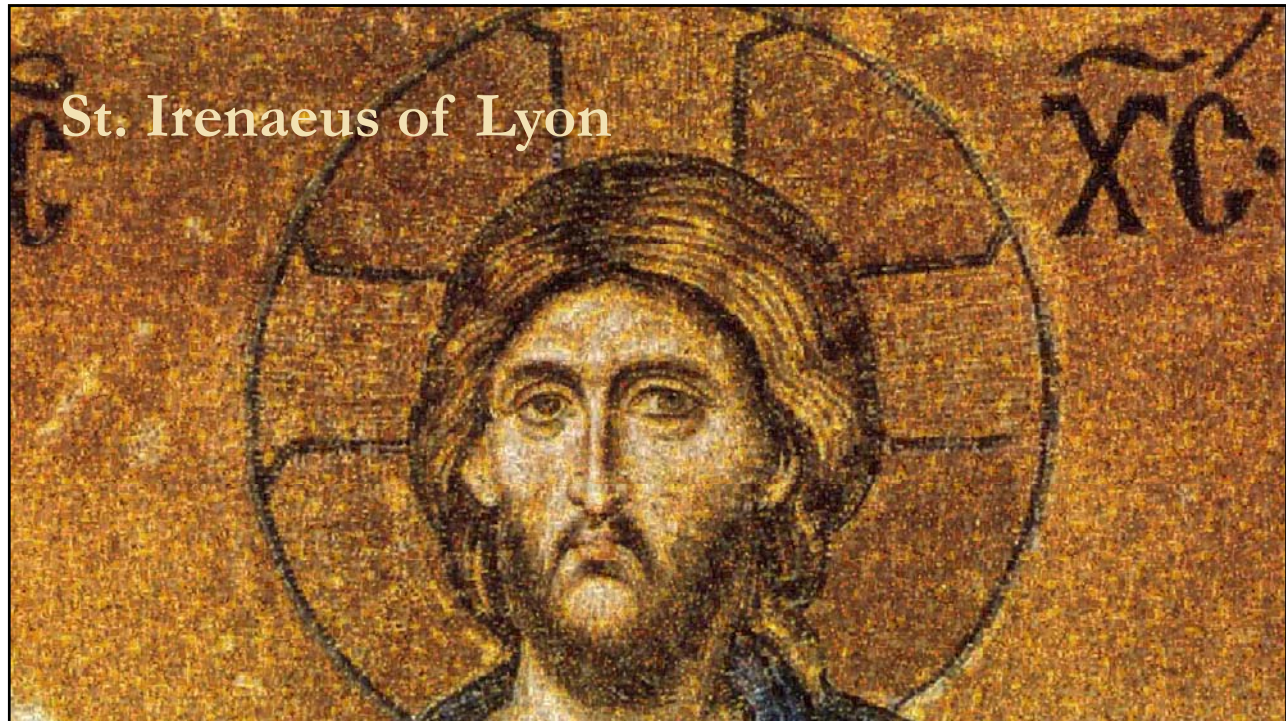




c. 130 – c. 202

Irenaeus tells us that in his early youth he had known Polycarp, who had himself known the apostles and been appointed by them as the bishop of the church in Smyrna.

“But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time,— a man who was of much greater weight, and a more steadfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics.”

(*Against Heresies*, III 3,4; and cf. Irenaeus’ *Letter to Florinus*, cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5:20:4-8).



**“Five Books on the Unmasking and Refutation of the
Falsely Names Gnosis”**

(= *Adversus Haereseis*, ‘Against Heresies,’ AH)

“The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching”

(= D)

“I call upon You, Lord, God of Abraham and God of Isaac and God of Jacob and Israel, You who are the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God who, through the abundance of your mercy, was well-pleased towards us so that we may know You, who made heaven and earth, who rules over all, You who are the one and the true God, above hom there is no other God; You who, by our Lord Jesus Christ gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit, give to every one who reads this writing to know You, that You alone are God, to be strengthened in You, and to avoid every heretical and godless and impious teaching.”

(AH 3:6:4)

1. The sign of the Son of Man

The thought of Irenaeus forms a great axis. Its first movement is steep and Godward. From the icy arrogance and worldly secrecies of Gnosticism, it flies straight to the saving heights of the ever greater God, whom no finite mind can grasp. The other movement is broad, slow, heavy, a line draw across the face of the earth. In contrast to the Gnostics' empty spiritualism and proud contempt for the body, he stubbornly refuses to let human beings cut ourselves off from the life of this world and escape into a pseudo-heavenly half-existence. Irenaeus is the outspoken champion of the 'realism' of Christian theology. If there is to be real redemption, this earth and no other, this body and no other, must have the capacity to take God's grace into itself.

(SI, 13).

Irenaeus, *Demonstration*, 34:

"By His obedience unto death on the Cross, He wiped out the ancient disobedience wrought on the tree. He is Himself the Word of almighty God, who in His invisible form pervades us all and encompasses the breadth and length, the height and depth, of the whole world, for by God's Word all things are guided and ordered. Now for God's Son was also crucified in them [the four dimensions], since He has imprinted the form of the Cross on the universe. In becoming visible, He had to reveal the participation of the universe in His Cross. He wanted to display, in visible form, His activity in the visible realm, namely, that it is He who makes bright the heights, that is, what is in heaven, and reaches down into the depths, to what is under the earth, and spreads out the length from East to West, and, like a pilot, guides the breadth from North to South, and calls together all the dispersed, from all the corners of the earth, to the knowledge of the Father."





He appeared as man in the fullness of time,
and, being God's Word, He summed up in
Himself all things in heaven and on earth.
He united man with God and brought
about communion between God and man.
(*Demonstration*, 30f).

For it was for this that the Word of God became man and the Son of God became the Son of Man, that man, commingled with the Word of God and receiving adoption, might become the son of God. (*Against Heresies*, III 19,1).

2. The True God and the False God

The Gnostic image of God was the first great temptation which Christian thought had to overcome. Pagan polytheism was relatively easy to deal with. But here was an enticing system claiming to incorporate Christianity into its 'synthesis.' Creation---the greatest intellectual scandal of all---was simply explained away by means of its doctrine of emanation. And its romantic mythology had a special magic. Human beings, longing for redemption, were entranced by this philosophical world of dreams and fairy tales. Irenaeus sets against this the humble and apparently unadorned image of God given in revelation. With the keenest perception, he sees the real motives behind the opposing system. (SI, 17)

Since we do not have enough time to penetrate the tangle of the different Gnostic systems, we will content ourselves with highlighting the main themes of the refutation.

The hallmarks of Irenaeus' doctrine of God are an unrelenting emphasis on God's freedom with regard to the world and a deep reverence for the unfathomable mystery of His being.



2.1 The Triune God of Revelation and Creation

For Irenaeus, we have no other access to the Trinity of God than salvation history, and every theology is well advised to avoid separating, even for a moment, its statements about the world-transcending 'immanent' Trinity from the 'economic' Trinity revealed in salvation history. Irenaeus' thought moves with perfect precision from the economic to the immanent Trinity, but without separating the two. The Son is said explicitly to be 'God,' and to get as far away as possible from the prying speculations of the Gnostics, Irenaeus plunges His eternal generation into such deep mystery that there is no chance at all of it appearing (as it might appear, for example, in Justin or Tertullian) as the first stage of the creation of the cosmos. He is God's Word, the Self-Expression of the Father.

The Holy Spirit, too, identified with the 'Wisdom' of God, appears as the constant companion of the Father and the Son, preceding all creatures.

In contrast to the Gnostic ‘emanations,’ which function as intermediaries between God and the world, Irenaeus, like the other early Fathers, asserts a clear concept of creation. Like St Paul and St John, he sees the creation taking place in the Logos, and the plan of creation is directed towards the summing up, in the fullness of time, of all things in the Son made man. That is why Irenaeus, without any subordination of them to the Father, describes the Son and the Spirit in terms of their function of making visible the invisible Father and indwelling creatures (he calls them the ‘hands of the Father’ at creation). Consider, for example, Irenaeus’ assertion that the Father is essentially invisible, and that the Son makes Him visible. The first proposition is just a Scriptural truth, while the second obviously refers to the Son as revealed in salvation history and finally made man (cf. III 11, 6).

Irenaeus’ seemingly one-sided emphasis on the ‘movement of descent’ (from Father to Son to Spirit) is counterbalanced by the view that the Spirit is not only the One who leads to the Son, as the Son leads to the Father, but also the Father’s highest chosen gift to believers, in whom alone we can see the Son. The Holy Spirit is, therefore, all that is innermost, all that is most intimate, in God. (See SI, 17-18)

Irenaeus, *Demonstration* 4-5, 7, 10, Excerpt:

“Creatures must have the origin of their existence from some great cause. Now the origin of all things is God. He was not created by anyone, but everything was created by Him. The first thing to believe, therefore, is that there is one God, the Father, who created and ordered all things, calling into existence what did not exist. He contains all things, yet cannot Himself be contained. Now ‘all things’ includes this world of ours, with man in it. So this world of ours too was created by God.

So, then, there is one God, the Father, uncreated, invisible, creator of all things. There is no other God above Him and no other God beneath Him. God is rational, and therefore produced creatures by His Reason---Word. God is also spirit, and so He ordered all things through the Spirit, as the prophet says: ‘By the word of the Lord the heavens were established, and all the power of them by His Spirit’ (Ps. 32:6).

The Word ‘establishes,’ that is, produces bodies and bestows permanence on what has come into existence, while the Spirit disposes and shapes the various ‘powers.’ The Word is, therefore, rightly called the Son, and the Spirit God’s Wisdom. His apostle Paul puts it well: ‘One God and Father of all, who is above all and with all and in all’ (cf. Eph. 4:6). The Father is ‘above all,’ but the Word is ‘with all,’ since it is through Him that everything was made by the Father. And ‘in us all’ is the Spirit, who cries ‘Abba, Father’ (cf. Gal. 4:6), and forms man into the likeness of God. The Spirit manifests the Word, and so the prophets proclaimed the Son of God. But the Word lets the Spirit blow, and so it is He who speaks in the prophets and leads men back to the Father...

Irenaeus, *Demonstration* 4-5, 7, 10, Excerpt (continued):

Our baptismal rebirth is accomplished through these articles: the Father grants us rebirth through His Son in the Holy Spirit. For those who have received the Spirit and bear Him within are led to the Word, that is to say, to the Son; and the Son presents them to the Father, and the Father makes them partakers of incorruptibility. Thus without the Spirit there is no seeing of the Word of God, and without the Son no one can approach the Father. For the Son is knowledge of the Father, and knowledge of the Son is through the Holy Spirit. But the Son, according to the Father's good pleasure, administers the Spirit, as the Father wills, to those to whom He wills.

The Father is called, in the Spirit, 'Most High' and 'Almighty' and 'Lord of Hosts,' from which we learn what God truly is: creator of heaven and earth and all worlds, the maker of angels and of men, the Lord of all, the origin and giver of all things, merciful, compassionate, full of tenderness, good, just, the God of all, of the Jews as well as of the Gentiles ... This God is glorified by His Word, who is His eternal Son, and by the Holy Spirit, who is the Wisdom of the Father of all. And their powers, the powers of the Word and of Wisdom, who are called Cherubim and Seraphim, also glorify God in songs of unceasing praise, and every creature in heaven gives glory to God, the Father of all."

3. Faith and Gnosis ('Knowledge')

If God is unbounded being, the world cannot be something that 'fell' from Him to be outside Him, as the Gnostics taught. And if He is the perfection of self-possessed freedom, the world cannot be a natural 'emanation' from His being. The Gnostics tried to explain the origin of the world, the origin of matter, in terms of transitions between the Groundless One and us. Christianity replaced this with the idea of the creature's direct relationship, stark yet serene, with the eternal God. We cannot distance ourselves from Him, nor can the existence of creation be 'derived' from anywhere or be explained as necessary.

Now if the world is in God, it is impossible for Him to be absolutely hidden from it. Creatureliness, by its very boundaries and limitedness, reveals the existence of Him who is Creator and Lord. But this 'knowledge' of His existence demands of the creature the fundamental act of faith, that is to say, a humble, trusting, free submission to the Lord who eludes every attempt at capture.

Gnosticism refuses to make this fundamental act. It wants to get to know all of God's mysteries by its own powers. However surprising it may seem, it does appeal to the Scriptures, and so it is forced to posit a secret tradition, coming down from Jesus and the apostles, alongside the official proclamation of God for the simple. However, the attempt to take hold of God by force inevitably falls into the 'void' (the supreme God is, of course, mere 'silence' beyond the Word of revelation), and so the struggle of the 'eternal quest' is prized more highly than the bliss of discovery.

Irenaeus shows the secret wisdom of his opponents to be nothing but arrogance and folly, and convicts it of contradiction. This contradiction, which makes Gnosticism the forerunner of later 'dialectical' thought, is resolved in Christianity in the fundamental relationship of analogy between God and the world. (Recall our lectures on the *analogia entis*!). The human being, composed of body and soul, is made in the 'image and likeness of God,' who towers above him in (greater) unlikeness" (See SI, 29-30).



3.1 The World is in God

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV 20.1:

"We were created along with those things contained by Him. It is He of whom Scripture says, 'And God formed man, taking the clay of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life' (cf. Gen. 2:7). It was not angels, then, who made or formed us. Angels could not make an image of God, nor could some 'power' remotely distant from the Father of all, nor could anyone except the true God. Nor did God need any of these to carry out what He had decided beforehand within Himself should be done. As if He did not have His hands! For the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, were always with Him. Through Them and in Them He freely and spontaneously created all things."

Also: "Creation shows its Creator, and what is made suggests its maker" (II 9, 1).

3.2 The arrogance of Gnosticism

“[The Gnostic] regards himself as greater and of higher authority than the prophetic spirit, though he is but man.” (*Against Heresies*, I 13, 4)

“They explain the birth of God’s Word, of Him who is Truth and Life, indeed Intellect; they act as midwife to the emanations from the Godhead” (*Against Heresies*, II 14, 8)

“We who still live on earth do not yet sit beside God’s throne... As long as we are on earth, as St Paul says, ‘we know in part and prophesy in part’ (cf 1 Cor. 13:9). If, then, we only know in part, we ought to leave difficult questions to Him who in part gives us His grace... In trying to investigate things which are above us and at present beyond our reach, we become so arrogant that we treat God like a book to be opened and act as if we had already found the unfindable. We talk stupidly about emanations and claim that God, the Maker of all things, derived His substance from ‘degeneration’ and ‘ignorance,’ thereby using a godless argument against God” (*Against Heresies*, II 28, 7).

3.3 The Humility of Faith and True Knowledge of God

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* II 25, 2-4:

“At this point someone may raise the objection: ‘Is it without reason and by chance that the imposition of names, the election of the apostles, the activity of the Lord, and the arrangement of created things are what they are?’

To this we say, ‘Certainly not! It is with great and delicate care that God confers proportion and harmony on what He has made; both the things of old and all that His Word has accomplished in the latest times.’ ...

Created things, in their great number and diversity, fit beautifully and harmoniously into the creation as a whole. And yet, when viewed individually, they appear discordant and opposed to each other, just as the sound of the lute makes a single harmonious melody out of many and opposite notes by means of the intervals between them. The lover of truth must not be deceived, therefore, by the interval between the different notes, nor imagine that this note was the work of one artist and author, and that note due to another, nor think that one person fitted the treble, another the bass, and yet another the tenor strings. He must not forget that one and the same Artist was responsible for the wisdom, justice, goodness, and munificence of the whole work. And those who listen to the melody ought to praise and glorify the Artist, and admire the tension of some notes, appreciate the relaxation in others, enjoy the moderation of those between the two extremes. Recalling that some things are symbols, they will consider what it is that each points to and what causes it. But they will never alter the rule, nor stray from the Artist, nor abandon faith in the one God who made all things, nor blaspheme our Creator.

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* II 25, 2-4 (continued):

“When someone fails to find the cause of all that he is investigating, he should recall that man is infinitely inferior to God... Man, you are not uncreated, and you have not existed from eternity with God, as His own Word has done. No, by His overflowing goodness you received the beginning of your existence, and have gradually learned from the Word the dispositions of the God who made you.

So keep your knowledge in its proper place. In ignorance of the good, do not try to rise above God Himself, for He cannot be surpassed. Do not look for anything above the Creator, for you will not find it; your Maker is without limits. And do not dream up some other Father above God, as if you had taken all His measurements, as if you had explored His entire creation, as if you had considered His whole depth and length and height [Think back to the opening quote!]. Your dreaming will come to nothing. Thinking against nature, you will become foolish. And if you persist, you will fall into insanity, regarding yourself as loftier and better than your own Creator, imagining that you can pass through and beyond the realms of God.”

3.4 God’s Incomprehensible Grandeur Known Because of His Love

“As regards His grandeur, He is unknown to all who have been made by Him, for no one has ever scaled the heights of God, neither the ancients nor the men of today. But as regards His love, He is evermore known through the One through whom He made all things. This is His Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, who in the last times became man among men, in order to join the end to the beginning, that is, man to God” (IV 20, 4).

“As regards His grandeur and indescribable glory, ‘no one shall see God and live’ (cf. Ex 33:20), for the Father is incomprehensible. But as regards His love and kindness towards men, and because He can do all things, He grants to those who love Him the privilege of seeing Him. The prophets foretold this, for ‘what is impossible to men is possible to God’ (Luke 18:27). Man by his own powers cannot see God, but if He so wills it, God can be seen by men: by whom He wills and when He wills and as He wills” (IV 20, 5).

“St Paul says that ... without love for God, there is no value in knowledge, nor in the understanding of mysteries, nor in faith, nor in prophecy. They are all hollow and vain without love. He says that it is love which makes man perfect, and that he who loves God is perfect in this world and in the world to come. We shall never cease to love God, but the more we behold him, the more we shall love Him” (IV 12, 2).

3.5 Ultimately, God can only be known through God

“No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known’ (John 1:18). From the beginning, the Son is the revealer of the Father, since from the beginning He is with the Father. At the fitting time, and for our profit, He has shown the human race, in a rational and harmonious way, the prophetic visions, the diversity of graces, His own ministrations, and the glorification of the Father. ... That is why the Word became the dispenser of the Father’s grace for the profit of men. It was for them that He accomplished such great dispositions, showing God to men, presenting man to God. ... He made God visible to men through many dispensations, lest man, wholly bereft of God, should cease to exist. For the glory of God is man fully alive, and the life of man is the vision of God” (*Against Heresies*, IV 20, 6-7).

“The Lord did not say that the Father and the Son could not be known at all, for in that case His coming would have been pointless. [‘No one knows the Son except the father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him’ (Matt 11:27)]. Why did He come here? To tell us: ‘Do not seek God, because He is unknowable, and you will never find Him?’ ... [That] is utter nonsense! What the Lord really taught is this: no one can know God unless God teaches him; in other words, without God, God cannot be known. What is more, it is the Father’s will that God be known.” (*Against Heresies*, IV 6, 4).

“Now it may be that the question will come into your mind: Did the Lord bring us anything new by His coming? The answer is this: He brought us all newness by bringing Himself ...” (*Against Heresies* IV 34, 1).

4. Salvation History

In God, the Son is the Word and Image of the Father, and thus the One who makes Him known. It will, therefore, also be the Word of God who shows the Father to the world---just as it is likewise He who shows the world to God---in nature, in grace, and finally by appearing in person Himself. So all that exists is God’s revelation, but that revelation is effected through God’s Word. To enable us to see and understand this divine revelation, God the Father in His grace gives us His Holy Spirit. In the course of history the revelations of the divine Word become increasingly clearer. They move, through the prophecies of the Old Testament, towards the central event, the Incarnation of the Word (See SI, 47).

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V 17, 1-3:

The [true] Creator is God. In His love He is Father, in His power He is Lord, in His Wisdom He is our maker and fashioner. By transgressing His commandment, we have become His enemies. And so in these last times the Lord has restores us to His friendship by His Incarnation. He became 'the mediator of God and men' (cf 1 Tim. 2:5), propitiating for us the Father against whom we had sinned, consoling Him for our disobedience by His obedience [on the Cross], granting us the grace of conversion and submission to our Creator. He therefore taught us to say in prayer: 'Forgive us our debts' (cf. Matt. 6:12). The very One against whom we had sinned in the beginning grants remission of sins in the end... How can sins truly be forgiven unless the One against whom we sinned is the very One who has granted forgiveness 'through the tender mercy of our God' (cf Luke 1:78), the mercy in which 'He has visited us' through His Son?

In forgiving sin, the Lord not only healed man, He also showed clearly who He was. If no one can forgive sins but God alone, and if the Lord did forgive them and did heal men, it is plain that He was Himself the Word of God made the Son of Man. Because He was both God and man, He received the power to forgive sins from the Father, so that, since as man He suffered with us, so as God He might take pity on us, and forgive us the debts we owe to God our Creator.

Trinitarian Ordering

"Where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and every grace, but the Spirit is truth" (*Against Heresies* III 24, 1).

"The Spirit prepares man for the Son of God, the Son leads him to the Father, while the Father confers on him incorruption and eternal life, which comes from the vision of God to those who enjoy it" (*Against Heresies* IV 20, 5).

"Through all these things God the Father is revealed. The Spirit is at work, the Son carries out His ministry, the Father approves, and man is perfected and brought to salvation" (*Against Heresies* IV 20, 6).



5. Incarnation as Recapitulation

The prophetic appearances of the Word pointed ahead to the one mystery: the union of God and man. All the threads in God's saving plan are here entwined. Now the 'wonderful exchange' (*admirabile commercium*) takes place: God becomes 'nothing,' so that the 'nothings' might become God. Irenaeus calls this wonderful thing 'recapitulation' (*anakephalaiosis*). What he means is this: the second Adam is the repetition, in divine truth, of the first Adam, the Adam who turned away from God. The second Adam repeats the whole natural development of man at the higher level of divine reality. Sinful, lost, and wandering man is not just put back on course by the companionship of love; more profoundly, he is taken into that love.

St Paul coined the word 'recapitulation' to express the meaning of the Incarnation: it was God's plan to 'bring everything together under Christ as Head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth' (Eph 1:10). As recapitulation (*ana-kephalaiosis*), Christ is the Head (*caput*, *kephale*) of the world.

In Him everything becomes clear and has meaning: the 'salvific order of sin,' which makes possible the revelation of God's superabundant mercy (Irenaeus here puts forward his boldest ideas); the self-abasement of Christ, by which He gets down to man and lifts him up to God; the reconciliation of the world and God, of nature and grace, which has its foundation in the one Incarnation.

This indestructible interweaving of things is the true touchstone of what is Catholic. The Gnostics tear Christ into two pieces; a mortal man and a spiritual being incapable of suffering; in so doing, they disown the heart of Christianity. Only when matter, Christ's very body, is safeguarded in God, is man redeemed. That is why Irenaeus regards the Eucharist as the pledge of redemption: here the fruit of the dark earth itself is transformed into grace.



5.1 The Exchange between God and Man

“The Son of God became the Son of Man, so that through Him we might receive adoption. This takes place when man receives and bears the Son of God” (*Against Heresies* III 16, 3).

“He became the Son of Man to accustom man to receive God and God to dwell in man” (*Against Heresies* III 20, 2).

“In His immeasurable love, He became what we are in order to make us what He is” (*Against Heresies* V, preface).

“It was man who was dragged by sin into slavery and held fast by death, and so it had to be a man by whom sin was slain, a man who went forth from death” (*Against Heresies*, III 18, 7).

5.2 Creation in Christ

Heaven and earth united in Christ:

“Into the paradise of life the Lord leads those who obey His preaching, ‘recapitulating all things in Himself, things in heaven and things on earth’ (cf. Eph 1:10). ‘Things in heaven’ are those which are spiritual, while the phrase ‘things on earth’ refers to that work of God which is man. Both these He has recapitulated in Himself, uniting man to the Spirit and making the Spirit to dwell in man. He became the head of the Spirit and gave the Spirit to be the head of man, for it is by the Spirit that we see and hear and speak” (*Against Heresies* V 20, 2).

Through the Incarnation the Image of God is shown forth:

“The truth of this was shown when the Word of God became man, assimilating Himself to man and man to Himself, so that, by His resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father. For in times past it was *said* that man was made in the image of God, but not *shown*, because the Word, in whose image man was made, was still invisible. That is why man lost the likeness so easily. But when the Word of God was made flesh, He confirmed both things: He showed the true image, when He Himself became what His image was; and He restored and made fast the likeness, making man like the invisible Father through the visible Word” (*Against Heresies* V 16, 2).

Brought back by persuasion, not violence

“Apostasy reigned over us unjustly, and, though by nature we belonged to almighty God, it alienated us against our nature, making us its own disciples. And so, in all things mighty, in His justice indefectible, the Word of God turned justly against this apostasy, redeeming from it His own property. He did not use violence, as the apostasy had done at the beginning when it usurped dominion over us, greedily snatching what was not its own. No, He used persuasion. It was fitting for God to use persuasion, not violence, to obtain what He wanted, so that justice should not be infringed and God’s ancient handiwork not be utterly destroyed” (*Against Heresies* V 1, 1).

Our Teacher had to become visible to us

“There was no other way by which we could learn the things of God than for our Teacher, who is the Word, to become man. No other could have revealed to us the secrets of the Father, none but the Father’s very own Word. ... Again, there was no other way for us to learn than to see our Teacher and hear His voice with our own ears. It is by becoming imitators of His actions and doers of His words that we have communion with Him. It is from Him who has been perfect from before all creation that we, so lately made, receive fulfillment” (*Against Heresies* V 1, 1).

Christ the Savior forms Adam with Himself in view

“He recapitulations in Himself all the nations dispersed since Adam, and all the languages and generations of men, including Adam himself. This is why St Paul calls Adam the ‘type of the one who was to come’ (cf Rom. 5:14), because the Word the maker of all things, did a preliminary sketch in Adam of what, in God’s plan, was to come to the human race through the Son of God. God arranged it so that the first man was animal in nature and saved by the spiritual Man. Since the Savior existed already, the one to be saved had to be brought into existence, so that the Savior should not be in vain” (*Against Heresies* III 22, 3).



5.3 The Meaning of Creatureliness

“This is what distinguishes God from man: God makes, man is made. The Maker is always the same, while what is made has to have a beginning, a middle, and a final state of maturity. God makes well, man is well made. God is perfect in everything, like and equal to Himself, wholly light, wholly mind, wholly substance, the fount of all good, whereas man receives increase and progress toward God. Just as God is always the same, so man in God always makes progress towards God. God never ceases to benefit and enrich man, and man never ceases to receive the benefit and enrichment from God” (*Against Heresies* IV 11, 2).

5.4 The Meaning of Sin

Think back to your Irenaeus reading earlier this semester!

“It is, therefore, totally unreasonable when people refuse to await the time of growth, and ascribe the frailty of their nature to God. They know neither God nor themselves. They are insatiable and ungrateful, unwilling to be at the outset what they were made to be, human beings subject to passions. Passing beyond the law of the human race, they want, before becoming men, to be like God the Creator and abolish the difference between uncreated God and recently made man. They are more stupid than dumb animals, for they [the dumb animals] after all do not reproach God for not having made them men, but each gives thanks for being made what it has been made. We, by contrast, blame God because He has not made us gods from the beginning, but first men and then gods later...

In His generosity, He has bestowed the good and made man in His likeness, endowed with free will. By His foreknowledge, He knew the frailty of man and what would result from it, but in His love and power, He will triumph over the substance of created nature. It was necessary that, first, nature appeared, then that the mortal was conquered and swallowed up by immortality, the corruptible by incorruptibility, and that man should be made in the image and likeness of God, having received the knowledge of good and evil” (*Against Heresies* IV 38, 4-5).

5.5 The Church and the Eucharist

“It is right that we should make an oblation to God, and in all things show our gratitude to God our Maker, with a pure intention and a faith free of hypocrisy, in firm hope and fervent love, offering the first-fruits of His creation.

Only the Church offers the Creator this pure oblation, offering Him, with thanksgiving, things that are part of His creation. ... How can [the heretics] say that the flesh [that is, our flesh], which is nourished with the Body and Blood of the Lord, falls into corruption and does not partake of life? They [these heretics] should either change their opinions or stop offering what we have just mentioned! Our view, however, is in harmony with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist confirms our view. For we offer Him His own, consistently proclaiming the communion and unity of flesh and Spirit. For just as the bread which comes from the earth, having received the invocation of God, is no longer ordinary bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly, so our bodies, having received the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, because they have the hope of the resurrection” (*Against Heresies* IV 18, 4-5).

6. Fulfillment in God

‘Recapitulation’ describes God’s objective plan of salvation: the maturing of the earthly world in the strength of a grace that descends from above. Now comes the question of man’s subjective fulfillment within this order of salvation. The Gnostics taught that human beings fall into two groups, the higher ‘spiritual’ and the lower ‘carnal’ or ‘animal,’ of which only the former can partake of true and complete redemption. Consistently with this, they also taught that the material and bodily elements in the spiritual man are just an inessential shell, which is incapable of entering into the pure spirit’s final state of perfection.

Irenaeus sees this as utterly anti-Christian. For him, the unity of body and soul is fundamental to the objective plan of salvation as revealed from above: as involving the unity of matter and spirit, law and love, nature and grace. So Gnostic ‘spirituality’ is replaced by the resurrection of the flesh as the ultimate affirmation of the complete and unabridged earthly world, the world of body as well as soul.

The indissoluble unity of body and soul is the sign that man is not a 'pure' anything. He is a creature, and so, in his innermost being, he is ordered, beyond himself, towards a Creator. This is expressed by the doctrine that man is made up essentially of three parts: body, soul, and spirit (*pneuma*). Spirit is the thing in man that is essentially more than man, something which does not 'rise from below' but 'comes down from above.' Like all the Fathers, Irenaeus is thinking of just the concrete (supernatural) order of the world; the call to grace and the life of grace belong to the concrete integrity of man. The doctrine of these three elements in man ('trichotomism') is, therefore, to be regarded as a first attempt, admittedly not a fully worked-out one, at understanding the relationship between nature and grace.

The same is true of the view, also held by other writers of the period, that the soul is only 'imperishable' by grace. Imperishability (*aphtharsia*) here means both natural immortality and engraced eternal glory; the two aspects have not yet been separated.

The background to this doctrine is a vivid idea of man's profound dependence on, and adherence to, God. He does not so much 'exist' as 'partake.' This leads to the idea of the creature's eternal becoming: even in heaven, in the vision of God face-to-face, there is a further, eternal movement into the ever new depths of the ever greater God. (See SI, 94-5).

6.1 Soul between body and Spirit

Trichotomism, that is, how our supernatural call fulfills what it means to be human

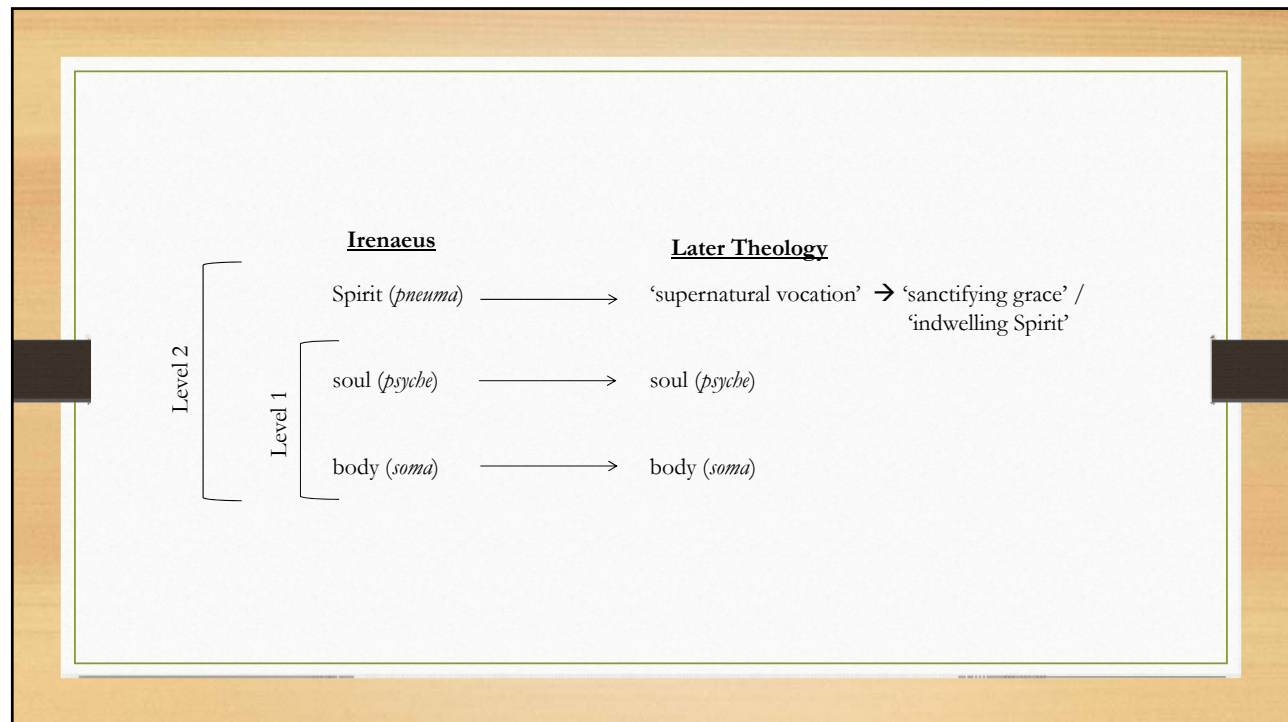
"The soul (*psyche*) and the spirit (*pneuma*) may be part of man, but they are certainly not the man. The complete man is a mixture and a union: the soul, which has received the Spirit of the Father, mixed with the flesh fashioned in the image of God....

[1] If you take away the substance of the flesh, in other words, the shaped clay, and consider just the naked spirit, what you are left with is not 'the spiritual man,' but merely 'the spirit of man' or 'the Spirit of God.' However, when this Spirit is blended with the soul and united to the shaped clay, the result, thanks to the outpouring of the Spirit, is a spiritual and complete man, and it is this, the complete man, who is made in the image and likeness of God.

[2] When the Spirit is missing from the soul, you have a being which, though truly animal and carnal, is incomplete. It may have the 'image' in the shaped clay, but it lacks the 'likeness' given by the Spirit. ...

[3] Thus the apostle, in his first letter to the Thessalonians, explains that the redeemed man is the complete and spiritual man: 'May the God of peace sanctify you completely, and may your whole being, spirit and soul and body, be kept blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thess. 5:23).

(Against Heresies V 9, 1).



6.2 The Christian Life

At the present we receive a part of His Spirit to perfect us and to prepare us for incorruptibility. In this way we become gradually accustomed to receiving and bearing God. The apostle calls this gift a 'pledge' (cf Eph 1:14), in other words, a part of the honour promised us by God ... This 'pledge' here and now dwells in us and makes us spiritual. The mortal is swallowed up by immortality (cf 2 Cor 5:4), for 'you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you' (Rom. 8:9). What is more, this is achieved not by casting off the flesh, but by communion with the Spirit; after all, the people to whom St Paul was writing were not fleshless beings, but simply those who had received the Spirit of God, in whom we cry 'Abba, Father' (cf Rom. 8:15). Therefore, if, even now, we have the 'pledge' and cry 'Abba, Father,' how wonderful it will be when we rise again and behold Him face to face, when all the members burst forth into a hymn of exultation, glorifying Him who raised them from the dead and gave them eternal life! If the simple pledge, wrapping itself round man, makes him cry 'Abba, Father,' what will be achieved by the complete grace of the Spirit when it is given by God to men? It will make us like Him and accomplish the will of the Father, because it will make man after the image and likeness of God.

6.3 The Fulfillment of God in the Vision of God

Just as those who see the light are in the light and share in its brightness, so those who see God are in God and receive His splendour. Now the splendour of God gives life; those who see God, therefore, receive life. That is why He who is uncontainable and incomprehensible and invisible presented Himself to be seen and comprehended and contained by men. He wanted to give life to those who receive and see Him. For just as His greatness is beyond measure, so His goodness is beyond expression. By that

goodness, having been seen, he bestows life on those who see Him. It is impossible to live without life, and there is only life by participation in God. But to participate in God is to know God and to enjoy His goodness. Men will, therefore, see God that they may live, and by the vision they will be made immortal and attain God. (*Against Heresies* IV 120, 5-6).



“Man is in as much need of communion with God as God is in need of nothing. For this is the glory of man: to persevere and remain in the service of God” (IV 14, 1).

“Men will, therefore, see God that they may live, and by the vision they will be made immortal and attain God” (IV 120, 5-6).