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# Irenaeus Of Lyons: A Defense of Recapitulation

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George Fox University

**Irenaeus Of Lyons: A Defense of Recapitulation**

A Thesis Submitted to  
The Faculty of George Fox Evangelical Seminary  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in Divinity

by

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*Abstract*

This work sets out to explain the atonement theory of Irenaeus of Lyons. Irenaeus' atonement theology is often described simply as "Christus Victor" but I argue that is simply a narrow sliver of the wider atonement theory of recapitulation. In this thesis I systematically try to expound what it is Irenaeus believed and why he believed it. In the first chapter I explain the problem at hand and a short biography of the bishop. In the second chapter I seek to summarize the Gnostic school of Valentinianism, which is the key opponent against Irenaeus writes in his best-known work "Against Heresies." In the third chapter I expound on Irenaeus' hamartiology. In the fourth chapter Irenaeus' theory of recapitulation is covered, looking at his understanding of the role of Christ, of Mary, and Christ's defeat of Satan. In the fifth chapter Irenaeus' understanding of deification is broken down. Finally in the sixth chapter we look at the role of the church in Irenaeus' soteriology.

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## Introduction

*“Some Eastern Orthodox theologians aver that all of theology is but a series of footnotes on Irenaeus.”<sup>1</sup>*

In my years of professional ministry and academic study I have become captivated by atonement models and the impact they have on the whole of a person’s theology. The way a theologian or pastor understands the atonement effects nearly every other belief held by that person and profoundly shapes his or her ministry. Growing up in the Christian West it would be easy to assume that there is only one model of the atonement that has any merit or offers any sort of biblical explanation of Jesus’ role in salvation, that of penal substitutionary atonement. While this model is not inherently wrong, I have been struck by the diversity and nuance of other historical models of the atonement. I have become fascinated by Irenaeus of Lyons’ understandings of who Christ was and how we are saved. His is a robust model with much to say to the Western world, a model that has, in many ways, been lost to time. I write this thesis on Irenaeus in the hope that his understandings of Jesus will breathe fresh life into Western Christian theology in general and evangelicalism in particular.

There is a surprising amount of disagreement of when or where exactly Irenaeus of Lyons was born; however, the majority of opinions place his birth near Smyrna in or around the year 130 CE.<sup>23</sup> There is not an enormous amount of detail surround his early

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<sup>1</sup> Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology : Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Press, 1999), 69.

<sup>2</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3 rev. ed. s.v. “Ireneus, St.”

<sup>3</sup> A Quick search through the Oxford Reference library reveals the days 130-202, 130-200, and 140-200. This is all only within articles published by Oxford University Press and demonstrates how unclear scholars are about when exactly he was born.

life, but we know, according to Irenaeus himself, that he had heard the Bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp, teach when he was younger.<sup>4</sup> As he grew up it seems that Irenaeus became known for his wisdom and understanding of theology. He then went to Rome to study and at some point was sent from Rome to Lyons in Gaul (modern day France) to help Christian immigrants from Asia Minor better settle in the region. While in Lyons he became a presbyter. On a journey back to Rome to deliver a letter to the bishop there, a persecution erupted at the orders of Marcus Aurelius and many Christians in Lyons were killed including Bishop Pothinus. When he returned from his travels Irenaeus was elected the next Bishop of Lyons and remained in that post the rest of his life.<sup>5</sup> While serving as bishop, Irenaeus became aware of a growing sect of Valentinian Gnostics within his See. He felt it his job as bishop to dispel this heretical sect and refute their claims. This was the impetus for his writing “Against Heresies” and “Proof of the Apostolic Preaching.” Irenaeus lived his life as a champion of orthodoxy, and, though he set out to refute heresy, much of what we consider orthodox today is reflected in his writing. He gives us the earliest theory of the atonement, a robust understanding of early Mariology, early understandings of papal authority, and a consummate ecclesiology that laid the groundwork for Christian theology, especially in the East, for millennia to come.

While Irenaeus’ influence is far reaching, or perhaps because of it, there seems to be great amounts of confusion, and oversimplification, on what it is that he believed and how he arrived at his theology. One writer declares that Irenaeus’ “theory states that the atonement of Christ has reversed the course of mankind from disobedience to obedience.

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<sup>4</sup> Unger Dominic J. Dillon John J. Irenaeus, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons against the Heresies* (New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1992), III.3.4.

<sup>5</sup> E. Caesarea and W. North, *The History of the Church* (Wyatt North Publishing, LLC, 2014), V.4-5.

It believes that Christ's life recapitulated all the stages of human life and in doing so reversed the course of disobedience initiated by Adam. This theory cannot be supported scripturally."<sup>6</sup> What the writer misses is the vast amounts of scriptural support within Irenaeus' theories. The very word 'recapitulation' comes from the Latin translation of the Greek text and Irenaeus sees himself as a defender (and in actuality a founder) of biblical orthodoxy. Still others readily acknowledge his biblical foundations but miss out on aspects of his theology that round him out. "While the incarnation does have a significance in atonement for me, it is not the only aspect of Christ that touches the subject of atonement. The Cross and The Resurrection being significant as well. [Recapitulation] also does not deal with the relationship aspects of God and man – namely sin has to be dealt with not only in humanity but previous sins as well."<sup>7</sup> Mr. Raby has a Masters of Arts in Theological Studies and writes extensively about theology on his blog. His view highlights many of the predominant understandings in both the academy and with the laity in terms of Irenaeus. Raby rightfully recognizes that recapitulation places immense emphasis on the importance of the incarnation; however, to say that Irenaeus then does not expound on the significance of the Cross and the universality of the atonement is to miss large swaths of his writing.

Beyond this there is a great scholarly oversimplification of Irenaeus' theology. Gustaf Aulén wrote *Christus Victor* in 1930. In the work he described the three main atonement theories throughout the centuries: the 'scholastic' view, also known as Satisfaction theory, exemplified by Anselm of Canterbury; the 'idealistic' view, also

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<sup>6</sup> "What Are the Various Theories on the Atonement?", Gotquestions.org <http://www.gotquestions.org/atonement-theories.html#ixzz3S7PIGBji> (accessed February 18 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Edward W. Raby, *Theology for Dummies – Recapitulation Theory of Atonement* <https://edraby.wordpress.com/2013/04/06/theology-for-dummies-recapitulation-theory-of-atonement/> (accessed February 18 2015).

known as Moral Exemplar, exemplified by Peter Abelard; and what he referred to as the ‘classic’ view, exemplified by the Patristic writers in the second and third centuries, which he describes as, “the idea of the Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ - Christus Victor - fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the ‘tyrants’ under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself.”<sup>8</sup> Aulén writes at length on Irenaeus in particular and draws out the theme of Christus Victor through Irenaeus’ writings. He does this first by showing the lack of the other two themes within his work. “The thought of the victory of Christ over the Devil occurs very frequently in Irenaeus.”<sup>9</sup> My objection to this does not lie with Aulén, however. Rather, it is the resulting incomplete interpretations of his work that I take issue with. In my experience within evangelicalism, and especially within the Parachurch world of Young Life Atonement has been narrowed from how Christ saves us to how Christ’s *death on the Cross* saves us. While Irenaeus views the cross as essential, it is not the central point of his atonement model. After Aulén published Christus Victor Irenaeus was linked to the theory, and it was understood to be the only understanding of Patristic thought and then narrowed to reflect only the cross, and not the robustness that Aulén expresses. This is not the case, especially for Irenaeus, and it is essential to demonstrate that Irenaeus held to a more robust theory than the version of Christus Victor that evangelicalism espouses.

It is my objective in this thesis to demonstrate clearly the comprehensiveness of Irenaeus’ theology and to show how robust it is. I will first show what he was writing against, the teachings of second century Valentinian Gnosticism. Irenaeus, like many if

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<sup>8</sup> Gustaf Aulen and A. G. Hebert, *Christus Victor* (London; New York and Toronto: Society for promoting Christian knowledge; Macmillan Co., 1931), 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

not all of the Patristic writers, wrote primarily *against* others. As such, we see less of why he believes what he does and more of why the beliefs held by someone else are wrong. Of course, if we are able to understand more clearly what he was writing against it becomes easier to see what it is that he himself believed. Secondly, after showing briefly what was it that Valentinian Gnostics believed, I will summarize Irenaeus' key beliefs in regards to the atonement. Unlike the incompleteness suggested by Raby, Irenaeus offers a fairly comprehensive theology of the atonement that explains far more than just what was happening on the cross. His theology accounts for personal and systemic sin as well as the role of the believer and the Church in individual and global reconciliation. It is in hopes of demonstrating the cohesiveness of Irenaeus' thought that the bishop's influence will once again make its way back into the world of Western Christianity, in hopes that it will push the church in the West to acknowledge more and diverse atonement theologies as we relate the gospel to the world at large.

## Chapter 1 - The Historical Backdrop: Valentinian Gnosticism

When seeking to understand Irenaeus' hamartiology and soteriology one must first understand competing theological lenses of his era. Failing to grasp where his theories are more rebuttals to 'false doctrine' and less fervently held beliefs could severely weaken an ability to understand his theology. When looking at Irenaeus' writings and the theological world in which he lived, it becomes clear that the bishop's main theological adversaries were the Valentinians. The Valentinians were a gnostic sect that flourished across the Roman Empire in the mid- to late-second century. Their founder, Valentinus, arrived in Rome at some point in the 130s.<sup>10</sup> It seems he was an active member of the Christian community there and quickly grew in popularity. Early on he caught the attention of Justin Martyr, who felt that Valentinus' theology was heretical and began a campaign to silence his teachings; however, we have no record of the church leadership at the time either calling on Justin to combat the teachings nor the church dividing over them.<sup>11</sup> Irenaeus tells us that Polycarp traveled to Rome and worked to root out heresy in the city, perhaps hinting that the Roman leaders did not see these teachings as heretical as others in the church at large did.<sup>12</sup> Tertullian implies that Valentinus himself was not a heretic. However it seems that Valentinus later became associated with a more heretical form of Valentinianism during Tertullian's lifetime.<sup>13</sup> Tertullian himself seems to change his position on whether or not Valentinus was a heretic several times, which reveals, at the very least, that he was unsure of the truth. Scholars today believe

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<sup>10</sup> Caesarea and North, V.4-5.

<sup>11</sup> Einar Thomassen, "Orthodoxy and Heresy in Second-Century Rome," *The Harvard Theological Review* 97, no. 3 (2004): 241.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>13</sup> Irenaeus, III.3.4. 305-311.

that Valentinus himself was not excommunicated, but, like Marcion left the orthodox catholic church on his own accord and that the full-fledged heresies we link to him today were only attributed later.<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to discern what beliefs the Valentinians held, since most of their writings were lost to time and the majority of what we have left is found within the works of those writing against them. However, we do have fairly complete copies of ‘The Gospel of Truth’ or *Evangelium Veritas*, which Irenaeus tells us Valentinians held to be the fifth Gospel.<sup>15</sup>

Using “The Gospel of Truth” and “Against Heresies,” we are able to gather a clearer understanding of what Valentinianism entailed. Valentinians, like most Gnostics, believed that the God of the Old Testament, Jehovah, was a demiurge and a lesser God, far below the unknowable God revealed through Sophia.<sup>16</sup> Jehovah created matter against the wishes of Sophia, and did not fully know the truth. It is because of his lack of knowledge that, while the world has some amount of beauty, it only contains traces of truth.<sup>17</sup> Further Valentinians believed the *monogenes*, or only-begotten, became incarnate to reveal the undistorted truth to humanity. Thomassen explains, “[Jehovah] grew angry with [Jesus], persecuted him, brought him to bay: so Jesus was nailed to the cross and thus became a fruit of the Gnosis of the Father. The fruit of this true tree of Gnosis, however, did not kill, like the fruit of the tree of knowledge in Paradise, but became cause of joy (Gospel of Truth 18,22-31).” Like nearly all the Gnostic sects, Valentinianism strove to exist solely in spiritual reality.<sup>18</sup> This had many ramifications in

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<sup>14</sup> Christoph Marksches, *Valentinus Gnosticus?: Untersuchungen Zur Valentinianischen Gnosis Mit Einem Kommentar Zu Den Fragmenten Valentins* (Mohr Siebrek Ek, 1992). 245.

<sup>15</sup> Thomassen, “Orthodoxy and Heresy in Second-Century Rome.” III.11.9

<sup>16</sup> Irenaeus. I.2.2

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., I.2.1.

<sup>18</sup> Quispel, “The Original Doctrine of Valentinus the Gnostic,” 331.

the lives of their followers. Valentinians were allowed to marry because it was seen as participating in the marriages of the Aeons. “Couples of man and wife ...[are] a symbol of the sacred marriage of the Aeons and for that reason they are all in favour of marriage.”<sup>19</sup> However, according to Irenaeus, sexual desire was a result of a lack of knowledge if it was motivated by a physical experience. Quispel quotes the Valentinian understanding in “The Gospel of Truth” “Whosoever being of this world has intercourse with woman, shall not attain to the truth, because he has so acted under the power of concupiscence.”<sup>20</sup> However, when understood as a spiritual metaphor, and motivated by seeking to understand that metaphor, it was viewed favorably. In “Against Heresies” Irenaeus writes, “You must realise that nothing is more certain and obvious than this truth that God the Lord of all that lives has devised to grant this mystery of everlasting procreation to all things.... Everybody can know from his own experience what I mean when he consults his own feelings and takes note of the sexual intercourse, which is a symbol of this mystery.”<sup>21</sup> This understanding that the unity of the genders results in a clearer understanding of the Aeons (eternal beings that served both as the pantheon of Gods and demigods within much of Gnostic thought) means that Valentinus was remarkably egalitarian. He believed that marriage “symbolizes the wholeness and fullness of the aeons, couples of males and females, separate but equal, compensatory of each other. This means that a Valentinian woman should not be subjected to her husband, but equal with him and on the same footing. Together they reflect divine androgyny.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> James M. Smith Richard Coptic Gnostic Library Project Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

<sup>20</sup> Gilles Quispel, “The Original Doctrine of Valentinus the Gnostic,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 50, no. 4 (1996): 334.

<sup>21</sup> Irenaeus, I.6.4.

<sup>22</sup> Quispel, “The Original Doctrine of Valentinus the Gnostic,” 336.

This was, even by the time of its writing, a fairly contrary idea within the orthodox Church. Whereas orthodoxy condoned marriage for necessary procreation, Valentinianism reveled in the spiritual insights gained from sex.

Scholars are unsure what Valentinus and early Valentinians believed about bodily resurrection, as nothing can be found in the remaining works. However, later Valentinianism seems to have affirmed a form of resurrection. The fourth-century ‘Treatise on the Resurrection,’ also known as ‘The Epistle to Rheginus,’ states, “If it is true that once thou wert not in the flesh, but only took flesh at the moment when thou didst come into this world, wherefore should thou not also take on flesh when thou goest up to the spiritual world?”<sup>23</sup>

Irenaeus sought to sum up Valentinian beliefs in book 1 of “Against Heresies.” Irenaeus explained that a Valentinian held to several core staples. They believe that the spiritual world existed before the creation of the world. This spirit world was comprised of thirty Aeons (Ages/Eternities). The lead Aeon was called the “First Beginning” or “First Father” who was known as the Proache or Propator. Alongside the Proache were many Aeons of importance, but the one that was central to Valentinians was “the Mind” who was “similar and equal” to the First Father and is known by the creation as the “Only begotten,” or the Monogenes the “Father,” and the “Beginning of all things.” The Only Begotten sent “the Word” and “the Life” into the creation and created everything that exists through them. When “the Life” and “the Word” came together they made humanity and “the Church.”

The thirty Aeons were only know to the leaders of the Valentinians and were divided into three groups, a group of eight, a group of ten, and a group of twelve. This is

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 335.

why they believe that Jesus, who they call Savior, but not Lord, did no ministry for his first thirty years, in order to reveal the existence of the thirty Aeons. Jesus, they say, also spoke of this in the parable of the thirty laborers who the master hired to work his fields. They were hired during the first, third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hours of the day, which again, adds up to thirty. According to Irenaeus the Valentinians draw many conclusions using similar treatments of scripture throughout the gospels.<sup>24</sup>

Irenaeus claims that only the Monogenes knew of the Propator, and only Monogenes was able to contemplate the Propator. The Propator was immeasurably great, without beginning, and incomprehensible and the Monogenes sought to make him known to the rest of the Aeons. But before he was able to do so, Sophia broke from Theletos and wanted to understand the Father on her own, aside from the help of Monogenes. Because of Propator's absolute incomprehensibility aside from the aid of Monogenes, Sophia fell and had to be caught by Horos (Mountain). When she fell she produced the material world. Thus, the material world is broken and separated from the Aeons. The Aeons, however, purified Sophia with Horos, who was made up of Stauros (Cross), Lytrotos (Sullutrotos: the Co-Redeemer), Carpistes (Siezer), Horothetes (Boundary-maker), and Metagoges (Conveyor). While Sophia was restored back to her previous standing among the Aeons, the other Aeons separated her from her enthymesis (or inborn idea) by the Horos and this kept her from her passion that had led her astray in the created matter and not in the Pleroma amongst the Aeons. According to the Valentinians this enthymesis is what Christians would call Jehovah, claiming that Jehovah/Yahweh is the inborn idea and desire of Sophia that was removed from her and left with the fallen matter. This enthymesis informed this newly created material world giving humanity its desire for the

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<sup>24</sup> M.L. Peel, "The Epistle to Rheginus, 1969," p. 47,2-8, Nag Hammadi Codices.

Propator, but because of the brokenness of the matter itself, this desire is warped and can only be fixed through the restored Sophia. To prevent any more of the Aeons from falling, Propator asked Monogenes to create Christ and the Holy Spirit in order to fortify the Pleroma and to complete the incomplete Aeons. Christ taught the Aeons to understand their natures and how to seek the Propator with his help, by looking to the Monogenes. The Holy Spirit taught the Aeons to be equal and so they came together. This created male and female Aeons. The male Aeons were Nous (Monogenes), Logos, Anthropos, and Christus; while the female Aeons were Aletheia, Zoe, Spiritus, and Ecclesia. Seeing these were perfectly made, the Propator brought all together into harmony to create Jesus who can be known by any of the previous names. In short, he could be called Mind, Word, Humanity, Christ, Truth, Life, Spirit, and Church, leaving only two aeons, the one before all, the Propator, and Jesus. The angels were then created to be Jesus' bodyguards because he would enter into the fallen material world.

These truths were revealed through the Scriptures and through Jesus' parables, not to all, being that they are incomprehensible to many, but only to those able to understand them, namely Valentinus and his followers. The Valentinians believe that their complete knowledge of Jesus, the full gnosis, will allow them to attain a perfect knowledge of God, freeing them from the fallen creation. Because their salvation relies entirely on knowledge, there is no place for good works for a faithful Valentinian. Irenaeus writes: "They hold that they shall be entirely and undoubtedly saved, not by means of conduct, but because they are spiritual by nature. For, just as it is impossible that material substance should partake of salvation (since, indeed, they maintain that it is incapable of receiving it), so again it is impossible that spiritual substance (by which they mean

themselves) should ever come under the power of corruption, whatever the sort of actions in which they indulged.”<sup>25</sup>

Understanding what the Valentinians believed informs our understanding of Irenaeus’ hamartiology and soteriology. It is clear that he arrived at a substantial part of his beliefs through the rejection of Gnosticism. Recognizing the bishop’s massive impact on early Christian thought and his continuing impact on Eastern Orthodoxy it becomes apparent that learning about Valentinian Gnosticism is profoundly helpful for understanding how the Church worked out its beliefs. While we may never know exactly what it was Valentinus himself believed, we do have a grasp of the later incarnations and resulting belief system. In the next chapter we will look at the resulting hamartiology that Irenaeus held and how it refuted the Valentinians.

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<sup>25</sup> Irenaeus, I.1.1-3.

## Chapter 2 - Irenaean Hamartiology

To understand Irenaeus' theory of the atonement, which scholars have called Recapitulation, one must first grasp his view of sin and the fall. While later understandings of the fall, such as those held by Augustine, have often seen the root of sin to lie in pride and thus that human pride was to blame for the fall of creation, or in the case of Luther, disbelief, Irenaeus saw things differently. Irenaeus read the fall narrative as a story rooted in impatience or immaturity. This forces a necessary shift from one paradigm to another. It is important to remember that Irenaeus predates Augustine by nearly two centuries; the view of pride-based sin does not become the norm until long after Irenaeus. So it would be best going forward to acknowledge that rooting sin in impatience is not wrong, it is just a different way of looking at things.

One of the most challenging realities when trying to systematize Irenaeus is that it is difficult to work out what provides the foundation of his theological worldview. It is hard to say whether he held recapitulation as the foundation of his beliefs and whether it helped him to understand sin the way he did, or if he thought sin where the foundation and that belief informs his understandings of the atonement. Regardless of that the one clear foundation in Irenaeus is his belief that the story of Adam and Eve directly parallels the story of Jesus. This becomes immediately clear as take a more in-depth look at his understanding of sin.

Just as Jesus was born as a baby in Bethlehem and did not simply appear as a full-grown man in Nazareth, Irenaeus starts from the presupposition that Adam and Eve were created as infants. Irenaeus does not mean this statement in the spiritual sense in the way that Paul (1 Cor. 3:1) or Peter (1 Pet. 2:2) refer to the infancy of new believers, regardless

of their age; he quite literally means that they were created as children and were set to grow up into adulthood.<sup>26</sup> Now, because they were infants, Adam and Eve first had to mature before they would be able to grasp their full humanity, their full perfection.

Irenaeus wrote, “God had power at the beginning to grant perfection to man; but as the latter was only recently created, he could not possibly have received it, or even if he had received it, could he have contained it, or containing it, could he have retained it.”<sup>27</sup> For Irenaeus, Adam and Eve were created incomplete because they would be unable to bear their completion as infants. Rather, God created them in order that they might mature.

By their continuing in being throughout a long course of ages, they shall receive a faculty of the Uncreated through the gratuitous bestowal of eternal existence upon them by God. . . . Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord.<sup>28</sup>

For Irenaeus, Adam and Eve were created to live and grow in the garden becoming more and more human. It is not that they were not truly ‘good’ in the beginning; rather it was that they were not yet strong enough to wield the power that was inherently a part of mature humanity. This would only come in time. For Adam and Eve, before they could obtain this fullness, this perfection, they had to live, grow, mature, and become more complete in a way that would leave them capable of receiving their full potential. Once their maturation had been completed, then and only then would they be given access to both the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. As Jeff Vogel states,

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<sup>26</sup> Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 12.

<sup>27</sup> Irenaeus, I.6.2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.38.2.

According to Irenaeus the fall is a mistake about means more than ends. Though God has always intended to give human beings a share in divine nature, it is necessary for them to become accustomed to bearing it over time. Instead they forfeit this opportunity by trying to become gods too quickly. They try to take what can only be given, to grasp what can only be graciously bestowed on them. ... In other words in their effort to take the divine life early, human beings render themselves unfit for participation in it, because the divine life is essentially only receivable. It proves elusive to all clutching, clinging, and clasping.<sup>29</sup>

It is in this way that sin is viewed as impatience rather than pride. It should be noted that from this perspective, it seems death did not enter during the fall, but rather was given a foothold in creation by Adam and Eve's impatience and by the two giving up their ability to obtain immortality. Because Adam and Eve were unwilling to wait to be gifted their share in the divine nature, they hastily took it for themselves. This is not pride in its purest form; it is impatience, though certainly pride can find its root in that. For pride is falsely looking at yourself as greater than you are, and yet, if one was willing to wait to their full maturity they would, in turn, be as great then as they think they are now. Their impatience has actually caused them to lose the potential to be as great as they could be. When sin is viewed as a loss of potential the fall takes on a new meaning. Rather than the fall resulting in the total depravity of humanity, Irenaeus explains that the fall resulted in "humanity losing that which it did not in actuality possess."<sup>30</sup> In other words, the fall is caused by humanity giving up their fullness in hopes of obtaining something sooner. It was a loss of the ability to live into the fullness and eternity of God, leaving humanity unable to recover that lost potential on their own. This was a result of Adam and Eve's impatience and unwillingness to wait on God's timing and it left humanity incomplete or unfinished. This means that while humanity was created good, it was not created

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., IV.38.3.

<sup>30</sup> Jeff Vogel, "The Haste of Sin, the Slowness of Salvation : An Interpretation of Irenaeus on the Fall and Redemption," *Anglican theological review* 89, no. 3 (2007): 443. 168.

complete. Rather, humanity was like a seedling, not yet fulfilling its telos of being a tree. It is not that there was anything broken in humanity, just as there is nothing broken in a seedling. Rather, given time and the right conditions that seedling will become a tree, and it will become what it was created to be. This also provides Irenaeus' answer to the age-old question, "What came first, the chicken or the egg?" Irenaeus could quickly answer, "the egg," which, given time will be a chicken, just as Adam and Eve, born as infants, given enough time would become fully human, or rather, the humans they were created to be. Adam, being the seed of all, left this mark of incompleteness on every human that came after him.

This could be understood differently if we think of how 3D printing works today. Now, a 3D print starts with a model in a computer. This model may not exist in any way in the physical world, but it is finished in the computer. Now, if I pressed 'print' on the 3D printing program and took the model out of the printer before the job was complete the incomplete model may resemble what it was going to be enough that a second person could come along, assume it was finished, scan it into the 3D printing software and press 'print.' This would then replicate an incomplete model. For Irenaeus the only way for humanity to be restored to their original potential was for Christ to be exactly like Adam in every way. Or, to go back to our model analogy, to run the original program to completion and then scan the final product into the second computer to print from it.

But again, think of this in comparison to the gnostic beliefs, "The Gnostics crave instant spiritual perfection;... therefore they are "unwilling to be at the outset what they have also been created—men subject to passions... before that they become men, they wish to be even now like God." In contrast, God has created us to be "at first merely men,

then at length gods.”<sup>31</sup> It is again clear that much of Irenaeus’ theology found its shape in a rebuttal against gnostic belief. Irenaeus seemingly came to know what it is he believed more concretely by hearing someone attest to something and then realizing the faith passed down to him seemed to assert the opposite. It is not that he was unaware of his beliefs prior to these erroneous statements, but that, having heard an incorrect claim, was better able to articulate the correct counterpoint. Irenaeus and many of the other Patristic writers seem to have embraced the French saying, “*prêcher le faux pour savoir le vrai*” (preach the falsehood to know the truth) before it was coined. Or, similarly, they seem to have been the accidental forbearers to Cunningham’s Law, “The best way to get the right answer on the Internet is not to ask a question, but to post the wrong answer.”<sup>32</sup> So while the internet was not a reality in Irenaeus’ day, the law stood, though it may have been rephrased to say, “The best way to determine orthodox belief is not to assert a true statement, but rather to start with a heretical belief and then formulate a rebuttal.”

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<sup>31</sup> Irenaeus M. C. Steenberg, “Irenaeus on Creation the Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption”, Brill <http://public.eblib.com/EBLPublic/PublicView.do?ptiID=468429>.

<sup>32</sup> Ben Schott, “Jurisimprudence”, New York Times <http://schott.blogs.nytimes.com/?s=cunningham> (accessed February, 23 2015).

### Chapter 3 - Irenaean Recapitulation

Irenaeus is probably best known for his understanding of the atonement. Today we call this his Recapitulation Theory. In short, it states that Christ reconciled all things to himself by being born, living, dying, and being resurrected fully human. The following is one of the earliest formal creedal statements we have and is found in Book 1, Chapter 10 of Irenaeus' "Against Heresies." Pay attention to the recapitulatory passages in this quote, which I have highlighted in italics, as they began to open up a firm foundation on which the Theory of Recapitulation is built on.

The Church, though dispersed through our the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: [She believes] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who *became incarnate for our salvation*; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and *the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His [future] manifestation from "heaven in the glory of the Father to gather all things in one, and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess to Him, and that He should execute just judgment towards all; that He may send spiritual wickednesses, and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly, and unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men, into everlasting fire; but may, in the exercise of His grace, confer immortality on the righteous, and holy, and those who have kept His commandments, and have persevered in His love, some from the beginning [of their Christian course], and others from [the date of] their repentance, and may surround them with everlasting glory.*<sup>33</sup>

Recapitulation is the earliest identified atonement theory within Christianity. The Oxford English Dictionary defines atonement as, "Reconciliation or restoration of friendly

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<sup>33</sup> Irenaeus, I.10.1.

relations between God and sinners.”<sup>34</sup> For Christians atonement theory is the process of trying to explain how Christ coming, living, dying, and being raised reconciles us with God. Today, the vast majority of western Christians explain this reconciliation with a theory called Penal Substitutionary atonement, which posits that Christ’s willingness to be executed without having ever sinned served as a substitute for the penalty of death which humans have deserved as a result of their sin. The predominant opposing theory, which is held in most of the Eastern Christian churches, is Christus Victor, which posits that Jesus’ perfect sacrifice, his dying while sinless actually defeated death and its hold over fallen creation. Recapitulation is different, in that it takes a step back and poses the question, “What was saving about the rest of Jesus life? If he only came to die, why did he have to live so long or teach anything?” So you will see as this chapter unfolds how Irenaeus answers those questions. Most scholars would say that for Irenaeus Christus Victor is contained within the greater theory of Recapitulation. Not that it is untrue, but that it only explains the cross, which is only part of the salvific actions taken by Jesus. Because Recapitulation is so robust it seems best to break it down into several parts in order to grasp the fullness of the theory. Let us start with the incarnation itself and Christ’s role as the Second Adam.

### *Christ as the Second Adam*

The crux of Irenaeus’ theology revolves around recapitulation. Rather than looking to the cross as the sole salvific work of Christ, Irenaeus sees salvific events through the whole of Jesus’ life. As stated earlier, Irenaeus believes that all of humanity participates in Adam’s fall. In this state humanity is incapable of living life as they were

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas N. Finger, “Christus Victor and the Creeds : Some Historical Considerations,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 72, no. 1 (1998).

created to live it. The only way that this fate could be undone is for a second Adam to come in the same way as the first, and to make the right choices at every step where the first Adam made the wrong choices, giving humanity a second lineage, participating in exultation and life rather than the fall and death. As Gustaf Wingren explains,

[For Irenaeus] if man is to be saved, it is necessary that the first man, Adam, be brought back to life, and not simply that a new and perfect man who bears no relation to Adam should appear on earth. God, who has life, must permit His life to enter into “Adam” the name who truly hungers and thirsts, eats and drinks, is wearied and needs rest, who knows anxiety, sorrow, joy, and who suffers pain when confronted with the fact of death.<sup>35</sup>

For Irenaeus, Jesus became the Second Adam in a very real way. There is a sort of presumed mystical indwelling of Adam’s original flesh within Christ’s humanity, not that it is Jesus’ soul in Adam’s body, but that Adam’s body is remade in Christ. So as Christ lives the life of a human he redeems every aspect left broken and unfulfilled by Adam. Ivor Davidson writes, “For Irenaeus, it is vital that the divine Word assumed full human flesh and suffered and died as a human being in order that he might represent humanity to God.”<sup>36</sup> Of course, the idea of Christ as the Second Adam is not unique to Irenaeus. Paul originated this idea in 1 Corinthians 15:45, “The first man, Adam, became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” However, there is a distinction in the two writers. For Paul, the emphasis is on the *Second* Adam, where as with Irenaeus the emphasis was on the Second *Adam*.<sup>37</sup> What I mean by that is where as Paul simply saw Christ coming as another human rectifying Adams wrongs, Irenaeus saw Jesus as ontologically the same as Adam. Just as Adam was created “anthropos,” or the

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<sup>35</sup> Gustaf Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation: A Study in the Biblical Theology of Irenaeus* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 95.

<sup>36</sup> Ivor J Davidson, *The Birth of the Church: From Jesus to Constantine, Ad 30-312*, vol. 1 (Monarch Books, 2005), 227.

<sup>37</sup> Benjamin H. Dunning, “Virgin Earth, Virgin Birth: Creation, Sexual Difference, and Recapitulation in Irenaeus of Lyons,” *The Journal of Religion* 89, no. 1 (2009): 59.

archetypal human, Jesus is the second iteration of that same archetype. Jesus literally comes as the new proto-human. Where all humanity prior to Jesus has come through Adam's mold, bearing his brokenness in the form of death, Jesus offers a second option, a second lineage.

Recapitulation works by summing up all of humanity within Jesus and so partaking in the life offered by him. As Jesus was an infant, he redeemed infancy, as a child, childhood, as an adult, adulthood, and as an elder (or as Irenaeus calls it, a Master), old age.<sup>38</sup> When Christ died on the cross he redeemed death, and when he was raised on Easter he defeated it. For Irenaeus every aspect of Christ's life was redemptive of something, and so allows humanity to live a fully human life while maturing into the individuals they were created to be. This is where Jeff Vogel's statement that sin was caused by a lack of patience comes into play. Vogel states, "According to Irenaeus, the Son's effective counter to Adam's disobedience is to remain in a condition of receptivity throughout his entire life, to wait on God where Adam did not."<sup>39</sup> In this sense, it was not only essential that Jesus lived a human life from infancy (Irenaeus believed that, like Jesus, Adam and Eve were created/born as infants, or at very least, children), but that his life was long enough to carry into adulthood. "By living a perfect human life and triumphing at every stage over the power of evil Jesus avoided the areas of the first Adam reversed their ultimate effects and restored humanity to its original glory and fellowship with God. The final consequence of his participation in the human condition is that human beings come by grace to participate in the divine nature"<sup>40</sup> His ability to save

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<sup>38</sup> Irenaeus, II.22.4.

<sup>39</sup> Vogel, "The Haste of Sin, the Slowness of Salvation : An Interpretation of Irenaeus on the Fall and Redemption," 442.

<sup>40</sup> Davidson, 257.

every aspect of human life demanded that he live every aspect. Christ's work of recapitulation is completed by his patience in living fully every aspect, in direct contrast to Adam's haste. As Vogel writes, "If it is haste that alienates human beings from God, insofar as it leaves them ill-disposed to receive divine life, a fitting salvation would have to undo this impatience. Christ also had to submit to time, to grow into perfection."<sup>41</sup>

Irenaeus goes so far as to state that Jesus lived into old age, claiming that all those around him would agree that old age begins some time after thirty, namely between forty and fifty years of age, and that the apostles testified to Jesus living to the "age of a Master," which would imply Irenaeus believed Jesus to be at least forty years old.<sup>42</sup> Johannes

Knudsen summaries this concept well:

Christ who is the creative word of God becomes human, and this is the beginning of the salvatory act. In the incarnation, Christ re-enacts the story of Adam. (Adam is not a "type" of Christ, but Christ is the re-enactment of Adam.) But it is the re-enactment in the reverse. Christ becomes that man which Adam was intended to be which had become corrupted after the fall. Christ therefore demonstrates first of all what the creation of Adam in the image and likeness of God had been.<sup>43</sup>

### *Mary as the Second Eve*

Of all the theological viewpoints of Irenaeus few prove to be as uncomfortable to evangelicals as his Mariology. Irenaeus held a profoundly high view of Mary, one that many like to think of as coming at a much later point in the history of the church. For any of the early church fathers to hold this view forces evangelicals and mainline protestants alike to wrestle more earnestly with Roman Catholic and Orthodox mariologies. The starting place in this doctrinal wrestling ought to begin in the same place that all of

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<sup>41</sup> Vogel, "The Haste of Sin, the Slowness of Salvation: An Interpretation of Irenaeus on the Fall and Redemption," 444.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 451.

<sup>43</sup> Johannes Knudsen, "Recapitulation Christology and the Church Today," *Dialog* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1963).

Irenaeus' theology begins, the garden. To say Irenaeus' understanding of the world operate through a highly typological lens would be an understatement. Sin begins in a garden with just two people and years later sin is defeated by the same two people made new, Adam and Christ, Eve and Mary. As Jesus Christ becomes the second Adam, saying "yes" where Adam said "no," Mary becomes the second Eve, leading Jesus to patience in the same way Eve led Adam to temptation. Of course, Mary's importance is obvious. In seeking to refute Gnosticism Irenaeus must root Christ in humanity and this is done in relation to his birth from Mary, and yet also the Spirit. However, for Irenaeus Mary serves a far greater role than God-bearer, *theotokos*. Through the centuries scholars have argued about the importance of Mary to Irenaeus' theology. Many have claimed that Irenaeus speaks of Mary simply as an aesthetic symmetry, Adam to Christ (the two that matter) and Eve to Mary (Mary serving simply as a balance to the fact that Eve exists and plays a role in the fall) and as a refutation of Gnosticism, proving that Christ came in the flesh. This makes sense when held alongside the mariologies of the other patristic fathers. Irenaeus develops a Mariology that proves far more developed than his first- and second-century contemporaries. Irenaeus paved the way for the high view of Mary that Protestants seem so uncomfortable with before anyone else (while Justin Martyr certainly states the Mary-Eve connection first Irenaeus develops it into a full blown doctrine).<sup>44</sup> M.C. Steenberg argues, "Irenaeus was not only the first Christian author to integrate the figure of Mary into his theology in an expansive and major way, but was also the first theologian whose anthropology was developed in such a manner as to justify, warrant and require that the salvation wrought by Christ be worked out in concert with the society of

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<sup>44</sup> Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church : The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought* (San Francisco: San Francisco : Ignatius Press, 1999).

humankind, typified first in Eve and later in Mary.”<sup>45</sup> Mary’s role for Irenaeus cannot be understated. Her name is brought up or alluded to over sixty-five times across all his works and in forty-eight chapters of “Against Heresies” alone.<sup>46</sup> She is used in three main categories in “Against Heresies”: the anti-Docetist argument where Mary serves as partial or complete proof God became human and was incarnate; the anti-adoptionist argument used to argue that the Christ was not a human adopted by God, but in fact the Son of God made human; and the recapitulative argument, which is where the Mary-Eve relationship is developed and expounded on. It is important to acknowledge that while the first two arguments, anti-Docetist and anti-adoptionist, are Christological in nature, seeking to clarify uncertainty about just who Jesus was, divine and human, the third, the recapitulative argument, is also soteriological. In short, Jesus is not Jesus without Mary in the first two, but we are not saved without Mary in the third. “Irenaeus saw in the late second century what various fathers and councils of the fourth and fifth would see during the height of the Christological controversy, namely that a flawed perception of Mary leads ultimately to a flawed perception of the person of Jesus Christ: either that He was not in fact made man, or that He was not fully or the same God as reigned in heaven.”<sup>47</sup> Once again, Irenaeus sees in Gnosticism something inherently other than what he knows himself. Gnostics see Mary as a vessel by which Christ entered the world, “pass[ing] through Mary just as water through a tube,”<sup>48</sup> not effected by her at all. Or, as others claim, an ordinary human adopted by God. As Irenaeus describes their view he writes that they believe that God, “setting free His servant, and adopting him (the human, Jesus)

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<sup>45</sup> M.C. Steenberg, “The Role of Mary as Co-Recapitulator in St Irenaeus of Lyons,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 58, no. 2 (2004): 118.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>48</sup> Irenaeus, III.11.3.

as a son; and, at the proper time, bestowing an incorruptible inheritance, for the purpose of bringing man to perfection,”<sup>49</sup> so that we might be saved through his death.<sup>50</sup> Of course, the Christological conversations are inherently soteriological in some sense, but that is a secondary outcome. Of course, the full humanity and divinity of Christ are absolutely essential in recapitulation so Irenaeus’ ability to refute these Christological heresies is truly essential for him to then build a sensible atonement theory. The soteriological implications of the third argument, that of Marian role in recapitulation, are central to how Irenaeus understood the salvation of humanity and took that task beyond the sole work of Christ. To argue against the anti-Docetist and anti-adoptionist arguments Irenaeus asserts the dual-generation of Christ, being fully God and fully human. While this emphasis was not nearly as developed as it would become centuries later at Chalcedon, he was conveying a very similar idea. It is out of this dual-generation of humanity and divinity that Mary enters her role in Irenaeian soteriology. It is out of this dual-generation that Irenaeus begins to draw the parallels between Eve and Mary. To Irenaeus, when sin entered through Adam and Eve they traded the human inheritance of life for the new inheritance of death.<sup>51</sup> So in childbirth Eve begets Cain, bound to his inheritance of death, and conversely, in childbirth Mary begets Jesus Christ, bound to the original inheritance of life because of his divinity and his act of being born reunites humanity with its original inheritance.<sup>52</sup> Irenaeus continues to draw conclusions between

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., IV.11.1.

<sup>50</sup> While Irenaeus writes primarily against Valentinian Gnosticism, his Christological arguments also address heresies promulgated by Ptolemaean Valentinians, the Marcosians, the followers of Simon Magus, Menander, Saturninus, Basilides, Carpocratian, Cerinthian, the Ebionites, the Marcionites, Sethians, Encratites, Barbeliotes and others to lesser extents.

<sup>51</sup> Irenaeus, III.5.3, III.12.11, IV.11.1.

<sup>52</sup> Antonio Orbe, *Antropología De San Ireneo* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1969).

the two: Both were committed to men while still virgins;<sup>53</sup> both submitted to an angel, Eve to the fallen angel speaking in the serpent and Mary to the archangel Gabriel,<sup>54</sup> and both were faced with the decision to obey or abandon the command of God.<sup>55</sup> Of course just as Irenaeus treated the relationship between Adam and Jesus by juxtaposing the two the same is done with Eve and Mary. Eve's transformation from virgin to mother was due to seduction, sin and rebellion to God's commands, while Mary's transformation to motherhood was in perfect harmony with the God's will, to such an extent that she did not even lose her virginity.<sup>56</sup> Eve was persuaded, because of her lack of faith and the persuasive deceptions of the serpent, to disobey God, whereas Mary's trust in the angel's message resulted in following the will of God. As Steenberg explains, "For each point of paralleled dilemma, Eve and Mary respond and act in the opposite, each the antithesis of the other. This is epitomized in the contrast of obedience and disobedience, the supreme virtue and cardinal sin in Irenaeus thought."<sup>57</sup> So for Christ so too for Mary; Mary says "Yes" at every instant that Eve said "No." This is laid out eloquently in book 3 of *Against Heresies*,

Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it to me according to your word." But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin. And even as she, having indeed a husband, Adam, but being nevertheless as yet a virgin ... (for it was necessary that they should first come to adult age, and then multiply from that time onward), having become disobedient, was made the cause of death, both to herself and to the entire human race; so also did Mary, having a man betrothed [to her], and being nevertheless a virgin, by yielding obedience, become the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race. ... So that the former ties be cancelled by the latter, that the latter may set the former again at liberty.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Irenaeus, III.21.4-6, III.22.4, V.19.1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.23.1, V.19.1.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, III.22.4.

<sup>56</sup> Orbe, 246-247.

<sup>57</sup> Steenberg, "The Role of Mary as Co-Recapitulator in St Irenaeus of Lyons," 128.

<sup>58</sup> Irenaeus, III.22.4.

For Irenaeus, Christ could not recapitulate humanity as a whole until Mary has first recapitulated virginity. In his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, he writes, “It was necessary and proper for Adam to be recapitulated in Christ, that “mortality might be swallowed up by immortality”; and for Eve to be recapitulated in Mary, that a Virgin, become advocate for a virgin, might undo and destroy the virginal disobedience by virginal obedience.”<sup>59</sup> Here is where Irenaeus goes further than any patristic father before him; were it not for Mary’s first act of recapitulation Christ would be unable to complete the second. This puts Mary in a far more central role in Recapitulation than she would have in any proceeding atonement theory. Certainly this ought to give modern readers pause in taking up Irenaeus’ theology today. Does he draw these striking claims purely out of his desire to juxtapose the garden narrative with the new narrative beginning with the incarnate Christ, or is there a more solid theological ground on which these statements are built?

Scholars have long argued for the former, stating that Irenaeus was simply enamored with the aesthetic beauty of the analogy he had described. The result of this, of course, is the crumbling foundations of his theory in general. If Eve is simply the second human and needs Mary to recapitulate her to full humanity, then do not all individuals need a personal recapitulator? The question then becomes, did Irenaeus believe there was an ontological difference between Adam and Eve? Steenberg argues here that Irenaeus was not simply enamored by the beauty of his theories, but that rather his theories develop from core theological and anthropological beliefs about the nature of humanity. In Irenaeus’ understanding of creation, Adam was created as universal man, or humanity. All of humanity was found within him, and so Christ’s recapitulation as the second Adam

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<sup>59</sup> Irenaeus, *Apostolic Preaching* 33.

completely recapitulated humanity to their full potential and full relationship with God. Here however comes the impetus of Irenaeus' understanding of Eve. Irenaeus gravitates to the Genesis 2:7-25 creation account rather than the account found in Genesis 1:1-2:6. For Irenaeus, God created Adam as the archetypal human, but this human was inherently lonely. Irenaeus states then that Eve was created from the beginning as a social being whereas Adam was a ruling being created to rule over and care for creation. Eve, on the other hand, was created as Adam's helper. For Irenaeus this meant that Adam was archetypal humanity and Eve was archetypal human society.<sup>60</sup> Adam was created as the archetypal human and Eve was the archetypal human society; through this society humanity would be able to grow and become what it was created to be. But in the fall Steenberg describes society's new warp: "In heeding the serpent and convincing Adam to partake of the fruit, the whole character of human society as a means of help and support was overturned: through the same virgin meant to be his greatest aid, "man was struck and, falling, died."<sup>61</sup> Thus, there was not one fall in the garden but two. The first was the fall of man as man through the sin of Adam, which was caused by Adam becoming less than he was supposed to be, the loss of potential as described by Vogel. And second was the fall of man as men, as a community of humanity, through the sin of Eve, in "turning from her own purpose, the aid to life becoming the "cause of death""<sup>62</sup> Both of these falls result in death, for distinct yet wholly interconnected reasons. Said more simply, the fall of Adam was the fall of human nature, the result was the inheritance of life was traded for the inheritance of death. The fall of Eve was the fall of human interrelation, the result of which was that human society, originally created to aid humanity in its growth into full

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 12-14.

<sup>61</sup> Steenberg, "The Role of Mary as Co-Recapitulator in St Irenaeus of Lyons," 134.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

humanness and to its inheritance of life, would now aid humanity in its spiral towards death. Now, to be clear, Irenaeus does not state these distinctions as clearly as Steenberg draws them out; however, he does make clear distinctions between the roles of Adam and Eve that he does not make about men and women later on. This implies he saw them as archetypes for something greater than just the first humans. They were the foundations for the world, as we understand it today. This means, then, that as Christ recapitulates humanity in himself, Mary recapitulates human society. While this isn't explicitly stated by Irenaeus it is a fair logical outworking of his theology. This then results in Irenaeus' theory of Recapitulation dealing with both personal sin and systemic sin, something seemingly absent from any theory that follows. Now, this is not to say that Mary's role in recapitulation was as central or powerful as Christ's. Mary herself, being fully human, needed to be recapitulated by the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. However, one man, regardless of his divinity cannot redeem society because society, by definition, is made of up multiple individuals. Thus, as Christ recapitulates Mary, Mary relates to Christ and humans were meant to relate to one another, the two creating a lineage of recapitulated human nature and human society. As Irenaeus says it, "The knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith."<sup>63</sup> Mary paves the way for Christ to recapitulate the whole of human nature, and, because of Mary's "untying the knot," also the whole of human society. This is why Christ lives in a way so different than those around him; he is quite literally relating to people in the way we were originally intended to relate, guiding our neighbors towards the truly Human.

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<sup>63</sup> Irenaeus, III.22.4.

While Steenberg argues essentially that Eve-Mary's gender is more or less circumstantial—it just happened that Christ and Adam were men, and Eve and Mary women—Benjamin Dunning disagrees, arguing that Eve-Mary's gender matters for three reasons. Dunning argues that Eve-Mary as virgin is essential to Irenaeus' placement of her in the recapitulative process. He sees this fleshing itself out in three distinct ways in the Irenaeus: “Virginity in terms of childhood innocence, in terms of the unpenetrated body, and in terms of a (paradoxical) state of fertility.”<sup>64</sup> While Dunning is right to point out the unique attributes of Mary, he seems to miss that only one of these traits is actually unique to Mary. Adam, too, had childhood innocence and an unpenetrated body, and was, of course, still fertile. The one attribute that remains is the true, physical difference between men and women: our reproductive systems. It is Eve-Mary's womb that sets her apart from Adam-Christ. Mary's “intact yet fertile female body situates the remainder solidly within the terms of God's redemptive project. Her virginal womb (“that pure womb which regenerates people to God”<sup>65</sup>) becomes the site where Irenaeus seeks to resolve the unruly interplay of desire, procreation, and sexual difference.”<sup>66</sup> This is where Dunning is most correct. For Irenaeus, it is the necessity of a “pure womb” that requires a female. Of course, this fits with later understandings of Mary and fits with the *theotokos* as well. It places Irenaeus' recapitulative understanding of Mary within the larger context of second and third century Christian theology, while still setting it apart and remaining unique. Irenaeus gives Mary a role far greater than anyone before him, or likely after, but his views of her are not altogether alien. She remains the Mother of God, yet for Irenaeus,

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<sup>64</sup> Benjamin H. Dunning, “Virgin Earth, Virgin Birth: Creation, Sexual Difference, and Recapitulation in Irenaeus of Lyons.”

<sup>65</sup> Irenaeus, IV.33.11.

<sup>66</sup> Dunning, “Virgin Earth, Virgin Birth” 63.

she still needs saving; she herself needs to be personally recapitulated to the God, and is also needed to be the “womb” the new humanity is birthed from, all while reckoning systemic sin overcome.

### *Humanity’s Potential Restored*

For Irenaeus, it is impossible to break down or separate out any of the events of Christ’s life as more important or salvific than any others; his was a profoundly holistic view of the life of Jesus. Vogel writes:

It is for this reason that Irenaeus insists on the need for Christ to have passed through every stage of human existence. His willing endurance of conception, birth, baptism, growth to maturity (which for Irenaeus means his arrival at old age), his subjection to temptation, betrayal, and, finally, even death—all of which occurred without sin—together constitute the saving act of God in Christ.<sup>67</sup>

Irenaeus’ view most certainly would differ from later theologians that seem to dwell solely on the salvific abilities of the cross. For Irenaeus, the incarnation is the most important act of Christ’s life. If it were not for the incarnation, for Christ becoming human, humanity would be dead in its sin. To think through the narrative of the gospels, when Christ comes upon a beggar needing sight, he is actively redeeming his blindness by re-stitching him to divinity, and thus redeems the brokenness caused by Adam. In the same way, as he comes upon the leper, or the demon-possessed man, or the woman caught in adultery, he re-stitches their fallen nature into the wholeness of God. Every aspect of His ministry is an act of salvation. Had he not lived the life he had humanity would still be dead in our sin. In the same vein, were Christ to be created as an adult and immediately killed, humanity would not find salvation under his lineage. For Irenaeus the incarnation is more than a necessary step in getting to the cross. Rather, the cross is the

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<sup>67</sup> Vogel, “The Haste of Sin, the Slowness of Salvation : An Interpretation of Irenaeus on the Fall and Redemption.”

necessary outcome of the incarnation. To put an emphasis, then, on the cross would be to miss the fact that the cross was a culmination of Christ's obedience, the culmination of the recapitulating that had taken place through His life. It was not the reason he was sent, but rather was the expected result of a mission to recapitulate humanity to himself. Of course, this is not to say that Irenaeus did not see the cross as important. For Irenaeus, the cross serves as proof of Christ's full humanity. This is heavily emphasized as it goes in direct contrast to the Valentinians and many other Gnostic sects. The cross also serves as the consummation of Christ's work on Earth and seems to be the area of Paul's greatest influence on Irenaeus thought.<sup>68</sup> It is also on the cross that the divine image is perfected in Christ.

From this fact, that He exclaimed upon the cross, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do, the long-suffering, patience, compassion, and goodness of Christ are exhibited, since He both suffered, and did Himself exculpate those who had maltreated Him. For the Word of God, who said to us, Love your enemies, and pray for those that hate you, Himself did this very thing upon the cross; loving the human race to such a degree, that He even prayed for those putting Him to death.<sup>69</sup>

Eric Osborn goes on to say it even more clearly,

Because Christ is true man and true God, he sums up and renews humanity. This he does on the cross when he forgives his enemies out of infinite love. This is the keystone of recapitulation. The cross has to be true and without pretence [sic] of any kind. Goodness and truth are joined, else the love of the cross could not be effective in the continuing life of the martyrs and other Christians. On the cross God becomes man and man becomes God as he displays divine forgiveness; in the union of God and man, man is brought to life.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Irenaeus, II.22.5. Book 3 of *Against Heresies* is titled, "Continuation of the foregoing argument. Proofs from the writings of St. Paul, and from the words of Our Lord, that Christ and Jesus cannot be considered as distinct beings; neither can it be alleged that the Son of God became man merely in appearance, but that He did so truly and actually" and pulls heavily from Pauline thought, especially in his pastoral epistles and his letters to the Romans and Corinthians.

<sup>69</sup> Vogel, "The Haste of Sin, the Slowness of Salvation : An Interpretation of Irenaeus on the Fall and Redemption," 452.

<sup>70</sup> Irenaeus, III.18.2.

Osborn does well to point out that rather than being an afterthought, the cross serves as the pinnacle, not in the sense of importance, but in the sense of finality, of his whole understanding of atonement. The cross gives Christ the opportunity to truly and completely say “yes” where Adam said “no.” If Adam and Eve sought to become like God in the garden, reaching for the fruit early, Jesus sought to give up his divinity and submit to death on the cross at the appointed time. For Irenaeus, were it not for the cross sin would remain, but to say that the cross is the only saving act in the life of Jesus is to wholly miss the power of the incarnation, and the power of God living amongst us. While it is apparent, then, that Irenaeus deals well with universal sin in his theory of the atonement, how does he deal with evil forces? To see that answer we turn to his understanding of the cross’s defeat of Satan.

*Recapitulation Serves as the Defeat of Satan*

While in this day and age we tend to think of Satan as, at best, an abstract principle—the personification of evil—and at worst a remnant of superstition that refuses to die out in the church, Irenaeus took the reality of Satan and the threat he posed very seriously. Thus recapitulation ought to be viewed both as an act that reconciles humanity to God, and also as a very real defeat of Satan’s power on this earth. While Irenaeus would argue that the whole of Christ’s life is a battle against Satan, his victory is on the cross and in the resurrection. “He has therefore, in His work of recapitulation, summed up all things, both waging war against our enemy, and crushing him who had at the beginning led us away captives in Adam.”<sup>71</sup> It is not enough for Jesus to bring humanity into right relationship with God. If humanity was brought into right relationship, but Satan was not defeated, he would continue to try plague humanity and attempt to lead

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., III.18.5.

them astray. By dealing with and defeating Satan Jesus allows the new recapitulated humanity the opportunity to strive towards their fullest potential without Satan seeking to thwart them. Jesus must also go after that which led humanity astray in the first place. This defeat begins in the incarnation and continues throughout Jesus' life as He wins battle after battle against Satan. Finger writes: "In the wilderness, for instance, the Devil tempted Jesus to disobey God's law by quoting from it; yet Jesus, by responding according to the law's true intent, showed that his opponent was transgressing the law and was condemned by this act."<sup>72</sup> Winning battles, however, is not enough. For Irenaeus, Christ must defeat Satan and that defeat is won on the cross. Defeating Satan accomplishes two things for Irenaeus; first, it breaks the grasp temptation has on the life of a believer, and secondly, it completes the antithesis to Adam's defeat by Satan in the garden. The garden is where Christ was triumphant, "as our species went down to death through a vanquished man, so we may ascend to life again through a victorious one."<sup>73</sup> This demonstrates an interesting reality within Irenaeus, that while he speaks of Satan's defeat as a temporal event he constantly warns of the ongoing battle of believers against Satan. "The devil... can only... deceive and lead astray the mind of man into disobeying the commandments of God, and gradually to darken the hearts of those who would endeavor to serve him."<sup>74</sup> This reality, that the devil is actively trying to lead astray and deceive people today, adds layers to Recapitulation and provides insight into just how interrelated all parts of the theory are. Christ not only defeats Satan, but as we are recapitulated into Christ's life we become more capable of resisting the devil and then able to defeat him while in our own "gardens." Beyond that, Irenaeus' understanding of

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<sup>72</sup> Finger, "Christus Victor and the Creeds : Some Historical Considerations," 46.

<sup>73</sup> Eric Osborn, "Love of Enemies and Recapitulation," *Vigiliae Christianae* 54, no. 1 (2000).

<sup>74</sup> Irenaeus, V.21.1.

the devil's sole power and deceit goes hand-in-hand with what he sees as Christianity's chief threat, the deception of the Valentinians, Marcionites, and other gnostic sects who seek to deceive believers into leaving the orthodox faith and the orthodox God in order to serve Satan. And while deification enables the believer to resist the devil it is solely because of Christ's work that we are victorious, and so the victory is truly His. As Irenaeus says,

Since the apostasy tyrannized over us unjustly, and, though we were by nature the property of the omnipotent God, alienated us contrary to nature...did righteously turn against that apostasy, and redeem from it His own property, not by violent means, as the [apostasy] had obtained dominion over us at the beginning, ... but by means of persuasion, as became a God of counsel, who does not use violent means to obtain what He desires.<sup>75</sup>

So for Irenaeus, Christ has defeated Satan and continues to equip his followers to combat him. It is a battle that has raged on for millennia and will until Jesus' triumphant return. The war against Satan is ongoing, but because of Jesus' recapitulative act, humanity is finally able to participate in the battle. The more they become deified the more equipped we will be to defeat the "apostate angel"<sup>76</sup>

Of course, it is fair to be asking several questions that have yet to be answered up to this point. To borrow the words of William P. Loewe, "How does the shedding of Christ's blood exert the persuasive force which breaks the power of Satan? Or, to glean a similar pointer from the passage, how does the shedding of Christ's blood free us from the state to which the fall reduced us, namely, that of being Satan's disciples?"<sup>77</sup> These are important questions when honestly thinking through Christus Victor's validity. And in response to those questions, Loewe argues that Irenaeus does in fact answer them.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., V.24.3.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., V.1.1.

For as 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]; so again, on the other hand, it was necessary that through man himself he should, when conquered, be bound with the same chains with which he had bound man, in order that man, being set free, might return to his Lord, leaving to him (Satan) those bonds by which he himself had been fettered, that is, sin. For when Satan is bound, man is set free; since none can enter a strong man's house and spoil his goods, unless he first bind the strong man himself.<sup>78</sup>

So for Irenaeus the defeat of Satan starts in the wilderness. It is there that Christ binds Satan. It is only once Satan has been bound that his house can be raided. "The power with which Satan bound humanity "consists in transgression and apostasy," and that power is broken when Christ exposes the lie on which it is based: "The Lord therefore exposes him as speaking contrary to the Word of God who made all things, and subdues him by means of the commandment."<sup>79</sup> For Irenaeus, this victory over Satan is a just victory. It is not God turning a blind eye to sin, but rather God punishing him who is really to blame.

And justly indeed is he led captive, who had led men unjustly into bondage; while man, who had been led captive in times past, was rescued from the grasp of his possessor, according to the tender mercy of God the Father, who had compassion on His own handiwork, and gave to it salvation, restoring it by means of the Word—that is, by Christ—in order that men might learn by actual proof that he receives incorruptibility not of himself, but by the free gift of God.<sup>80</sup>

This both illustrates the justice of the act, and demonstrates that this defeat is what allows humanity to become children under the lineage of the Second Adam. It is not by human will or ability, but rather by the gift given by God the Father.

Christ's defeat of Satan however still does not fully explain the universality of his work, or fully why Satan's defeat provides freedom for his captives. Is not this just a victory of Christ over Satan leaving humanity to fight its own battle? No, it is much more

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., V.24.3.

<sup>79</sup> William P. Loewe, "Irenaeus' Soteriology : Christus Victor Revisited," *Anglican Theological Review* 67, no. 1 (1985): 6.

<sup>80</sup> Irenaeus, V.21.1

than that. Loewe explains this more clearly:

Christ's obedience wins a more than personal victory; it decisively subdues Satan, leaving him bound and powerless. How? By exposing him in his true colors. His power was based on a lie, a false promise of immortality, and the exposure of that falsehood leaves Satan bound with the same fetters with which he had bound humanity, namely, judgment as a sinner by the Word of God. With this exposure of his identity as a liar and sinner, his promises lose their allure, and thus his power is broken.<sup>81</sup>

Note, however that it is only the allure of the promise that is broken. Its hold over humanity may remain until humanity chooses to walk away from the false promise of Satan and choose to believe the true promise of Christ. It is in choosing to believe Christ's promise of immortality that humanity becomes grafted into the lineage of the Second Adam and recapitulated into a restored humanity. While it is Satan's power to deceive that has led us astray, "Christ's victory must occur through recalling human beings to the truth, opening their hearts once again and drawing them back to the practice of obedience."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Irenaeus, V.21.3.

<sup>82</sup> Loewe, "Irenaeus' Soteriology : Christus Victor Revisited," 7.

## Chapter 4 - Theosis / Deification / Divinization

“For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God.”<sup>83</sup> Perhaps the most unfamiliar aspect of Irenaeus’ theology for Western Christians is his understanding of deification. Deification is a central aspect of Eastern Orthodox theology, and within certain areas of Catholicism, but for Protestants it can feel foreign. In the OED two definitions of deification stand out: “a. The action of deifying; the condition of being deified or made a deity; a deified embodiment.” and “c. The rendering of any one a partaker of the divine nature; absorption in the divine nature.”<sup>84</sup> It seems the majority of Protestants assumes deification to mean definition ‘a.’ This definition assumes that by being deified Jesus is making humanity into gods. However, that is simply not the case within Irenaeus or the Eastern Orthodox understanding of the concept. To Irenaeus definition ‘c.’ is a better fit, in particular “the rendering of any one partaker of the divine nature.”

Perhaps a better word to use going forward would be “theosis.” Theosis is an inherently Christian concept, while deification is the overarching idea across religious belief systems. *The Oxford Handbook on Byzantium* defines theosis as “the goal of man to which he is naturally destined and which is realized through the grace of God... Theosis preserves and saves the created order of human nature, which remains incommensurable to God; it is maintained without commingling and unseparated as in

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>84</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, “*Deification, N.*” (Oxford University Press).

Christ.”<sup>85</sup> Despite the fact that theosis is a better fit, scholars use both it and deification with regularity. If we think of recapitulation as Christ stitching two pieces of fabric together that have been ripped apart, theosis is the resulting unified piece of fabric. Again, from a Protestant perspective, it is tempting to assume the pieces of fabric represent humanity and divinity. That seems like a fair assumption with a name like theosis, but actually the two pieces of fabric are fallen humanity and true humanity. Note the platonic idea of forms coming through, which is undoubtedly a huge influence on the Patristic fathers in particular, and on Christianity as a whole, until scholasticism in the Middle Ages. It is not that the two pieces become one and lose their unique characteristics, but rather that as the two are joined the piece that was torn off is once again made complete. Humanity does not become less human as it is deified, or rejoined to the larger piece of fabric, rather it becomes more human. To say it another way, theosis is not the belief that in Christ humanity becomes gods, but rather that in Christ humanity becomes human.

Looking at this through the lens of Irenaeus’ understanding of sin these explanations become even clearer. While in the garden, “humanity [lost] that which it did not in actuality possess.”<sup>86</sup> In Christ it is given back to those who choose to live under the lineage of the Second Adam rather than that of the first. Living under the lineage of the Second Adam, Christ, and living in the New Eden, the Church, humanity has the opportunity to mature and become fully human; this is the same opportunity that was squandered by Adam and Eve in the garden, and in turn bares the same reward: the fruit

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<sup>85</sup> A. P. Kazhdan, *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), Theosis.

<sup>86</sup> Vogel, “The Haste of Sin, the Slowness of Salvation : An Interpretation of Irenaeus on the Fall and Redemption.”

from the trees of life and of the knowledge of good and evil. As humans live under this lineage and in this new garden they are made more fully human.

Irenaeus was certainly Platonic in his thinking, believing there is a “true human” form that we all have been created to experience. As humans submit in patience to the will of Christ and allow their lives to be sown back into the fabric of true humanity, they become the version of themselves that they were created to be and could not become without the grace of Christ. This can be clearly seen in book four of “Against Heresies” where Irenaeus writes, “In the first place, [we must] believe not only in the Father, but also in His Son now revealed; for He it is who leads man into fellowship and unity with God. In the next place, [we must] not only say, but we must do; for they said, but did not. And [we must] not only abstain from evil deeds, but even from the desires after them.”<sup>87</sup> And it is made even clearer, “For to follow the Saviour is to be a partaker of salvation, and to follow light is to receive light. But those who are in light do not themselves illumine the light, but are illumined and revealed by it: they do certainly contribute nothing to it, but, receiving the benefit, they are illumined by the light.”<sup>88</sup> Here is where it becomes clear that the act of being deified is not something that humanity, or any human in particular, can become on their own. It is not fully clear how free will and God’s sovereignty play together in Irenaeus’ mind, but it is clear that it is not of human power and human will that humans are made “partakers in salvation.” Rather, it is by basking in the light of the savior, in submitting to the life God has created us to live, and by living into the recapitulated creation. In the aforementioned analogy of the two pieces of fabric being joined, fallen humanity with perfect humanity, Jesus serves as the thread, being

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<sup>87</sup> Irenaeus, IV.13.1.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., IV.14.1.

fully human, born into fallen humanity and yet living a life of full humanity he rejoins the fabric. Theosis, then, is the process of humans living a fully human life by coming under the lineage of the Second Adam and allowing their fallen nature to be replaced by a fully human nature. This power to live as fully human is a combination of grace being showered upon humanity and humanity looking to Jesus as a moral guide and patriarch. Once joined to full humanity, humans are also fully restored to relationship with the Divine as it was in the garden. There seems to be an unspoken tension in Irenaeus that theosis is both an instantaneous process in the acknowledgement of a new lineage, and also an incredibly slow process in a lifelong following after Christ and living a life in line with full humanity. The latter is the crux of theosis. Irenaeus does not claim that there is a line that must be crossed before salvation is reached. It would seem that to acknowledge Christ, as Second Adam, is enough to participate in the resurrection. Admittedly, however, Irenaeus seems less concerned with salvation-centric theology, which is almost certainly a response to the fact that Gnosticism was so salvation-centric, but also in line with the early church as a whole. Instantaneous salvation was not the goal; rather living a fuller life as humans on earth was. Salvation/life/life eternal were just the positive consequences of being fully human. So while attaining participation in the resurrection may happen in an instant, the act of theosis is a life-long journey.

Theosis plays a major role in shaping soteriological developments of Christian theology throughout history. Irenaeus' role in shaping theosis is utterly foundational to these historical developments. As Jules Gross states, "Almost all subsequent [soteriological] development will follow paths shown by [Irenaeus]."<sup>89</sup> "But where the

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<sup>89</sup> Jules Gross, *The Divinization of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers*, 1st ed.. ed. (Anaheim, Calif.: Anaheim, Calif. : A & C Press, 2002), 266.

Spirit of the Father is, there is a living man, ... adopting the quality of the Spirit, being made conformable to the Word of God.”<sup>90</sup> Irenaeus lays the groundwork that will be built on for millennia, but he finds his foundations in the Psalms. Psalm 82:6, “I say, “You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you.” Irenaeus was not the first to draw this distinction; that was Justin Martyr.<sup>91</sup> But, once again, it was Irenaeus who developed this into a more robust theological position. Justin uses this passage in his understandings of what was lost in the fall. Humanity, in his mind, was to be like God, free from suffering and death. With the fall, death and suffering entered. Justin does not take this idea beyond this explanation or elaborate on its ramifications for the future of humanity in Christ in the ways Irenaeus does.

Irenaeus breaks down the process of theosis into multiple aspects. It is a process that ends in union with God. Ben Blackwell explains the two processes at length and traces them to their final end. “Ultimately, this speaks of deification as a relational process through adoption and communion that culminates in the resurrection life of incorruption and immortality.”<sup>92</sup> Irenaeus bases these conclusions primarily on the texts of Galatians 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. These two separate processes that bring deification to completion explain the tension between the immediate and on-going process of becoming like God. In the instant someone turns to acknowledge Jesus they are adopted into the family of God to be children of God. This moment then is the beginning of living in perfect communion with God, which continues as a lifelong process. This process of

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<sup>90</sup> Irenaeus, V.9.3.

<sup>91</sup> Justin and A. Lukyn Williams, *Justin Martyr, the Dialogue with Trypho* (London; New York: S.P.C.K. ; Macmillan, 1930), 124.

<sup>92</sup> Ben C. Blackwell and Ben C. Blackwell, “Christosis Pauline Soteriology in Light of Deification in Irenaeus and Cyril of Alexandria,” in *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Tübingen : Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 50.

joining into perfect communion is also the process of learning to discern good from evil, and the process of becoming human. This is where Irenaeus brings nuance into the process. It is not in deification that we are to become like Adam, because Adam still had maturing to do, rather deification is the process of maturing to become like Christ, first in his humanity and then in his divinity. One of the things that sets humans apart, the traits that make humanity God-like, is our ability to differentiate “good” from “evil.” “Man has received the knowledge of good and evil. It is good to obey God... God, therefore, gave [to man] such mental power man knew both the good of obedience and the evil of disobedience, that the eye of the mind, receiving experience of both, may with judgment make choice of the better things”<sup>93</sup> This process of differentiating “good” and “evil” does not make humans divine, however. First, Irenaeus posits, they must be made human. “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 lately created? How, again, can he be immortal, who in his mortal nature did not obey his Maker? For it must be that you, at the outset, should hold the rank of a man, and then afterwards partake of the glory of God. For you do not make God, but God you.”<sup>94</sup> Irenaeus’ concluding argument, then, is that as humans differentiate “good” from “evil” they allow God to remake them, for God made humans in the first place. Blackwell summarizes this more completely: “[Irenaeus] concludes by arguing that since God is the maker, believers should allow themselves to be moulded by him by offering him a soft heart.”<sup>95</sup> Behr says this slightly differently, “To become truly human, to become a god, man must allow God to fashion him.”<sup>96</sup> This continues to demonstrate that

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<sup>93</sup> Irenaeus, IV.39.1.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., IV.39.2.

<sup>95</sup> Blackwell and Blackwell, 53.

<sup>96</sup> John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford

deification is not becoming God, but becoming divinely human. Humanity never takes on the role of creator; rather they continue as the role of stewards. Just as humanity was placed in the garden to “to till it and keep it” in Genesis 2:15, so is humanity expected to “till and keep” the soil of our hearts, so that God can grow life out of them.

It then could be assumed that the goal of deification is to understand “good” and “evil,” or, similarly, to become immortal, but Irenaeus sees it differently. Learning “good” and “evil” is essentially the beginning of coming to know God, but the goal is not this knowledge, or the immortality that results, rather the goal of this process is to see God. “Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord.”<sup>97</sup> It is for this purpose that humanity ought to strive, so that, like in the beginning, we can walk with God in the garden. This goes back to the beautiful circularity that runs through the whole of Irenaeus’ theology. In the beginning humanity and God walked together in the garden. Humanity was immortal because it could be in the presence of God. When humanity, in its impatience, took the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, before it had matured enough to handle its power, their will turned away from God, and God withdrew God’s face from their sight. Now, God has come to earth, dealt with their sin, and once again offers humanity the opportunity to walk with God in the garden. Irenaeus says this even more simply earlier on in book 4, “Men therefore shall see God, that they may live, being made immortal by

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New York: Oxford  
New York : Oxford University Press, 2000), 116.  
<sup>97</sup> Irenaeus, IV.38.3.

that sight.”<sup>98</sup> However it must be said that Irenaeus does little to explain how this vision of God occurs. He simply states that if humans become human enough and are able to choose “good” over “evil,” they will see God.<sup>99</sup>

For Irenaeus theosis cannot be achieved without Christ first recapitulating humanity to God. By “following the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.”<sup>100</sup> He goes on to say, “We could have learned in no other way than by seeing our Teacher, and hearing His voice with our own ears, that, having become imitators of His works as well as doers of His words, we may have communion with Him.”<sup>101</sup> The two ideas, recapitulation and theosis, simply cannot be separated. In the Fall humanity had utterly lost its access to communion with God, and thus the ability to experience immortality. It was only in Christ’s rejoining humanity to God that they once again could access their created potential, and this access only comes through coming to know Jesus and imitating his works. In fact, humanity itself “does not possess life but only participates in it, the continuance of [a human’s] existence depending on the grace of God.”<sup>102</sup> This is not to say that prior to Christ’s coming humanity was condemned. In fact, Irenaeus does not view that fall as an inherently bad thing. Because humanity’s purpose in the garden was to mature and their sin distorted their ability to mature into complete humanity, the fall actually protects humankind by introducing death “as a limitation to the effects of sin, [death] enables us to gain a deeper

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., IV.20.6.

<sup>99</sup> Blackwell and Blackwell, 61.

<sup>100</sup> Irenaeus, V.0.1.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., V.1.1.

<sup>102</sup> Norman Russell, “The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition,” (Oxford: Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2006), 107-108.

understanding of good through experience of the contrary, and also teaches us the limitations of our nature and thus the “true comprehension of existent things, that is, of God and man.”<sup>103</sup> Because sin could only distort to the point of death, humanity could only become distorted to a certain extent. Thus human evil can only be so evil, whereas the evil of demons can be far worse in that they are immortal and can continue to distort for eternity. Humanity, on the other hand, cannot. Then, in encountering Christ, humanity is shown the path back toward maturity. It is important for Irenaeus that Satan is never in control; even in the garden Satan only succeeded in misleading humans, never in thwarting God. Where some Patristic fathers later are comfortable with the devil having some sort of control, Irenaeus almost sees him as a pawn.

Deification does not result in an ontological change. It is not that humans become something greater than human, but rather become more fully human. This finds its roots in Pauline thought in passages like 2 Corinthians 8:9, “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” The Father gives “divinity” in the form of immortality; it is never something controlled by humanity, nor do humans become divine, but is a result of our adoption. “For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God.”<sup>104</sup> This is not seen as an automatic process upon conversion to Christianity, but rather is dependent on moral behavior. “It depends on our moral behaviour and on our participation in the sacraments, which together attain the divine likeness, morality being

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>104</sup> Irenaeus, III.19.1.

linked with the freedom and the sacraments with the life of the divine likeness.”<sup>105</sup> This is where Irenaeus ties our salvation into the role of the Church in our lives.

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<sup>105</sup> Russell, 109.

## Chapter 5 - The Role of The Church in Recapitulation

Irenaeus, like nearly all in his day, saw the church as absolutely essential to the salvation of believers. Salvation was found only within the confines of the Christian community and could not be found without it. W.H.C. Frend says,

If Irenaeus was a pioneer in his theology, his concept of the church and its work followed more traditional lines. He was a pastor moved as in the prayer found in 1 Clement (LXIX.6) to 'Reclaim the wanderers and convert them to the Church of God,' and to 'confirm the minds of the neophytes.' The catholic, or universal church was the means through which salvation was obtained. Its teaching had been established by the apostles and 'made clear in all the world,' The Eucharist united God and creation by imparting Christ's divine life to believers and guaranteed the regeneration of the flesh.<sup>106</sup>

Irenaeus was a colossal advocate for the role the church played in the life of believers. This, of course, is hugely important in refuting Gnostic ideas, and his emphasis on submission to the leadership of the apostolic church ought not be separated from his role as apologist and fighter of heresy. If there is no sort of hierarchy, if there is no one who has the final word, then no one is definitively right or wrong. Irenaeus acknowledges the importance of the church in the refutation of heresy by strongly enforcing the ideas of apostolic succession. In tracing his lineage and his inherent authority Irenaeus roots himself in the very origins of Christianity. Jesus disciplined John who disciplined Polycarp, from whom Irenaeus learned; the church that acknowledged the authority of Polycarp also acknowledged the authority of Irenaeus himself.

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

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<sup>106</sup> W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 249.

learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true.”<sup>107</sup>

However, to say the church was central to salvation because it preserved apostolic teaching would woefully misinterpret and overly simplify Irenaeus’ ecclesiology. For the bishop, while the preservation of orthodoxy was important, its administration of the sacraments was utterly essential. In the Gnostic claim that creation is made evil, the church becomes the proof of its inherent origins in goodness. “Creation is integral to the divine economy of salvation, encompassing the entire relation of the creator to that which he created. Salvation does not occur in an ethereal realm, as the Gnostics held, but rather in the very midst of God’s created order.”<sup>108</sup> Kurz goes on to say this more clearly, “As Christ revealed the creator “by means of the Creation” in the flesh of his incarnation, so in his Eucharist does he reveal the creator “by means of the Creation.” The incarnate Lord who sanctified bread and wine for his Eucharist is the very one who wrought their source in creation: he is the Word made flesh.”<sup>109</sup>

Irenaeus spends a great deal of time discussing the Eucharist as proof of both one God and creation’s goodness in his brief refutation of Marcion. “Moreover, how could the Lord, with any justice, if He belonged to another father, have acknowledged the bread to be His body, while He took it from that creation to which we belong, and affirmed the mixed cup to be His blood?”<sup>110</sup> The Eucharist takes a central role in the ecclesiology of

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<sup>107</sup> Irenaeus, III.3.4.

<sup>108</sup> Joel R. Kurz, “The Gifts of Creation and the Consummation of Humanity: Irenaeus of Lyons’ Recapitulatory Theology of the Eucharist,” *Worship* 83, no. 2 (2009): 114.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Irenaeus, IV.33.2.

Irenaeus. As Kurz states, “The Eucharist thus establishes the faith of the church and imparts to humankind the very divine life of the creator through the life of creation.”<sup>111</sup>

### *The Eucharist*

For Irenaeus Jesus shows a level of intentionality with the sacraments that some often miss today. In “Against Heresies” Book 3 chapter 11 Irenaeus pens a significant treatise on Jesus’ sanctification of the created order. Irenaeus asserts that Jesus’ signs in John, both in the wedding at Cana and the feeding of the five thousand (John 2:1-10 and 6:1-13 respectively), set a precedent that Jesus would only provide nourishment through means of the already existing creation. Even though, theoretically, Jesus has the ability to create from nothing, in those instances he is intentional in choosing to supply the bread and wine from already existence substances. Irenaeus sees Jesus as conforming to the nature of the creation when he provides the elements. “For he is the incomprehensible who comes by means of the comprehensible—the invisible by means of the visible.”<sup>112</sup> “Countering those who might infer the deficiency of created matter in such events, Irenaeus specified that the wine first consumed at Cana was good and without fault, being in fact “produced by God in a vineyard.”<sup>113</sup> Through this provision of food and drink, the Son mediated life to humankind and manifested his unity with the Father.”<sup>114</sup> Put simply, “the Eucharist is the nexus of the creator’s redemptive work.”<sup>115</sup>

The bread and the wine demonstrate the unity of creation within itself but also the consummation of all things in heaven and on earth and also the replacing of our fallen

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<sup>111</sup> Kurz, “The Gifts of Creation and the Consummation of Humanity: Irenaeus of Lyons’ Recapitulatory Theology of the Eucharist,” 115.

<sup>112</sup> Irenaeus, III.11.5.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Kurz, “The Gifts of Creation and the Consummation of Humanity: Irenaeus of Lyons’ Recapitulatory Theology of the Eucharist,” 115.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 116.

flesh with the recapitulated flesh of Christ. “For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity.”<sup>116</sup> Said more directly, “Christ’s recapitulation of all things centers in and emanates from the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the Creator lifting up the gifts of Creation and imparting Christ’s body and blood for the life of the world.”<sup>117</sup>

Just as in our chapter on Recapitulation we learn that Christ, in some very ontological way, assumed the flesh of the first Adam in coming as the second, and in that way reunited humanity to God, the Eucharist continues to reunite the flesh of Adam in us with the flesh of the reunited, recapitulated flesh of Christ. As humanity, within the church, is recapitulated to the flesh of Christ, “the Church may be fashioned after the image of His Son.”<sup>118</sup> As Joel Kurz says it, “The church is fulfilled humanity living in the renewed creation through the second Adam; it is humankind eating to fullness of life rather than death.”<sup>119</sup> Kurz ties the consuming of the Eucharist into the greater ontological need of humanity to eat. He writes that as humans are created, the second command given in the garden, after “be fruitful and multiply,” is to eat from all the foods given them. Humanity’s flesh is comprised of what they eat from the beginning, and it is from this desire for food that they are led into temptation. It is, after all, only after Eve

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<sup>116</sup> Irenaeus, IV.18.5.

<sup>117</sup> Kurz, “The Gifts of Creation and the Consummation of Humanity: Irenaeus of Lyons’ Recapitulatory Theology of the Eucharist,” 130.

<sup>118</sup> Irenaeus, IV.37.7.

<sup>119</sup> Kurz, “The Gifts of Creation and the Consummation of Humanity: Irenaeus of Lyons’ Recapitulatory Theology of the Eucharist,” 126.

sees that “the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes” (Gen. 3.6) that she gives in to the temptation to eat.

So once again in the mirrored aesthetic from one garden to the other, as humanity is led into brokenness through eating, they are, in the same way albeit opposite, led into wholeness through the consumption of the Eucharist. As Anselm Walker writes, “The fruit of the tree is He who hung on the cross. . . . The flesh of the crucified and risen, the glorified and deified Savior now becomes the food of those redeemed by Christ.” Walker continues, demonstrating well the mirrored aesthetic: “As Adam and Eve manifested their disobedience and pride through eating the forbidden fruit, so now man, to manifest his obedience to God’s redeeming economy in Christ, must eat the flesh and drink the blood of him who hung on the cross, lay in the tomb and arose for our salvation.”<sup>120</sup>

This incarnated-ness flew in the face of the Gnostics, who asserted again and again that flesh was beyond redemption and was something to escape. Not only is flesh capable of salvation, argued Irenaeus, but it was actually the very vehicle through which salvation comes. Irenaeus insisted salvation comes through flesh. “By His own blood he redeemed us, . . . He has acknowledged the cup (which is a part of the creation) as His own blood, from which He bedews our blood; and the bread (also a part of the creation) He has established as His own body, from which He gives increase to our bodies.”<sup>121</sup> And it is said even more clearly in the following section, especially in how this recapitulating prepares us for the resurrection:

When, therefore, the mingled cup and the manufactured bread receives the Word of God, and the Eucharist of the blood and the body of Christ is made, from which things the substance of our flesh is increased and supported. . . . And just as a cutting from the vine planted in the ground fructifies in its season, or as a corn of wheat

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<sup>120</sup> Anselm Walker, “The Recapitulation Theme in St Irenaeus,” *Diakonia*, no. 12 (1977).

<sup>121</sup> Irenaeus, V.2.2.

falling into the earth and becoming decomposed, rises with manifold increase by the Spirit of God... the Eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ; so also our bodies, being nourished by it, and deposited in the earth, and suffering decomposition there, shall rise at their appointed time, the Word of God granting them resurrection to the glory of God.<sup>122</sup>

For Irenaeus there is an inherent problem in his understanding of recapitulation that the Eucharist solves. While Jesus recapitulates humanity to the creator, we are still born into the lineage of Adam initially and so are literally made up of fallen creation. This is solved, according to the bishop, but taking in the divine and recapitulated flesh of Christ. Once this flesh is taken in through the consuming of the Eucharist it, quite literally, replaces our fallen flesh with the recapitulated flesh of Christ, and the fallen flesh is discarded on our next trip to the bathroom. This also demonstrates the sheer patience involved in being recapitulated through the Eucharist, for humans are large and the amount consumed in a given partaking of the Eucharist is small. The process is slow and is a journey that takes a lifetime, or rather even more than a lifetime. Kurz writes, “Even after death, the body is not incapable of life. The body engrafted into Christ through baptism and nourished through the Eucharist continues to advance towards the final consummation, even when buried in the earth.”<sup>123</sup> Again, Irenaeus’ soteriology is rooted deeply within the creation. It is not that our souls escape upon death, but that our bodies become seeds from which the resurrection body springs. It is a decidedly anti-gnostic position that no doubt seeks to re-root humanity in the created world. “The gifts of creation, given by Christ in his Eucharist, are indeed the means through which humanity partakes of Christ’s recapitulation. The Eucharist manifests the unity of action

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., V.2.3.

<sup>123</sup> Kurz, “The Gifts of Creation and the Consummation of Humanity: Irenaeus of Lyons’ Recapitulatory Theology of the Eucharist,” 129.

between creator and creature, for “those who are in the church are recipients.”<sup>124</sup> It is, of course, only in the Church that the Eucharist can be consumed. Remembering that in Irenaeus’ time the Church did not mean a building or a government-recognized 501.c.3 with a board of directors etc.; rather it meant that “the Church, though dispersed through our the whole world, even to the ends of the earth,”<sup>125</sup> was a body of believers confessing belief in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

### *The Church as the New Eden*

“The universal ramifications of Adam’s disobedience need not obscure the observation that the act occurred within a certain location...within the confines of the garden altered creation and succeeding humanity. In the same manner, humankind experiences restoration through the second Adam in the specific “location” of the church.”<sup>126</sup> Irenaeus’ theological aesthetic knows no bounds. If the fall took place in the garden and humanity was condemned, then their redemption must occur within a garden. For Irenaeus, that second garden was the Church. “The Church has been planted as a garden in this world; therefore says the Spirit of God, “You may freely eat from every tree of the garden,’ that is, Eat you from every Scripture of the Lord...Into this paradise the Lord has introduced those who obey His call, “summing up in Himself all things which are in heaven, and which are on earth.”<sup>127</sup> The church serves as the context within which humanity is able to partake of the divine life, of the recapitulated creation. The

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>125</sup> Irenaeus, I.10.1.

<sup>126</sup> Kurz, “The Gifts of Creation and the Consummation of Humanity: Irenaeus of Lyons’ Recapitulatory Theology of the Eucharist,” 123.

<sup>127</sup> Irenaeus, V.20.2.

church is, as Gustaf Wingren explains, “a wellspring in creation (in which abides) a giver who pours out gifts to the world.”<sup>128</sup>

And just as Adam stood in the center of the garden with the two trees when humanity fell, Christ now stands at the center of the new garden, the Church, forever holding heaven and earth together in recapitulated reality. This is not to say that the Church is an inherently holy institution, but rather the Church is made holy by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was the animating presence of the church.<sup>129</sup> For Irenaeus, the Spirit “descended at the day of Pentecost...having power to admit all nations to the entrance of life, and to the opening of the new covenant; from whence also, with one accord in all languages, they uttered praise to God, the Spirit bringing distant tribes to unity, and offering to the Father the first-fruits of all nations.”<sup>130</sup> It is this unifying Spirit that creates the church and it is through this unifying power that the church has spread through the whole of the world. Irenaeus sees this church as the “first fruits of the new humanity.” “Paul declared when he said, “And if the first-fruits be holy, the lump is also holy,” teaching that the expression “first-fruits” denoted that which is spiritual, but that “the lump” meant us, that is, the animal Church, the lump of which they say He assumed, and blended it with Himself, inasmuch as He is “the leaven.””<sup>131</sup>

It is from this lump that Irenaeus talks of both the Church and the Eucharist. Irenaeus saw in the element of bread both a practical example of the recapitulation of creation, and the reunification of humankind through the Spirit’s coalescing work beginning in baptism. “As bread is comprised of the harvested grain, so the church is

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<sup>128</sup> Gustaf Wingren, *Gospel and Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 5.

<sup>129</sup> Kurz, “The Gifts of Creation and the Consummation of Humanity: Irenaeus of Lyons’ Recapitulatory Theology of the Eucharist,” 123.

<sup>130</sup> Irenaeus, III.17.2.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, I.8.3.

composed of the harvest of humanity.”<sup>132</sup> In the same way, the wine of the Eucharist was made from the grapes collected from the vineyard of the world. “For God planted the vineyard of the human race when at the first He formed Adam and chose the fathers... He chose Jerusalem: He dug a winepress, that is, He prepared a receptacle of the prophetic Spirit. ... The illustrious Church is [now] everywhere, and everywhere is the winepress dug: because those who do receive the Spirit are everywhere.”<sup>133</sup> It is from this central point, found throughout the whole world that the church, the New Eden partakes in the Eucharist. This universal accessibility to a temporal reality within the world is central to Irenaeus’ understanding of Eden. In his mind, it would be impossible to be truly redeemed within the fallen world, and in the fallen societies of the Roman Empire, because they would seek to push an individual further away from reconciliation. For Irenaeus then, stepping into the literal space of the church provided a safe space for the believer to grow towards righteousness. It was like an incubation center for the eschaton.

### *Baptism*

While Irenaeus devotes an enormous amount of energy to his discussions on the Eucharist, baptism takes on a far smaller role. The word “baptize,” or some variation thereof, appears less than thirty times in the whole of “Against Heresies.” In most of the instances it does appear it speaks directly to the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by John. And yet, baptism does play an important role in the salvation of a believer according to Irenaeus. Irenaeus argues in “Against Heresies” 1.9.4 that the rule of truth, or the rule of faith, is acquired in baptism. It is, much like described in Kurz, in baptism that the believer is grafted into the vine of Christ. Irenaeus viewed baptism as the water

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<sup>132</sup> Kurz, “The Gifts of Creation and the Consummation of Humanity: Irenaeus of Lyons’ Recapitulatory Theology of the Eucharist,” 124.

<sup>133</sup> Irenaeus, IV.36.2.

of life, and the signifier of adoption as children of God.<sup>134</sup> It was in this act of being baptized that a believer became a son or daughter of God.

Adoption in Irenaeus' day was more permanent than even legitimate birth. A child that disobeys his or her father could be disowned, written out of the family, but an adopted child was forever a family member. This was a contractual covenant between God and the baptized. Once again, baptism, like communion and every other aspect of Irenaeus' theology, was profoundly incarnated. It happens within the world, with physical means affecting a physical body. Baptism was a cleansing of the body in the lineage of Adam. "It is this [body] that needs to be cleansed, and reconciled to God. It is this that needs to be made solid against its natural tendency to disintegrate. It is this that needs to be anointed, so as to shine with the glory of God."<sup>135</sup>

Baptism is the beginning of the Christian journey for Irenaeus. It is the start of recapitulation; just as Jesus' baptism in the wilderness was the start of the Spirit coming to dwell in humanity as a whole, so too is the baptism of an individual the start of their journey towards recapitulation. The Spirit descended on Jesus in the river in order to "grow accustomed with him to dwell amongst the human race and to rest upon human beings and to dwell within what God had modeled, working the Father's will in them and renewing them from oldness to newness in Christ."<sup>136</sup> Where as the Eucharist is the "nexus" of recapitulation baptism is the beginning. It is the act of getting baptized that prepares the body to be recapitulated.

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<sup>134</sup> Denis Minns, *Irenaeus : An Introduction* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 129.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Irenaeus, III.17.1.

## Chapter 6 - Conclusion

The impact of Irenaeus of Lyons and of the theological frameworks he left behind cannot be overstated. He was one of the earliest theologians to quote the texts that would become the New Testament as acknowledged Scripture and quoted more of the eventual canon than anyone before him. He was the first to begin to flesh out a complex hamartiology, soteriology, and eschatology in the patristic age. Much of what he wrote starts on the foundations of Justin Martyr, but Irenaeus elaborates and develops them into working theological belief systems. He worked to write against an enormous number of heretical schools in his day, writing to refute Roman Valentinians, Ptolemaean Valentinians, the Marcosians, the followers of Simon Magus, Menander, Saturninus, Basilides, Carpocratian, Cerinthian, the Ebionites, the Marcionites, Sethians, Encratites, Barbeliotes, and others to lesser extents. His writing is prolific, with “Against Heresies” alone containing 1120 different sections. He crafted one of the earliest semi-formal creeds we still have and it is safe to say that Christian theology and the theology of Irenaeus cannot be separated today.

That said, the theologians that have followed in Irenaeus’ footsteps have, in many ways, eclipsed his work. Athanasius further developed the Christus Victor motifs that Irenaeus first fleshed out. Augustine offered a competing understanding of sin that utterly took over in the West. Since Irenaeus we have embraced the atonement theories of Substitution first described by Anselm and more completely by Aquinas before being refined and put forth as dogma by the Reformers. In many ways, Irenaeus has been forgotten in the Christian West. The Irenaeus that has been remembered has been misinterpreted or over simplified for centuries. He is utterly unknown by most and

considered a heretic by some (mostly within the far-right of conservative evangelicalism), and yet now the theories put forth by this second century bishop are once again essential in our re-contextualization of the Gospel into the language of post-modernity.

In this thesis I have tried to show what it is Irenaeus believed and how robust his theories were. I have tried to do this in a number of ways. In the first chapter I worked to unpack the systems Irenaeus was writing against, primarily that of the Valentinian Gnostics. While today schools have argued that the Gnosticism Irenaeus describes is, in some ways, a caricature of the real thing, I do not believe these realizations matter in what I have tried to write. Whether or not Irenaeus was accurate in his compellation of Valentinian beliefs, his theology was shaped by that caricature. And so, I worked to succinctly and clearly describe what it is that Irenaeus thought was being taught by Valentinus and his followers. From there I explained Irenaeus' soteriology, but in order to do that effectively it was necessary first to depict his hamartiology. Unlike the dominant view in the West today, Irenaeus did not view sin as being rooted in pride or unbelief, but rather understood its origins in impatience. For Irenaeus sin was "humanity losing that which it did not in actuality possess."<sup>137</sup> Adam and Eve were unwilling to mature to the point of being given the fruit from the trees at the center of the garden, and in their impatience ate from the trees before they were ready. This resulted in humanity never attaining their complete humanness, becoming less than they were created to be, and becoming separated from their divine inheritance. It is into this reality that Irenaeus' soteriology comes into play. Rather than simply being a proponent of the model of Christus Victor understood within much of evangelicalism, his is a theology that finds

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<sup>137</sup> Vogel, "The Haste of Sin, the Slowness of Salvation : An Interpretation of Irenaeus on the Fall and Redemption," 443. 168.

salvation just as much in the incarnation as on the cross. Irenaeus sees Christ as ontologically being incarnated as the Second Adam. As Jesus grows and matures he says “yes” in every stance that Adam said “no.” “By living a perfect human life and triumphing at every stage over the power of evil Jesus avoided the areas of the first Adam reversed their ultimate effects and restored humanity to its original glory and fellowship with God. The final consequence of his participation in the human condition is that human beings come by grace to participate in the divine nature.”<sup>138</sup> But there is more nuance to Irenaeus’ understanding of Christ recapitulating humanity to God. While Christ’s coming and living recapitulates the individual, Irenaeus’ theory is more robust. He sees Mary to take on the role of co-recapitulator. Mary, though, unlike Christ, is not divine and cannot redeem humanity; rather she becomes the vessel for the redemption of human society. “The knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith.”<sup>139</sup> Mary and Christ together provide the redemption of human relationships, for one person cannot redeem that which exists between two. From this position I go on to explain the role of Christus Victor in Irenaeus’ theology. It is not that the cross is not important for Irenaeus, but that the cross is the final “yes” to combat Adam’s final “no.” Where Adam sought to be eternal, to be like God, Christ, being “very nature God,” submitted to death, and this allows this recapitulated Christ to pull the whole of humanity out of its march towards death. “As our species went down to death

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<sup>138</sup> Davidson, 257.

<sup>139</sup> Irenaeus, III.22.4.

through a vanquished man, so we may ascend to life again through a victorious one.”<sup>140</sup>

And in his victory Jesus leaves Satan bound and his power over death weakened.

Christ’s obedience wins a more than personal victory; it decisively subdues Satan, leaving him bound and powerless. How? By exposing him in his true colors. His power was based on a lie, a false promise of immortality, and the exposure of that falsehood leaves Satan bound with the same fetters with which he had bound humanity, namely, judgment as a sinner by the Word of God. With this exposure of his identity as a liar and sinner, his promises lose their allure, and thus his power is broken.<sup>141</sup>

With Satan defeated, humanity is able to once again become that which we were created to be: fully mature human. This process is essential in understanding Irenaeus’ soteriology as a whole. Were it not for the process of theosis one could think that being recapitulated only takes turning towards Jesus, but in reality that is only the start. “For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God.”<sup>142</sup> Becoming a son or daughter of God is not an instantaneous change in Irenaeus’ theology, but rather is a slow and life-long process. “This speaks of deification as a relational process through adoption and communion that culminates in the resurrection life of incorruption and immortality.”<sup>143</sup> Beyond simply being a slow process theosis is also a community-centric process. It is not that the process is dependent on anything other than life with Christ, but rather that it can only be accomplished while living in the New Eden, the Church. “The universal ramifications of Adam’s disobedience need not obscure the observation that the act occurred within a certain location...within the confines of the garden [it] altered creation and succeeding

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<sup>140</sup> Osborn, “Love of Enemies and Recapitulation.”

<sup>141</sup> Irenaeus, V.21.3.

<sup>142</sup> Loewe, “Irenaeus’ Soteriology : Christus Victor Revisited,” 7-8.

<sup>143</sup> Blackwell and Blackwell, 50.

humanity. In the same manner, humankind experiences restoration through the second Adam in the specific “location” of the church.”<sup>144</sup> For Irenaeus the Church becomes the global manifestation of the garden spread throughout the world. Entry into this New Eden is marked by baptism, where a human is first grafted into the vine of Christ. And it is in baptism that the body of a believer begins to be prepared for immortality. “It is this [body] that needs to be cleansed, and reconciled to God. It is this that needs to be made solid against its natural tendency to disintegrate. It is this that needs to be anointed, so as to shine with the glory of God.”<sup>145</sup> Once grafted into the new humanity through baptism and welcomed into the New Eden, the Church, a believer is able to partake in the single most important act towards the fulfillment of their recapitulation to God, the Eucharist. “For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity.”<sup>146</sup> Not only is the Eucharist the vehicle by which our fallen humanity is replaced with the recapitulated humanity of Christ, but, according to Kurz, “Christ’s recapitulation of all things centers in and emanates from the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the Creator lifting up the gifts of Creation and imparting Christ’s body and blood for the life of the world.”<sup>147</sup> It is with the Eucharist that the Irenaeian atonement model is completed. It is far more than simply Christus Victor as it is often understood today, and it is far more rooted in biblical texts

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<sup>144</sup> Kurz, “The Gifts of Creation and the Consummation of Humanity: Irenaeus of Lyons’ Recapitulatory Theology of the Eucharist,” 123.

<sup>145</sup> Minns.

<sup>146</sup> Irenaeus, IV.18.5.

<sup>147</sup> Kurz, “The Gifts of Creation and the Consummation of Humanity: Irenaeus of Lyons’ Recapitulatory Theology of the Eucharist,” 130.

than many claim. I hope that in this thesis it has been clearly shown how robust and encompassing recapitulation is an atonement model.

### *Recommendations for Further Study*

In my five years on Young Life staff, I was trained to deliver an engaging gospel presentation within a five-talk progression that led students from the creation, through the incarnation and the life of Jesus, to the reality of sin, and finally the Cross of Christ. Young Life was founded in 1941 and in its 74 years it has grown to the world's largest youth ministry organization, reaching over two million students a year. In my five years of full time staff alone, however, I began to be less and less comfortable with the atonement model put forth by Young Life, that of the Reformers, Penal Substitutionary Atonement. Obviously this is the preferred atonement model of the whole of Protestantism and is ubiquitous with evangelicalism in the United States. As I grew less comfortable with this dominant view, I began searching for atonement models that were more satisfying. That is when I stumbled onto Recapitulation and Irenaeus of Lyons. In my last three years on Young Life staff I reworked my gospel presentation through the lens of Recapitulation and was amazed by its effectiveness. Students responded far better to this model, in my experience, than any did with the old model. As I began sharing my findings with fellow Young Life staff and pastors I began to notice the theme that many were no longer comfortable with the old view and all seemed to be invigorated by a more nuanced understanding of Christus Victor in general and Recapitulation in particular.

I would encourage further study on the effectiveness of Recapitulation as an Atonement model for churches in a post-modern context. As we see church numbers across the West collapse it seems essential that we begin to recontextualize the gospel

into a new language that resonates with the culture at large. Recapitulation offers this resonant language while staying true to an orthodox understanding of faith. Further scholarship is needed in this area, of course, but it seems incredibly worthwhile from my perspective in the Pacific Northwest. To that end, I would recommend further study on atonement and post-modernity as a whole. If Penal Substitution is not the most effective model for our current cultural context, what is? Is there a new language necessary going forward that is not found in the corpus of the Christian tradition? James Dunn writes an updated version of Christus Victor that is beautifully contextualized in our modern vernacular.

“If we have understood Paul’s theology of sacrifice alright [sic], the primary thought is the destruction of the malignant, poisonous organism of sin... The wrath of God in the case of Jesus’ death is not so much retributive as preventative. A closer parallel may perhaps be found in vaccination. In vaccination germs are introduced into a healthy body in order that by destroying these germs the body will build up its strength. So we might say the germ of sin was introduced into Jesus, the only one “healthy”/ whole enough to let sin run its full course. The “vaccination” seemed to fail, because Jesus died. But it did not fail, for he rose again; and his new humanity is “germ-resistant,” sin-resistant (Rom. 6:7, 9). It is this new humanity in the power of the Spirit which he offers to share with men.”<sup>148</sup>

While Dunn’s recontextualization of Christus Victor in the aforementioned “Vaccination Model” is a wonderful start, there is a supreme benefit in recapitulation as a whole in giving purpose to the whole life of Christ. As Christianity has become more and more dualistic in our faith and treatment of the created order, the incarnation focus of recapitulation provides a workable theory that forces us out of the clouds and back into the soil. What is the language needed to repack recapitulation for the post-modern church of tomorrow? I see no more important area of focus for scholarship in the next fifty years

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<sup>148</sup> J.D.G. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit: Collected Essays of James D.G. Dunn* (W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 208.

than that of the atonement. It is in my opinion that our atonement theology sits at the core of every other tenant of theological truth we identify with, if we are to properly steward the planet and the church, our understanding of how we are made “one” with God must be framed in a way that can respond to the needs, desires, and expectations of the world today while staying true to the faith of those who have gone on before us.

To that end, it would also be advantageous to further study how Irenaeus can remain relevant in a world sympathetic to the theory of evolution. It is almost certain that Irenaeus believed in a literal, historical Adam and Eve and I have made it clear in this thesis that his entire soteriology revolves around Christ being the Second Adam. Research ought to be done to consider how these two seemingly opposing views of humanities’ origins can be reconciled. It is my belief that they can be, and that the answer lies in the distinction between the historical Adam and the typological Adam. If Adam is simply the typological first human, and Eve is typologically shown to be human society, not a historical woman, then we can re-frame Irenaeus’ soteriology in a way that it remains relevant today. This evolution sensitive work must be done, not just for the sake of Irenaeus’ soteriology, but also for the whole notion that the sin of one person could lead to the death of all. Further work must be done in this area and if I’m right that Irenaeus’ theology is helpful to churches in a post-modern context while simultaneously churches in a post-modern context also affirm evolution, work must be done to keep the dialogue healthy and active.

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