17 was not proved false by the long life of Adam and Eve.

<sup>39</sup> 5.23.1.

For *along with the fruit* they did also fall under the power of death, because they did eat in disobedience.<sup>40</sup>

The fruit itself, the potential for genuine knowledge of good and evil, the capability for godly knowledge in humanity, is, together with that humanity, become forfeit to death in the eating. The human person's disobedience to the divine prohibition not only entails the death of his personal being—the immediate and direct consequence of his defiance of God's economy—it entails also the disruption of the very nature of his potential within the economy designed and wrought for his sake. Adam and Eve's 'eating in disobedience' does not disturb solely the eaters, but the very fruit of which they are partaking. This represents a substantial Irenaeus insight. The forfeiture of life is both personal and historical: Adam and Eve would die 'on that same day', but so also will all human generations from that time forward perish and the fruit of the tree of knowledge will become more elusive still.

Irenaeus does not expand further his comment on the fruit falling together with humanity under the forfeiture to death, but his consideration of the expulsion from the garden proffers the same essential point. Adam and Eve are expelled from paradise upon their transgression; 'God put the man far from his face'.<sup>41</sup> To behold God, to attain to the divine vision, is for Irenaeus the very definition of full and true knowledge.<sup>42</sup> The casting of humanity out of the garden, away from God's 'face' and thus from pure vision, represents the same anthropological teaching as the falling of the fruit of the tree into the sway of death. The perfection of true knowledge, so much the goal of the rational human being that God planted this tree at the very centre of paradise, moves outside the grasp of humankind on its transgression. Adam's potential for growth in the course of the economy has been altered. This loss shall require restoration.

### *The question of humanity's 'fall'*

Is this, then, not a 'fall'? In some sense, the answer must be yes. Suggesting that the potential for the ascent to knowledge, for the beholding of the divine vision of God, was removed from the human race in consequence of its sin, is indeed to claim that something in the nature

<sup>40</sup> SC 153: 290–1, emphasis mine.

<sup>41</sup> *Epid.* 16.

<sup>42</sup> See 4.20.5, cf. Osborn, *Irenaeus* 204–05.

of humanity was altered through the transgression in Eden—made less than once it had been. God created life, but Adam became ‘the beginning of those who die’.<sup>43</sup> His turning aside from God is his forfeiture of life, and as Adam was given this life in his genesis, there is without any question a genuine and real loss in consequence of the transgression in the garden.<sup>44</sup> The fall of knowledge and later expulsion from Eden confirm this. Such loss radically effects humanity’s relationship with the cosmos in which it has been placed, its communal relationships, and its relationship with the triune God with whom it had lived in Eden. An attempt to read Irenaeus as presenting no scheme whatever of an Edenic ‘fall’ would be to over-estimate the case. But of the loss itself, Irenaeus presents the scenario, absent among Christian writers before and rare among those since, of humanity losing that which it did not in actuality possess. This loss of potential, rather than the loss of actualised realities, is one of the most important nuances of Irenaeus’ treatment of sin and human nature, and for its explanation there is still no better analogy than that drawn some fifty years ago by Wingren:

A healthy, newborn child is unable to talk, for example, but it has every likelihood of being able to do so in the future, and provided only that the child grows, it will reach the stage of being able to talk. An injury to the child, however, may prevent it from ever beginning to talk. This is the situation of the first man. He is a child, created in the image of God, but he is not the image of God. That he lacks something, however, is not due to sin. No injury has yet happened to the child. He is uninjured, but he is just a child—he does not yet realise what he is to be.<sup>45</sup>

We need not greatly expand on this description, for Wingren’s comments make clear the manner in which Irenaeus is able to speak of the loss of what he also claims Adam and Eve did not at that time possess. What is of interest is the manner in which Irenaeus’ understanding of perfection as an eschatological, and more so a Christological, concept,

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<sup>43</sup> 3.22.4; cf. 1 Cor 15.22.

<sup>44</sup> See 5.12.2 on sin as forfeiture.

<sup>45</sup> Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation* 20. Cf. his important expansion a few pages later: ‘If we take as an example a child’s power of speech, it is not in the least 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 spoke, by doing something, that is, which it had never done before the accident occurred. The child recovers its power of speech which it never had’ (Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation* 27).

causes him to read such texts at a remarkable degree of face value. He does not speak of the transgression of God's prohibition as effecting a change in human nature any more than does the text of the scriptural account. There is a loss incurred through the sin, a 'fall' in this sense; but Irenaeus does not read into this fall anything beyond the direct measure of the text. These children are not perfect at their formation, as no child can be; and his understanding of human nature after the expulsion from Eden remains largely unchanged from this initial state. Protology, for all its profundity and—in sin—its cataclysm, remains nonetheless a beginning; and this beginning, orientated toward Christ, remains orientated toward him as much in its state of transgression as before it. It is primarily humanity's relationship to the cosmos, God and other human persons that is altered, and this through the transgression proper and the circumstances under which Eve and then Adam were to violate the divine command. In this treatment of this subject in particular, Irenaeus emphasises in a poignant way the activity of the devil.

#### THE DEVIL AND THE DECEPTION OF THE HUMAN CHILD

Irenaeus' treatment of the prohibition against the tree of knowledge is, as the previous section already began to show, intimately tied in to his treatment of the temptation of humanity by the serpent. That God's prohibition and the activities of the devil should be borne together in such close connection is no more than is warranted by the scriptural account, where Gen 3.1 presents the serpent's first words as a misquotation of Gen 2.16. It will come as no surprise to discover that, for Irenaeus, this close proximity of God's works and the devil's in the first phases of the economy are illumined chiefly by their close connection in the incarnate life of the Son, with whom the devil is associated in antagonism from the first moments after his baptism. This intermingling of divine intent and demonic delusion is part of the recapitulative obedience of the Son, and connects the creation saga in Eden to that carried forward in Galilee, perfected in the eschatological kingdom.

The precise manner in which the serpent reacts to and manipulates God's prohibition against the tree has the additional value, for Irenaeus, of spelling out the principal contours of the devil's character and relationship to the new human formation, as well as the manner of that relationship as it shall continue throughout the whole of the economy.

The character of the devil who tempts and leads into transgression the heretics surrounding second-century Lyons—as Irenaeus presents them—is defined for him by the text of the Genesis narrative, as this narrative is illumined by Christ’s own temptations by Satan. These considerations on the person of Satan are in turn of importance when Irenaeus comes to speak of the end times, and especially of the reign of the Antichrist in the context of the chiliastic kingdom—a topic to which he dedicates substantial space.<sup>46</sup> There he will hark back specifically to the creation narrative as spelling out the protology of evil in its relationship to humankind, itself recapitulated both by the devil and by Christ.<sup>47</sup>

*The devil’s motivation*

If the devil is indeed the great temptor and deceiver, the initial question must be, ‘why?’. What is the motivation whereby he emerges in the form of a serpent and convinces humanity to betray its creator? For Irenaeus the response is the devil’s envy, and specifically, his envy of the human handiwork.

Just as if anyone, being an apostate and seizing in a hostile manner another man’s territory, should harass its inhabitants and claim for himself the glory of a king among those ignorant of his apostasy and robbery, so likewise the devil, being one among those angels who were placed over the spirit of the air, as the apostle Paul declared in his epistle to the Ephesians (cf. Eph 2.2), becoming envious of man, was rendered an apostate from the divine law; for envy is foreign to God.<sup>48</sup>

This interpretation of the devil’s fall as motivated by his envy for humankind is found in abbreviated form in the *Epidexis*:

This commandment [not to eat from the tree of knowledge, cf. *Epid.* 15] the man did not keep, but disobeyed God, being misled by the angel who, because of the many gifts of God, which he gave to the man, became jealous and looked upon him with envy, and so ruined himself and made the man a sinner, persuading him to disobey the commandment of God.<sup>49</sup>

The devil, ‘one among those angels placed over the spirit of the air’, beholds the treasures given to the human race: the earth, the whole

<sup>46</sup> See *AH* 5.21.2 through to the end of 5.30.4.

<sup>47</sup> On Antichrist’s ‘recapitulation’ of iniquity, see 5.29.2.

<sup>48</sup> 5.24.4 (SC 153: 304–7).

<sup>49</sup> *Epid.* 16.



cosmos, the plants, the animals; but more than these, the ability to grow into perfection and ‘be like God’. Such is impossible for the devil as one who is immaterial and therefore exterior to the temporal order, thus incapable of genuine growth. While the psalmist may proclaim that God made humanity ‘a little lower than the angels’ (Ps. 8.6), Irenaeus finds in Satan an envy that operates on the reverse assumption. Genesis makes clear that God has given to this race gifts not granted to the angels; and indeed the incarnation of the Son is a peculiarly human-orientated gift. The whole cosmic creation is presented to this new child who is to be its lord. The angels, on the other hand, are but its stewards.<sup>50</sup> The devil, together with the other apostate angels, look upon humanity as that which is lower than they, yet which has been given greater gifts.

It is interesting that Irenaeus nowhere makes mention of Wisd 2.24, ‘through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it’, for such is precisely his point in these passages. However, there are other possible sources for his emphasis in this regard. Irenaeus follows the tradition established by the apocryphal *Life of Adam and Eve*—though there is no evidence that he had ever read the book itself<sup>51</sup>—where it is unquestionably envy that prompts the rebellion of the apostate angels, as is evident in the Latin version of the text and substantially more so in the Armenian.<sup>52</sup> While Irenaeus may never have read such passages, he was familiar with the tradition of which they stand as principal witnesses. The devil’s acts against the human race are rooted in this envy of the latter’s gifts, even of its own being in the divine image. This becomes clear for Irenaeus through the devil’s activities after the revelation of his true nature by Christ:

As his apostasy was exposed by man, and because man became the means of searching out his thoughts, he has set himself in opposition to man with greater and greater determination, envying his life and wishing to involve him in his own apostate power.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> See *Epid.* 11.

<sup>51</sup> Behr calls attention to the parallel: Behr, *Apostolic Preaching* 105 n. 48.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. ch. 15.3 in the Latin recension; 12.1–17.3 in the Armenian. See G.A. Anderson and M.E. Stone, *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve, Second Revised Edition* (Second Revised edn.; Atlanta: Scholar’s Press, 1999) 15–18.

<sup>53</sup> 5.24.4 (SC 153: 306–7). Cf. 4.40.3, quoted above (p. 162), which speaks similarly of the devil being ‘envious of God’s workmanship’ and designing ‘to make man the enemy of God’.

While Satan was stirred against humankind from the beginning due to his envy of Adam and Eve in paradise, this anger would later take on the additional weight of revenge. Satan will finally be defeated by the New Adam, the Son become incarnate as the very human creature the devil had always envied, and for this the ragings of his envy will grow all the stronger. Such a defeat represents the ultimate reversal of all toward which the devil has worked since he first appeared as a serpent in the garden, namely, the overthrow of humankind.<sup>54</sup> To be defeated in the end by this same humankind is the ultimate affront. The object of the devil's envy shows forth its reason: the angel is defeated by the man. But this defeat comes only after the active attempt of the devil to crush and destroy the object of his envy—an attempt that will reach the pitch of its fury in the dominion of the Antichrist.<sup>55</sup> This battle against humankind has, however, been ongoing through the whole of human history, and it is one which took its root in, and which can be understood in any age through a reflection upon, the deception of Adam and Eve in the garden.<sup>56</sup> Once again the commixture of protology and eschatology in Irenaeus' reading of creation is evident. The nature of the battle which shall end at Armageddon is set out in the deceit of humanity by the serpent in Eden.

*The nature and the accomplishment of the deceit*

We have already seen, in our discussion on the nature of the prohibition on the tree of knowledge, how Irenaeus employs Gen 3.1–5 in *AH* 5.23.1 to demonstrate the interaction of Eve and the serpent as leading to the transgression. Irenaeus' main point in that context is to show that the devil is a liar: he misquotes the commandment of God (Gen 2.16) in such a manner as to make God seem jealous or envious, 'lying against the Lord' as Irenaeus characterises the deception.<sup>57</sup> Irenaeus is explicit that the serpent knew better, that his improper quoting of the command is intentional, a deliberate attempt at the temptation of Eve. In this Irenaeus can relate the action of the devil to that of his

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<sup>54</sup> That the overthrow of humankind is the devil's intention and mission leads to ps-Justin calling him the 'misanthropic demon' (*H.ad.Gr.* 21). Justin's view of Satan is markedly similar to that of Irenaeus. In the thought of both writers, the fallen angel is driven by his vision of the human creation as foe.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. 5.25.1, 5.30.1–4.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. 5.30.1.

<sup>57</sup> 5.23.1.

Valentinian contemporaries, and more broadly, all those outside the Church; for the devil acts by ‘concealing falsehood under the guise of scripture, as is done by all the heretics’.<sup>58</sup> Irenaeus makes an example here of Satan in his attempt to deceive Christ in the wilderness (drawn from Mt 4.1–11; cf. Lk 4.1–13, Mk 1.12–13), in which instance the devil quotes Dt 8.3, Ps 90.11–12 and Dt 6.16 in his attempt at provocation. Irenaeus attacks the Valentinians for doing precisely the same thing, especially as regards the Ptolemaean misuse of Jn 1.1–18, recounted in *AH* 1.9.2, and the activity common to ‘all the heretics’ of misrepresenting Paul’s statement that ‘flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God’ (1 Cor 15.50).<sup>59</sup> Even the opening paragraph of the *Adversus haereses* draws attention to this distortative practice.

All this in imitation, Irenaeus would have it, of the serpent whose first attempt at the deception of humankind was to misquote the words of God in the hearing of Eve. She, however, recalls properly the words formerly spoken, and responds with their correct repetition (cf. Gen 3.2–3), ‘exposing the falsehood by simply relating the command’. *AH* 5.23.1 contains Irenaeus’ only direct quotations of Gen 3.1–3 (as it does of 3.4), which introduces the serpent’s response to Eve’s revelation of his misquotation. At this, the serpent steps into the realm of pure lie:

He finally deceived Eve by a falsehood, saying, ‘Ye shall not surely die, for God knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes shall be opened and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil’. In the first place, then, in the garden of God he disputed about God as if the latter were not there, for he was ignorant of God’s greatness. Then, in the next place, after he had learned from the woman that God had said that they would die if they tasted from the tree, he opened his mouth and uttered the third falsehood: ‘You shall not surely die’. But that God was true and the serpent a liar was proved by the result, death having passed upon them who had eaten.<sup>60</sup>

That the devil is liar and lie has been offered by others in characterisation of Irenaeus’ view, and such is the primary understanding of the devil’s person that Irenaeus takes from the serpent’s role in the Garden.<sup>61</sup> If indeed the events of the Old Testament were recorded for the

<sup>58</sup> 5.21.2.

<sup>59</sup> Irenaeus’ address of this problem begins in *AH* 5.9.1, the refutation lasting all the way through to the conclusion of 5.15.4.

<sup>60</sup> SC 153: 288–91.

<sup>61</sup> See Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation* 11–13, 45–47.

teaching and admonition of future generations, as Irenaeus insists is the case, then certainly this is the primary lesson to be learnt from Genesis' description of the serpent in Eden. This again is in accord with the reading of Justin, who calls the devil the emulator of truth, the imitator of the prophets. He and the demons misrepresent the truth in all their ways, as the very substance of those ways.<sup>62</sup> Irenaeus draws attention repeatedly to this deceptive nature exposed by Justin and himself. *AH* 3.23.1 makes direct allusion to Gen 3.1–3 in such a context:

For, while promising that they would become like gods, which was in no way possible for him, the devil wrought death in them. On this account, he who had led man captive was justly recaptured in his turn by God.<sup>63</sup>

The devil's power may be real, in the sense of his genuine ability to take and hold humanity captive; but his power is based on a lie. 'His power consists in transgression and apostasy, and with these he bound man'.<sup>64</sup> He did not have the ability to modify the commandment of God or to promise life, any more than he had the power, millennia later, to grant to Christ the objects of the temptations offered in the desert. One is to give no heed, says Irenaeus, 'to him who falsely promises things not his own'.<sup>65</sup> This methodology of deception is, Irenaeus can declare, the only genuine power the devil possesses:

The devil, however, as he is the apostate angel, can only go to this length, as he did at the beginning; namely, to seduce and deceive the mind of man into transgressing the commandments of God, and gradually to darken the hearts of those who would endeavour to serve him, to the forgetting of the true God, but to the adoration of himself as God.<sup>66</sup>

This passage is particularly revealing, inasmuch as the subject of Irenaeus' discussion is the kingdom and power of Antichrist at the end of the human economy, and in this he specifically refers to the role of the serpent 'at the beginning'. The connection of beginning and end is nowhere more explicit. The first picture of the devil one receives in scripture as that of a liar, as portrayed in the present verses, and from this Irenaeus draws his conclusions regarding the nature and role of

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<sup>62</sup> See *Dial.* 69; cf. *IApol.* 14.

<sup>63</sup> SC 211: 446–7.

<sup>64</sup> 5.21.3.

<sup>65</sup> 5.22.2.

<sup>66</sup> 5.24.3 (SC 153: 304–5); cf. 5.25.1, 5.28.2.

the devil in every era of the human economy, straight through to the end of time. 'As he lied at the beginning, so also in the end'.<sup>67</sup>

So did the serpent lie to Eve in the garden, and she, for the immaturity of her experience, was convinced by his lie and transgressed. She and Adam were 'beguiled by another under the pretext of immortality', deceived by the devil into the belief that they should, by the simple partaking of fruit, become 'like God'. It is the same envious arrogance of the truth that prompts the heretics, 'who profess that they themselves have the knowledge of good and evil'.<sup>68</sup> Irenaeus sees the activity of the devil in Eden, as well as the reaction of humankind, repeated in his own day.<sup>69</sup>

It cannot be stressed enough that the first transgression was the result of humanity in some sense 'giving in' to external, deceptive influences. Even after the sin, such remains the essential nature of human disobedience. The *Epideixis*' explanation of sin 'spreading out' over the world stresses the active nature of the evil itself (under the promotion of the devil), to which humanity continues, though with ever more engaged a role, to succumb.<sup>70</sup> Later centuries of creation exegesis based on the interpretive foundations of 'total depravity' after a 'fall', have greatly distorted Irenaeus' teaching in this regard. Downing, whose work on Irenaeus' conceptions of regeneration offers much that is sound and accurate, seriously misinterprets Irenaeus on the motivations for disobedience in human nature. The 'natural spirit of disobedience' which he attributes to humankind simply does not exist in Irenaeus' thought.<sup>71</sup> The devil lies, and man succumbs. The latter's 'natural spirit' is overpowered, for Adam is not yet cognisant of his own nature which is one

<sup>67</sup> 5.24.1.

<sup>68</sup> 5.20.2. Cf. Irenaeus' great rhetorical question at 4.39.2: 'how then, shall he be a God, who has not as yet been made a man? Or how can he be perfect who was but recently created?'

<sup>69</sup> See the same charge levelled against the heretics (namely the docetists) by Ignatius of Antioch: 'Do you, therefore, flee from these ungodly heresies; for they are the inventions of the devil, that same serpent who was the author of evil, who by means of the woman deceived Adam, the father of our race' (*Ig Trall.*, longer recension, 10). Both the shorter and longer recensions of chapter 11 expound further the role of the devil in inspiring the docetists.

<sup>70</sup> See *Epid.* 18; *AH* 3.23.7. Cf. a similar comment in ps-Justin, *Sole Gov.* 1.

<sup>71</sup> See Downing, 'Doctrine of regeneration', 110. The author also seems indefensibly to characterise Irenaeus' conception of recapitulation according to similar lines: 'To oversimplify, Irenaeus is speaking of taking something once done wrong (creation) and "doing it over right" (redemption)' (*ibid.* p. 109).

of obedience, not disobedience. Nature is held captive. The human person is weak, but he is not naturally evil. For this reason Irenaeus routinely refers to the devil as the ‘strong man’, by whom the weaker is overwhelmed.<sup>72</sup> But in every instance in which he so does, he contrasts the strength of the devil to that of Christ, as evidenced in the eschaton at the final defeat of the enemy. As *AH* 3.8.2 makes clear, the ‘strong man’ is strong only in relation to immature humanity. He is no match for Christ, the fully mature human person.

#### THE RESPONSE TO SIN: HUMANKIND

Irenaeus, like the scriptural accounts of creation themselves, focuses more on effect than substance. Taking the Genesis saga as a kind of paradigm for this balance, the first six verses of chapter 3 address the actual motions of the transgression in paradise, while a remaining 18 deal with the aftermath of that transgression: first the response given by Adam and Eve at the realisation of what they had done, and second the response of God. This ratio of emphasis on results over the act of the transgression equates roughly to the expository treatment given by Irenaeus, for whom Christ’s incarnation reveals the value of questions around ‘what next?’ more than ‘what happened?’ This latter is answered by the straightforward claim of disobedience, and in some sense for Irenaeus, there is little else to say on the matter, save for his important commentary on the role of the devil in promoting the disobedience, discussed in the preceding section. That to which Adam and Eve’s immature act of disobedience led, however, is a more heady topic of consideration. As Irenaeus notes, ‘because all are implicated in the first-formation of Adam, so we were bound to death by the disobedience’.<sup>73</sup> The disobedient act of the two individuals in Eden has consequences on all future generations, and especially upon the ‘latter days’ of Irenaeus’ own era, in which the life of Christ was still seen as a contemporary event, only two generations antecedent.

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<sup>72</sup> See 3.18.6, 3.23.1, 5.22.1. This is to be contrasted with the approach of Theophilus, whose emphasis is upon the fault of humanity. Says Bentivegna, ‘The temptation as such seems carefully avoided in the commentary of Theophilus. The troubles that accompany human history are not to be imputed to anything, but to man’s misdeed alone. [...] Satan, of course, is not ignored by Theophilus, but he thinks it irrelevant to speak of him on this occasion’ (Bentivegna, ‘Christianity without Christ’, 121).

<sup>73</sup> *Epid.* 31.

How does—and how should—humanity react in the face of the sin it commits? How does God respond to the disobedience of his creation? These are the kinds of questions to which the incarnation of the Son bears most directly in response, and which most interest Irenaeus in terms of exegeting Christologically the implications of creation and transgression.

*The opening of humanity's eyes: awareness and reaction*

Given the degree of focus on it by various groups against which he wrote, as well as the tendency we have witnessed for Irenaeus to address texts in common (mis)usage among his counterparts, his omission of Gen 3.7 ('the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked') is surprising. After Adam and Eve eat of the tree of knowledge, a change occurs in their state of knowledge—a change that the Valentinians classically considered defining for the future spiritual life of true awareness. The *Apocryphon of John* suggests that eating from the tree opened the knowledge of Adam and Eve to divine truth, previously hidden by their fashioner:

I [the saviour, true knowledge] appeared in the form of an eagle on the tree of knowledge, which is the Epinoia from the foreknowledge of the pure light, that I might teach them and awaken them out of the depth of sleep. For they were both in a fallen state and they recognised their nakedness. The Epinoia appeared to them as a light and she awakened their thinking.<sup>74</sup>

The anonymous *Origin of the World* extrapolates further, declaring that the intellects of both are opened on Eve's heeding the true words of the beast, the 'wisest of all creatures':

Now Eve had confidence in the words of the instructor [the beast]. She gazed at the tree and saw that it was beautiful and appetising, and she liked it. She took some of its fruit and ate it, and she gave some also to her husband, and he too ate it. Then their intellect became open. For when they had eaten, the light of acquaintance had shone upon them.<sup>75</sup>

This is precisely the type of system Irenaeus describes at *AH* 1.10.7–9 as belonging to the Ophites, though he never himself offers an alternative exposition of the opening of the eyes of Adam and Eve. In the

<sup>74</sup> *Ap. John*, NHC (II,1) 23.26–35.

<sup>75</sup> *Or. World*, NHC (II,5) 119.6–13.

*Epidexis*, when he comes to consider the transgression and its consequences, Irenaeus notes simply that the serpent convinced humanity to disobey God's commandment, and for this the young race was cast from the garden.<sup>76</sup> It can be fairly said that in this shorter work Irenaeus emphasises the role of disobedience in the Edenic narrative more strongly than he does in the *Adversus haereses*, and it is perhaps for this reason that he moves directly from the act of the sin to the response of God in the curse against the serpent, along with the expulsion of Adam and Eve, without anywhere mentioning either the result of the eating on their persons or their reaction to the deed at hand.

The *Adversus haereses* has more to say on these matters, but even here the text of this critical verse never figures into Irenaeus' discussion. The closest he comes to addressing directly the fact that 'the eyes of both of them were opened' is at 3.25.5, an important passage, but one which nonetheless deals with this theme only on the way to addressing at much greater length the response of Adam and Eve with respect to their flight from God. In the present context, Irenaeus notes merely that Adam 'is immediately seized with terror' and implies, through his subsequent treatment of Adam's clothing himself with fig leaves, that 'they knew that they were naked'. This is as far as he goes—Irenaeus dwells no further on the precise implications of what it means for the eyes of Adam and Eve to be opened. It is sufficient for him to note that this new level of awareness brought about the recognition of their nudity.

There is little clear evidence to help determine why Irenaeus, so regularly the respondent to 'Gnostic' mis-use of scripture, does not take up the charge in this case. Nonetheless, Irenaeus provides us with some means, elsewhere in his texts, to glean a more robust picture of his thought in this regard. At *AH* 3.22.4, in which he addresses the original nudity of Adam and Eve (cf. Gen 2.25), he notes that scripture proclaims them as being unashamed of such nudity, because they 'had no understanding of the procreation of children; for it was necessary that they should first come to adult age'. If, following the transgression at the tree, Adam and Eve are suddenly overcome with shame at their nakedness and take measures to cover themselves, it may be implied that this knowledge of procreation, of the function to which their sexual organs is aimed, was now made known to them—a notion borne out

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. *Epid.* 16.



by the fact that Adam and Eve will soon after bear children (cf. Gen 4.1 ff.). The knowledge of the procreative function of humanity is now found in the first man and woman, despite the fact that the prerequisite time of growth and maturation prescribed in 3.22.4 for the attainment of this knowledge has not been accomplished. It seems reasonable to conclude that this awareness, which otherwise would have come at a more appropriate time in human development, was among those things to which ‘the eyes of both of them were opened’ when Adam and Eve ate of the tree.<sup>77</sup> One cannot, however, be emphatic here, as Irenaeus makes no explicit statement on the matter.

*Humanity’s flight and confrontation with God*

If Irenaeus has unusually little to say on the opening of the eyes of Adam and Eve, he has unusually much to say on the act which immediately follows: the sewing together of fig leaves (cf. Gen 3.7b) and flight from God to hide among the trees of the Garden (cf. Gen 3.8), predominantly because such details relate directly to the advance of the economy in an awareness of transgression—themes that relate Adam’s acts directly to the mission of the incarnate saviour. Irenaeus sees in humanity’s reaction to its own state of sinfulness, which at first seems evasive, even irresponsible, a picture of hope for the future economy, ultimately borne out in the redemptive work of Christ. On the one hand, these events deal with the aftermath of the darkest moment of human history, the moment in which the goodness of God’s greatest creation is first infected with the wickedness that would thereafter ‘spread out for a long time, seizing the entire race of men’. On the other hand, these same events provide Irenaeus with an image of the great difference between the wickedness of humanity and that of the devil: one increases in anger and transgression, the other repents. As Irenaeus reads the narrative of Gen 3.7–8:

Having been beguiled by another under the pretext of immortality, [Adam] is seized with terror and hides himself—not as if he were able to escape from God, but, in a state of confusion at having transgressed his command, he feels unworthy to appear before and to hold converse with God. ‘The fear of the Lord’, let us recall, ‘is the beginning of wisdom’ (Prov 1.7, 9.10). The sense of sin leads to repentance, and God bestows his compassion upon those who are repentant. Indeed, Adam demonstrated

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. Behr, ‘Ascetic Ideal’, 310.

his repentance by his conduct, through means of the girdle: for he covered himself with fig leaves, though there were many other leaves [in the garden] which would have irritated his body to a lesser degree. He, however, adopted a dress conformable to his disobedience, being awed by the fear of God. Resisting the erring, lustful propensity of the flesh—since he had lost his natural disposition and childlike mind and had come to the knowledge of evil things—he girded a bridle of continence upon himself and his wife, fearing God and waiting for his coming.<sup>78</sup>

Irenaeus has found in the very words of Genesis, which might seem only to indicate the depth of human sin, indication that salvation is yet possible and that the whole thrust of the post-transgression economy is in fact rooted in and toward this repentance. This has, for Irenaeus, confessional implications: if humankind, having lost life in the transgression, could not be restored to life, ‘God would have been conquered’.<sup>79</sup> He reads Gen 3.7–8 in such a way as to find evidence that this conquering of God was never a possibility, even at that moment when the creature ‘intended for life’ seems to have fallen wholly off the course to that life and God’s purpose for him seems impossible. At this very moment there are clear indications of the future restoration.

Adam does not take pride in his sin, does not race off to sin again (as the devil will do, moving from Eve to Cain).<sup>80</sup> He is overcome with fear, with terror, and he hides. Irenaeus will not read this hiding as yet another sin, the act of a man trying to deceive God and brush under the carpet the transgression he has committed. Adam flees ‘not as if he were able to escape from God’, but because his immaturity has suddenly been overburdened with the knowledge of evil, of good, of procreation, of life and death—in general, a knowledge too great for him to grasp. He is confused and feels unworthy to stand before his creator in such a state. It is in this context that Adam hides among the trees, and Irenaeus finds in this a foreshadowing of the whole economy of salvation that culminates in Christ crucified and resurrected. Adam’s shame draws him away from God, yet God seeks him out for restoration. Irenaeus makes the Christological implications here clear:

So the scripture, pointing out what would come to pass, reports that when Adam had hid himself on account of his disobedience, the Lord came to him in the evening, called him forth and said, ‘Where are you?’

<sup>78</sup> 3.23.5 (SC 211: 456–9).

<sup>79</sup> 3.23.1.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *Epid.* 17.

This means that in these last times the same Word of God has come to call man, reminding him of his deeds, living in which he had been hidden from the Lord. For just as at that time God spoke to Adam in the evening, searching him out, so in these last times, by means of the same voice, searching out his posterity, he has visited them.<sup>81</sup>

The recapitulative connection of this primal event to the incarnate mission of the Word is the grounding of Irenaeus' attention on these moments from the creation saga in particular. One finds this familiar interpretive method employed again at 5.19.1, with reference to Eve, who 'was led astray by the word of an angel, so that she fled from God when she had transgressed'. As Adam's hiding predicts Christ's seeking out of lost humankind, so does Eve's flight predict Mary's obedience to the angel and the word he comes to deliver.

These two passages, *AH* 5.15.4 and 5.17.1, represent Irenaeus' only direct quotations of Gen 3.8. His reflections on the garments of fig leaves in 3.23.5 are similarly his only allusions to the latter half of 3.7, which text he never employs directly. But his reading of this verse follows on what he takes up from the flight of Adam and Eve, and is primarily centred round the repentance shown by the first humans in the act, rather than any increase in sin. Irenaeus notes that Adam is in a state of confusion at having transgressed God's command, thus coming to be afraid to stand before him. At this point Irenaeus quotes Prov 1.7 / 9.10: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom', for such fear leads to repentance, and this is precisely what is seen in Adam's actions—the sewing of garments of fig leaves, especially irritating to human skin, as a 'dress conformable to his disobedience'. Behr is the only scholar to have suggested that this action, to which God responds in merciful compassion, is actually a sign of humanity's self-imposed continence preventing him from receiving God's gift of increase and growth.<sup>82</sup> This seems an attractive reading, which sits well with a vision of humanity's growth and perfection serving as the chief aims of God's economy in Eden. We shall have more to say on this when we come to examine God's response to sin in the next section.

It is important to Irenaeus that God *seeks out* Adam and Eve who have thus fled and covered themselves in garments of repentance. We have already seen that, at 5.15.4, it is the Word himself that thus seeks

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<sup>81</sup> 5.15.4 (SC 153: 212–3).

<sup>82</sup> See Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 118–19; cf. Behr, 'Ascetic Ideal', 311–13.

after Adam, and Irenaeus' sole quotation of Gen 3.9, the brief 'Where art thou?' that the text indicates is spoken by 'the Lord', is employed to make this equation between the Lord of that verse and the Word. Irenaeus has indicated the same at 4.10.1, where he shows that the Son of God is he who spoke to all generations of men—at one time with Abraham, at another with Noah, 'and at another time, inquiring after Adam'. Irenaeus' analysis of Gen 3.8 at *AH* 5.17.1 also contains his explanation of the idea that Adam 'heard the voice of the Lord God' as meaning Adam heard the voice of the Word, whom *Epid.* 12 portrays as being present with him in paradise. There Irenaeus had written that this presence 'prefigured the future, which would come to pass, that he would dwell with him'; and the more elaborate connection of the Word seeking out Adam and Eve in the garden after their sin with the life of Christ seeking out the lost sheep and forgiving their sins is the focus of *AH* 5.17. That Christ will have compassion on sinful humanity and forgive its sins (as Irenaeus reads Mt 9.2 and Lk 5.20 in *AH* 5.17.1), rather than take vengeance or act in angered retribution, is foretold in the reaction of the Word to the discovery of Adam's having clothed himself in garments of fig leaves. Rather than amplify Adam's self-inflicted torment, the Word takes pity and offers more comfortable garments made of skins.<sup>83</sup>

What strikes the reader of both of these passages, is the lack of any negative implication to Gen 3.11–12 (Adam's casting of blame upon Eve) in Irenaeus' reading. Nowhere does he reflect on Adam's re-assignment of blame to his partner as an attempt to explain and justify his own act of disobedience. Gen 3.12, which would be taken up by a host of later patristic writers to imply an additional act of sin on Adam's part in his attempt to avoid responsibility for his deed, is simply left to one side by Irenaeus.<sup>84</sup> *AH* 3.23.5 implies its message to some degree ('God interrogates them [Adam and Eve], that the blame might light upon the woman'); but Irenaeus immediately follows this up in the same section with a quotation (his only) of Gen 3.13:

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<sup>83</sup> See below, p. 188. To a certain degree, this reading of Gen 3.9 follows that of Theophilus at *Ad Autol.* 2.26, though the Antiochene does not extrapolate on the matter in nearly the detail of Irenaeus. For him it is sufficient simply to note that God's questioning after Adam's location in hiding was not an act of ignorance, but of patience. Through it Adam is given opportunity to confess and repent.

<sup>84</sup> Cf., e.g., Augustine, *Enchiridion* 25, 26; John Chrysostom, *Homily* 12.10, 11.

And again, he interrogates Eve, that she might transmit the blame to the serpent. For she relates what had truly taken place: ‘The serpent’, she says, ‘beguiled me and I ate’. But God did not interrogate the serpent, for he knew that he had been the principal actor (*principem*) in the guilty deed.<sup>85</sup>

Here God’s questioning of Adam and Eve is intended to reveal that the serpent *was* in fact primarily at blame in the transgression. Adam and Eve’s transmission of responsibility away from themselves is read by Irenaeus as a proclamation of the deeper truth of the affair: Eve related ‘what had really occurred’. It truly was the devil who was most at fault in the transgression. Irenaeus appears throughout his reading of Genesis 3 to regard the sin of disobedience as ample to imply the condemnation of the primal creatures: there can be no greater sin than this single act by which death is wrought, ailments come upon the human race, the vision of God is made impossible, life is forfeited, true knowledge is destroyed, and the divine likeness is lost. The remainder of the narrative’s account of their activities (i.e. the hiding, the transferral of blame, etc.) is therefore not read by Irenaeus as revealing a compounding of sin, but as showing that its gravity is nonetheless mingled with clear signs of hope for the future.<sup>86</sup> The Christological centrality of the incarnation, as that movement of salvation that will redeem this grave transgression, sets into perspective these subsequent events. The world, however disjointed by sin, still waits for—and in some sense actively orientates itself toward—the coming of the Son in the flesh. This is seen in the fear shown at the transgression, in the confused shame that spurs Adam and Eve’s flight, and in the clear repentance shown in the garments woven by them. And it will be clear, too, in Irenaeus’ treatment of God’s reaction to the whole matter of the transgression.

#### THE RESPONSE TO SIN: GOD

If Irenaeus’ intention in commenting on Adam and Eve’s response to sin is to emphasise their repentance and humility as signs of the possibility of future correction, and to orientate an authentic reading

<sup>85</sup> SC 211: 460–1.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. D.J. Bingham, ‘Hope in Irenaeus of Lyons’, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 76.4 (2000), 273–75.

of creation around the salvation offered in the incarnate Christ, his intention in commenting on God's reaction is to demonstrate the divine compassion and mercy to the same ends. It is the full scope of the economy that is initiated in the transgression story, and as this is an economy of redemption and the perfection of humanity, Irenaeus' cardinal aim remains always to demonstrate through his commentary the framework and grounding of such a redeeming perfection. Such was the purpose of his various emphases on the cosmic creation and the formation of the human race, as it was the purpose of his dwelling on the repentance shown by that race after the sin in Eden. Moreover, it is the purpose of his emphasising the mercy shown in God's reaction to that sin, exemplified in the particular details of what seem to be two otherwise unmerciful acts: the pronouncement of a curse and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise.

### *The curse*

As the creation saga continues, there is a move in the narrative from the human response to the transgression to the divine. Adam has by now indicated (truthfully) his beguilement by Eve, and she has in turn (and equally as truthfully) indicated her own deception by the serpent. It is at this point that God turns from inquisition to declaration, and this declaration must be examined in detail:

[Gen 3.14] And the Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, you are cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon your belly shall you go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. [15] And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.'

[16] And to the woman he said, 'I will greatly multiply your sorrow in childbirth; in sorrow will you bring forth children. And your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.'

[17] And to Adam he said, 'Because you have hearkened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, saying You shall not eat of it: cursed is the ground for your sake; in sorrow shall you eat of it all the days of your life. [18] 'Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field; [19] in the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, until you return to the ground; for out of it were you taken. For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.'

It is easy enough to read these verses and find in them a simple, condemnatory cursing of all those involved in the transgression. This is precisely

the manner in which multiple groups second-century interpreted the text, as Irenaeus was well aware. There was not, however, substantial commentary on the text among Irenaeus' near-contemporary Christian writers. If Theophilus ever commented on the curse of Gen 3.14–19 it was in a work now lost to us.<sup>87</sup> Justin likewise remains silent on the curse, though the tenor of both his and Theophilus' writings reflects a solid appreciation for its aftermath, namely, the punishment for sin. But in neither author can we find a forebear of Irenaeus' remarkable reading of these verses. This reading is summed up neatly at *AH* 3.23.3, which though lengthy must be reproduced in its entirety:

Immediately after Adam had transgressed, as scripture narrates, God pronounced no curse against Adam, but against the ground (in reference to his works) as a certain person among the ancients has observed: 'God did indeed transfer the curse to the earth, that it might not remain in man'.<sup>88</sup> But man received, as the punishment of his transgression, the toilsome task of tilling the earth, to eat bread in the sweat of his face, and to return to the earth whence he was taken. Similarly the woman also received toil, labour, groans, the pangs of parturition, and subjection—that is, that she should serve her husband. This came about that they should neither perish altogether when cursed by God, nor, by persevering without reprimand, should they be led to despise God. But the curse in all its fullness fell upon the serpent who had beguiled them. 'And God', scripture declares, 'said to the serpent: Because you have done this, you are cursed above all cattle, above all the beasts of the earth' (Gen 3.14). This same thing is said by the Lord in the Gospel, to those who are found upon the left hand: 'Depart from me, you cursed ones, into everlasting fire which my Father has prepared for the devil and his angels' (Mt 25.41), indicating that eternal fire was not originally prepared for man, but for him who had beguiled man and caused him to offend—for him, I say, who is chief of the apostasy and for those angels who became apostates along with him. This fire they also shall justly feel who, like him, persevere in works of wickedness, without repentance, and without retracing their steps.<sup>89</sup>

Irenaeus notes with careful precision that God's curse falls only upon the serpent, and upon the soil. Adam and Eve receive chastisement and correction, but never is a curse proclaimed against them with the same directness as against the serpent. Irenaeus is guided here by his connection of cursing as act with the end result of destruction, revealed

<sup>87</sup> He does, however, comment on the expulsion from Eden; see below p. 188.

<sup>88</sup> It is unclear to whom Irenaeus is here referring.

<sup>89</sup> SC 211: 450–5.

by Christ's parable of those on the left and the right. That which is cursed is ultimately doomed to annihilation, wherefore Adam and Eve are spared this 'so that they should not perish altogether when cursed by God'. The devil, on the other hand, active in the serpent, is punished with precisely this sort of ultimate destruction, and this for the different manner in which he was involved in the transgression. It is he who beguiled Adam and Eve, it is he who 'of his own according did stealthily sow the tares, that is, [...] brought about the transgression'.<sup>90</sup> And so the full weight of the curse falls upon him, together with the earth itself, which had become an obstacle to human growth rather than an aid, and which in that form must now pass away.

'But God took compassion upon man, who, through want of care no doubt, but still wickedly, became involved in disobedience'.<sup>91</sup> The fundamental exegetical conviction that all aspects of the creation saga find their meaning in the incarnate Son has here radically influenced Irenaeus' approach to the text. The redemption worked by the incarnate Christ is a redemption begun already in God's first reaction to human transgression—a response meted out in measured relation to the gravity of involvement with that sin. God does not desire annihilation for his creatures, even if the latter may in some sense deserve it.<sup>92</sup> They are chastised and meet with real consequences for their actions (Irenaeus alludes to Gen 3.17–19 at *Epid.* 17, where he describes the hard toils and labours of humanity after Eden), but they are chastisements meant for correction. The 'discipline that leads to imperishability' characteristic of the trials and joys of the millennial kingdom, is found begun as early as the post-transgression reprimanding of Adam and Eve in Eden.<sup>93</sup> The whole encounter bears a striking resemblance to *AH* 5.36.1, the final chapter in Irenaeus' great work and his culminating vision of the future kingdom.<sup>94</sup> There he insists that Paul's reference to the 'fashion of the world' passing away (cf. 1 Cor 7.31) refers specifically to the fashion and not the essence; that is, 'those things among which transgression has occurred', which are temporary in scope and in which humanity has 'grown old', shall be destroyed and the earth reprimanded in and

<sup>90</sup> 4.40.3. On the 'tares' cf. Mt 13.24–30.

<sup>91</sup> 4.40.3; cf. 3.23.5: 'For God detested him who had led man astray, but by degrees and little by little, he showed compassion to him who had been beguiled'.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. 3.18.7, *Epid.* 37.

<sup>93</sup> See 5.35.2; cf. our chapter on chiliasm, above.

<sup>94</sup> This passage is quoted above, p. 55.



by their absence. It is when this 'fashion' passes away that humanity itself is renewed, eventually reaching incorruptibility and 'forgetting to die'. But the earth, the centre of God's creative cosmos, is never itself abandoned or destroyed; rather, the creation of the Son is perfected in the Son. So too with Irenaeus' conception of the curse pronounced in Eden. The serpent, whose destructive influence had thwarted the human child, is set for destruction. The means by which the child shall grow old in his sin is tagged for defeat. The human person himself, the central focus of all God's economic activity, is chastised in accordance with his need for correction—but he shall not ultimately pass away. It is his destiny to be corrected and restored, advanced into the fullness of the image of the triune God.<sup>95</sup>

The influence of Irenaeus' Christocentric chiliasm on his reading of the curse does not end with the establishment of its corrective and ultimately redemptive qualities. Twice he works to show that the curse proclaimed against the serpent is indicative of the ultimate triumph over Satan in Antichrist by the risen Saviour. In a chiliastically-orientated chapter on the ultimate victory of Christ, Irenaeus writes:

In recapitulating all things, he has recapitulated also the war against our enemy, crushing him who at the beginning led us away as captives in Adam, trampling upon his head. This can be perceived in Genesis, where God said to the serpent, 'And I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; he shall be on the watch for your head, and you on the watch for his heel' (cf. Gen 3.15). For from that time, he who should be born of a Virgin after the likeness of Adam was preached as keeping watch for the head of the serpent.<sup>96</sup>

This text bears several similarities to Irenaeus' discussion at 3.23.7, where he alludes to the same scriptural text. In both, his point is to draw out the connection of the curse against the serpent to the coming of Christ who will eventually reign over and dominate the power of the serpent. Christ is the link that binds together the beginnings and the ends and unites the whole of the economy.

In all this, Irenaeus' reading of God's initial reaction to the transgression resounds with the sense in which the divine response to sin is characterised by the great lengths to which God will go to preserve the possibility of human redemption following the introduction of evil

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. 5.36.3, where this is the image of hope with which Irenaeus concludes his lengthy work.

<sup>96</sup> 5.21.1 (SC 153: 260–3).

into the economy. This is seen in the curse against the serpent's head, which has direct chiliastic overtones and foreshadows Satan's defeat in the kingdom. It is seen in the lack of a destructive curse pronounced against Adam and Eve, and in the fact that the chastisements they are dealt are intended for correction and discipline. And it is seen most clearly of all when Irenaeus comes to address God's subsequent reactions to the transgression: the clothing of Adam and Eve in garments of skin and the expulsion of these first humans from paradise, which, like the elements that precede them, are wholly orientated toward the coming of Christ.

*The clothing and the expulsion from paradise*

In all his commentary on creation and transgression, Irenaeus never comments on Adam's giving of the name 'Eve' to the woman created from his side (cf. Gen 3.20). Irenaeus simply calls her Eve from the beginning, referring to 'Adam and Eve—for this was the woman's name'.<sup>97</sup> This is perhaps a meaningful indication of focus: the first scriptural revelation of Eve's name, also terms her 'mother of all living', and this is patently not the role Irenaeus wishes to highlight in the first woman. It is rather the opposite: it is through Eve that 'man was struck and, falling, died', she who was the 'cause of death' for the whole human race—though in these instances Irenaeus is principally exegeting an Adam-Christ/Eve-Mary parallel, and not attempting to ascribe any ultimate guilt to Eve in the interjection of sin into the economy (he clearly believes this to have been the responsibility of the serpent).<sup>98</sup> The title 'mother of life' in Gen 3.20 fits more properly with his vision of Mary, and he uses strikingly similar language for her at 3.22.4.<sup>99</sup>

But if Irenaeus is quiet on the naming of Eve in the scriptures, this is compensated by his unique emphasis on the specific text of Genesis that follows: 'For Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin and clothed them' (3.21). This short verse, which seems almost insignificant in light of the larger narrative of which it is but a single and outwardly minor detail, is central for Irenaeus. Though he employs it only once in his corpus, at *AH* 3.23.5 (and there by allusion and not

<sup>97</sup> *Epid.* 14.

<sup>98</sup> See *Epid.* 33; *AH* 3.22.4.

<sup>99</sup> See my comments on this terminology in Steenberg, 'Mary as co-recapitulator', 15–17.

quotation) and, as Behr notes, does not expand on his interpretation of precisely what the ‘garments of skin’ were, his extrapolation on the motivation for God’s actions in providing them is telling.<sup>100</sup> We have already seen that Irenaeus believed Adam’s and Eve’s departure into hiding and fabrication of fig leaf garments to have been acts of repentant contrition motivated by their newfound and holy fear of God. God’s response, then, as the reader of Irenaeus will by now expect, is of merciful correction aimed at the future growth of his creation. Irenaeus observes:

Adam would no doubt have retained this [uncomfortable fig leaf] clothing forever, thus humbling himself, if God who is merciful had not clothed them with tunics of skins instead of fig leaves.<sup>101</sup>

Irenaeus reads the original fig leaf garments to have been the result of Adam’s sorrow at his sin, yet suggests that God knew better than Adam the route by which repentance should be lived out. He does not condemn Adam’s initial act as such, and in fact seems to admire the obvious depth of his contrition and the length to which he was willing to go to realise it (the entire scene is placed in contrast to Cain’s reaction to his own sin, which Irenaeus characterises as wholly unrepentant, ‘aggravating his own wickedness’).<sup>102</sup> God’s response is, nonetheless, mercifully to lessen the degree of physical punishment self-inflicted by Adam. The fact that Adam has ‘taken control of himself’ is a response for which Irenaeus praises him—especially in distinction to Cain. There is no direct suggestion of Adam having been in the wrong in fashioning garments from fig leaves, ‘thus humbling himself’ (a trait Irenaeus admires); God’s offering of more comfortable attire is read as the outpouring of his mercy rather than his correction of a deviant activity.<sup>103</sup> Once again, Irenaeus reads the motions of creation as orientated toward the compassion of the Son, whose recapitulative

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<sup>100</sup> See Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 119.

<sup>101</sup> 3.23.5 (SC 211: 458–61).

<sup>102</sup> 3.23.4.

<sup>103</sup> Here I offer a slightly different reading than that put forward by Behr, who notes that ‘in such a state of repentant, but self-imposed continence, man would not have been able to receive the growth and increase which God has set before him’ (Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology* 119). While it seems to me that Irenaeus’ contrast of Adam to Cain in our present passage challenges such a reading, Behr’s thesis is nevertheless creative and appealing, and in line with Irenaeus’ exhortations elsewhere—especially 4.39.2, where humanity is compared to soft clay that must remain tractable if it is to be moulded by God (and, as such, the self-imposed continence of Adam may be read as preventing such tractability).

endeavour is grounded in a forgiveness and compassion aimed to re-pristiniate and heal broken humanity, rather than further repress it.

The mercy-driven motivation of God's response to sin reaches its pinnacle expression in Irenaeus' treatment of the expulsion of these first humans from paradise. Irenaeus alludes to the event on two occasions, once at *AH* 3.23.6 directly after his consideration of the garments of skin, and the other at *Epid.* 16, a chapter that examines the whole event of the transgression and its aftermath. This latter text utilises the history of the expulsion in a straightforward way, concluding its account with the observation that 'God put the man far from his face, making him dwell by the road into paradise, since paradise does not receive sinners'. *Epid.* 17 goes on to note the misfortunes that Adam and Eve were to experience outside Eden, but the expulsion itself is mentioned only for its significance as one among the many consequences of sin. It has little other value anywhere in the *Epideixis*.

Not so at *AH* 3.23.6. Here Irenaeus finds a deeper significance to the expulsion than merely a punishment for or consequence of disobedience:

God also drove Adam out of paradise, and placed him far from the tree of life, not because he envied him the tree of life, as some dare to claim, but because he pitied him and did not desire that he should persevere forever as a sinner, nor that the sin which surrounded him should be immortal, and evil interminable and irremediable. But he set a bound to man's sin by interposing death, thus causing sin to cease, putting an end to it by the dissolution of the flesh which should take place in the earth, so that man, ceasing at length to live to sin, and indeed dying to it, might begin to live to God.<sup>104</sup>

In this reading, Irenaeus is clearly following Theophilus, who promotes a near-identical interpretation of the expulsion:

In so doing, God conferred a great benefit upon man. He did not let him remain forever in a state of sin but, so to speak, with a kind of banishment he cast him out of paradise, so that through this punishment he might expiate his sin in a fixed period of time and, after chastisement, might later be recalled.<sup>105</sup>

Both Theophilus and Irenaeus advance a vision of the expulsion that does not occur before their combined witness (it seems impossible that Irenaeus is here not expanding on Theophilus; the middle section

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<sup>104</sup> SC 211: 460–3.

<sup>105</sup> *Ad Autol.* 2.26.

of *Ad Autol.* 2 was obviously read by him, and much of Irenaeus' childhood imagery with respect to Adam and Eve is drawn from the chapter immediately preceding it). Irenaeus' remarkable expansion on Theophilus' proclamation of the expulsion as 'limit' is his claim that death itself is given as a gift by God for the betterment and perfection of the human creature. Theophilus may have believed the same (his mention of a 'fixed period of time' in which humanity might act seems to imply a finite lifespan bounded by death), but Irenaeus makes this explicit, becoming the first author to indicate that the death imposed by God at the expulsion from Eden was in fact a gift designed, in an ultimate sense, to foster life. Here Irenaeus' belief in the power of God's redeeming goodness reaches its full extent and effect. Not even death shall thwart the economy in its purpose or progression.

It should be noted that Irenaeus' comments on death are, by one reading, inconsistent. In the present context it is clearly a positive reality by which the possibility of the human person existing in an eternal state of elated sinfulness is prevented and humanity's knowledge of its coming, inevitable end inspires repentance and reliance on God. Such a view is in accord with Irenaeus' remarks at 3.20.2, where death is that by which humankind comes to know the frailness and limitation of its own nature, thereby appreciating all the more the power and compassion of God; and 4.37.7, where his point is that the individual's experience of ill-health and death makes him appreciate and give thanks for health and life.<sup>106</sup> But what of the myriad passages in which Irenaeus speaks of death as a great evil, as the defeat and destruction of man, as the enslaving force by which he is made a captive? These are too numerous to cite exhaustively, though a few may be highlighted as characteristic of this type of commentary. At 3.21.10 death is described as that which was sinfully brought into the world and which reigned over the human race. 3.23.1 describes death not as the work of God but of Satan: it was the true face of the gift he offered under the pretext of immortality, and by which he held humankind under his power. At 3.23.7 death is humanity's enemy, a reading inspired by Paul's statement at 1 Cor 15.26 that 'the last enemy to be destroyed is death'. 4.39.1 proclaims that death is the evil result of not obeying God, and so on. Do not such statements contradict Irenaeus' claim at 3.23.6 that death is a blessing given by the Creator?

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<sup>106</sup> See also 5.2.3.

There is an element of conflict in these definitions that remains unresolved in Irenaeus' thought. There are, however, hints that this conflict represents two distinct views or sentiments on death, both held by Irenaeus without his ever clearly defining them as such. On the one hand, death is the blessing offered at the expulsion from Eden, described above. On the other, death is the overthrow of life, the defeat—however temporary and redeemable—of God's purpose for human growth into a fully living being. It is in this latter sense that death is usually presented in scripture, and for this reason it is employed much more frequently in Irenaeus than the former which is only mentioned a handful of times, however potent these may be. That there is a nascent distinction in Irenaeus' views on death is suggested by certain texts in particular; namely 5.27.2, where he describes death as separation from God (the opposite of what is implied in 3.23.6, vis-à-vis the expulsion) and the host of passages in which death is the work and fruit of the devil. But in both cases, Irenaeus states that God has the power to overcome the limits on life imposed by death, and 5.15.1 adduces numerous proofs from the prophets to this effect.

If, therefore, death is one effect of sin encountered in the expulsion from paradise, the other is distance from the true and full knowledge of God. Irenaeus never suggests that the garden as a site is the locus of God's presence or revelation, but his characterisation of it as a place of holiness in which sin cannot dwell (cf. *Epid.* 16), out of which those who engage in sin must be cast, implies a priority of value to this location. He describes it in *Epid.* 12 as a place 'better than this earth', and it is here that God walks and talks with his human handiwork. Humanity's knowledge of God comes directly from the source in Eden, in a manner that it does not in the economy outside paradise. The expulsion thus involves a certain distancing from direct knowledge of the divine—an implication already found in Irenaeus' comment on the falling of the fruit into destruction.<sup>107</sup> Humankind's ability to know God is hindered in its sin. Only the incarnation will restore to it the ability for full communion with God.

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<sup>107</sup> See above, p. 186. Ps-Justin implies the same at *H.ad.Gr.* 21, where humankind outside of Eden is no longer taught by God. Irenaeus does not go this far, and in fact insists that the divine pedagogy is an ever-present reality of the whole economy.

The end result of the transgression, then, is that Adam and Eve stand outside the gates of Eden, chastised by God in a severe but loving manner, now subject to a death that will limit their potential for unrestricted sin. The devil remains active, though still possesses the power only to deceive—and his end has now been clearly foretold. Irenaeus does not draw upon the scriptural imagery of the Cherubim and the flaming sword set eastward of garden ‘to guard the way to the tree of life’; he is keen to remind his readers that Adam and Eve, now cast out of the paradise of their genesis, will one day return to the state of intimate union with their creator they had known therein. The incarnate Christ, who in the future kingdom shall restore this union and in fact propel it to new and previously unknown heights, is himself a divine sword—an image Irenaeus gleans from John’s Apocalypse.<sup>108</sup> The context of humanity’s relationship to God and the cosmos has been radically altered in the course of the transgression; but it is an alteration that the power of the Lord shall overcome, and already from those first moments is working actively to redeem. Christ, the two-edged sword of eschatological victory, is a reality of more potency than any obstacle that might prevent the way to paradise.

Irenaeus’ overarching vision of creation as economic protology has now progressed through three distinct stages. First the cosmos, wrought of nothing by the goodness and power of God, provides the context of humanity’s formation and growth. Secondly, in the creation of Adam and Eve, this context receives its subject and the direct perfection of the human race is begun. Thirdly, sin, wrought by provocation and in immaturity, yet still wrought, modifies the actualisation of this economy of perfection through the experience of disobedience—a captivating force—and the introduction of death. Yet humanity’s humble and repentant attitude, together with God’s mercy, indicate in a pronounced way that the economy, though disturbed, has not been overthrown and may still reach fulfilment. The Christological testimony of the incarnation is the chief testimony to the positive potential retained after Eden. Adam’s story continues. What remains, then, is the question of how this disturbed economy will advance onward to its goal despite these new obstacles.

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<sup>108</sup> See *AH* 4.20.11; cf. *Apoc* 1.16.





## CHAPTER FIVE

### STUMBLING TO PERFECTION: LIFE AFTER EDEN

The nature of humanity's relationship to God, to itself as social community and to the cosmos in full, is the context into which the whole of Irenaeus' reflection on post-Edenic history is set. In this, the scope of that history, and his reading of it, serves the single end of demonstrating the manner in which the human creation exists in the cosmos after its transgression and God's initial response in the form of the expulsion from paradise. The familiar stories of Cain and Abel, Noah and the deluge, and the tower of Babel each, in turn, reveal the character of post-Edenic humanity and God's relationship to this expanding human culture, each with an eye toward the defection from the protological environment of humanity's initial creation, but viewed in light of the incarnational recapitulation of all subsequent error and transgression. And precisely because this Christological focus is central, Irenaeus takes a keen interest in several of the less-commonly-exegeted details of the post-Edenic creation story, especially the relationship of the curse and blessing pronounced on the children of Adam and Noah and their implications for the future of the human economy. In all these are borne the vision of humanity as 'a somewhat crippled creature', yet one that still retains the potential to reach the perfection for which it was created.<sup>1</sup>

#### CAIN AND ABEL, AND THE INTERNALISATION OF TRANSGRESSION

Irenaeus' reflection on the story of Cain and Abel comes as the logical extension of his discussion on the transgression in Eden. Adam and Eve have been expelled from paradise and live under the full weight of their due chastisement, which, though corrective in nature, is nonetheless severe. Beyond the changes wrought in their relationship to the earth (which must be tilled, which is less productive) and one

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<sup>1</sup> The language of 'slightly crippled' humanity is drawn from M.G. Chapman, 'Notes on the nature of God, the cosmos, and *novus homo*: an Eastern Orthodox perspective', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 21.3 (1976), 258.

another (through procreation and the pains of childbirth), there is the fact of sin now present in the world. The serpent's activities are not restricted to the garden, and Adam and Eve—however unwitting may have been their initial disobedience—now have experience in turning from God. Irenaeus describes their condition as a kind of sorrowful misfortune, 'walking upon this world with much sadness and toils and lamenting'.<sup>2</sup> This forms the context for his comments on the advent of Cain and Abel:

Then came to pass what was written, 'Adam knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and after this bore Abel' (Gen 4.1–2).<sup>3</sup>

Despite the interest of some scholars in the question, Irenaeus actually shows little interest in the physical relationship of Adam and Eve in its post-Edenic development. He offers no commentary on what may have led to their decision to have children, no judgement on the question of sexual procreation as being the first specific event noted in the scriptures as occurring outside the garden. Rather, his interest in the generation of Cain and Abel is to show the continuation of the devil's activity in humanity's new context of existence. Throughout Irenaeus' exposition of Satan, the notion of his uniform activity across the economy is a constant. The devil is always out to deceive and destroy the human creation. Thus Irenaeus continues at *Epid.* 17:

But the apostate angel, who also led the man into disobedience and made him a sinner and was the cause of his expulsion from Paradise, not satisfied with the first, wrought a second evil upon the brothers. For he filled Cain with his own spirit and made of him a fratricide (cf. Gen 4.8). And so, in this way, Abel died, killed by his brother, signifying that thenceforth some would be persecuted, oppressed and killed, while the unjust would kill and persecute the righteous. Whereupon God, being exceedingly angry, cursed Cain, and so it came to pass that all his descendants, via their inheritance, became like the progenitor (cf. Gen 4.17–24). But God raised another son for Adam, in place of the murdered Abel (cf. Gen 4.25).

There is a notable difference between the manner in which Cain responds to the devil, and that which had been evidenced previously in Adam and Eve. The present text notes only that the devil 'filled Cain

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<sup>2</sup> *Epid.* 17, wherein is found clear allusion to Gen 3.17–19 on the punishments of sin.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* In his employment of Gen 4.1–2, Irenaeus quotes only the first half of each verse.

with his own spirit', but Irenaeus is clear elsewhere that Cain had a willing part in this possession. At *AH* 4.18.3, his heart 'was divided with envy and malice, which he cherished against his brother'.<sup>4</sup> He is involved, active. But more important yet is the implication that it was Cain himself who chose to commit the murder. The serpent in Eden had told Eve to eat of the apple, which act represented the deliberate contravention of an established divine commandment. In the case of Cain, however, the evil of murder (against which there was as yet no specific commandment, yet which Irenaeus clearly believes was wrong in any case), though inspired by the deception of the devil, in some sense sprang from his own heart. This becomes clear at 3.23.4, in a discussion on 'the heretics':

These act as Cain did, who, when he received counsel from God to be still, since he had not made an equitable division of that share to which his brother was entitled (cf. Gen 4.7 LXX), but with envy and malice thought that he could dominate him, not only did not acquiesce, but even added sin to sin, indicating his state of mind by his actions. For what he had planned, the same he also put into practice: he domineered over and slew him [...]. And Cain [...] did not stop short with that evil deed; but, being asked where his brother was, said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?' (Gen 4.9), extending and multiplying his wickedness by his response. For if it is wicked to slay one's brother, it is much worse insolently and irreverently to reply to the omniscient God as if it were possible to baffle him. For this he bore a curse about with him, since he gratuitously brought an offering of sin, having had no reverence for God nor having been put to confusion by his act of fratricide.<sup>5</sup>

Immediately after this comes the passage, addressed earlier, in which Irenaeus describes Adam's response to sin as having been the opposite: one of contrition, sorrow and repentance. What is seen in Cain's aggression against his brother is a deliberate act motivated by envy and hatred inspired by the devil, yet according to Cain's own will.<sup>6</sup> There is additionally demonstrated a lack of contrition or shame at the sin committed, and in this Irenaeus finds evidence of a change in the nature of human transgression outside of Eden. Humanity has

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<sup>4</sup> The same is said earlier at 3.23.4.

<sup>5</sup> SC 211: 454–7.

<sup>6</sup> In this Irenaeus represents a view slightly different from that of Theophilus, who believes that the devil inspired Cain specifically to commit the act of murder. Cf. *Ad Autol* 2.29, where Theophilus also claims that through Cain's act, 'death came into the world, to reach the whole race of men to this very day'. The spread of death beyond Adam and Eve is vaguely connected to Cain's transgression. See also *Ad Autol*. 2.25–27.

become a more active participant in the evil into which it is led by the devil. This is encapsulated in Cain's response to God's questioning, in which he lies directly to his maker. For Irenaeus this act is more heinous than the murder and shows the ridiculous extent to which Cain's sin has laid grip over his person.

Irenaeus is equally desirous to show that God actively worked to prevent Cain's sin, as well as encourage him toward repentance after the fact. In this he is inspired by the specific wording of the Septuagintal text of Gen 4.7, which differs from the Masoretic. In the reading of the LXX:

οὐκ ἔαν ὀρθῶς προσενέγκῃς, ὀρθῶς δὲ μὴ διέλῃς, ἡμάρτες; ἡσύχασον· πρὸς σὲ ἡ ἀποστροφή αὐτοῦ, καὶ σὺ ἄρξεις αὐτοῦ.

There is a centrality in this version to the notion of right division or meeting out (ὀρθῶς διαιρέω), which will be important when Irenaeus comes to address the notion of sacrifice and intention. But what has direct value on the consideration of God's benevolence towards Cain is the Greek ἡσύχασον—'be at peace' or 'be calm'. There is no equivalent command in the Masoretic reading, but for Irenaeus this single word is at the centre of the verse's theological meaning. Through it he discovers the divine reaction to the envy and malice in Cain's heart, which God reveals

when reproving Cain's hidden thoughts: 'Though you offer rightly, yet, if you do not divide rightly, have you not sinned? Be at rest (ἡσύχασον)' (Gen 4.7 LXX) [...] For God said to him, 'Be at rest', but he did not assent. Now what else is it to 'be at rest' than to forego purposed violence?<sup>7</sup>

This is a textual interpretation that no author before Irenaeus takes up, by which the LXX text offers a clear line of witness to Irenaeus' overriding conviction that God, throughout every aspect of the economy, works for the betterment and growth of his human creation.<sup>8</sup> Other authors do find evidence in the text of God's intended correction of

<sup>7</sup> 4.18.3 (SC 100: 600–3).

<sup>8</sup> Irenaeus also employs the verb ἡσυχάζω at 3.19.3, of the Word as 'quiescent in Christ during the temptation' (Lampe, *PGL* 608). It is remarkable that Lampe nowhere notes the verb as present in the LXX of Genesis, nor does he mention Irenaeus' important reading of it. The only other occasions of its usage cited in his lexicon, apart from a myriad of later texts on hesychasm and monastic contemplation, refer to tranquillity of life as conducive to prayer; cf. Evagrius, *De oratione* 3; *Apothevmata* PG65:201C.

Cain, but they do so through his reaction to Cain's sin, not through any prior exhortations.<sup>9</sup>

Irenaeus employs this narrative of Cain and Abel in two contexts: At 4.18.3, which we have just quoted in part, his larger purpose is to show the nature of true sacrifice as dependent upon the conscience of the offerer, in which context he attacks the Pharisees (cf. Mt 23.27–28) by comparing them with the impure heart with which Cain wrongly meted out his sacrifice to God (cf. Gen 4.3–7). At 5.14.1, towards the end of Irenaeus' sustained argument on the possibility of the resurrection of the flesh, Cain's spilling of his brother's blood is used as evidence that the blood of the lineage of Adam calls out for satisfaction, for redemption. Irenaeus quotes Gen 4.10 ('The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me') as evidence that 'blood cries out from the beginning of the world'. This is again a recapitulative argument by which Irenaeus intends to make clear that Christ's advent must be as a real man possessing human blood, and which subsequently shows forth the possibility of fleshly resurrection, since what was witnessed in Christ's own resurrection was the raising thus of flesh and bones.

Irenaeus concludes *Epid.* 17 with a narration of God's cursing of Cain (cf. Gen 4.11–12), noting that 'it came to pass that all his descendants, via their inheritance, became like the progenitor'. The phrase 'all his descendents' is Irenaeus' quick summation of the genealogy provided in Gen 4.16–24, and it is especially important to note that he views the descendants of Cain as 'becoming like their progenitor'. We have already established that Irenaeus does not allow for the idea of a transmission of the guilt of personal transgression from one person to another, but in this passage he clearly indicates that it is possible for

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<sup>9</sup> Theophilus exemplifies this approach in his reading of God's response to the fratricide: 'God, who is merciful and desired to provide for Cain, as he had for Adam, an opportunity for repentance and confession, said: "Where is your brother Abel?" (Gen 4.9). But Cain, who did not trust God, answered: "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" So God became angry with him and said: "Why did you do this? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the earth. And now you are accursed from the earth, which opened to receive your brother's blood from your hand; you shall be groaning and trembling on the earth" (cf. Gen 4.9–14)'; see *Ad Autol.* 2.29. Theophilus wishes to emphasise that even in the face of the most severe sin of murder, God is merciful still and desires the repentance of him who has fallen. We have already seen Irenaeus employ God's questioning of Cain in the same manner at 3.23.4, where the latter's response is the antithesis of Adam's. But for Irenaeus, unlike Theophilus, this was the second and not the first occasion for which the Genesis narrative indicates God's attempt to correct Cain from his wrongs.

the actions of an individual to effect the lives and characters of those to come after him or her. An example more potent in this regard than that of Cain is Eve, whom Irenaeus argues multiple times was the ‘cause of death’ for all future generations. The jealousy and rage that infused Cain with the desire and willingness to act against God and his fellow race will likewise effect future generations, who shall adopt them out of habit, influence, and example. It is in this sense that sin is ‘set up, and spreads out against man’.<sup>10</sup>

#### ENOCH, NOAH AND THE DELUGE

The long genealogy of Adam’s family tree, recounted in Genesis 5, does not figure heavily into Irenaeus’ reading of human history outside Eden, save for the comments (in 5.24) on Enoch’s long life and translation to heaven without the experience of death (‘and Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him’), which he sees as having direct bearing upon the resurrectional life offered in Christ. This episode is taken up by Irenaeus at *AH* 5.5.1 as evidence (a) of the long life of the ancients, by which he desires to show that physical bodies do possess the potential for life beyond what is presently experienced in the world and thus the resurrection is not untenable; and (b) that Enoch was translated to paradise, whence Adam had been cast out, since this is the place to which ‘all those who have been translated’ remain as a prelude to immortality—a direct linkage of Eden to the recapitulative work of the incarnate saviour.

It is rather unlikely that Irenaeus would have commented on this verse at all, were he not influenced by the tradition of *1 Enoch* and thus prone to catch references relating to its themes. His only other allusion to Gen 5.24 makes his familiarity with the tradition of Enoch even more obvious, describing him as possessing ‘the office of God’s legate to the angels, although he was a man’ and again indicating that he is preserved unto the present day as a witness to God’s justice.<sup>11</sup> Irenaeus does not go beyond this (his proper focus at 4.16.2 is the relationship of righteousness and circumcision; Enoch is brought up only as an example of one who was righteous before the institution of the practice and thus evidences that righteousness was not worked out solely by it), though it is

<sup>10</sup> 3.23.6, cf. *Epid.* 18.

<sup>11</sup> See 4.16.2; cf. *1 Enoch* 1, 6–8, 11–13.

clear that his reading of *1 Enoch* holds influence in his general approach to the post-Edenic condition of humankind.<sup>12</sup> This becomes most clear when Irenaeus turns to the *Nephalim*, or giants, whose actions form the stage on which the drama of the deluge shall be set.

Reference has been made numerous times in this study to the richly-imagined phrase employed by Irenaeus at the opening of *Epid.* 18: ‘Wickedness, spreading out for a long time, seized the entire race of men, until there was very little seed of righteousness in them’. It is now pertinent to note that this comment is made at the close of Irenaeus’ chapter on Cain and Abel, as the introduction to his narrative of Noah and the flood. *Epid.* 18, which narratively bridges these two otherwise independent historical events, does so by mention of the sinfulness of the world which has by now seen generations pass since the expulsion from Eden, and whose wickedness will shortly reach such a pitch that God will react with the flood. In explaining this wickedness, Irenaeus describes the spread of evil in the phrase quoted above, justifying it as follows:

For unlawful unions occurred on earth, as angels united themselves with daughters of men, who bore them sons who, because of their exaggerated height, were called giants (cf. Gen 6.2–4). The angels then gave their wives, as gifts, wicked teachings, for they taught them the powers of roots and herbs, of dyeing and cosmetics, and the discovery of precious material, love-potions, hatreds, loves, infatuations, seductions, bonds of witchcraft, and all kinds of divination and idolatry hateful to God. When these entered the world, the things of wickedness overabounded, while those of righteousness decreased, until judgement came upon the world from God [...].<sup>13</sup>

Here, as at 4.16.2, Irenaeus demonstrates his familiarity with and influence by *1 Enoch* 6–8. This appears to have been a well-known text in the era, for Justin also employs it, though it is not utilised in Theophilus’ apologetic.<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus takes the imagery of *1 Enoch*’s account to fill out the rather ambiguous contents of the Genesis narrative, in which the ‘giants’ parented by the unions of fallen angels and humans are simply mentioned but not described in any detail. For Irenaeus it is important that the wickedness of such illicitly-fostered offspring be noted (for such

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<sup>12</sup> As can also be said of Justin, though perhaps to a lesser degree. See Droge, *Homer or Moses?* 55–56. Cf. Schutz, ‘Origin of sin’, 176–80.

<sup>13</sup> *Epid.* 18–19.

<sup>14</sup> See Justin, *2Apol.* 5; cf. Behr, *Apostolic Preaching* 105 n. 54.

helps explain the extent of God's response), and to this end the details of *1 Enoch* prove helpful. It must be the case that Irenaeus knew the text and not just the tradition, for the catalogue of skills which Irenaeus presents the Nephalim as teaching to humankind (powers of roots and herbs, cosmetics, use of metals, etc.) comes directly from chs. 7–8 of the pseudepigraphal text.<sup>15</sup>

At *AH* 5.9.2, the only other passage in which Irenaeus makes allusion to the Nephalim and the precursors to the flood, he refers to 'that most infamous generation which lived in the times of Noah'. This infamy, he there notes, is due to 'the commixture of wickedness that took place previous to the deluge, due to the apostasy of the angels'. Through such activities the destructive sin of the human community escalated in the generation of Noah until such a point as God required to act, should the human race be saved from its own rush towards self-destruction. Thus 'a judgement came upon the world from God, by means of a flood in the tenth generation after the first-formed'.<sup>16</sup>

Irenaeus' employment of the flood-story is—perhaps surprisingly, given its expansive treatment over three chapters in Genesis and its host of implications vis-à-vis the nature of God and his relationship to humankind—fairly minimal. On only eight occasions does he make reference to the history of Noah and the flood, and three of these are simply re-presentations of heretical distortions of the story. The Ophites are recounted as describing the whole event as Sophia's protection of humanity (in the person of Noah) from the rage of the demiurge; while the Marcosians employ their customary numerology to find in the measurements of the ark the image of the Triacontad (for it was to be 30 cubits in height, cf. Gen 6.15), and an image of the Ogdoad in the number of persons saved in that ark (namely eight, as per Gen 6.18).<sup>17</sup> Irenaeus is, as usual, dismissive of this sort of wholly numerological exegesis, though, as with his limited numerological interpretations elsewhere, he is not wholly averse to such readings if they are in accord with larger Christian revelation.<sup>18</sup> As such, the fact of Noah's age as 600 years when the deluge came upon him (cf. Gen 7.6) is anticipatory

<sup>15</sup> Cf. M. Black, *The Book of Enoch, or 1 Enoch*, eds. M. De Jonge and A.M. Denis (Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985) 28–29, 330–31. Enoch's listing is much longer than Irenaeus', and it seems that the latter extracted only the most audacious items for inclusion in his summary.

<sup>16</sup> *Epid.* 19.

<sup>17</sup> For Ophite usage, see 1.30.10. For the Marcosians see 1.18.3, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. above, p. 99.



of the Antichrist's number as 666 (cf. Apoc 13.18), for Antichrist shall sum up in his person all the evil of the generation previous to Noah.<sup>19</sup> Irenaeus never explains precisely how the number 600 foretells 666, but seems to believe that it is only in conjunction with the sixty-cubit height and six-cubit breadth of the image set up by Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Dan 3.1) that the symbolism is made complete; for Antichrist sums up all the evil of the generations prior and posterior to the deluge.

Justin had earlier engaged in a similar type of reasoning. At *Dial.* 138 Noah is a type of the economy of Christ. The eight inhabitants of the ark foretell the eighth day on which Christ appeared and was resurrected; the salvation wrought through the wood of the ark foretells the wood of the cross on which salvation shall be completed; the water of the deluge foretells the waters of baptism. Irenaeus' utilisation of limited numerology is thus not without a forebear among those authors whom he read and respected. The fact that the marking out of a 'reasonable degree' for such a numerology is subjective is, not surprisingly, pointed out by neither Irenaeus nor Justin. It must be admitted, however, that in Irenaeus' case the extent to which he allows numerological speculations to enter into his discussion here is, given his distaste for Marcosian practices, surprising. It seems likely that the focus of *Adversus haereses* 5 as largely a reflection upon the Apocalypse will have influenced him in this regard, given the symbolically and numerically heavy content of that book. Perhaps it was precisely because the Marcosians so freely offered numerological explanations for all aspects of history that Irenaeus felt the need to justify the numerology of Revelation with support from older and more established scriptural texts. In any case, *AH* 5.29.2 is the only instance in which Irenaeus connects Apocalyptic numerology with a passage from Genesis.

In addition to the above passages, which contain exposition of various misuses of the deluge epic as well as the chiliastic back-reading of Antichrist's number into the details of the scriptural narrative, Irenaeus employs details of that narrative on two occasions for purposes that have little to do with an exposition on the deluge *per se*, but which are wholly served by his Christocentric approach to scripture as a whole. At 4.10.1 he argues that the Old Testament scriptures make frequent and consistent reference to the Son of God, offering examples of the Word at one time speaking with Abraham, and 'at another time with

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<sup>19</sup> See 5.29.2.

Noah, giving him the dimensions of the ark' (cf. Gen 6.15–16).<sup>20</sup> Later, at 5.14.1, his defence of the fleshly humanity of Christ as evidence for the possibility of corporeal resurrection makes reference to those around Noah as among those whose 'blood will be inquired after, as [God] said to those with Noah, "For the blood of your souls will I require, even from the hand of all beasts"' (Gen 9.5–6 LXX). In both texts, Irenaeus' use of select scriptural passages has little to do with a treatment of the deluge story proper and more to do with supporting his Christological and eschatological polemic—but this is of course the very context in which he understands the significance of the whole creation saga. The circular, interconnected character of a recapitulative salvation history encourages the expository connection of present and past events in the history of humankind, and thus Irenaeus' scriptural demonstrations of Christological and soteriological matters come, as here, from narratives relating to the early history of the human race, as we have seen numerous times in this study.

This leaves Irenaeus with two passages that address the deluge in its own right. *Epid.* 19 provides a brief and sweeping account of the whole epic, making specific allusion to the text ('Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord') in the declaration that Noah was the sole righteous man found in his generation; as well as to the naming of Noah's sons (cf. Gen 9.18–19). As far as the story of the flood goes, however, the chapter provides no real exegesis. It is merely an abbreviated re-telling of the saga as condensed from Genesis. *Epid.* 22 concludes the deluge account through a description of God's covenant with Noah, partially quoting Gen 7.23 vis-à-vis the extent of the destruction caused by the flood (it destroyed 'every living thing on the face of the earth'), and fully quoting Gen 9.14–15, which recounts God's formation of the rainbow and covenantal promise not to repeat the deluge in future. Most importantly, Irenaeus quotes Gen 9.1–6, concluding with the Genesis narrative's final proclamation of humankind as created in the image of God. His purpose in ending on a quotation of this verse, which he expounds in order to make explicit that 'the image of God is the Son, according to whose image man was made' is the re-establishment of God's intrinsic love for the human creature as the motivation for all his actions—including his response to sin in the time of Noah. Though the

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<sup>20</sup> Justin engages in similar exegesis at *Dial.* 127, where the phrase 'God shut Noah in the ark' (Gen 7.16) is expounded as describing the activity of the Word.

deluge has come and the population of the earth has been destroyed, still God has saved a remnant of humankind, for this race is his image and moves toward the central soteriological moment of incarnation.

Irenaeus' use of the deluge story is thus remarkably brief. Apart from his anti-'Gnostic' and polemically-orientated use of the account for proof-texts as found in the *Adversus haereses*, his positive exposition is restricted wholly to the *Epideixis* and there primarily offered simply as a paraphrase of the scriptural account. Such exegesis as is offered shows that God saved the race of humankind because it bears his image, after establishing that he was just in dealing out so severe a punishment in response to sin. The point of significance is that in the harshest response to sin, God nonetheless provides redemption, and the story of the human creature is not wholly abolished. Adam's lineage is saved for Christ. Beyond these purposes, Irenaeus shows little interest in the deluge as historical event. He does not follow Theophilus in speculations on the meaning of Noah's name, nor in chronological considerations of the flood's duration, depth, etc., nor in advancing proofs of a singular flood or the extant remains of the ark.<sup>21</sup> His interest in the deluge as centred in God's saving a remnant, draws his attention instead to the history of humankind after the deluge—to the descendents of Noah and their repopulation of the human race; for in their story, the economy of human history finds its next chapter.

#### THE DESCENDENTS OF NOAH AND THE FUTURE OF THE RACE

*Epideixis* 19 concludes with the introduction of Noah's three sons, Sem, Cham and Japheth, proclaiming that 'of these the race was multiplied again, for they are the origin of the men who came after the deluge' (cf. Gen 9.18–19). It is in their role as new progenitors of the human race that Irenaeus finds these sons of special interest—of more interest, it seems, than he found Noah. This latter served as the righteous bridge between the first era in human history (pre-deluge) and the second (post-deluge), but it is in Noah's three sons that the more potent parallels to Adam and Eve are to be found in the post-flood generation. Their

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Ad Autol.* 3.19; cf. *Ad Autol.* 3.16–18. See also the new article by L.H. Feldman, 'Questions about the Great Flood, as Viewed by Philo, Pseudo-Philo, Josephus, and the Rabbis', *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 115.3 (2003), 401–22 for Philo's analysis of this event and its details, esp. pp. 408–12 on God's attempts to spur humanity to virtue.

stories are not expounded in anywhere near the detail of those of the first humans, yet the sole historical event of their lives recounted in scripture (their encounter with and response to their father's nakedness, cf. Gen 9.20–27) ends with what is, for Irenaeus, an event of radical importance: the cursing of one brother and the blessing of the two others. Irenaeus' attention to this incident is motivated entirely by his soteriological and eschatological concerns, for he finds in the curse the source of ongoing evil in the world—which shall continue until its culmination in the end-time conflicts—and in the blessing the foretelling of Christ's advent and the mission of the Church.

Irenaeus nowhere quotes or paraphrases the scriptural verses that contain the actual story of Noah's drunkenness and his sons' reactions. He simply notes that 'on account of their deeds, one of these fell under a curse, while two inherited a blessing; since the youngest of these mocked their father [...] but Sem and Japheth [...] had pity towards their father'.<sup>22</sup> Irenaeus does, however, quote directly from Gen 9.25, which contains the nature of the curse: 'Cursed be the child Cham, a slave shall he be to his brothers'.<sup>23</sup> His interest in this event lies in the fact that it represents a direct cursing of a human individual (we are reminded of his emphasis on the fact that such a curse was not offered against humanity when God reacted to the transgression in the garden), set alongside a blessing pronounced on two others in a narrative that moves on to describe the future generations of these three individuals. This is accomplished in Genesis 10, the genealogy of the descendents of Noah, and Irenaeus finds in this genealogy divergent histories based on the blessing or curse of the progenitor. So while Irenaeus was not interested in the earlier genealogy of Adam's immediate descendents, he finds direct Christological significance to the genealogy of Noah's. To quote from *Epid.* 20 more fully:

Cham [...] received a curse, and to all who were from his seed extended a share of the curse, whence it happened that every generation after him, being cursed, increased and multiplied in sin (cf. Gen 10.6–20). [...] They all fell under the curse, the curse extending for a long time over the ungodly.

<sup>22</sup> *Epid.* 20.

<sup>23</sup> See Behr, *Apostolic Preaching* 105 n. 56 for a helpful note on Irenaeus' divergence here from both the Masoretic and majority LXX renditions of the verse, which read 'Canaan' where Irenaeus has 'Cham' (after a minority MS tradition).

This in contrast to the future lineage of Sem and Japheth:

And just as the curse continued on, in the same manner also did the blessing continue upon the blessed race, each of them in turn. The first of them, Sem, was blessed with these words: ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Sem and let Cham be his servant’ (Gen 9.26). The significance of the blessing is this, that the God and Lord of all became for Sem a peculiar object of worship. This blessing flourished when it reached Abraham, who, of the seed of Sem, by genealogy was the tenth generation downwards (cf. Gen 11.10–26); and for this reason the Father and God of all was pleased to be called the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob’, for the blessing of Sem extended to Abraham.<sup>24</sup>

This comparison and contrast between the divergent lineages of Sem and Japheth on the one hand, and Cham on the other, is of special interest in a number of regards. First, one encounters here the notion of a ‘lineage of sin’, of evil that is passed along from one generation to another as an ‘inheritance’. What does Irenaeus mean by such a notion? Is there, after all, a doctrine of imputed guilt or sinfulness in Irenaeus thought? Secondly, there arises the issue of the ‘enlargement of Japheth’, of the blessing spoken to Sem and Japheth that Irenaeus takes as a foretelling of the lineage of Christ, and ultimately of the Church in its mission to the world.

On the first issue of the lineage of sin, it should be noted first of all that Irenaeus here echoes the thought of Justin who, at *Dial.* 139–140, gives a general overview of the descendants of Noah, speaking specifically of the blessing and curse of the sons. In his discussion, ‘sin cleaves to the descendants of Cain’, which can be traced through Cham’s bloodline. The ascription of human evil to the first of the new lineage to act in sin thus goes back before Irenaeus, and serves more as a logical answer to the question of ‘whence?’ that must inevitably arise in reflection upon the fact that the world after the deluge continued to experience evil and transgression, than it does a meaningful exposition on a certain race as itself inherently sinful. Irenaeus does not say that the descendants of Cham fell under a congenital inclination to sin, but under the ‘curse’—that is, under the just judgement delivered upon their progenitor for the evil he had committed against his father. Irenaeus demonstrates again an insistence on the solidarity of all humankind through the lineage of blood received from Adam.<sup>25</sup> Sin

<sup>24</sup> *Epid.* 21.

<sup>25</sup> See 3.12.9.

as disobedience mandates that only the individual can be responsible for sin, as disobedience is a personal act; yet the members of a family, of an heritage, are interconnected in their communal existence. The acts, right or wrong, of one member effect the lives of the other. This was first seen in the case of Adam and Eve, where the latter's deception by the serpent led to Adam's own act of disobedience through the influence of his wife. It is seen on a larger scale in the present circumstance, where the sin of Cham evokes a 'following' in sin amongst his descendents. Though the chastisement of God (which, we must recall, is for Irenaeus always corrective) remains upon them, nevertheless they 'increased and multiplied in sin'.

The above analysis interpretively tidies up what must nonetheless remain a challenging passage in the Irenaeus corpus. *Epid.* 20 seems out of character for Irenaeus, with its implication of what reads, if we strip away our above exegesis, as a rather straightforward proclamation of congenital sin. This is, however, the solitary text 'for', out of a lengthy corpus in which Irenaeus otherwise argues consistently against such a concept. Moreover, given that Irenaeus' text in the previous chapter (on Noah and the deluge) was almost wholly a condensation of the Genesis text and not an exegetical study, it may simply be the case that Irenaeus' mention here of the lineage of wickedness that succeeded from Cham is but a re-telling of the facts as they appear in the scriptural narrative. He certainly does not long dwell on this circumstance, nor does he attempt to find in it a coherent explanation for the ongoing state of human sinfulness. It is more likely that his description of the lineage of evil in the descendents of Cham is made—at least partially—as an aesthetic lead-in to the matter which for Irenaeus has much more value: the blessing of Sem and Japheth. Irenaeus discovers in the genealogy of these brothers the beginnings of the race that would bring forth Abraham, whom Irenaeus calls 'God's friend', and which eventually would produce the human lineage of the incarnate Christ.<sup>26</sup> In the blessing, 'the God and Lord of all became for Sem a peculiar object of worship', showing that through the righteousness exhibited by one or two members of the human race, a right relationship to the creator may be fostered in a whole generation and beyond. The deliberate

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<sup>26</sup> On Abraham as God's friend, see 4.13.4; cf. Jas 2.23. This is the same manner in which Justin reads the promise of Japheth's expansion; cf. *Dial.* 140.

connection of Abraham's sanctity to the blessing given to Sem is a prime example of just this. Moreover, the promise of enlargement to Japheth (cf. Gen 9.27) indicates the expansion of this sanctified lineage beyond purely blood lines. Irenaeus will hearken back to this promise in comments on Christ's role as bringing together all humankind, and more specifically in his discussions on the Church's mission as calling to salvation the Gentiles.<sup>27</sup> When human persons—Jew or Gentile—are encouraged to obedience and raised to life, Japheth is enlarged.<sup>28</sup> In the blessing given to Sem and the promise made to Japheth, the continued advancement of the economy is declared and enabled.

#### THE TOWER OF BABEL AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF RACES

From his discussion on the descendents of Noah, Irenaeus turns to the activity of those descendents in the land of Senaar (Shinar). The construction of the tower of Babel is treated only once in the corpus, at *Epid.* 23 (beginning with the last two sentences of *Epid.* 22), though in this singular paragraph Irenaeus offers a substantial amount of interpretive extrapolation. To flesh this out, it will be helpful to reproduce his words in full:

After this covenant the race of mankind multiplied, proliferating from the seed of the three. And 'there was one lip upon the earth' (Gen 11.1), that is, one tongue. Then, rising up, they made their way from the land of the East and, while they traversed the earth, they happened upon the extensive land of Senaar (cf. Gen 11.2). There they undertook to build a tower, contriving a device by which to ascend to the heavens, wishing to leave their work as a memorial for those men after them. The edifice was made with baked brick and bitumen (cf. Gen 11.3–4). And the temerity of their arrogance increased, as they were all of one mind and one will, the single language giving aid to the purpose of their will. So, in order that the work might not advance still further, God divided their languages, so that they might no longer be able to understand one another. And in this way they were scattered and occupied the earth; they dwelt in groups according to their respective languages: whence comes the diverse peoples and various languages upon the earth (cf. Gen

<sup>27</sup> The unification of all humankind as Japheth's expansion is discussed at 3.5.3, where Gen 9.27 is quoted in this context. *Epid.* 21 addresses more specifically the mission to the Gentiles; cf. *Epid.* 42.

<sup>28</sup> See 5.34.2, where Gen 9.27 is quoted for the final time in the corpus.

11.5–9). And therefore three races of men occupied the earth: one of them was under the curse, while two were under the blessing. And the blessing came first of Sem, whose race dwelt in the east and occupied the land of the Chaldeans (cf. Gen 11.28).<sup>29</sup>

One encounters here a re-telling of the full overview of the story, drawing an emphatic emphasis on the primary sin of Babel as arrogance. The unified people desire to build a memorial by which to be known in future generations, by which they will ascend to heaven as the ‘temerity of their arrogance’ increases. There is in this a parallel to the bypassing of proper economy that had occurred in the serpent’s promise of God-likeness to Eve. It is not well enough to await the good order and time of God, who will eventually provide access to the tree of knowledge: one must eat the fruit now. The tower in Senaar represents once again the attempt to grow into ‘perfection’ (here symbolised in the ascent to the heavens) in a manner other than that which God has provided. Here, however—unlike Eden though similar to the situation witnessed in the fratricide of Cain—the motivation for disobedience has become internalised. There is no serpent instructing Noah’s descendents to build the tower, rather it is their own arrogance that motivates its construction. Irenaeus is intently critical of this fact, witnessed in the biting language he employs for its description. There is even less Satanic provocation witnessed here than in the story of Cain, and so the human persons involved are yet more responsible for the evil of their ways. The arrogance of the devil is spreading to an arrogance of humankind.

Theophilus offered a similar recapitulation of the Babel narrative at *Ad Autol.* 2.31, going—predictably—into rather more detail than Irenaeus as to the specifics of the genealogies that lead up to it. He, like Irenaeus, emphasises that the ‘one tongue’ of the human race aided in the advancement of their arrogance (Theophilus sees the aim of the tower as self-glorification), but brings out, in a way that Irenaeus does not, the idea that the tower was built in opposition to God’s purposes. The Lord’s principal motivation in levelling the project is to punish a people who are acting against his purposes, his will. Irenaeus seems to agree, if the purposes of God are taken in an economic sense as implying the proper advancement of human history; but he never explicitly says as much.

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<sup>29</sup> *Epid.* 22–23.



It is remarkable, given Irenaeus' treatment of the plural 'Let us' of Gen 1.26, that he does not quote or comment upon Gen 11.7, where this plural language is echoed: 'Come, let us go down and there confuse their language'. Yet the context here is important. Irenaeus' treatment of the tower story comes well into the *Epideixis*, beyond his brief treatment there of triune themes and well into his Christological reflections on the history of man that leads to the incarnation and passion. His purpose in this context is not the elaboration of God's nature, but humanity's. The *Epideixis* is as a whole more focused and coherent a text than the *Adversus haereses*, one chapter flowing into the next in an ordered history that culminates in the salvation wrought by the Son. Nonetheless, it is curious that Irenaeus does not make use of Gen 11.7 anywhere in his *Adversus haereses* as a support for the argument he makes rather extensively with regard to the implied trinitarianism of Gen 1.26. He does not even allude to Babel in his listing, at *AH* 4.10.1, of those instances in which the activities of God in the Old Testament are the activities of the Word, though Justin before him had done so.<sup>30</sup> It is of little benefit to speculate on why Irenaeus did not dwell on this verse. It may have been that he felt his trinitarian point sufficiently made with recourse to Gen 1.27 alone.

Irenaeus concludes his chapter on Babel with God's destruction of the tower and division of the 'one tongue' into the various languages that would persist thereafter. The arrogance that inspired the tower's construction was fostered by the common language shared by all humankind, and to prevent this arrogance from continuing unabated in the course of the human economy, 'God divided their languages, so that they might no longer be able to understand one another'. As with God's reaction to the sin of Adam and Eve, as with his response to the fratricide of Cain, as with his response to the shameless behaviour of Cham, so is God's activity in response to the arrogance in Senaar an act of corrective chastisement. The common tongue is divided, 'in order that the work'—and Irenaeus has just called the work an act of temeritous arrogance and pride—'might not advance still further'. The pride of the new race of humankind must be prevented, lest it advance to impossibly dangerous heights. It was the devil's arrogance, after all, that had caused his fall from heaven.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Dial.* 127.

<sup>31</sup> See 5.21.2; cf. 3.20.1.

The divided languages thus cause the formation of divided cultures, divided societal groups, which subsequently spread out over the earth. Irenaeus' final commentary on the pre-Abrahamic story of creation is to re-iterate, at the close of his narrative on Babel, the fact that the descendents of Noah lie 'one under the curse, while the other two under the blessing'. His point is to emphasise the blessing, not the curse. He wishes to show that despite the division of humankind into various races, despite the apparent disintegration of the human community as originally fashioned in Eden, a blessing still lies upon the people. Holiness yet dwells in this newly confounded human culture. 'The blessing came first to Sem', notes Irenaeus, then beginning *Epid.* 24 with the continuation, 'Later, when time had passed [...] we find Abraham'. And Abraham, as Irenaeus repeatedly calls to mind, is the ancestor of Christ. Irenaeus' final reflections on the creation saga are soteriological and ultimately eschatological. The beginnings, from Eden to Babel, point toward the future.

## CONCLUSION

For Irenaeus to be a ‘consistent creationist’ is, as this study has shown, for him to be deeply and intensely cognisant of human life as unfolding reality, built upon the eschatological hope of the heavenly kingdom that has been revealed into the present through the event of the incarnation. The witness of the ‘new Adam’, the perfected human person, makes evident with henceforth unknown clarity the *telos* toward which the whole economy has always moved, and through the revelation of this *telos* the meaning of the economy’s other extreme becomes vividly clear. Protology and eschatology combine, for in the light of the Gospel they are inseparable aspects of what is ultimately a single movement of salvation.

Irenaeus’ creationism is, then, in a most direct way, his soteriology. The reason Irenaeus presents no ‘chapter on creation’, as we noted in the introduction, lies precisely in this: for our author, ‘creation’ and ‘salvation’ are not distinct elements of address. To speak of one is to speak in the same breath of the other. Conversely, to divide the two is to depart from the ‘demonstration of the apostolic preaching’ which is ultimately a demonstration of the fact that Christ has perfected the economy begun in Eden. It is, to use the often cited Irenaeian analogy, to re-arrange the stones in a mosaic, transforming the image of a king into the image of a dog.<sup>1</sup>

In maintaining this inherent unity, or rather synonymity, of creation and salvation, Irenaeus consistently approaches the saga of creation from the context of the revealed eschatology of Christ, itself the image of perfected humanity. The first word of the first verse of scripture already speaks of the human creature, already of Christ, already of the Kingdom. In this we see a certain methodology to Irenaeus’ approach to the creation story, driven by a soteriological, christological emphasis on the human person. Each element of the creation saga is explored by Irenaeus from this perspective, with the purpose of demonstrating the unity of the one economy by which the child, Adam, shall reach the glory of God for which he is destined. The formation of the cosmos,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. 1.8.1.

the shaping of the dust, the breathing into the nostrils, even the response to the transgression, the sin of Cain and the deluge with Noah—all show forth the consistency of this process of growth. God shall bring his creation to perfection. The devil may show untiring relentlessness in his attempt to thwart this growth out of envy, and humanity itself may immaturely and later intentionally act in disobedience to or rebellion against its creator; but the narrative of humanity's first historical experiences shows above all that the will and power of God shall overcome such rebellion. It is the triune God, the Father with his Son and Spirit, who created *ex nihilo* all things by divine goodness and power, who advances the economy; and the self-revelation of God's glory shall ultimately overcome the darkness of ignorance and disobedience.

Irenaeus thus reads the creation narrative throughout from an intently anthropocentric and eschatological perspective, as we have seen evidenced time and again in his treatment of the story and its details. We observed in chapter one that the interpretive framework by which he approaches the text sets the groundwork for the whole manner of analysis to follow. That creation is motivated not by God's ignorance or necessity but through the intentionality of his good, and therefore relational, self-expressive and creative nature, serves as the conceptual key by which Irenaeus can unlock the positive and salvific value of such acts as the expulsion from Eden, the cursing of Cain, the deluge and the destruction at Babel. Seemingly negative actions, which others might relegate to the ragings of a desperate demiurge, Irenaeus will consistently read as expressive of the intentionality present in the will for growth and maturation fostered by God's inherent, eternal goodness.

Directly connected to such an emphasis is the notion fostered by Irenaeus' strict adherence to a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, namely, that God's goodness is combined with his absolute power. While Irenaeus uses this doctrine, as we saw in chapters one and two, to extrapolate on the ultimate and unparalleled authority of God as sole creator and divinity, it also serves the larger function of emphasising the limitlessness of his power over the cosmos and the economy. The devil may have might, he may even be the 'strong one' who binds and enslaves a whole people, but ultimately his power is paralleled to that of a human builder whose control is limited by the elements of the natural order. God, on the other hand, possesses an unparalleled power that goes beyond all confines of natural limitation. Only he creates from nothing, and this most elemental demonstration of his unique supremacy is the

proof by which one can be assured of the ultimate victory of God's economy in the face of every evil. We saw in chapter three how this belief motivates Irenaeus' interpretation of human materiality, presented in Gen 2.7, as limitation yet transcendable limitation. It may be the natural property of matter eventually to dissolve and fall into corruption; but the one who fashions the human creature from the dust and breathes life into its nostrils is he who at the first called that dust into being from non-being. Surely the power which went beyond nature to work the prior miracle will be able, in the end, to conquer the natural limitations of the latter.

This, in turn, ties into what we defined in chapter one as the third principal motif of Irenaeus' approach to creation: his chiliastic or millenarian focus. The reality of Christ's life, death, resurrection and promise of a future kingdom provides the lens through which Irenaeus can examine the whole economy, the initiation of which is the subject of the creation saga. It is in light of what has been revealed through these events (the incarnation, the resurrection) and the revelation to the apostles (especially the Apocalypse of John) that the *telos* of human history—which, we might recall, is that of which Irenaeus believes the whole of creation to speak—can be fully discerned. We saw this in chapter two, in his reflections on the peaceable state of animals in the chiliastic kingdom and thus in paradise; and again in chapter three, when we examined Irenaeus' discussion on the establishment of paradise and humanity's placement therein as leading to perfection, which he later establishes as that of the millennial kingdom. This chiliastic focus, however, became most apparent in chapters four and five, where the whole scope of Irenaeus' address of the transgression, of the response of both God and humankind, and of life outside of Eden is defined by his belief that such events served to prepare, educate and direct the human race into the Spirit-filled life of obedience that the kingdom represents and which it, too, shall continue to foster.<sup>2</sup>

If, then, we are to summarise Irenaeus' approach to the creation story, we may do so as follows: For Irenaeus, the protological saga presents a divinely-inspired report of the establishment of the one economy of human salvation. This economy cannot be known apart from the life and witness of Christ, passed down through the apostles, who makes known its terminus or *telos* and thus enables an authentic approach to

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. 2.28.3.

its beginnings. To examine this narrative is, then, to read backward from present experience and future promise the reality of past history, which is the basis of hope and assurance in all that is to come. Specific events must be read, and are always read by Irenaeus, in light of the whole breadth of this revelation, grounded in the unchangeable beliefs that the one God enabled and enacted the economy from his goodness and of his power, and that this economy shall not be thwarted until it comes to its promised end. Protology and eschatology are mutually revelatory: not only does the eschaton illumine events that occurred 'in the beginning', but those events similarly clarify the nature of the future kingdom, since both *telo*i are bound up in the Son. The story of human salvation can be read both ways, for it is an economy of recapitulation in which the ends and the beginnings unite in the person of Christ, through whom the creation of the cosmos and of the child Adam eventually reach perfection in beholding the glory of the Father, Son and Spirit, 'becoming a perfect work of God'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 4.39.2.

## APPENDIX I

### A NOTE ON IRENAEAN SOURCE TEXTS AND DATES

#### THE IRENAEAN CORPUS

##### *Reading Irenaeus: a note on source texts*

A precise reading of Irenaeus has become so much the easier since the careful critical editions of the *Adversus haereses* were completed in 1982 by Rousseau et al. for the *Sources Chrétiennes*.<sup>1</sup> The Latin manuscripts and Greek fragments collated and compared to produce the SC Latin editions with Greek retroversion have rendered a substantially more authentic and reliable text than those of Massuet/Migne<sup>2</sup> and Harvey,<sup>3</sup> and the additional use of the Armenian as a reference to *AH* 4–5 increases still further the reliability of the SC editions. At present, however, there is no critical text of the Armenian version of these latter books, and so a detailed analysis of the Mekerttschian/Minassiantz manuscript has yet to figure into Irenaeus source criticism in a substantial way.<sup>4</sup>

In the present study, all references to the *Adversus haereses* are to the *Sources Chrétiennes* critical editions, and translations have been made from these volumes in collation with the Armenian manuscript as appropriate. Additionally, I have benefited to a large degree from the critical English translation work of the late Fr Dominic Unger, OFM. Cap., whose translation and commentary on Irenaeus was cut short by his death in 1981. His edition of *Adversus haereses* book 1, edited by Fr John Dillon and published in 1992 by Ancient Christian Writers, was immediately welcomed by Irenaeus scholarship as the first detailed translation of the text (the Roberts/Donaldson translation in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*

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<sup>1</sup> See bibliography for full details on the SC editions of the *AH*.

<sup>2</sup> J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Irenaeus: Adversus haereses*, PG 7: 437–1224 (1882); a reprint of Massuet's edition of 1712.

<sup>3</sup> W. Harvey, *Irenaeus: Against heresies* (Cambridge: 1857).

<sup>4</sup> See K. Ter-Mekerttschian & E. Ter-Minassiantz (eds.), *Irenäus, Gegen Die Häretiker: "Έλεγχος και ανατροπή της ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως, Buch IV u. V in armenischer Version, Texte und Untersuchungen* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1910).

volume 1 being notoriously inaccurate).<sup>5</sup> I am in possession of Unger's typeset translation and commentary of *AH* 2–5, to which I have had recourse in making my own translations for the present study, as J. Dillon and I advance the task of updating and completing Unger's work for publication.<sup>6</sup>

With regard to the *Epideixis*, the situation is at the same time simpler and more complex than that of the *Adversus haereses*. It is simpler in that there is but one extant manuscript of the *Epideixis*, in Armenian, discovered in 1904 by Archimandrite Karapet Ter-Mekertschian and subsequently published in *Patrologia Orientalis* 12 (1917) with S.G. Wilson. To examine the source is thus to examine but a single document. However, the widely-available critical edition of the *Epideixis*, which constitutes Sources Chrétiennes 406, is not in fact a critical text but a critical translation, rendering in Latin retroversion and modern French the contents of the Armenian manuscript. A. Rousseau has set out the motivations and justification for this approach in his introduction, grounded primarily in the question of accessibility.<sup>7</sup> It is a remarkably precise translation into a language of comparable grammatical structure (which is indeed why Latin was chosen for the retroversion), but it is a translation still, and one made under a decade ago at that. Its value as a critical basis for translation must be assessed with this in mind.

Throughout the present study, citations and references to the *Epideixis* are taken from the numeration and apparati of SC 406. Translations have been made from the Armenian edition in PO 12, with consultation given to Rousseau's Latin retroversion. Throughout, I have relied heavily on Behr's critical English translation of the Armenian, to which in the end I have made only slight modifications.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Dating the Epideixis with respect to the Adversus haereses*

The exact dating of the *Epideixis* with respect to the *Adversus haereses*, the latter of which can be fixed to sometime within the episcopal reign of Eleutherus in Rome (c. 175–189), remains an open question. At the 2003 International Conference on Patristics Studies, one

<sup>5</sup> See D.J. Unger, *Against the Heresies: Book 1*, ACW 55 (Ancient Christian Writers: Paulist Press, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> *AH* 2–5 shall be forthcoming in English translation under Unger's name, J. Dillon and M.C. Steenberg eds.

<sup>7</sup> See SC 406: 29–49, esp. 'Le décalque Latin', pp. 42–45.

<sup>8</sup> See Behr, *Apostolic Preaching* 39–101.



speaker reopened the debate as to whether this shorter text pre- or post-dates the *Adversus haereses* in composition, and at least one scholar of Irenaeus agreed with her that the *Epideixis* is the earlier text.<sup>9</sup> This debate is not new, though it has not developed in any major way since its beginnings.<sup>10</sup> Whether or not *Epid.* 99, with its overt reference to the *AH*, together with chapters 98 and 100 should be taken as an integral part of Irenaeus' original text (as per Rousseau) or a later addition or appendix to an earlier document (the position of Blanchard and Behr) remains at the heart of the dispute; but with the paucity of manuscript evidence for the *Epid.* as a whole, it remains a question which must be answered solely through speculations on the internal characteristics of the two texts. To this end, differences in style and language between the *Epideixis* and *Adversus haereses* may be, and have been, used to support conclusions in either direction (Rousseau and Behr, for example, can comment on the same grammatical specimens in support of opposite conclusions), though it would be unsupportable to claim that such differences definitively answer the question.

For the purposes of the present study, the question over dating the *Epid.* in relation to the *AH* is of minimal importance in ascertaining the protological convictions of their author. While Irenaeian scholarship must await a dedicated examination of the internal evidence for or against the more traditionally ascribed later date of the *Epid.*, the few occasions in the present study which make reference to the dating demonstrate my general agreement with the traditional ascription, whether or not chapters 98–100 are a later appendage to the original text (which seems almost certain). Themes that appear in both works seem in the *Epid.* to be distilled or refined versions of the more verbose and less organised reflections of the *AH*, rather than the other way round. Examples of this are commented upon in the notes.

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<sup>9</sup> S.L. Graham, 'Irenaeus and the Covenants: Immortal Diamond' (Oxford: 22 August, 2003); J. Behr, in attendance at the communication, agreed with Graham's assertions of an earlier date for the *Epid.* See his comments to this end in J. Behr, *The Formation of Christian Theology, vol. 1: The Way to Nicaea* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001) 30 n. 34; cf. Behr, *Apostolic Preaching* 118 n. 229.

<sup>10</sup> See Blanchard, *Aux sources du canon* 113 n. 2; A. Rousseau, *Irénée de Lyon: Démonstration de la prédication apostolique—introduction, traduction et notes* (Sources Chrétiennes, 406; Paris: CERF, 1995) 352–53; Behr, *Apostolic Preaching* 118 n. 229. Tixeront's introduction to the *Epid.* in 1916, written just twelve years after the ms was discovered, professed with absolute certainty that the *AH* was the earlier text: J. Tixeront, 'Introduction à la Démonstration de la Prédication Apostolique', *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 6 (1916), 364–65. This position has been echoed in the present day by Grant, *Irenaeus* 10.



## APPENDIX II

### USE OF GENESIS 1–11 IN THE IRENAEAN CORPUS

In the following table, references in Irenaeus to passages from Genesis 1–11 (as indicated in the left column) are exhaustively detailed (in the right column). References not in square brackets are to passages from the Irenaeian corpus which directly quote the indicated Genesis verse in part or in entirety, while references in square brackets are to passages in the corpus that make obvious allusion to the indicated Genesis text without quoting it directly.

A particular difficulty is encountered in attempting to tabulate references to Gen 1.26, given that any occurrence of the phrase ‘image and likeness’ in the Irenaeian corpus might be considered a partial direct quotation, even though no other reference may be made to the verse itself. For the entries on this verse alone, non-bracketed references are to sections in which Irenaeus’ use of the terms ‘image and likeness’ seems intentionally aimed at calling to the reader’s attention the context of Genesis 1. Bracketed references are to passages which utilise this phrase without any apparent intention on Irenaeus’ part to relate his comment directly to the Genesis text.

#### **Genesis 1**

1.1	1.18.1, 2.2.5, [ <i>Epid.</i> 43]
1.2	1.18.1 (x2)
1.3	4.32.1
1.3–27 <sup>1</sup>	[1.18.1]
1.5	5.23.2
1.16–17	[1.18.2]
1.26(–27)	1.24.1, 1.30.6, 3.18.1, 3.22.1, 3.23.1, 4.Praef.4, 4.20.1, 4.33.4, 5.1.3, 5.2.1, 5.6.1, 5.8.1, 5.10.1, 5.12.4, 5.15.4, 5.16.1, 5.21.2, 5.28.4, 5.36.3, <i>Epid.</i> 32, <i>Epid.</i> 55, <i>Epid.</i> 97, [1.14.6], [1.18.2], [4.38.4], [ <i>Epid.</i> 5], [ <i>Epid.</i> 11]
1.28	4.11.1, [3.22.4]

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<sup>1</sup> I.e. allusion to the narrative of this full portion of the chapter, as opposed to Gen 1.3 in specific, above.

**Genesis 2**

2.1–3	5.28.3, [4.16.1], [5.33.2]
2.5	3.21.10, 3.22.4, <i>Epid.</i> 32
2.7	2.34.4, 3.21.10, 4.20.1, 5.7.1, 5.15.2, <i>Epid.</i> 11, <i>Epid.</i> 32, [1.5.5], <sup>2</sup> [4.39.2], [5.1.3], [5.3.2], [5.14.2], [ <i>Epid.</i> 14], [ <i>Epid.</i> 15]
2.8	5.5.1, [ <i>Epid.</i> 12]
2.15–23	[1.22.1], [4.14.1]
2.16–17	5.20.2, 5.23.1, 5.23.2, <i>Epid.</i> 15, [1.29.3], [4.38.4], [4.39.1], [5.20.2]
2.18	<i>Epid.</i> 13
2.19	<i>Epid.</i> 13
2.21	<i>Epid.</i> 13 (x2)
2.23	<i>Epid.</i> 13
2.25	3.23.5, <i>Epid.</i> 14
2.20–25	3.22.4, [1.30.7]

**Genesis 3**

3.1	5.23.1
3.2–3	5.23.1
3.5	3.23.1, 4.Praef.4, 5.23.1, [5.20.2]
3.1–7	[1.30.7], [3.23.1], [3.23.5], [5.16.3], [5.17.3], [5.17.4], [5.19.1], [ <i>Epid.</i> 16]
3.8	5.15.4, 5.17.1, <i>Epid.</i> 12, [3.22.4]
3.9	5.15.4, [4.10.1]
3.10	5.17.1, [3.23.5]
3.13	3.23.5, [5.19.1]
3.14	3.23.3, [1.30.8–9], [ <i>Epid.</i> 16]
3.15	4.40.3, 5.21.1, [2.20.3], [3.23.7]
3.17–19	3.23.3, 5.16.1, <i>Epid.</i> 15, <i>Epid.</i> 17, [3.22.4], [5.7.2]
3.21	3.23.5
3.20–23	[3.22.4], [3.23.6], [4.39.1], [ <i>Epid.</i> 16]

**Genesis 4**

4.1–2	<i>Epid.</i> 17, [1.30.8–9]
4.4	4.18.3
4.7	4.18.3, [3.23.4]
4.8	[ <i>Epid.</i> 17]
4.9	3.23.4
4.10	5.14.1
4.17–24	[ <i>Epid.</i> 17]
4.25	[ <i>Epid.</i> 17]

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<sup>2</sup> Usage here is via a summation of Valentinian allusion to Gen 2.7.

**Genesis 5**

5.24 [4.16.2], [5.5.1]

**Genesis 6–9**<sup>3</sup>6.1–4 [5.29.2], [*Epid.* 18]

6.5–9.1 [1.30.10]

6.8 [*Epid.* 19]

6.15 [1.18.4], [4.10.1]

6.18 [1.18.3]

7.23 5.29.2, *Epid.* 229.1–6 5.14.1, *Epid.* 229.14–15 *Epid.* 229.18–19 [*Epid.* 19]9.25 *Epid.* 209.26 *Epid.* 219.27 3.5.3, 5.34.2, *Epid.* 21, [4.10.1], [4.16.2], [*Epid.* 42]9.21–27 [*Epid.* 20]**Genesis 10**10.6–20 [*Epid.* 20]

10.24 [4.10.1]

**Genesis 11**11.1–9 [*Epid.* 23]11.10–26 [*Epid.* 21]11.28 [*Epid.* 23]

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<sup>3</sup> References to Genesis 6–9 are grouped together due to their pooling as a collective source from which Irenaeus draws his reflections on the history and person of Noah, which regularly allude to passages that span the chapter divisions of the text.



APPENDIX III

IRENÆUS' EMPLOYMENT OF THE TWO ACCOUNTS  
OF HUMANITY'S CREATION

Irenæus' unitary reading of the two creation accounts in Genesis is an integral aspect of his approach to the text. Nowhere does he acknowledge the existence of two unique or independent strands of history or interpretation present in Genesis 1–2, but throughout treats that which modern scholarship refers to as the 'two accounts' as a coherent whole. The manner of this approach has been treated in the text, but may be further evidenced by a comparison of his usage of the verses that form the two accounts, demonstrating the manner in which he connects passages from each account to texts in the other.

<b>'First creation account'</b> (Gen 1.26–28)		<b>'Second creation account'</b> (Gen 2.4–25)	
Genesis verse and references in the Irenæan corpus:	The same Irenæan text also makes reference to:	Genesis verse and references in the Irenæan corpus:	The same Irenæan text also makes reference to:
<b>Gen 1.26[-27]:</b>		<b>Gen 2.4–6:</b>	
1.24.1		3.21.10	Gen 2.7
3.18.1		3.22.4	Gen 1.28, 2.25
3.22.1	Gen 2.25	<i>Epid.</i> 32	Gen 1.26, 2.7
3.23.1	Gen 2.25	<b>Gen 2.7:</b>	
3.23.2	Gen 2.25	2.34.4	
4.praef.4		3.21.10	Gen 2.5
4.20.1	Gen 2.7	4.20.1	Gen 1.26
4.33.4		5.7.1	
5.1.3	Gen 2.7	5.15.2	Gen 1.26
5.2.1		<i>Epid.</i> 11	Gen 1.26
5.6.1		<i>Epid.</i> 32	Gen 1.26, 2.5
5.8.1		[1.5.5] <sup>1</sup>	
5.10.1		[5.1.3]	Gen 1.26
5.12.4		[5.3.2]	
5.15.4	Gen 2.7	[5.14.2]	

<sup>1</sup> Usage here is via a summation of Valentinian allusion to Gen 2.7.

Table (*cont.*)

<b>'First creation account'</b> (Gen 1.26–28)		<b>'Second creation account'</b> (Gen 2.4–25)	
Genesis verse and references in the Irenaeus corpus:	The same Irenaeus text also makes reference to:	Genesis verse and references in the Irenaeus corpus:	The same Irenaeus text also makes reference to:
5.16.1		[ <i>Epid.</i> 8]	
5.16.2		[ <i>Epid.</i> 14]	Gen 2.25
5.21.2		[ <i>Epid.</i> 15]	Gen 2.16–17
5.28.4		<b>Gen 2.8:</b>	
5.36.3		5.5.1	
<i>Epid.</i> 32	Gen 2.5, 7	[ <i>Epid.</i> 12]	
<i>Epid.</i> 55		<b>Gen 2.16–17:</b>	
<i>Epid.</i> 97		5.20.2	
[1.14.6]		5.23.1	
[1.18.2]		5.23.2	
[1.29.3]	Gen 2.16–17	<i>Epid.</i> 15	Gen 2.7
[4.14.1]		[1.29.3]	Gen 1.26
[4.37.4]		[5.20.2]	
[1.30.6]	Gen 2.20–25	<b>Gen 2.18–25:</b>	
[ <i>Epid.</i> 11]	Gen 2.7		
[ <i>Epid.</i> 5]		<i>Epid.</i> 13 (x5)	
<b>Gen 1.28:</b>			
4.11.1		<i>Epid.</i> 14	Gen 2.7
[3.22.4]	Gen 2.5, 20–25	3.23.5	Gen 1.26
		[1.30.7]	Gen 1.26
		[3.22.4]	Gen 1.26, 28; 2.5



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