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I Introduction

The following is the second of a projected seven-volume work on the doctrine of the Trinity in Christian antiquity. The first volume of this work was entitled, *Theology of Radiance: The Form of Fatherhood and Sonship in the Trinitarian Theology of St. Athanasius of Alexandria*, and because I have chosen to begin my history of Trinitarian theology with the fourth century, investigating in detail the theology of fatherhood and sonship in the writings of ‘the father of orthodoxy’ and canon of post-Nicene Trinitarian confession—*rather than* beginning with the first century, following a linear chronological order—a brief word is in order, to explain why I have so chosen, to shed light on the specific theses which will be advanced in the present volume, and to give the reader an intimation of how this study coheres with what preceded, and what will follow—god willing—in succeeding volumes. Finally, I’ll bring this introduction to a conclusion by summarizing Athanasius’ understanding of the relationship between the Father and Son as explored in the study mentioned above, emphasizing especially those aspects of his doctrine which bear significantly on the present study.

Though I’m merely an undergraduate, I have for the past several years devoted the majority of my free time and personal resources to the study of the doctrine of the Trinity. I personally own all of the works listed in the bibliography above, and have devoted countless hours to studying their contents. And in the course of studying these works, I became aware of several inadequacies in their approach to, and articulation of, the Trinity. Thus the *first* reason why I am writing is that I believe that the doctrine of the Trinity—both as regards its historical *and* theological treatment—needs to be readdressed on several key points.

The work on Athanasius focused primarily on one such inadequacy—the seemingly incoherent manner in which the Trinity is often articulated, and the common

attribution of this incoherency (whether or not it is explicitly recognized as such) to the Nicene fathers themselves. In addressing this problem, I focused on two themes in Athanasius' Trinitarian theology: the relationship between the Father and Son in the 'immanent' Trinity, and how that form influences the manner in which the Trinity *as triune* operates *ad extra*.¹ With regard to the former, I grounded my study of Athanasius' Trinitarian theology in the Wisdom tradition of the New Testament and ante-Nicene era, and argued that according to Athanasius, there is a causal asymmetry within the 'immanent' Trinity, such that the Father is the source and cause of the Son and Spirit, and *not* vice-versa. Furthermore, I showed that, according to Athanasius, the Father is understood as an ever-fecund fountain of life, and that the Son is *intrinsic to god as such*, being *the exhaustive expression of the inexhaustible Father*. With regard to the latter—the form of operations *ad extra* vis-à-vis the Father and Son—I argued that, according to Athanasius, the 'economic' Trinity is *confluent* with the 'immanent Trinity,' from which it follows, once again, that there is an intrinsically *asymmetrical* relationship between the Father and Son with regard to operations *ad extra*. Thus, with regard to the study as a whole, perhaps the principal and most valuable thesis established was that this asymmetrical understanding of the relationship between the Father and Son (and Spirit) is *not* antithetical to Nicene orthodoxy—indeed, it is intrinsic to the very brilliance, the heart *itself*, of Nicene Trinitarian theology.

In focusing on these two aspects, I showed not only that many presumed incoherencies are not to be had by reference to the theology to which they are attributed, *but also* that the very asymmetry wherewith the above charge is rendered void opens up to an unexpected, glorious, and beautiful understanding of the Christian god—an understanding that has, of its own accord, the capacity to shed its light on all theology and existence. And in focusing on these aspects of Athanasius' Trinitarian theology, yet another possibility avails itself—something perhaps not as obvious as the preceding two, but quite significant for Trinitarian theology. For if, as I had argued, the Trinitarian theology of the Nicene era has been misunderstood in several important respects, then it

¹ The adjectives 'immanent' and '*ad intra*' signify the Trinity *in itself*—the eternal relations and modes of origin whereby the three divine persons are united and distinguished; the adjectives 'economic' and '*ad extra*' refer to the *actions* of god *as triune* in relation to that which is outside the divine life. Thus the eternal generation of the Son by the Father pertains to the 'immanent' Trinity, and the Incarnation of the Son pertains to the 'economic' Trinity.

follows that the theological *worth* of *ante-Nicene* Trinitarian theology—*so long as it is measured by the canon of Nicene orthodoxy* (and regardless of the universal sentiment of historians of theology that *of course* it would be unjust to judge the ante-Nicenes by the canon of ‘later’ orthodoxy, the fact remains that the *claim that the ante-Nicenes are in fact* at a substantial distance from their posterity with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity, is every bit as universal)—must be re-assessed. This is the *second* reason why I am writing, and much of what follows in the present volume will be devoted to this task.

According to the common treatment of the history of the doctrine of the Trinity, the ante-Nicene era (including the New Testament) presents us with something of a defective, inadequate, and, in a word, ‘not quite orthodox’ (in light of ‘later’ orthodoxy) articulation of the Trinity.² More specifically, it is quite often taken for granted that the ante-Nicene understanding of the Son and Spirit is, to a significant extent, ‘not in line’ with that of Nicene and post-Nicene Trinitarian theology. This presumed discrepancy may be summed up under three charges: 1) that the ante-Nicenes, in some sense, denied the eternity, or true divinity, of the Son of god;³ 2) that the ante-Nicenes advocated a form of ‘subordination’ with regard to the Son and Spirit that would have been deemed heretical by posterity; and 3) that the ante-Nicenes held to a ‘binitarian’ understanding of god,⁴ according to which it is assumed that *personhood* was denied to the distinct hypostasis of the Spirit.

Of course, those who hold to, and advance this understanding of the history Trinitarian theology do not thereby intend to disparage the ante-Nicenes; rather, they seem to see the movement from the ‘sub-orthodoxy’ of the ante-Nicene era to the orthodoxy of the First Council of Constantinople as a coherent development—an evolution in Christian understanding that is both healthy and, perhaps more importantly, historically comprehensible. Thus, according to this understanding, the *traces of what*

² Cf., e.g., Han-SCDG, 870—“The story [of the achievement of the Nicene era] is the story of how orthodoxy was reached, found, not of how it was maintained.”

³ Cf., e.g., For-TG, 60—“But in describing the origin of the Logos-Son, [the second century Apologists] sometimes presented the personality of the Logos and the generation of the Son so obscurely as to leave a strong impression that the Logos-Son was a non-eternal divine person, a diminished God drastically subordinate to the Father.”

⁴ See Pel-CT1, 184ff, for an account which places some emphasis on the ambiguity between the Son and Spirit in the early Church, and Stu-TI, 52ff, for an account of the Apologists’ pneumatology which denies binitarianism.

was to become the Trinitarian theology of ‘later’ orthodoxy are present even in the New Testament, yet not fully formed—indeed, not as such altogether congruent with ‘later’ orthodoxy—and it would take centuries of thought—consisting not only of helpful insights and remarkable advances, but also of several wrong turns and false starts—before Christians were able, through the disputes and upheavals of the Nicene era, ‘to come to terms’ with their understanding of god and ‘arrive at’ what has *since* come to be known as orthodoxy.

While I by no means wish to deny wholesale the notion of development in theology, Trinitarian or otherwise, in the following it will be shown that the understanding of the history of Trinitarian theology sketched above is—with regard to the aforementioned particulars—false. The charge of the non-eternity of the Son will be refuted with explicit passages from the ante-Nicenes, alongside implicit inferences from other aspects of their theology; the charge of the (sub-orthodox) ‘subordination’ of the Son and Spirit will be refuted by investigating their theology of the ‘economic’ Trinity, and, when viewed in light of the claims of ‘later’ orthodoxy, it will be shown that this accusation is wholly misplaced; the charge of ‘binitarianism’ will be challenged with reference to explicit passages from their writings, and implicit inferences drawn from their theology as a whole. Thus one of the theses advanced in the following will be that the evidence does not require us to see the Trinitarian theology of the primitive Church as ‘sub-orthodox.’ Ante-Nicene Trinitarian theology is confluent with Nicene Trinitarian theology: *only* the Nicene Trinitarian theology of the ‘immanent’ Trinity renders coherent the Trinitarian theology of the ante-Nicenes, and *only* the ‘economic’ Trinity of the ante-Nicenes renders coherent the Trinitarian theology of the Nicenes. To put the matter bluntly, it is my claim that we can speak, without gross anachronism, of the Nicene faith of the ante-Nicene fathers.

Yet more than simply ‘vindicating’ the ante-Nicenes of the charge of ‘sub-orthodoxy,’ it is my desire to show the inherent brilliance of their Trinitarian vision. Trinitarian theology is today receiving more attention than at any other time save the Nicene era, and a principle component of much of the work following from this is grounded in a return to earlier theologians. And while it is common to see theologians gain inspiration and insight from the Cappadocians (Zizioulas), Athanasius (Torrance), or

Richard of St. Victor (Swinburne) to name a few, a turn to the *ante-Nicenes* for inspiration and guidance is far less common, and with few exceptions either significantly less pronounced, or altogether absent⁵—and this indeed should come as little surprise if, as claimed above, the ante-Nicenes are commonly viewed as ‘sub-orthodox.’ Thus the second thesis of this study will be that, as regards certain extremely significant aspects, the Trinitarian theology of the ante-Nicenes—viewed especially in light of the New Testament and Irenaeus—has seldom been equaled, and never surpassed, in the history of Trinitarian thought, and as such, it is indispensable for the future of theology.

In this regard, the Trinitarian form of salvation in the theology of Irenaeus, alongside the ante-Nicene era (including the New Testament), will be the central theme of the present study. The ‘immanent’ Trinity of the Nicene era will be viewed according to the ante-Nicene understanding of the economy of salvation, and it is my hope that in exploring this latter under the double aspect of 1) the incarnational ground of the epistemology of the Son’s revelation of the Father, and 2) the incarnational ground of the understanding of Christian life—as well as the life of the entire cosmos—as participation in the Trinity, the testimony of the ante-Nicenes will be seen not as an underdeveloped theology that can be safely ignored (or dispensed with after one has arrived at the Nicene era), but rather, as a living well-spring that can impart vitality and inspiration to our own and succeeding generations.

The contour of the present volume will be as follows. In **section II**, I’ll explore the Trinity and the form of salvation as it is found in the New Testament, with special emphasis being given to the Pauline and Johannine writings. In this section, it will be argued that the New Testament understandings of god (as triune), the incarnation of the Son of god, and soteriology are absolutely intrinsic one with another, constituting an integral unity. Grounding this claim of mine—alongside the reassessment of the ante-Nicene doctrine of the Logos to be offered later on—will be an exploration of the theme of the revelation of god the Father through Christ crucified in the Johannine writings, and with regard to the Pauline corpus, a ‘new’ interpretation of the Colossians hymn of the

⁵ Yet there are significant exceptions to this general rule. Irenaeus was a major influence on von Balthasar and Colin Gunton, both of whose theology was thoroughly Trinitarian. Also, an appeal to the Greek fathers of the ante-Nicene era played a significant role in Rahner’s articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, especially with regard to his claims concerning the ‘immanent’ and ‘economic’ Trinity (cf. Rah-TR).

cosmic Christ (1:13ff). Viewing this hymn as chiasmic in structure, and grounded in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, I shall claim that its point of departure is indeed a doctrine of the relationship between the Father and Son *ad intra*, which throws a new light on the Son's being predicated the "*prototokos* ("firstborn") of all creation," thus unifying the doctrines of god (*as triune*), and the economy of salvation, within a single vision. While this interpretation will run counter to common treatments, it is my hope that it will gain a hearing, both because of its intrinsic beauty, and because of its exegetical plausibility. Furthermore, if this interpretation is indeed correct—or even plausible enough to be deemed worthy of further consideration—it will have the capacity, I believe, to revolutionize the traditional estimation of the theological worth of the ante-Nicene doctrine of the Logos of god.

In **section III**, attention will shift to Clement of Rome and the first great door of the Church of the second century (Irenaeus being the other), Ignatius of Antioch. Much the same as in **section II**, the focus in this section will be the integral unity of the doctrines of god, the incarnation, and soteriology, with special attention being devoted to ecclesiology and the sacramental character of salvation. In **section IV**, I'll move on to the Apologists of the second century: Justin Martyr, Tatian the Assyrian, Theophilus of Antioch, and Athenagoras of Athens. Though in this section primary focus will be given to the reassessment of their doctrine of the Logos, the economy of salvation will ever be kept in mind; also, I will claim that the common charge of 'binitarianism'—which is grounded in their 'silence' with regard to the Spirit—is unwarranted..

Section V will consist of an introduction to the theology of Irenaeus, with special attention being given to the tripartite ground of his theological method: logic, the rule of faith, and aesthetic coherence. In the following section—**section VI**—focus will be given to explicit passages in his *Against Heresies* and *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* from which it will be argued that Irenaeus believed that the Son and Spirit are *intrinsic to* the very being of god the Father, and therefore, that although Irenaeus does not offer a sustained account of the generation of the Son (as found in, e.g., Athanasius) or the procession of the Spirit (as found in, e.g., Augustine), his Trinitarian theology is inherently confluent with Nicene Trinitarian theology (*ad intra*). The ground being thus

laid, in **section VII**, I'll return to soteriology, giving special attention to the Trinitarian form, and incarnational grounding, of salvation in Irenaeus' theology.

In **section VIII**, I'll bring the present study as a whole to a conclusion, and briefly attempt to summarize and vindicate its central theses—that the Trinitarian theology of the ante-Nicenes is *not* 'sub-orthodox' when viewed alongside that of the Nicene and post-Nicene eras, and that, secondly—and this is especially in light of Irenaeus' theological vision—it is possessed of an inherent brilliance, a living well-spring from which Trinitarian theologians of our own generation can draw nourishment and inspiration. In place of the common account described above—which sees the movement from the ante-Nicene to the Nicene era as being one of 'sub-orthodoxy' to orthodoxy—I will claim that the relationship between ante-Nicene and Nicene Trinitarian theology can only be understood along the lines of what Newman described as a 'true development.' The Nicenes did not have to 'depart' from the ante-Nicene confession in order to 'construct' orthodoxy. In the New Testament and writings of Irenaeus is to be found a holistic vision of god (*as triune*) and salvation history that is wholly confluent with Nicene Trinitarian theology, and the Apologists' doctrine of the Logos—viewed especially in light of the interpretation of Col. 1:13ff that will be offered in **section II** below—is itself in harmony with these.

Concerning the basic form of the remaining volumes of the projected seven-volume study of the doctrine of the Trinity in Christian antiquity, the principal notion underlying the whole of the work is that the Christian god—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is the ground of all beauty and goodness, and that the fulfillment of existence and life's meaning—and all joy and happiness—is had by *participation* in the Trinity; the methodological assumption upon which the work as a whole is grounded is that it is only by returning to the fathers that we are able to perceive this mystery—that it is only by attending to their *words* that we are able to attune ourselves to the same *Spirit* which guided their thought, and harvest the garden of Scripture, thereby presenting anew *to our own generation* the ancient faith. Such being the case, each volume will focus *not* on the Trinity considered in absolute isolation; rather, each volume will view a particular theological and soteriological aspect of the Christian faith as understood *in light of* the Trinity.

Volume I explored the form of fatherhood and sonship in Athanasius of Alexandria, alongside giving brief attention both to the Wisdom tradition in the New Testament and ante-Nicene era, and Alexander of Alexandria and Arius—Athanasius’ mentor and arch-nemesis, respectively. Because it focused *both* on the Trinity *ad intra*, *and* on how the form of the Trinity *ad extra* is *confluent with it*, it is the ground of all following volumes. The present study—**volume II**—explores the Trinitarian theology of Irenaeus of Lyons, with brief attention being given to the New Testament, Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, and the second century Apologists, and its focus is the Trinitarian form of salvation. In **volume III** I intend to explore the Trinitarian theology of Augustine of Hippo, giving brief attention also to that of Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, and Marius Victorinus. The goals of this study will be two. In the first place, it will be my goal to reassess the Trinitarian theology of Augustine (and the West) and establish that, in it, we do not find the seeds of a confused doctrine of god lying somewhere between the ‘cloud of unknowing’ and modalism (which, per Rahner and others, was the cause of a Trinitarian ‘dark ages’ that slowly robbed the Church’s Trinitarian vision of vitality), but rather, a theology of the Trinity that is fundamentally harmonious with that of the Greek fathers of the Nicene era, and though it is no doubt attended by peculiar difficulties, much fruit can be harvested by attending to the heart of this Trinitarian vision (rather than *abandoning* it). Also, in this volume I’ll explore the doctrine of pneumatology, and drawing on Scripture, I will offer an extension of Augustine’s doctrine of the Spirit.

In **volume IV** I’ll return to the ante-Nicene era, focusing on Origen of Alexandria, alongside giving brief attention to his predecessor, Clement of Alexandria. Whereas **volume III** will devote special attention to pneumatology, in this study, the focus of attention will be the Son of god. The Trinitarian theology of Origen has been a subject of heated dispute from the fourth century to the present, and my goal will be to establish that Origen of Alexandria’s doctrine of the Son of god is not only orthodox, but also, that it is—insofar as anything outside the New Testament has a right to the name—the very fountainhead of Nicene orthodoxy. As with Irenaeus before him and Bonaventure after, in Origen we find a doctrine of the Trinity that stands in relation to the whole of his theology as a heart stands in relation to a body, or the sun in relation to earth, relentlessly

pouring life into, and shedding light onto, the whole. For this reason, the mysticism of Origen will serve as the matrix through which his doctrine of the Trinity is to be understood.

Volume V will focus on the doctrine of god the Father in the theology of John Damascene, alongside the Cappadocian fathers and Photius of Constantinople. After presenting the Eastern doctrine of the monarchy of the Father as found in John Damascene and the Cappadocians, the particular points of emphasis given to it by Photius will be assessed in light of the mystery of personhood (human as well as divine), following which I will attempt to formulate a synthesis between the Trinitarian theology of the East, and that of the West, as regards the doctrine of the *filioque*, showing how the two have the capacity to compliment one another.

In **volume VI**, I'll explore the Trinitarian theology of Bonaventure, with brief attention also being given to Richard of St. Victor. In this volume, the brilliance and radiance of Bonaventure's Trinitarian vision will be explored, both with regard to his doctrine of the 'immanent' Trinity, but also, and especially, with regard to the universal, cosmic scope of this vision as it is rendered present in the mysteries of creation and salvation history. While there have been many remarkable theologians in the history of the Church, it is my belief that no other has written so brilliantly, or speaks so much to our own generation, as Bonaventure, and that by attending to his writings, we too can behold his vision of unsurpassable beauty, and participate in the same radiant, all-encompassing glory that is the Trinity.

The reader may have noticed that the general structure of these six volumes, considered as a whole, has a deliberately Trinitarian form, mirroring the form of the Trinity *ad intra* and *ad extra*: 'immanent' Trinity (**volume I**), economy of salvation (**volume II**), the Holy Spirit (**volume III**), the Son of god (**volume IV**), the Father (**volume V**), and once again the economy of salvation (**volume VI**). Since, as mentioned above, the principal goal of the work as a whole is to ground the mystery of all being and existence in the doctrine of the Trinity, the Trinitarian *form* of the work is intentional. Thus the final volume of the work—**volume VII**—will once again focus primarily on the 'immanent' Trinity. Unlike the preceding volumes, however, this work will not be a monograph on a particular theologian; rather, it will consist of my own theology of the

Trinity, as grounded in the theologies of those explored in preceding volumes. Taking as my point of departure the crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of god, my goal in this work will be to articulate a Christian philosophy for our own generation—a Trinitarian metaphysics of existence that is cosmic in scope; a ‘pointing’ to that radiant flame of love and glory that throws its light upon, and vivifies, all things.

Because one of the principal theses of the present volume is that the ante-Nicene doctrine of the Trinity—and their doctrine of the Son of god *in particular*—was not defective, it is fitting at this point briefly to recapitulate the findings of my study on Athanasius’ doctrine of the relationship between the Father and Son, so that the reader may ever have in mind this ‘canon of orthodoxy’ while reading what follows. The ultimate ground of Athanasius’ understanding of the Son of god is the Wisdom tradition, according to which certain passages in Scripture speak of the Son as the ‘Word,’ ‘Wisdom,’ ‘Radiance,’ ‘Power,’ etc., of god.⁶ By interpreting the sonship of the Son in light of these Scriptural predicates, Athanasius is able to argue that he *cannot* be—as Arius and those of like persuasion claimed—a contingent creation created *ex-nihilo*; rather, argues Athanasius, the Son is *as such* seen to be *intrinsic to* god the Father as a (or, to speak more accurately, *the*) *property of* god. Furthermore, as the above predicates would suggest, Athanasius sees an *asymmetrical, causal* relationship between the Father and Son.⁷ The principal means whereby Athanasius articulates this relationship is taken from the Scriptural predication of the Son as the *Radiance* of god—not only is the Son intrinsic to the Father as shine is intrinsic to the sun, but also, the Son is ever *caused by* the Father just as shine is ever caused by the sun. And following from this understanding of the relationship between the Father and Son *ad intra*, Athanasius sees a similar form expressed in their operations *ad extra*.⁸ The mystery—indeed, the very *possibility*—of creation is to be found in the Father’s eternal generation of the Son; the fact that the principle of all things is an ever-fecund wellspring of life.⁹ And as it is *through* and *in* the Son that the very being of god the Father is *expressed*, so too it is *through* and *in* the Son—being the Logos and Power of god—that the divine will is realized through the

⁶ See my *Theology of Radiance* (henceforth, Pau-TR), 32ff

⁷ See Pau-TR, 38ff

⁸ See Pau-TR, 64ff

⁹ See Pau-TR, 43ff

course of salvation history, stretching from creation to the eschaton. Such being the case, for Athanasius, *theology* and *soteriology* co-inhere, and the goal of salvation history is the participation of man and creation in the Son's filial relationship with the Father.

Thus it is *not* the case that Nicene Trinitarian theology leaves us with a confused notion of god, with the Father and Son (and Holy Spirit) being understood as identical with "God" while (somehow) not being identical with each other.¹⁰ The god of the Nicene era is the Father, and the Son and Spirit are included in the confession of the one god because they are *intrinsic to the very being* of the Father. The doctrine of the *homoousios* does *not* imply the *identity* of the Father and Son with the *person* who is "God;" rather, it proclaims the Son to be *truly the son*, and the Father to be *truly the father of the Son*. Nor still does the Nicene confession of god imply that since both the Father and Son are truly divine, that the possibility of any *order* in the relationship between the two—such that the Son might 'receive' from the Father, or that the Father might be the source of all that the Son has—is precluded. Far from this, the order of operation is grounded in the order of procession *ad intra*, and this latter is—as shown above—the underlying principle of Nicene Trinitarian theology.

That said, we are now prepared to explore the Trinitarian form of salvation as it is found in the theology of Irenaeus and confession of the ante-Nicene Church.

¹⁰ See Pau-TR, 55ff

II The New Testament: Trinity and Salvation

The message of the New Testament is that the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the god of creation, Israel, and the covenant; the only god—has effected through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ the goal of salvation history, fulfilling not only the promises set forth in the Old Testament, but the goal of creation as well. In this section, I'll explore this message in what are commonly, and rightly, considered the principal *theological* fonts of the New Testament—the Johannine and Pauline writings. First, I'll treat of Johannine theology, focusing on the crucifixion of the Son of god and how it reveals god the Father, the eternal form of the inter-relatedness of the Father and Son, and the Johannine understanding of soteriology, which is the participation of the Christian—and all creation—in *that relationship*. Following this, I'll turn to the Pauline corpus, focusing on the divinity of the Son, the divinity and personhood of the Spirit, and how the *form* of the eternal relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit, when viewed in light of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of god, illuminates the whole of salvation and cosmic history according to the following chiastic schema: 'immanent' Trinity, creation; new creation, participation in the filial relationship of the Son with the Father in the Spirit.

Before undertaking this task, a brief word is in order concerning the exegetical method that will be employed in the remainder of this section. While it is by no means my intention wholly to disregard either the findings, or worth, of the historical-critical method (as found in the likes of, e.g., James Dunn, Ben Witherington, and Ray Brown), my own exposition of the New Testament will be more after the manner of that of the fathers of the Church, and this for two principal reasons. In the first place, it is my belief that the historical-critical method must *itself* be subjected to the unified, historical *kerygma* of the Church, and thus the writings of the New Testament are to be viewed

holistically rather than atomically, and interpreted *in accordance with* the same Spirit wherewith they were written rather than according *only* to what can be hypothesized from historical documents and archaeological findings. In the second place, and this following from the former, it is my belief that the historical-critical method is itself *incapable* of fully disclosing the contents of the New Testament. Just as a complete understanding of the morphology of a language is incapable of allowing one to read a work written in that language without a corresponding understanding of its *grammar*, so too the historical-critical method is impotent when faced with the New Testament if it is not grounded in, and supple to, a *rhythm* of understanding which is extrinsic to itself. The very basis of the historical-critical method is the notion that a text is to be understood in light of its *historical* and *cultural* contexts; it allows no presuppositions, theological or otherwise, but begins from the empirical word and its (possible) connotations in the empirical world, and it is for that very reason incapable of dealing with anything that *might* have an *actual* metaphysical *ground* that is *not* the empirical. For in the final analysis, the historical-critical method is grounded in the *secular*—a grounding that is necessarily inept if the empirical is not the ground of *itself*. If indeed there is a god, and this god has acted and acts still in history, and if this god has revealed himself in a particular manner, impressing the form and rhythm of his disclosure on a particular historical Body, then it follows that the exegete must attend to Her voice every bit as much—indeed, more so—as to the empirical understood as *abstracted* from any such influence. In other words, according to this hypothesis, attending to what such people as Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, John Damascene and Bonaventure said *after* the New Testament was written is just as important for understanding its contents as attending to whatever was said by anyone *before* it was written, or while it was being written; the letter must be understood through the lens of the Spirit if it is to be understood at all. I reiterate that in saying this, I am *not* disregarding wholesale the historical-critical method. I write neither in ignorance of, nor with lack of respect for, the works of some of its more celebrated practitioners—nor still will the historical-critical method be completely ignored in what follows. It is not a question of whether or not this method has value—it most certainly does, and its employment has reaped innumerable benefits for scholar and believer alike. Rather, it is simply a matter of epistemology—of what is the proper *point of departure*

for the investigation of *this particular* matter, and *from whence* is gained the pattern of vision according to which *this subject* is to be interpreted. Thus in what follows, the historical-critical method will not be altogether ignored, but its utility will be determined by a conscious attending to its ground—the internal dynamic and rhythm of the *breathing faith* of the Catholic Church.¹¹ With that said, I now turn to the New Testament.

Johannine theology is that of Father, Son, and Spirit; of god, his eternal Word, and the Water of life; of the cruciform revelation of the almighty god in the flesh of the Christ nailed to the cross, and the outpouring of the living Stream from the body of the slain Lamb—in a word, the Johannine proclamation is that god the Father has been expressed in the life and death of his Son, and that the life of god has been declared by his resurrection, and offered to humankind through the presence of the Spirit.

The Son, according to John, is the eternal Logos who “dwells within the Father’s heart” (Jn. 1:18; cf. Rev. 19:13) and was “toward the god” (Jn. 1:1) “in the beginning” (Jn. 1:2); “from the beginning” (1 Jn. 1:1) the Son was “the eternal life that was with the Father” (1 Jn. 1:2). Only this Logos—this Son—has “seen the Father” (Jn. 6:46), for the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father (Jn. 17:21), and the Father loved and glorified the Son “before the foundation of the world” (Jn. 17:24). Within this love, the Father and Son are transparent one to another (Jn. 5:20; 10:15), and the Father, who is the source of the eternal life of the Son (Jn. 10:28f), ever dwells within the Son (Jn. 14:11), exhaustively pouring forth his all into the Son (Jn. 16:15). It was through this Son, who is “the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev. 22:12; cf. Rev. 1:17)—the “*Arkhe* of god’s creation” (Rev. 3:14)—that “all things came into being, and without him not one thing came into being.” (Jn. 1:3). With the Almighty god and Father, the Son is himself the Temple and light of the eternal Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22f), and it is “to the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb” (Rev. 5:13) that the eschatological worship of “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them” (Rev. 5:12) is directed. As such, the Son is the “I Am” of the Old Testament (Jn. 8:58), and the Lord and god of the believer (Jn. 20:28).

¹¹ For an example of the form of exegesis which I’m recommending in the above, and how it incorporates the findings of the historical-critical method without surrendering completely to it, see Bal-GLTA1 and Lub-ST.

The principal basis of this understanding of the Son of god is to be found in the Wisdom tradition of the Old Testament.¹² The Wisdom of god was brought forth from everlasting (Prov. 8:22ff)—“before all other things” and “from eternity” (Sir. 1:4)—for the Wisdom of god is “breath of the power of god, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty”; She is the “radiance of eternal light” and “an image” of the very goodness of god (Wis. Sol. 7:25f). Wisdom is the eternal throne companion of the almighty god (Wis. Sol. 9:10), and “She glorifies her noble birth by living with god, and the Lord of all loves Her” (Wis. Sol. 8:3); She was “daily” the “delight” of god, “rejoicing before him always” (Prov. 8:30). And it is through this Wisdom, who “came forth from the mouth of the Most High and covered the earth like a mist” (Sir. 24:3), that all things were created (Wis. Sol. 8:4ff; cf. 9:1f; Prov. 8:30) and are ever preserved in being and order (Wis. Sol. 7:26f; 8:1).

From the preceding it follows that the form of Johannine theology—and, as will be shown below, Johannine soteriology as well—takes as its point of departure a perception of the eternal *communion that is god*. John presents us not with a god who is to be understood as absolutely alone and solitary, but rather, with a god whose eternity is defined by his relationship to his Logos, his Wisdom, his Son. Yet, as is clearly understood with reference to the Wisdom tradition in which it is grounded, Johannine theology does not envisage a plurality of deities, nor two ‘first principles.’ The Son is not seen as a second god, for—as Wisdom and Word—the Son is *intrinsic to* the one god, who is his Father; the ‘god-ness’ of the Son is not understood as *over-against* that of the Father, for the Father is the eternal *source* of the Son’s divinity, and the divinity that the Son *has* is the Father’s.

Yet, if the eternal inter-relatedness between the Father and Son is the *form* of Johannine theology, the *character* that is realized *within* that relationship is the *content* which must be, retrospectively, perceived in the life, death, and resurrection of the Logos Incarnate, and understood as *determining* the *contour* of the form.¹³ As the Son is the eternal ex-pression of the Father and the receptacle of all the glory of god, the very hypostasis of the Son is defined by his absolute reliance upon, and obedience to, god his

¹² For John’s dependence on the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament in his understanding of Christ, see Wit-JW.

¹³ For more on this theme, see Bal-GL1, 611ff.

Father: “I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father” (Jn. 14:31). The Son knows the Father, for he is from him, and sent by him (Jn. 7:29); the judgment of the Son is valid, “for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me” (Jn. 8:16). As having come “from the Father” and “into the world” (Jn. 16:28), the very food of Jesus is “to do the will of” the one who sent him, and “to complete his work” (Jn. 4:34).

The Son is wholly reliant upon the Father:¹⁴ “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (Jn. 5:30). The Son’s doctrine originates not in himself, but in the one “who sent” him (Jn. 7:16), for “the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing” (Jn. 5:19). As the very Son of the Father, and he in whom the full power of the Almighty god abides, he has the power both to lay down his own life and to take it up again; as having this power by receiving from the Father, so too, he has “received this command” from his “Father” (Jn. 10:18). Yet the relationship between Father and Son cannot simply be likened to that between a master and a servant, for the Son is *truly from god as the Wisdom of the Father*, being thus “a spotless mirror of the working of god” (Wis. Sol. 7:26), and therefore, “whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise” (Jn. 5:19).

As such, the Son—in the very act of doing the will of the Father—*reveals* the Father: “whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world” (Jn. 12:45). To know the Son is to know the Father (Jn. 14:7), to receive the Son is to receive the Father (Jn. 13:20) and whoever hates the Son hates the Father also (Jn. 15:23), for “[t]he Father and I are one” (Jn. 10:30) and “the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (Jn. 10:38). The vision of the Incarnate one lays bare the nexus of time and eternity, for in seeing him, “you will see heaven opened and the angels of god ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (Jn. 1:51). Therefore, the entire Incarnate existence of the Son is the revelation of god: “I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence” (Jn. 8:38), and “[w]hoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9).

Yet it is only through the lens of the cross that the vision of the Father becomes wholly transparent: “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I

¹⁴ Cf. Wit-MFOC, 174

Am, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak . . . as the Father instructed me” (Jn. 8:28). It was only in his humiliation and crucifixion that the Son’s revelation of the Father was manifested absolutely: “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly of the Father” (Jn. 16:25). It is on the cross that the glory of the Son is fully disclosed: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (Jn. 12:23); it is on the cross that the glory of the Father is declared: “it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name” (Jn. 12:27f); it is on the cross that that love wherewith the Father “loved” the Son “before the foundation of the world” (Jn. 17:24) breaks forth like the sun upon all things: “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you” (Jn. 17:1). The very *form* of the relationship between the Father and Son is disclosed in the humility of the Son of Man: “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from god and was going to god, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself . . .” (Jn. 13:3f).

Though “[n]o one has ever seen god”, “the only Son, who dwells within the Father’s heart, has revealed him” (Jn. 1:18); the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world is seated “at the center” of the eschatological throne (Rev. 7:17).¹⁵ “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:16), and “god’s love was revealed among us in this way: god sent his only Son into the world . . . he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 Jn. 4:9f); “the Son of god has come and has given us understanding so that we may know the true god” (1 Jn. 5:20). Thus, when Pilate drags the crushed Son of Man before the crowd, wearing a mock-robe of purple and crown of thorns, John presents before the world its creator and Almighty god—“Behold the man” (Jn. 19:5); behold the god: “Whoever sees me sees him who sent me” (Jn. 12:45).

It is this understanding of god that is suspended in the universe of Johannine theology as a sun, casting its light upon, and vivifying, all things, and it is *because* this god has become man that man can participate in the life of god, thereby obtaining salvation. And just as it was on the cross that the very being of god was disclosed, so too it is *from* the cross the Church is born—through which the divine life is poured out upon the world—and the original transgression of the human race in the Garden of Eden is

¹⁵ For more on this theme, see especially Bau-GC and Bau-TBR, 54ff.

reversed: “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself” (Jn. 12:32), and “there was a garden in the place where he was crucified” (Jn. 19:41). Just as the bride of Adam was taken from his side, so too the New Eve, who is “the bride and wife of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:9), was taken from the side of Christ, as “one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out” (Jn. 19:34). This blood and water signifies the humanity of the Son, through which the Spirit of god is communicated to the world: “When Jesus had received the wine, he said, ‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his Spirit” (Jn. 19:30). The nascent Church is embodied in the disciple whom Jesus loves, and Mary, who is given to this disciple as a mother; it is upon them, standing at the foot of the cross, that the Spirit is breathed (Jn. 19:26). As such, Mary, who is the mother of Jesus, is the mother and archetypical form of the Church—“the elect lady and her children” (2 Jn. 1). And as the mother of the Church, she is the recapitulation of Israel, to whom the covenant promise was given, and in whom it has been fulfilled. It is she who “gave birth to a son, a male child who is to rule all the nations” (Rev. 12:5); she is the “woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet” (Rev. 12:1) against whom, together with “the rest of her children”, the devil wages his war (Rev. 12:17).

The internal circulation of the Church is the very life of god, and to be in the Church is to participate in the filial relationship of the Son with the Father: “I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture” (Jn. 10:9). This gate is the humanity of the Son of god, who is “the bread of life” (Jn. 6:35) and “the bread of god . . . which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (Jn. 6:33). The *humanity* of the Incarnate Son of god is the very locus of contact between god and the cosmos, and the center-point through which the life of god is communicated: “Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn. 6:51); “Abide in me as I abide in you. . . . I am the vine, you are the branches” (Jn. 15:4f). By believing in the Son and participating in his life, believers “become children of god” (Jn. 1:12), for “god abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of god, and they abide in god” (1 Jn. 4:15). And as the internal circulation of the Church is the life of god, the vivifying force of this circulation is the very being of god—the eternal relationship of the Father and Son: “and truly our

fellowship is with the Father and with his Son” (1 Jn. 1:3); “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love” (Jn. 15:9); “As you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” (Jn. 17:21). Salvation is participation in the life of god, participation in the life of god is obtained only through the flesh of the Son of god Incarnate, and participation in the flesh of the Son of god Incarnate is to be incorporated into his body, the Church.¹⁶ By participation in the divine sonship, the Church partakes of the love and glory of god revealed on the cross, and through this love god himself, whom no one has ever seen, is made manifest to the world through the Church (1 Jn. 4:11f). Because “the Logos has become flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14), and because it is from this “fullness” that “we have all received, grace upon grace” (Jn. 1:16), and because “[t]his is the one who came by water and blood . . . not with water only but with the water and the blood” (1 Jn. 5:6), “those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh” are “the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 Jn. 7).

“The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me” (Jn. 17:22f). Salvation is participation in the very life of god; more specifically, it is in-corporation into the sonship of the Son through participation in the glory of god disclosed in the crucifixion, and this glory—which was the *that within which* the love of Father and Son was reciprocated in eternity—is the Spirit (cf. Ex. 40:35; Isa. 63:9ff). The Spirit is “the gift of god” and “living Water” (Jn. 4:10) which, in the believer, becomes “a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (Jn. 4:14), and “no one can enter the kingdom of god without being born of water and Spirit” (Jn. 3:5). It is out of the heart of the Incarnate Son that flow the “rivers of living Water” that are the Spirit (Jn. 7:38f), and for this reason “he will take what is” the Son’s “and declare it” to the believer (Jn. 16:14), thereby effecting within the believer participation in the divine sonship: “And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us” (1 Jn. 3:24), and “[b]y this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit” (1 Jn. 4:13). It is the Spirit who is “the river of the Water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of god and of the Lamb” and into the new creation—the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church (Rev. 22:1).

¹⁶ For a work which emphasizes the sacramental character of Johannine Christianity, see Bro-CBD, and especially Bar-TGW; for a modern study of Johannine pneumatology which claims a lesser sacramental significance, see Bur-AC.

“‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (Jn. 20:21f). Through the Spirit, the Church is made the body of Christ and empowered to represent Christ on earth, thus “‘whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me” (Jn. 13:20; cf. 17:18). The Spirit is “the Advocate” who “will teach” the Church” everything by disclosing the mystery of the revelation of god in the Incarnate Son (Jn. 14:26)—“he will guide you into all truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears” (Jn. 16:13). Since the nexus of communion between god and the world is *the physical body* of the Incarnate Son, through whom the Spirit is communicated to humankind, the Church is therefore a historical, empirical body existing in the world. Such being the case, those who are not of the Church are excluded from salvation, which is participation in the life of god: “They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us” (1 Jn. 2:19), and “Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have god; whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son” (2 Jn. 9). It is the apostle Peter who is given a particular commission as the shepherd of Christ’s Church (Jn. 21:15ff), yet it is the beloved disciple—who leans on the heart of the Lamb (Jn. 13:21), and stands at the foot of the cross in the embrace of his mother (Jn. 19:26)—who leads Peter (Jn. 20:3f), even while recognizing Peter’s particular dignity (Jn. 20:5f).¹⁷

The Johannine corpus discloses the mysteries of god and salvation in a single, unified vision. All begins with the one god—the Father—and the Logos, his Son. In the crucifixion and humiliation of the Incarnate Son, god himself is disclosed absolutely, and it is through the lens of this perception of god that the whole of Christ’s ministry and teaching is viewed retrospectively. Through the slain Lamb, the very heart of the almighty god is ex-pressed in space and time; yet this ex-expression reveals not only the Father, but the Son as well, along with the very form which defines the eternal relationship between them. This unfathomable love is made present in the world through the Incarnation, and is poured out upon all things from the cross; it is from the cross that

¹⁷ For more on the relationship between the Johannine and Petrine (and Pauline and Marian) ‘offices’ within the Church, see Bal-OPSC.

the Church is born from the very body of Christ, and it is from the cross that the Holy Spirit is breathed upon this Church. As it is the Spirit—the glory of god—who is the very circulation of the eternal relationship between the Father and Son, so too it is through the Spirit that the Church abides in the eternal relationship between the Father and Son; and as it is through the very flesh of the Incarnate Son that the Church participates in this communion of Father, Son and Spirit, the form of salvation is participation in the filial relationship of the Son to the Father. Faith is the door that opens to this participation, and baptism and the eucharist are the bond uniting the Church to the flesh of Christ, within which the Spirit abides. Because the bond uniting man to god is the very flesh of the Incarnate Son, the Church is an historical, empirical body; therefore, the Church is the locus of salvation. The Spirit not only unites this body, guiding it into all truth and preserving its historical continuity; it also manifests within this body the very life of god. The form of salvation in Johannine theology is thoroughly Trinitarian. The epistemic ground is the cruciform revelation of god in Christ; the ontological ground is the eternal relationship between the Father, Son, and Spirit; the effective, experiential ground is the presence of the Spirit, through whom the Church participates in that eternal relationship.

Moving on to the Pauline corpus, here too we find an integral unity between theology and soteriology, such that each can be understood only in light of the other. Jesus the Christ is the center-point of covenant history; the Holy Spirit is the presence of god with his people—the cohesive force and internal dynamic of the body of Christ, and the bond of unity joining humankind to god. But, as we'll see below, this soteriological reality experienced by Paul and his churches is grounded ultimately in the eternal being of god the Father. The Christ has not merely brought *a* message about god, and the crucifixion of the Son of god is not merely *a* point on the timeline of salvation history; it is the locus of god the Father's glory, and it is through the cross that this glory has been revealed to the world, and the love of god has shone forth. The Son is the eternal Wisdom of god—the center of all being and cosmic history—and the Spirit is the one in whom the Church in space and time is joined to the eternity of god through the crucified Son of god. In a word, the explicit Pauline *form* of salvation is grounded in an implicit Trinitarian ontology, and it will be my claim that the Pauline hymn to the cosmic

Christ—Colossians 1:13ff—is the lens through which the unity of Pauline theology, and that of the New Testament as a whole, is most clearly perceived.

The secondary literature on the question of the deity of the Son of god in Pauline studies is immense and varied in its conclusions. On one side of the debate, scholars such as J.D.G. Dunn have argued that, though Paul’s understanding of god was drastically altered by his understanding of Jesus—and this to such an extent that his monotheism itself was transformed, though not abandoned—still, Paul did not understand the Son to be eternal *as personal*.¹⁸ Others, such as Richard Bauckham and N.T. Wright, have argued that not only had Paul’s understanding of monotheism been transformed through Christ, but also, that Paul did indeed see the Son as the eternal, pre-existent Lord.¹⁹

This latter position better accords with the evidence of the Pauline corpus itself. For example, in place of the *shema*, Paul claims that “for us there is one god, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor. 8:6). The central factor that tips the scales in favor of understanding the “through whom” in the above cited verse as indicative of an understanding of the Son as pre-existent is the fact that—like John—Paul’s understanding of the Son is grounded in the Wisdom tradition, and therefore, Christ can be described as “the Power of god and the Wisdom of god” (1 Cor. 1:24).²⁰ But the principal text in the argument over whether or not Paul understood the Son to be pre-existent is Phil. 2:5ff, according to which Christ was “in the form of god” (Phil. 2:6) “but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (Phil. 2:7) in order to endure “death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8) for the salvation of the world. While some, such as Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, have argued that this passage is to be understood principally in light of Paul’s

¹⁸ See, e.g., Dun-UDNT, 221—though Dunn allows that the New Testament identified Jesus with the Wisdom of the Old Testament, still, claims Dunn, “Jesus was not himself pre-existent; he was the man that pre-existent Wisdom became.”

¹⁹ See Wri-WSPR and the more emphatic Bau-GC. Perhaps the most significant contemporary treatment of Paul’s doctrine of the Son is to be found in the work of Larry Hurtado (Hur-LJC), who has argued that the evidence of cultic devotion to Christ in the Pauline corpus—as well as the entire New Testament—indicates that Christ was perceived as central to the theology and worship of the earliest Christianity.

²⁰ See Ric-PLG, 296ff, for a reading of 1 Cor. 8:6 that denies any implications of the pre-existence of Christ. While Richardson’s study is in my opinion quite correct with regard to its central thesis (i.e., that Paul’s understanding of god was transformed through his understanding of Christ), I find his argument concerning this text—that the meaning of *ta panta* is determined by its context, and that in *this* context there is a (possible) distinction between the scope of god’s activity and that of Christ—to be unconvincing for the reasons given below.

Adam Christology²¹ (rather than as implying pre-existence), there are at least four significant factors that tell against such an interpretation.

In the first place, there is no mention whatever of Adam in the passage, nor is there any indication that Paul is here contrasting him with Christ. In the second place, the principal ground for seeing such a contrast between Adam and Christ (alongside the presumption that *of course* Paul would neither ‘compromise’ his monotheism, nor claim that a *human* who had been recently *crucified* is god) is Paul’s description of the Son as being in the *form* of god, which, we are told, is to be contrasted with Adam as being made in the *image* of god. Yet Paul does *not* use the Greek word for “image” (*eikon*) to describe Christ in this passage; rather, he uses *morphe*. In the third place, there is the obvious contrast between the form of god on the one hand, and the form of a slave on the other: Paul claims that Christ “emptied himself” before “taking the form of a slave” (Phil. 2:7), but if Paul merely intended to contrast the lives of two *humans*, there would be no reason to describe one of them as having emptied himself.²² And finally, the passage concludes by applying one of the most strictly monotheistic passages in the entire Old Testament—Isa. 45:23 (“To me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear”; cf. Isa. 45:22—“For I am god, and there is no other”, and Isa. 45:24—“Only in the Lord, it shall be said of me”)—to Christ: “every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:10f). Paul, therefore, understood Christ to have pre-existed his earthly life; just as with John, so too with Paul, the Son of the Father is the eternal Wisdom of god.

Turning our attention to the Holy Spirit, that Paul recognized his divinity is not a point of argument—the fact that he is the Spirit *of god* all but removes from the outset the possibility of understanding him as less than divine—but there is less agreement among scholars as to whether or not the Spirit was recognized by Paul (and early Christianity at large) as *personal*. According to many scholars, Pauline theology sees the Spirit merely as an impersonal *force*—the *power* of god through which Christ (and/or god) may be

²¹ Cf. Mur-PCL, 227

²² Cf. 2 Cor. 8:9—“for your sake he made himself poor though he was rich”. The affirmation of a *kenosis* on the part of the Son of god *for the sake of* his earthly ministry cannot be understood without assuming pre-existence.

experienced by believers. But there are at least two strong arguments that can be registered against this thesis.

In the first place, there are the many parallels between Christ and the Spirit.²³ *Righteousness*: Christ (2 Cor. 5:21), the Spirit (Rom. 14:17); *Justified in*: Christ (Gal. 2:17), the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11); *In*: Christ (Rom. 8:1, 10), the Spirit (Rom. 8:9); *Joy in*: Christ (Phil. 3:1), the Spirit (Rom. 14:17); *Peace in*: Christ (Phil. 4:7), the Spirit (Rom. 14:17); *Sanctified*: Christ (1 Cor. 1:2, 30), the Spirit (Rom. 15:16; 2 Thess. 2:13); *Speaking from*: Christ (2 Cor. 2:17), the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3); *Fullness of*: Christ (Col. 2:10), the Spirit (Eph. 5:18); and *Dwelling place*: Christ (Eph. 2:21), the Spirit (Eph. 2:22).²⁴ When these parallels are viewed in light of the fact that Paul clearly *distinguishes* between the Son and the Spirit on several occasions²⁵—and *never* identifies the two—the supposition that the *functional* language applied to the Spirit implies a *lack* of personhood—or that he is merely the impersonal conduit through which god is made present to the Church—is strongly challenged. Second, there are several passages in the Pauline corpus that clearly imply a personal understanding of the Spirit. The Spirit “leads” (Rom. 8:14) and “*gives witness with our spirit*” (Rom. 8:16). Just as Christ “intercedes” for the Church, so too the Spirit “helps us in our weakness” and “*makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be expressed*” (Rom. 8:26). The Spirit “*scrutinizes*” (1 Cor. 2:10); because “no one *knows* what lies at the depths of god but the Spirit of god” (1 Cor. 2:11), he can therefore *teach* the Church “spiritual things in spiritual terms” (1 Cor. 2:13). Just as the Father “accomplishes all” (1 Cor. 12:6), so too the Spirit “produces all” as “he wills” (1 Cor. 12:11). Just as the Father “gives life” (Rom. 8:11), so to the Spirit “gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6), and the Christian is to receive the

²³ Here I follow Con-IBHS1, 37-38.

²⁴ This parallelism is even stronger in the gospel according to John—*Given by the Father*: the Son (3:16), the Spirit (14:16); *With the disciples*: the Son (3:22; 13:33; 14:20; 14:26), the Spirit (14:16ff); *World cannot receive*: the Son (1:11; 5:53), the Spirit (14:17); *World does not know/only believers know*: the Son (14:19; 16:16ff), the Spirit (14:17); *Sent by the Father*: the Son (5:37), the Spirit (14:26); *Teaches*: the Son (7:14ff; 8:20; 18:37), the Spirit (14:26); *Comes from the Father*: the Son (16:28; 18:37), the Spirit (15:26; 16:7, 13); *Bears witness*: the Son (5:31ff; 8:13ff; 7:7), the Spirit (15:26); *Speaks only what he has heard*: the Son (7:17; 8:26ff; 12:49ff; 14:10), the Spirit (16:13); *Glorifies*: the Son (17:1, 4), the Spirit (16:14); *Unveils/communicates*: the Son (4:25; 16:25), the Spirit (16:13ff); and *Guides into truth*: the Son (5:33; 18:37; 14:6), the Spirit (16:13); cf. Con-IBHS1, 55f.

²⁵ E.g., Rom. 15:30; 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Cor. 13:13

“joy that comes from” the Spirit (1 Thess. 1:6). The Spirit *cries out* from within the believer (Gal. 4:6), and we are to do nothing to “*sadden*” the Spirit (Eph. 4:30).²⁶

The evidence in the Pauline corpus, therefore, suggests the divinity of both the Son and Spirit, as well as heavily implying a personal understanding of the Spirit, and on that account we must recognize as the *ground* of Pauline theology a genuinely Trinitarian understanding of god. And when this is understood, the confluence of Johannine and Pauline theology becomes all the more apparent. The Son is the “beloved” of the Father (Eph. 1:6) in whom are the “magnificent riches” (Phil. 4:19), and “every treasure of wisdom and knowledge”, of god (Col. 2:3), and being “the Image of god” (2 Cor. 4:4), it is the Son who is the revelation “of the mystery of god” (Col. 2:2). Yet more specifically, Christian knowledge of *god* is “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2); the foundational perception of Pauline theology is “to grasp fully . . . the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ’s love” (Eph. 3:18) “which surpasses all knowledge” and leads to the attainment of “the fullness of god himself” (Eph. 3:19). The cross of Christ is the ex-pression of the very heart of god; the “glory of god shining on the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6) is “the mystery hidden for ages in god” (Eph. 3:9).

As such, the Son is the universal nexus—the locus and ground of all things and the cosmic bull’s eye of the meaning of salvation history. It is in Christ that god gathers together “all things”—“things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:10); the “eternal purpose” of god has been “carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:11), for “He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things” (Eph. 4:10). Likewise, all Scripture is to be seen through the lens of “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4), “since only in Christ” is its veil lifted and its meaning disclosed (2 Cor. 3:15).

The Church, through the blood of Christ, subsists “in his flesh” (Eph. 2:13f); Christ abolished the law through the cross “that he might create in himself one new humanity” (Eph. 2:15). The Church, therefore, is the locus of god’s communion with man—it is the “body” of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27) and “the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:23). The Church is the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:31f), and it is “through the Church” that “the wisdom of god in its rich variety” is proclaimed in the heavens (Eph.

²⁶ See Fee-GEP, 829 – 831, for more on the personhood of the Spirit in the Pauline corpus.

3:10). The Church, being the body of Christ, is grounded in the sacraments: in baptism, for “he saved us” through “the water of rebirth” (Tit. 3:5), and “[a]s many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal. 3:27); in the eucharist, for “[t]he cup of blessing that we bless” is “a sharing in the blood of Christ”, and “the bread that we break” is “a sharing in the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 10:16). Since “there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17). And because the Church participates in the very body of he who became Incarnate, it is an empirical, historical reality. The leader of the Church must therefore “[g]uard the good treasure entrusted to” him (2 Tim. 1:14), and pass on his office and authority “to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well” (2 Tim. 2:2; Tit. 2:15).

Hence, just as with John, so too with Paul salvation is understood as participation in the life of god, and “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new. All this is from god, who reconciled us to himself through Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17f). Salvation is participation in “the fellowship” of the Son of god (1 Cor. 1:9); by being in the Son we “receive adoption as children” of god (Gal. 4:5), and through the Son the “Spirit” has been “poured out on us richly” (Tit. 3:6). Through Christ we “have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18): “There is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one god and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4ff). In the body of Christ, and through the indwelling of the Spirit (Rom. 8:11), “the whole structure” of the Church (and the cosmos) “is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:21).

The Pauline vision of salvation history has a Trinitarian form. God the Father is the source of all things, and with him from everlasting was his Son, who is the Wisdom and Power of god. The Son is the universal nexus—the center-point and ground of all things: it was through the Son that all things came into being, it is in the Son that all things are gathered together, and it is through the lens of the Son crucified that the treasures of Scripture are laid bare before the world. The Spirit is the *that which* within Christ by whom all things are vivified and through whom participation in the Son’s sonship is realized. The Church is the archetype of the new creation in Christ and the receptacle of the effusion of god’s gifts, which were poured out upon the world through

the cross. As it is in the flesh and blood of Christ that salvation has been achieved, it is in his flesh and blood—the sacraments—that salvation is realized. The Incarnation of the Son of god is the locus of the presence of god’s Spirit in the world and the gravitational center that draws all things toward itself that creation might be renewed and participate in the life of god.

My final task in this section will be to argue that Col. 1:13-20 is the recapitulation of the New Testament as a whole, and that through it, the New Testament’s theology and soteriology are unified in a single vision. The passage reads as follows—

13 *He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son,*

14 *in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

15 *He is the image of the invisible god, the firstborn of all creation;*

16 *for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.*

17 *He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

18 *He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.*

19 *For in him all the fullness of god was pleased to dwell,*

20 *and through him god was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

While this passage has commonly been recognized as an early Christian hymn to Christ—and scholars have likewise noted the universality and cosmic scope of Christ’s lordship in the hymn—the recognition of the hymn’s *chiastic structure* has received less attention. It is by reading the passage as such that I here offer my ‘new’ interpretation of it.²⁷ According to this structure, the hymn may be set out as follows—

A—*He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*

B—*He is the Image of the invisible god*

C—*The firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created*

²⁷ For other treatments of the hymn, cf. Dun-UDNT, 136f; Wit-MFOC, 81ff; Mur-PCL, 240ff; and John Behr’s *Colossians 1:13-20: A Chiastic Reading* (Saint Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly, 40:4 [1996], pgs. 247 – 265). I am indebted to Behr for recognizing verses 13 and 14 as being part of the hymn, yet my division, and interpretation, of the hymn differs from his own, especially with regard to my locating the point of departure of the hymn in the interpersonal communion of the Trinity *ad intra*. As far as I’m aware, this move has been made by no contemporary commentators.

D—*Things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church*

E—*He is the Arkhe*

D'—*The firstborn from the dead*

C'—*So that he might come to have **first place in everything***

B'—*For in him all the fullness of god was pleased to dwell*

A'—*And through him god was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Foundational to the interpretation of this passage to be offered below are the meanings of Christ's being "the Image of the invisible god" (B) and his being "the firstborn of all creation" (C), as well as *both* the *distinction* and the *connection* between the two. The key issue is the meaning of the word "firstborn" in verse 15. According to most commentators, "firstborn" is to be understood with reference to Christ's *primacy* in relation to creation, and this over against the possibility of seeing the word as having any *temporal* connotations. William Barclay claimed that taking "firstborn" in a temporal sense would "include Jesus Christ in creation rather than identify him as the Creator", and that to do this would be to neglect "the rest of Paul's thinking."²⁸ After reviewing several possible meanings of the word, he concludes that there "is only one real solution to the problem. The word *prototokos* has quite commonly another meaning which has nothing to do with time at all. It means *first in place, first in honor.*"²⁹

Likewise, according to Witherington—

*[T]he firstborn terminology is found in each stanza but in neither case should the reference to birth be taken literally. In the first stanza the Christ is said to be the author of all creation, so the term **prototokos** probably doesn't refer to his being created but to his existence prior to all creation and his precedence and supremacy over it, just as he also precedes all others in the resurrection of the dead. Verse 16 in fact stresses that Christ created even the supernatural powers and principalities . . .*³⁰

²⁸ Bar-JTSH, 399

²⁹ Bar-JTSH, 400

³⁰ Wit-MFOC, 82

Similar interpretations are offered by O’Collins³¹ and Grillmeier.³² Against such,³³ however, it is my claim that—when the passage as a whole is read according to its chiasmic structure—the “firstborn” of verse 15 indeed *does* have a literal, temporal referent, and this *not in exclusion to* the notion of the eternity of the Son. The bases for this assertion on my part are three. In the first place, the chiasmic structure of the passage at most requires, and at least allows, that there be a distinction between Christ as *the Image of god* on one hand, and Christ as *the firstborn of all creation* on the other, and this distinction is itself illuminated by the allusion to the Wisdom tradition in calling Christ “the Image of god” (B), as well as by the corresponding sections of the respective parts of the passage, when viewed according to its chiasmic structure. In the second place, every other section of the passage, which speaks of Christ as “first”, *does* denote *temporal* priority, even though the temporal signification does not itself exhaust the meaning of the word in its respective occurrences. In the third place, interpretations that seek to exclude a temporal signification of the word “firstborn” miss *the integral unity* between salvation and theology that is evident not only in this passage, but also in the New Testament—as a whole—as well.

Thus in place of the common exegesis of this passage, I offer the following. The “Image of the invisible god” in (B) identifies Christ—the “beloved Son” spoken of in (A)—as the Wisdom of god. As we saw above, the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament describes god’s Wisdom not only as eternal, but also as *both* being eternally caused by god, and *also* as the eternal object of god’s love. Furthermore, we’ve also seen that the Old Testament talks of the *creation*—or *coming forth*—of Wisdom at the time of, and for the purpose of, the creation of the cosmos, as well as that the Wisdom of god is seen in the Old Testament as the locus of cosmic rule and cohesion; this, I submit, is the background against which the “firstborn” of (C) is to be understood. By further interpreting both (B) and (C), and the remaining sections of the hymn, in light of the *Arkhe* of (E), we are left with the following.

³¹ Oco-CH, 35

³² Gri-CCT, 25

³³ Though Ray Brown at least *acknowledged the possibility* of taking “firstborn” in a temporal sense (Bro-INTC, 135f), for the reasons to be offered below it will become apparent why I disagree with his contention that, were the temporal sense of the word to be granted, “this would be a preexistence dating back to the moment of creation.”

All begins with the Triune god—with the Father, whose eternal fecundity and love finds its eternal term in the Son; with the Son, who is the exhaustive expression of the Father’s eternal fecundity; with the Spirit, who is the eternal locus and expression of the communion of the Father and Son. It is only with reference to such a point of departure—a ground that is an eternal communion of self-giving love—that the remaining sections of the hymn become fully transparent. As the Son is the eternal *ex-pression of the Father*, and the locus of his all, so too it is *in the Son*—the ‘original Other’—that the creation of *that which is other* is both effected and located. Being eternally *generated by the Father*, the Son is the ‘place’ of all creation; being the eternal *ex-pression of the Father*, it is he through whom the Father is *revealed to creation*. In other words, from the single fact of the Father’s eternal generation of the Son follows the Son’s being *Arkhe* in relation to *all things*, and since he is eternally originated, it follows that he is the origin of creation and salvation history. Because he is the eternal ex-pression of god (B), he is also the ex-pression of god in the world (B’); because he is the *Arkhe* in relation to creation (C, D), he is also the *Arkhe* in relation to the new creation, of which the resurrection is the font (D’, C’). He is the *Arkhe* (E); therefore he is the locus of god’s communion with, and redemption of, the cosmos (A, A’). Thus we are left with the following schema: 1) ‘immanent’ Trinity and the eternal communion which defines god → 2) creation → 3) Incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of the Son of god ← 4) new creation in Christ ← 5) participation of the new creation in the very life of god via the Son and Spirit.

Only an exegesis of the hymn that follows this basic outline is capable of becoming transparent to the obvious chiasmic structure of the hymn, as well as the particulars by which its respective sections are defined. The triune form of god *ad intra* is the ontological ground of salvation history, and salvation history—recapitulated and brought to its consummation in the Incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ—is the epistemic point of departure for understanding the communion, the form, of the triune god. God stands in relation to every event in salvation history as the nucleus in relation to the radii of a circle; in the Colossians hymn, every point on the circumference of the circle can only be understood in relation to this nucleus, and when this is done, the

nucleus is itself perceived in each of the radii, and the radii can, by being seen individually in light of this common point of unity, illuminate one another.

The taking of “firstborn” in the temporal sense, therefore, does not in the slightest imply that the Son had a beginning, or that he was himself created; rather, it refers to the *distinct* procession of the Son from the Father *for the particular purpose of* creation. When this is understood, the staggering unity between salvation and theology envisioned in this passage becomes readily apparent. From all eternity, the Son proceeds forth from the Father, has the Spirit communicated to him, and returns himself to the Father in the Spirit. Such being the case, the very form of the Father’s fatherhood is seen to be defined by fecundity and self-giving love. The procession of the Son is the precondition for god’s act of creation; as the Son is the ex-pression of the Father and the principle of distinction itself, creation of that which is not-god is effected both *through* the Son and *in* the Son: *through* the Son in that the Son is the Logos of god, *in* the Son in that the Son is the ‘original Other.’ The supreme revelation of the very character of the Father is the Incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of the Son of god. In becoming incarnate, the Son unites man and the cosmos to god, and god to man and the cosmos. By faith in Christ, and through communion with his very body through the Church, the Spirit of god indwells the believer, creating all things new by effecting, through his presence, the creation’s partaking of the eternal communion that is god.

I here offer the following catena of passages from Scripture so as to further illuminate, and make clear the Scriptural scope, of the intended meaning of the exegesis of Col. 1:13 – 20 offered above. Further passages could be added to each section, but I trust that the following are sufficient to recommend my exegesis of the passage to readers.

A—*He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*

Song Sol. 2:10ff—*My beloved speaks and says to me: ‘Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away*

Song Sol. 6:3—*I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he pastures his flock among the lilies*

Zech. 14:8f—*On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem . . . And YHWH will become king over all the earth; on that day, YHWH will be one and his name one*

Wis. Sol. 8:2—*I loved her and sought her from my youth; I desired to take her for my bride, and became enamored of her beauty*

B—He is *the Image of the invisible god*

Wis. Sol. 7:25f—*For she is . . . a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty . . . she is the radiance of eternal light*

1 Cor. 1:24—*Christ, the Power of god and the Wisdom of god*

Heb. 1:3—*He is the Radiance of god's glory and the exact imprint of god's very being*

Ex. 34:6—*YHWH, YHWH, a god . . . abounding in steadfast love*

1 Jn. 4:8—*For god is love*

Wis. Sol. 8:3—*She glorifies her noble birth by living with god, and the Lord of all loves her*

Prov. 8:30—*I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always*

C—*The firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created*

Eph. 1:4—*He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world*

Ps. 45:1f—*My heart overflows with a good Word; I speak . . . grace is poured out*

Prov. 8:22—*YHWH created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago*

Sir. 1:4—*Wisdom was created before all other things*

Sir. 24:3—*I came forth from the mouth of the Most High and covered the earth like a mist*

D—*Things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the Church*

Wis. Sol. 8:4—*She is an initiate in the knowledge of god, and an associate in all his works*

Wis. Sol. 7:22—*Wisdom, the fashioner of all things*

Jn. 1:3—*All things came into being through him . . . in him*

Heb. 1:2f—*Through whom he created the worlds . . . he sustains all things*

Wis. Sol. 8:1—*She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well*

E—He is the Arkhe

Jn. 1:1—*In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was toward the god, and god the Logos was*

Rev. 22:13—*I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end*

Col. 2:2f—*The knowledge of god's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*

Eph. 1:9f—*The mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him*

Jn. 12:32—*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself*

D'—The firstborn from the dead

Rom. 8:21—*The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of god*

Wis. Sol. 8:30—*Because of her I will have immortality*

Rom. 1:3f—*The gospel concerning his Son . . . made Son of god in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead*

Rev. 21:5—*See, I am making all things new*

Phil. 3:10—*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection*

Ps. 2:7—*You are my Son; this day I have begotten you*

C'—So that he might come to have **first place in everything**

Jn. 12:3—*The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume*

Ps. 110:3—*Before the daystar, like the dew, I have begotten you*

Mt. 3:16—*As he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of god descending like a dove and alighting on him*

Ps. 133:2—*Precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard . . . running down over the collar of his robes*

2 Cor. 5:17—*If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old order has passed away; now all is new*

Rom. 6:3f—*All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death . . . so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life*

Eph. 1:20ff—*God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named . . . And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things*

B'—*For in him all the fullness of god was pleased to dwell*

2 Cor. 4:6—*The glory of god shining in the face of Christ*

Isa. 6:1ff—*I saw the Lord sitting on a throne high and exalted; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, Holy, Holy, is YHWH of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots on the threshold shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke*

Isa. 57:15—*I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are crushed and lowly in spirit*

Mt. 27:28f—*They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head*

Ez. 1:28—*Like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the splendor all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of YHWH. When I saw it, I fell on my face*

Jn. 1:18—*The only Son, who dwells in the heart of the Father, has revealed him*

Ps. 34:18—*YHWH is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit*

Rev. 7:17—*The Lamb at the center of the throne*

Lk. 23:33f—*When they came to the place that is called “the Skull,” they crucified Jesus . . . Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them”*

Jn. 14:9—*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*

Mt. 17:2—*He was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white*

A’—*And through him god was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Lk. 3:21—*You are my Beloved Son*

Prov. 9:5—*Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed*

Jn. 15:4f—*Abide in me as I abide in you . . . I am the vine, you are the branches*

Eph. 1:6—*His glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved*

Jn. 6:56—*Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them*

Sir. 6:31—*You will wear her like a glorious robe, and put her on like a splendid crown*

Jn. 14:20—*I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you*

Jn. 17:26—*So that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them*

Lk. 4:18—*The Spirit of god is upon me*

Jn. 7:38f—*“Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living Water.” Now he said this about the Spirit*

Jn. 19:30ff—*He bowed his head and gave over his Spirit . . . One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and Water came out*

Rev. 22:1—*Then the angel showed me the river of the Water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of god and of the Lamb*

Rev. 21:3f—*See, the home of god is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and god himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away*

By interpreting the Colossians hymn according to its chiasmic structure, its unified vision of god and salvation history becomes readily apparent. The ground of this vision is the eternal, triune communion which defines the very being of god. Because of the *form* of this relationship, recognizing an explicit distinction between Christ's being "the Image of the invisible god" on the one hand, and "the firstborn of all creation" on the other, is necessary for the perception of the passage's doctrines of god, salvation, and the unity between the two, according to which the form of the latter (salvation) is determined by that of the former (god).

Having thus explored the Trinitarian form of salvation as it presented in the New Testament, we are now prepared to investigate the Trinity and salvation in Irenaeus and the ante-Nicene fathers of the second century Church. The distinction and unity explored above between Christ the Image, and Christ the first-born—along with all that this unity and distinction entails—will be foundational for understanding all that follows.

III Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch

The works of Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch belong to that select body of literature commonly designated as the writings of the Apostolic fathers, a collection which (usually) also includes *The Didakhe* (ca. 100 a.d.), the so-called *Second Epistle of Clement* (ca. 150 a.d.), Polycarp of Smyrna's *Epistle to the Philippians* (ca. 135 a.d.), fragments from the lost work of Papias of Hierapolis (*Logion Kuriakon Exegeseis*, ca. 130 a.d.), the so-called *Epistle of Barnabas* (ca. 135 a.d.), and the mysterious, apocalyptic work known as *The Shepherd of Hermas* (ca. 140 a.d.). Clement was the third bishop of Rome,³⁴ and following Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (3:15:34), his office as bishop can be dated as having extended from 92 – 101 a.d. It is generally agreed that his *Epistle to the Corinthians* was written in Rome sometime around 96 a.d. Ignatius was the second bishop of Antioch, and during the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan (98 – 117 a.d.), he was ordered from Syria to Rome to be martyred. On his way to Rome, and under Roman guard, Ignatius wrote epistles to the churches in Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles and Rome from Smyrna, and to the churches in Philadelphia and Smyrna, as well as to Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, from Troas. While the textual history of these seven epistles is somewhat problematic, it is today generally agreed that the middle recension of the epistles is indeed genuine,³⁵ and that the epistles written sometime around 110 a.d.

As with the epistles of the New Testament, those of Clement and Ignatius are primarily pastoral and moral in character, and any theological notions within them are implicit and must be had by way of inference from the principles evident in their more explicit claims concerning ecclesiology and soteriology. On the other hand, with the

³⁴ Cf. Ire-AH, 3:3:3

³⁵ Cf. Sul-FAB, 104f; Pel-DCD, 57ff; Qua-PAT1, 73f; of course, only the middle recension will be cited in the following.

passing of the apostles and spread of the Church throughout the Roman empire, in these works—and those of Ignatius especially—these latter two doctrines, as viewed in light of one another, are stated in a far more explicit and developed form than is to be found in the New Testament, and this to such an extent that the very clarity wherewith they are articulated manifests with itself an unmistakable and vividly expressed understanding of how the Church is *grounded in the person* of Christ, the Incarnate Son of god, and how the very meaning of salvation is *participation* in the life of god *by being in* the Son, thereby receiving the Spirit. In the previous section of this work, we focused our attention on both theology and soteriology, and showed how these two were perceived by Paul and John as an integral unity; in the following section on the Apologists, the unity of these two will also be kept in view, but attention will shift primarily to theology. Thus, in the present section, our goal—while ever keeping the unity of theology and soteriology in mind—will be to focus primarily on soteriology; more specifically, on the incarnational grounding of ecclesiology and the sacraments, whereby salvation is shown to be participation in the life of god through the incarnation of the Son, and the Church is seen as the body of Christ—an empirical, united, historical reality existing in the world, and the locus of god’s salutary presence on earth.

The unity of the Church is perhaps the central theme of Clement’s letter to the church in Corinth; indeed, the letter was written to address “the odious and unholy breach of unity”³⁶ that had recently arisen in Corinth—a discord which arose because the Corinthians had forsaken the practice of “deferring with correctness to those who were set” over them, and were no longer treating their elders “with the honor due them”.³⁷ The importance of the reference to the “elders” of the Church, implying a principle of ecclesial structure and organization, was to be spelled out more emphatically by Ignatius, but even in Clement we see that the notions of salvation and Church are interdependent, and that the office of the bishop played a particularly important function with regard to this latter. In Clement’s letter to the Corinthians, written within a generation of the Apostolic age, we have an explicit, unambiguous reference to apostolic succession. As Christ represented the Father who sent him, so too were the apostles sent by Christ as his

³⁶ CleRom-COR, 1

³⁷ CleRom-COR, 2

representatives, and they, in their turn, passed their authority and office on to others for the preservation of the Church—

*Now, the gospel was given to the apostles for us by the Lord Jesus Christ; and Jesus Christ was sent from god. That is to say, Christ received his commission from god, and the apostles theirs from Christ. The order of these two events was in accordance with the will of god. So thereafter, when the apostles had been given their instructions . . . they set out in the full assurance of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the coming of god's kingdom. And as they went through the territories and townships preaching, they appointed their first converts—after testing them by the Spirit—to be bishops and deacons for the believers of the future.*³⁸

Furthermore, the apostles instructed that the office of the bishop was to be perpetuated into the future—

*[O]ur apostles knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be dissensions over the title of bishop. In their full foreknowledge of this, therefore, they proceeded to appoint the ministers I spoke of, and they went on to add an instruction that if these should fall asleep, other accredited persons should succeed them in their office.*³⁹

It is only in light of the role of the bishop that Clement's admonitions to the Corinthian church can be properly understood. It is "shameful in the extreme" that they

³⁸ CleRom-COR, 42

³⁹ CleRom-COR, 44; it should be noted that the plurals in this passage (i.e., e.g., "It will undoubtedly be no light offence on our part, if we take *their* bishopric away from *men* who have been performing its duties with this impeccable devotion"; "You, however, as we notice in more than one instance have turned *men* out of an office in which *they* were serving honourably") are commonly today taken as proof that, during the time when Clement wrote, the office of the bishop (*episkopos*) was held *not* by a single person, but rather, by several (cf. Sul-FAB, 95ff). Though the principal theses of the present study are not threatened by such a contention, there are some important considerations that tell against it. In the first place, as we'll see, Ignatius, writing less than fifteen years after Clement's letter to the Corinthians, places such importance on the role of the *one* bishop in the churches to whom he writes, that it would be almost inexplicable were it the case that this custom had been different—and this on that very point where Ignatius places the strongest degree of emphasis—within the very lifetime of Ignatius himself. In the second place, Ignatius wrote epistles to six distinct churches, and having emphasized the role of the bishop in each, with the exception of that to the Romans, we are warranted, if not required, to see his testimony as being grounded in a universal, accepted custom. In the third place, when Irenaeus recounts the apostolic succession in the church of Rome, he refers only to the bishopric having been passed down to individuals, never groups of individuals. And finally, the language in Clement's letter does not *require* that it be taken as stating the office of the bishop to be held in the plural. In the first century, and into the second, the words for, and offices of, the 'elder' (*presbuteros*), 'deacon' (*diakonos*) and 'bishop' (*episkopos*, literally, "overseer" or "guardian") overlapped and were to a degree interchangeable; it is not impossible that the "men" that the Corinthians turned out had held offices that were actually distinct, though closely aligned and interdependent, and that Clement's mentioning *episkopoi* was intended to illustrate a principle that held for all churches, and was not a reference to the *actual* state of the office in the *particular* church of Corinth. For a defense of the claim that each church had a single bishop in the early church—and the importance of the role of the bishop—see Ziz-EBC.

are “at odds with” their “clergy”,⁴⁰ for it is by “submission to the clergy”⁴¹ that the unity of the Church is maintained, and schism avoided. If there is “any man of noble mind among you”, writes Clement, any “man overflowing with love”, that person’s love and nobility would show forth, were he to say—

*If it is I who am the cause of any disorder, friction, or division among you, I will remove myself. I will go away, anywhere you wish, and I will do anything the congregation says; only let there be peace between Christ’s flock and their appointed clergy.*⁴²

In light of Clement’s emphasis on the unity of the Church, it is worthwhile to consider what importance he assigned to the particular church to which he belonged—that of Rome. The epistle opens with Clement apologizing for not having addressed the troubles of the Corinthian church earlier due to a “recent series of unexpected misfortunes and set-backs”,⁴³ he later admonishes them to take heed to his advice, that they might not “entangle themselves in transgression and no little danger”,⁴⁴ and near the end of the epistle, Clement claims that the epistle has been written to the Corinthians, by the church of Rome, “through the Holy Spirit”; furthermore, the Roman church will dispatch an envoy to address the problems in Corinth in person.⁴⁵ Thus, while the epistle offers no formal declaration of the universal jurisdiction of the Roman church, nor does it *necessitate* the universal supremacy of Rome be recognized, still, at most it entails, and at least it implies, that the Roman church was understood as holding a certain preeminence.⁴⁶ The scope and manner of this preeminence, however, have long been disputed, and are in no way addressed—still less resolved—in Clement’s epistle.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ CleRom-COR, 47

⁴¹ CleRom-COR, 57

⁴² CleRom-COR, 54

⁴³ CleRom-COR, 1

⁴⁴ CleRom-COR, 59

⁴⁵ CleRom-COR, 63

⁴⁶ Cf. Qua-PAT1, 46f

⁴⁷ And similarly with Ignatius. That his letter to the Roman Church is the *only* epistle of his wherein he does *not* emphasize the office of the bishop; that he describes it as “holding chief place in the territories of the district of Rome” and “foremost in love” (salutation), that he describes it as “a source of instruction to others” (3), that he goes out of his way to make clear that he himself is not issuing orders to it (4), and that—in light of the fact that he, its bishop, is about to be martyred—he seems to suppose that it will play some special role in taking care of his own church in Antioch (9) warrant the conclusion that he saw the Roman church as being in some sense preeminent. This preeminence, however, is not defined, and offers no ground—from the text itself—for arriving at positive conclusions regarding the nature and scope of Rome’s primacy in relation to the Church as a whole.

Turning our attention to theology, though Clement offers nothing by way of systematic statements concerning god, certain passages nonetheless imply that Clement’s understanding of salvation has as its ground a Trinitarian basis. “As surely”, writes Clement, “as god lives, as Jesus Christ lives, and the Holy Spirit also (on whom are set the faith and hope of god’s elect)”⁴⁸—thereby identifying the three as the single object of Christian devotion. Indeed, it is this very Trinitarian basis of salvation that makes the Corinthian’s discord all the more deplorable. The unity of Father, Son and Spirit provides the archetypal form for the concord of the Church, and the one body of the Incarnate Son as crucified and risen—through participation in which salvation is had—entails the unity of the Son’s body as the Church—

*Have we not all the same god, and the same Christ? Is not the same Spirit of grace shed upon us all? Have we not all the same calling in Christ? They why are we rending and tearing asunder the limbs of Christ, and fomenting discord against our own body? Why are we so lost to all sense and reason that we have forgotten our membership of one another? . . . your thoughtlessness has brought the name of the Lord into disrespect, to say nothing of imperiling your own souls.*⁴⁹

As the Father is the source of all things, so too is he the term of Christian worship and devotion, which are offered by Christians through the Son,⁵⁰ who is himself the exemplar according to which Christians are to pattern their own lives.⁵¹ The Spirit is he through whom god (and Christ)⁵² has inspired the Scriptures.⁵³ Concerning the person of the Son, the most telling claim on his behalf to have come from the hand of Clement—a highly significant passage in light of the argument laid out in **section II** above, according to which the cornerstone of the Church’s understanding of Christ is the Wisdom tradition—is to be found in chapter 36 of the epistle.⁵⁴ The passage reads thus—

*Jesus Christ, the High Priest by whom our gifts are offered, and the Protector by whom our feebleness is aided. **Through him we can look up to the highest heaven and see, as in a mirror, the peerless perfection of the face of god.** Through him the eyes of our*

⁴⁸ CleRom-COR, 58

⁴⁹ CleRom-COR, 46f

⁵⁰ CleRom-COR, 20, 32, 50, 61, 64, 65; cf. 58—“Jesus Christ, by whom is god glorified for ever and ever, amen”.

⁵¹ CleRom-COR, 2

⁵² CleRom-COR, 22—“All these promises find their confirmation when we believe in Christ, for it is he himself who summons us, through his Holy Spirit”.

⁵³ CleRom-COR, 8

⁵⁴ To my knowledge, no scholar of patristics has drawn attention to this passage’s significance as regards the person of the Son in the Trinitarian theology of the early Church.

*hearts are opened, and our dim and clouded understanding unfolds like a flower to the light; for through him the Lord permits us to taste the Wisdom of eternity. He is the Radiance of god's majesty . . .*⁵⁵

This passage is remarkable for several reasons. In the first place, Clement's allusion to the Wisdom tradition is emphatic and undeniable. Not only does he close the passage by citing Heb. 1:3ff—one of the most direct allusions to the Wisdom tradition in the entire New Testament—but he *precedes* this citation by, first, describing Christ as a mirror-image of god (which hearkens back to Paul's calling Christ "the Image of the invisible god" in Col. 1:15), and second, by *explicitly claiming* that the Son is the one through whom god's *eternal* Wisdom is manifested. In light of the fact that Heb. 1:3 (and Col. 1:15, for that matter)—the passage that Clement immediately goes on to cite—*itself* cites Wis. Sol. 7:25f ("she is . . . a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty . . . she is the radiance of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of god, and an image of his goodness") *without* explicitly applying the predicate *sophia* to Christ, implies that *Clement himself consciously understood Heb. 1:3 in light of Wis. Sol. 7:25ff*. This point is momentous, and ought not be overlooked, for there is no other passage in the entire Old Testament wherein the divinity and eternity of god's Wisdom are so emphatically pronounced, alongside the eternal *communion of love* between god and his Wisdom. That Clement was familiar with *The Wisdom of Solomon* cannot be denied, for he cites it twice elsewhere in his epistle.⁵⁶

In light of these considerations—and what we have seen in the preceding sections, and what we will see presently in the writings of Ignatius, alongside those of whom we will treat of in the following sections of this work—it is my claim that Clement of Rome not only offers further support for believing that the principal means whereby the person of the Son of god had been articulated and understood by the early Church was the Wisdom tradition, but also, as such, the Son was understood as intrinsic to the very being of god. For Athanasius and the defenders of Nicene Trinitarian theology, the predication of the Son as the *Radiance* of god in Heb. 1:3 was—without doubt—the cornerstone of the defense of the Son's divinity and eternity; Clement's citation of the passage,

⁵⁵ CleRom-COR, 36

⁵⁶ CleRom-COR, 3, cf. Wis. Sol. 2:24; CleRom-COR, 27, cf. Wis. Sol. 11:21, 12:12; another possible allusion to Christ as the Wisdom of god may be found in CleRom-COR, 57.

alongside the interpretive comments wherewith he introduces it, suggests that the distance between the faith of the earliest Church and that of the First Council of Constantinople is perhaps not so great as the span of three centuries would suggest. Whether or not the Apologists of the second century—due to the influence of Greek philosophy, and, to be more specific, (middle-) ‘Platonism’—‘squandered’ this ‘high’ view of the Son will be treated in **section IV** below; for now we turn our attention to the most worthy voice of the Church between the time of the apostles and Irenaeus, the great door through whom the Church of the second century is opened, Ignatius of Antioch.

As with Clement, in Ignatius we see the unity of the Church emphasized to a greater degree than in the New Testament, and this unity is understood especially with reference to the office of the bishop—an office which Ignatius himself emphasizes nearly to the point of the obsessive and stresses to a far greater degree than the New Testament, or even Clement. However, unlike Clement’s epistle, and like the Johannine and Pauline works before him, and that of Irenaeus after him, in the writings of Ignatius, this ecclesiology (which is but an aspect of soteriology) is *always* understood in the *immediate* light of the Incarnate Son of god, and the *fact that* he who became incarnate, was crucified and rose again is the Son *of god* is ever kept in view. In other words, the unity of Ignatius’ thought is such that in saying anything he says almost everything, all is referred to, and understood directly in light of, a single, underlying theme—that salvation is participation in the life of god through participation in the Incarnate Son of god.

As with Clement, perhaps the foremost concern in all the Ignatian corpus is the preservation of the unity of the Church—understood as the body of Christ—in the face of schism and heresy. “Give thought especially to unity”, writes Ignatius to Polycarp, “for there is nothing more important than this”; to the church in Philadelphia, Ignatius urges, “come all of you to your meetings like one man, without a thought of disunity in your hearts”.⁵⁷ This unity is essential to Ignatius’ understanding of the Church because, as we’ve seen in Paul and John, the Church was understood as the body of Christ, through which salvation is communicated to humankind: “To be inside the sanctuary”, the Church, “is to be clean; to be outside it, unclean”.⁵⁸ As “completely united” the members

⁵⁷ IgnAnt-PHIL, 6

⁵⁸ IgnAnt-TRAL, 7

of the Church are “members of his Son’s body”, and as such, can “sing aloud to the Father with one voice through Jesus Christ”—“a whole symphony of minds in concert”—and be heard by the Father.⁵⁹ Heresy, therefore, is not simply a divergence of opinion, and its consequence goes infinitely beyond mere disagreement; rather, the “alien herbs of heresy” are “poison” and “a lethal drug” which bring upon the one who mistakes them for the “honeyed wine” of orthodoxy “his own destruction with a fatal relish”,⁶⁰ and for this reason Ignatius urges the Ephesians that “you must never let yourselves be anointed with the malodorous chrism of the prince of this world’s doctrines, or he may snatch you into his own keeping and away from the life that lies before you”.⁶¹ And the visible, empirical symbol wherein this unity of the Church is preserved is the person of the bishop, for “as the Lord was wholly one with the Father, and never acted independently of him”, so too “you yourselves must never act independently of your bishop and clergy”.⁶²

As with the eternity and divinity of the Son in the theological works of Athanasius, the role and importance of the office of the bishop is present everywhere in Ignatius’ writings, and interconnected with everything he has to say. “[W]here disunion and bad blood exist, god can never be dwelling”, and this unity is itself “unity with god and with the bishop’s council of clergy”.⁶³ Alongside acknowledging the deacons and clergy, who form his council, the church must “look on the bishop as a type of the Father”, “for without these three orders no church has any right to the name”.⁶⁴ Because the bishop’s authority “was never obtained” by “mere human agency”, but rather, “was conferred upon him by the love of god the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”,⁶⁵ the laity

⁵⁹ IgnAnt-EPH, 4

⁶⁰ IgnAnt-TRAL, 7

⁶¹ IgnAnt-EPH, 17

⁶² IgnAnt-MAG, 7

⁶³ IgnAnt-PHIL, 8

⁶⁴ IgnAnt-TRAL, 3

⁶⁵ IgnAnt-PHIL, 1; this passage is often contrasted with Clement’s account of the institution of the bishop to the effect that, whereas Clement saw the office of the bishop as extending to the apostles, Ignatius held to no notion of apostolic succession, but rather, understood the bishop as receiving his authority directly from god. This, however, is merely an argument from silence, and the texts themselves in no way necessitate that such a conclusion be drawn (if it is posed in such a manner as to suggest a dichotomy between the two). As we’ve seen above, Clement’s own account of apostolic succession is grounded in the notion of representation (the Father sent the Son who represents him, the Son sent the apostles who represent *him*, and the apostles ordained bishops who represent *them*—this hardly suggests that Clement saw the bishop’s authority as being grounded merely in the human). Because Ignatius’ thought is grounded

must “follow him like sheep”.⁶⁶ A church must “acknowledge god and the bishop”,⁶⁷ is present entirely *in* the bishop,⁶⁸ and any meeting of church *without* its bishop “can have no sort of valid authority”.⁶⁹ “Where the bishop is to be seen, there let all his people be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is present, we have the Catholic Church”:⁷⁰ unity with the bishop means unity with the Church, unity with the Church means unity with the Spirit, unity with the Spirit means unity with Christ, and unity with Christ means unity with god the Father—

*If I myself reached such intimacy with your bishop in a brief space of time—an intimacy that was less of this world than of the Spirit—how much more fortunate must I count you, who are inseparably one with him as the Church is with Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ with the Father, so constituting one single harmonious unity throughout.*⁷¹

To be in the Church is to partake of a Trinitarian existence—an existence wherein the believers are “attuned to their bishop like the strings of a harp” and “all together from god”, “sing[ing] aloud to the Father with one voice through Jesus Christ”;⁷² the laity are to be “as submissive to the bishop and to one another as Jesus Christ was to his Father, and as the apostles were to Christ” “so that there may be complete unity”—“from beginning to end in faith and love, in the Son and the Father and the Spirit”⁷³—a “church of god the Father and our beloved Jesus Christ” that is “mercifully endowed with all the gifts of the Spirit”.⁷⁴ When Ignatius had warned the church of Philadelphia to be “loyal to your bishop and clergy and deacons”, he spoke with “the very voice of god”; more specifically, “that was the preaching of the Spirit itself . . . to cherish unity and shun divisions, and to be imitators of Jesus Christ as he was of his Father”.⁷⁵ As mentioned above, Ignatius’ near-obsession with the notion of the unity of the Church is nothing

in the Incarnation of the Son of god, and this to such an extent that it is *immediately* present in *everything* he has to say, his silence regarding apostolic succession is quite probably more inconspicuous than is commonly supposed.

⁶⁶ IgnAnt-PHIL, 2

⁶⁷ IgnAnt-SMYR, 9

⁶⁸ IgnAnt-MAG, 2

⁶⁹ IgnAnt-MAG, 4; cf. IgnAnt-SMYR, 8

⁷⁰ IgnAnt-SMYR, 8; this is the earliest known occurrence of the phrase “Catholic (*katholikos*) Church.”

See Ziz-EBC, 107ff for an important, and provocative, analysis of the meaning of this term as it occurs here in Ignatius.

⁷¹ IgnAnt-EPH, 5

⁷² IgnAnt-EPH, 4

⁷³ IgnAnt-MAG, 13

⁷⁴ IgnAnt-SMYR, salutation; cf. IgnAnt-PHIL, salutation

⁷⁵ IgnAnt-PHIL, 7—the identification of *the Spirit* as god in this passage is especially remarkable.

more than the natural outcome of his understanding of salvation. Far from being concerned with mere formality and order, Ignatius' ecclesiology, included within which is his hierarchical understanding of the Church, is anchored in his vital perception of the fact that the locus of contact between god and man in the Son of god Incarnate, and Christian life, as such, is participation in the very being of god—

*[Y]ou refused to allow [the] dissemination [of heresy] among you, and stopped your ears against the seed [that the false teachers] were sowing. Deaf as stones you were: yes, stones for the Father's Temple, stones trimmed ready for god to build with, hoisted up by the derrick of Jesus Christ (the Cross) with the Holy Spirit for a cable; your faith being the winch that draws you to god, up the ramp of love.*⁷⁶

Given the relative brevity of the Ignatian corpus, his doctrine of the Son is remarkably thorough, and he has left us with several passages that we would perhaps more readily expect to find in the age of the Nicene or Chalcedonian Creeds than the beginning of the second century. Though Ignatius frequently refers to the Son as “god,”⁷⁷ in order properly to grasp his understanding of the Son—as well as to see the confluence of his doctrine with that of the New Testament which preceded him, and that of those who succeeded him, from the Apologists to the Nicene era and beyond—one must recognize his articulation of the Son as being grounded in the Wisdom tradition. The Son “was with the Father from all eternity and in these last days has been made manifest”;⁷⁸ “he represents the Mind of god”⁷⁹ because he is the “Word of his own from silence proceeding”;⁸⁰ and “the stamp of god the Father, through Jesus Christ”,⁸¹ is impressed upon the believer. The Son “came down from the one and only Father, is eternally with that One, and to that One is now returned”.⁸²

This last passage demonstrates the extent to which Ignatius' understanding of the Son has been conditioned by the Wisdom tradition, for here we see what is called the ‘V pattern,’ according to which the Son descends to earth from heaven, achieves the salvation of the world, and then returns to heaven. Not only does this pattern provide the

⁷⁶ IgnAnt-EPH, 9

⁷⁷ E.g., IgnAnt-EPH, salutation, 1, 15, 18, 19; IgnAnt-ROM, salutation, 4, 6; IgnAnt-TRAL, 10; IgnAnt-POL, 8

⁷⁸ IgnAnt-MAG, 6

⁷⁹ IgnAnt-EPH, 3

⁸⁰ IgnAnt-MAG, 8

⁸¹ IgnAnt-MAG, 5

⁸² IgnAnt-MAG, 7

basic form for all the major creeds of the Christian faith that were to be formed centuries later, but it is also evident throughout the New Testament in those passages wherein the Son is most transparently articulated in light of Old Testament Wisdom literature.⁸³

According to Ben Witherington—

*The V narrative pattern of these hymns, discussing in turn the pre-temporal, temporal, and post-temporal nature, life, and activity of the Son, favors the suggestion that the dominant influence of these hymns is the earlier Jewish reflection on the career of Personified Wisdom. Even the return of Wisdom to a place of glory once she was rejected is found in the material from 1 Enoch. All of the hymn fragments include protological material at least by implication, which is hardly surprising if the Wisdom material is the dominant influence here.*⁸⁴

And just as the perception of Christ as the Wisdom of god occasioned the ‘highest’ christological passages in the New Testament in the form of hymns, so too in the writings of Ignatius—

*[K]eep your eyes on him who has no need of opportunities, being outside all time.
Whom no sense can reveal
Was for us made manifest;
Who no ache or pain can feel
Was for us by pain opprest;
Willing all things to endure,
Our salvation to procure.*⁸⁵

*There is only one Physician—
Very flesh, yet spirit too;
Uncreated, and yet born;
God and man in one agreed,
Very life in death indeed,
Fruit of god and Mary’s seed;
At once impassible and torn
By Pain and suffering here below:
Jesus Christ, whom as Lord we know.*⁸⁶

It is only in light of the Wisdom tradition that Ignatius’ doctrine of the Son can be properly understood. As the eternal Word and Wisdom of god, the Son is “outside all time” and “uncreated”, yet at the same time, the Son has entered time, was born of Mary and verily became man for the life of the world; the “impassible” one who subsists

⁸³ Cf. Jn. 1:1ff; Phil. 2:5ff; Col. 1:13ff; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 3:18ff; Heb. 1:2ff

⁸⁴ Wit-JS, 254

⁸⁵ IgnAnt-POL, 3

⁸⁶ IgnAnt-EPH, 7

spiritually has become “very flesh”. And *because* the Son is the *very* Logos of god, he has *ex-pressed* and *revealed* the Father in the world, and is himself the gravitational center-point around which the whole of salvation history is aligned. “The age-old empire of evil was overthrown, for god was now appearing in human form to bring in a new order”.⁸⁷ The Son is the “mouthpiece, by which the Father’s words of truth find utterance”,⁸⁸ and he in whom the “one sole god” has “revealed himself”. As such, he is the “sole Teacher” of the Church,⁸⁹ and—

*[T]o him alone are the secret things of god committed. He is the doorway to the Father, and it is by him that Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the prophets go in, no less than the apostles and the whole Church; for all these have their part in god’s unity.*⁹⁰

The whole of the Old Testament converges on the single person of the Incarnate Christ, in whom it is fulfilled and through whom its meaning is revealed: “for my part, my records are Jesus Christ; for me, the sacrosanct records are his cross and death and resurrection”.⁹¹ The prophets “proclaimed the gospel in their preaching, and set their hopes on him”.⁹² And, in turn, it is by viewing the life, death and resurrection of Christ retrospectively, in light of the whole of salvation history through the lens of Scripture, that he is himself seen: “the fact that Jesus Christ is now within the Father is why we perceive him so much the more clearly”.⁹³

The divine Son of god is perceived through the Scriptures, and the Scriptures have been fulfilled in the life, death, crucifixion and resurrection of the Incarnate Son of god. That the very reality of salvation—as participation in the life of god—hinges ultimately on the reality of the Incarnation of the Son of god is a point Ignatius never grows weary of drawing his audience’s attention to—

Christ was of David’s line. He was the son of Mary; he was verily and indeed born, and ate and drank; he was verily persecuted in the days of Pontius Pilate, and verily and indeed crucified, and gave up his spirit in the sight of all heaven and earth and the powers of the nether world. He was also verily raised up again from the dead, for his

⁸⁷ IgnAnt-EPH, 19

⁸⁸ IgnAnt-ROM, 8

⁸⁹ IgnAnt-MAG, 8f

⁹⁰ IgnAnt-PHIL, 9

⁹¹ IgnAnt-PHIL, 8

⁹² IgnAnt-PHIL, 5

⁹³ IgnAnt-ROM, 3—I’m indebted to Fr John Behr for bringing this point to my attention.

*Father raised him; and in Jesus Christ will his Father similarly raise us who believe in him, since apart from him there is no true life for us.*⁹⁴

Just as with the apostle John, so too for Ignatius, docetism—the denial of the true humanity of the Christ—constitutes the denial of god’s revelation in the world and the negation of salvation itself, and it is therefore the arch-heresy. Those who claim that “his sufferings were not genuine” “deny god” and “have no faith”,⁹⁵ they “have no care for love, no thought for the widow and orphan, none at all for the afflicted, the captive, the hungry or the thirsty”.⁹⁶ If “everything our Lord did was only illusion”, then so too are the chains which bind Ignatius, and if the Son did not in truth suffer on the cross, Ignatius asks, “to what end have I given myself up to perish by fire or sword or savage beasts?”⁹⁷ In denying that Christ “ever bore a real human body”, the heretic “denies everything else about him”.⁹⁸ Against this, the Son’s “passion was no unreal illusion, as some skeptics aver who are all unreality themselves”.⁹⁹ He “was in actual human flesh, even after his resurrection”, and the apostles “had contact with the flesh-and-blood reality of him”.¹⁰⁰ He is “the perfect man” who gives strength to the martyr as an exemplar,¹⁰¹ and “his human flesh” is “a fruit imparting life to us from his most blessed passion”.¹⁰² “It is by the Cross that through his passion he calls you, who are parts of his own body, to himself”,¹⁰³ and it is the passion of the Incarnate Son of god “which effects our resurrection from the dead”.¹⁰⁴ The life of the Church is lived in the body of Christ—“in his flesh and blood, in the passion and resurrection of his body and his spirit, in the divine unity”.¹⁰⁵

Given Ignatius’ soteriology, according to which salvation is participation in the very being of god through the flesh of the Incarnate Son, it is little surprise that in his

⁹⁴ IgnAnt-TRAL, 9

⁹⁵ IgnAnt-TRAL, 10

⁹⁶ IgnAnt-SMYR, 6

⁹⁷ IgnAnt-SMYR, 4

⁹⁸ IgnAnt-SMYR, 5

⁹⁹ IgnAnt-SMYR, 2

¹⁰⁰ IgnAnt-SMYR, 3

¹⁰¹ IgnAnt-SMYR, 4

¹⁰² IgnAnt-SMYR, 1

¹⁰³ IgnAnt-TRAL, 11

¹⁰⁴ IgnAnt-SMYR, 5

¹⁰⁵ IgnAnt-SMYR, 12

writings we also find an explicit, unambiguous affirmation of the salutary efficacy of the sacraments. The Christ “was born, and he submitted to baptism, so that by his passion he might sanctify water”,¹⁰⁶ through which the Christian is regenerated and initiated into the Church. The eucharist—the celebration of which is valid only in the presence of the bishop, or under one appointed by the bishop¹⁰⁷—“is the self-same body of our Savior Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins, and which the Father in his goodness afterwards raised up again”,¹⁰⁸ it is “the medicine of immortality, and the sovereign remedy by which we escape death and live in Jesus Christ forevermore”,¹⁰⁹ and those who “will not admit that the eucharist is the self-same body of our Savior” are “doomed in their disputatiousness”.¹¹⁰ The partaking of “the flesh of Jesus Christ”, which is “the bread of god”, and “that blood of his which is love imperishable”,¹¹¹ constitutes the being and unity of the Church—

*Make certain, therefore, that you all observe one common eucharist; for there is but one body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and but one cup of union with his blood, and one single altar of sacrifice—even as also there is but one bishop, with his clergy and my own fellow-servitors the deacons. This will ensure that all your doings are in full accord with the will of god.*¹¹²

“Leave me to imitate the Passion of my god”;¹¹³ “I am his wheat, ground fine by the lions’ teeth to be made purest bread for Christ”;¹¹⁴ “I am yearning for death with all the passion of a lover . . . in me there is no spark of desire for mundane things, but only a murmur of living water that whispers within me, ‘Come to the Father’”.¹¹⁵ The ointment with which the Lord had been anointed before his death was accepted by him that he might “exhale the fragrance of incorruptibility upon his Church”.¹¹⁶ As the eucharist of which the Christian partakes is the very body and blood of the Lord, so too the Lord himself lives in the body of the Christian. The Church is the earthly locus of communion

¹⁰⁶ IgnAnt-EPH, 18

¹⁰⁷ IgnAnt-SMYR, 8

¹⁰⁸ IgnAnt-SMYR, 7

¹⁰⁹ IgnAnt-EPH, 20

¹¹⁰ IgnAnt-SMYR, 7

¹¹¹ IgnAnt-ROM, 7

¹¹² IgnAnt-PHIL, 4

¹¹³ IgnAnt-ROM, 6

¹¹⁴ IgnAnt-ROM, 4

¹¹⁵ IgnAnt-ROM, 7

¹¹⁶ IgnAnt-EPH, 17

wherein the life of god is circulated through divine blood, and the martyr is not only the recapitulation of what is to be a Christian, but he is also the one in whom participation in Christ is most fully realized, and being thus united with Christ, the sacrificial power of his death is realized within him. “My life is a humble offering for you”, writes Ignatius, “and so are these chains of mine”;¹¹⁷ “My spirit offers itself on your behalf, not only now but also when I shall stand in the presence of god”.¹¹⁸ Just as—*because* its members participate in the very life of god—Ignatius receives the strength necessary to endure his martyrdom through the intercession of the Church,¹¹⁹ so too is Ignatius himself, through his martyrdom, “a humble sacrifice” on behalf of the Church.¹²⁰ Because the life of the Christian is participation in the life of god, that love wherewith the Son gave himself for the life of the world was itself *declared* in Ignatius—

*For by staying silent and letting me alone, you can turn me into an intelligible utterance of god; but if your affections are only concerned with my poor human life, then I become a mere meaningless cry once more. This favor only I beg of you: suffer me to be a libation poured out to god, while there is still an altar ready for me. Then you may form a loving choir around it and sing hymns of praise in Jesus Christ to the Father, for permitting Syria’s bishop, summoned from the realms of the morning, to have reached the land of the setting sun. How good it is to be sinking down below the world’s horizon towards god, to rise again later into the dawn of his presence!*¹²¹

In bringing this section to a conclusion, it is important to note not only the continuity of Ignatius’ and Clement’s doctrine with that of the New Testament, but *also* the fact that in those places wherein their doctrine ‘goes beyond’ what was explicitly set forth by the apostles, this ‘development’ is itself a direct consequence of the *realization* of the chief theological and soteriological principles laid out in the New Testament. The principle of representation and mission, which was realized in the first place with the Father’s sending of the Son, is the basis of Clement’s doctrine of apostolic succession, which was indeed instituted by the apostles, but not explicitly mentioned in the New Testament. Likewise, the whole of Ignatius’ ecclesiology—which he puts forth in such an exact, vivid manner—is nothing more than an extension of, on the one hand, the

¹¹⁷ IgnAnt-SMYR, 10

¹¹⁸ IgnAnt-TRAL, 13

¹¹⁹ IgnAnt-POL, 7

¹²⁰ IgnAnt-POL, 2

¹²¹ IgnAnt-ROM, 2—the same notion of the martyr’s participation in the sacrifice of Christ is present in MarPoly, esp. 15 – 18.

Pauline doctrine that the Church is the body of Christ, and on the other, the Johannine doctrine that salvation is participation in the life of god through the body of the Son of god Incarnate, in which the Holy Spirit is communicated to the world. And just as with the New Testament, it is *because* the Son of god is understood according to the Wisdom tradition that the ecclesiology and soteriology of Clement and Ignatius took the form that it did. Because the Son is the Image, Word and Wisdom of god in eternity, he *truly* reveals the Father on earth, and in his body and blood, that life wherewith he is eternally united with the Father is itself offered to the world through the presence of the Spirit. The triune being of god is the ontological ground of the reality of salvation, and as we'll now see, despite common claims to the contrary, that this is so was not lost on the part of the Apologists of the second century.

IV The Christian Apologists of the Second Century

The intellectual context of the Christian Apologists of the second century is significantly distinct from that of the New Testament and Apostolic fathers, such as Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, for as the name “apologist” would indicate, they did not write primarily for a Christian audience, nor for the sake of addressing the internal well-being of the Church. Rather, their principal goal was to demonstrate the rationality of the gospel to the wider Greco-Roman intellectual culture, whether by proving the antiquity of Christianity, the possibility of the resurrection of the body, the fulfillment of ancient philosophy in the Christian system, or the innocence of Christians from the charges commonly brought against them. In this section, I will draw for the most part on the extant works of four of the Apologists: Justin Martyr (ca. 110 – 165 a.d.), who in Rome gained a following of Christians with philosophical proclivities; Tatian the Syrian (fl. ca. 170 a.d.), who was a follower of Justin before going on to found an heretical sect with gnostic tendencies; Athenagoras of Athens (d. ca. 180 a.d.), who was without doubt the most philosophically astute of the Apologists, alongside being the most eloquent and competent; and, Theophilus (d. ca. 190 a.d.), the reported sixth bishop of Antioch.

Though the general task of the Apologists was to vindicate a *particular* aspect of the Christian faith (i.e., e.g., that monotheism is to be preferred to polytheism, that Christians are neither atheists nor cannibals, etc.) before a *particular* audience (i.e., e.g., the Roman Emperor, Jews, pagans, etc.), and though none of their extant works are devoted to an articulation of their understanding of god, or the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, still, in each of their works are to be found significant passages pertaining to each of these. As mentioned in the **Introduction** to this study, according to the common estimation of historians of dogma, the Trinitarian confession of

the ante-Nicene Church in general—and that of the second century Apologists in particular—was in some significant sense defective, or ‘sub-orthodox.’ This estimation of the Apologists’ Trinitarian theology (as well as that of the ante-Nicene era in general) may be summed up according to the following three charges: 1) that it, in some sense, denied the eternity, or true divinity, of the Son of god; 2) that it advocated a form of ‘subordination’ with regard to the Son and Spirit that would have been deemed heretical by posterity; and 3) that it expressed a ‘binitarian’ understanding of god, according to which it is assumed that *personhood* was denied to the distinct hypostasis of the Spirit. Against this view, however, I will argue in this section that the general contour of the Apologists’ Trinitarian theology is confluent not only with that of the New Testament and Apostolic fathers, but also with that of the Nicene and post-Nicene eras as well. Of principal concern in vindicating this thesis will be the Apologists’ doctrine of the generation of the Son of god—whether they held the Logos to be a mere ‘potentiality’ within god that came to existence only *at the moment of creation* (which was basically the view of Arius and those of similar persuasion), or rather, whether they held that the Logos was indeed an eternal ‘person,’ intrinsic to the very being of god (which affirmation was the point of departure of the Nicene defense against Arianism in its various forms). By viewing their allegedly ‘suspect’ passages in light of their broader theological and soteriological vision, as well as the exegesis of Col. 1:13ff offered above, I will argue that the latter claim is to be preferred to the former. In other words, it will be my claim that the Trinitarian theology of the Apologists is indeed congruent with that of the Nicene and post-Nicene eras, and that the commonly held understanding of their Trinitarian theology must therefore be abandoned.

We can begin by exploring the implicit Trinitarian structure of the Apologists’ theology and soteriology. While confessing of god “that he is one, the creator, and maker, and fashioner” of all that is, and that, furthermore, these things were done “by him alone,”¹²² this understanding of the unity and singularity of god (the Father) implicitly included the recognition of the Son and Spirit, for though god *alone* created all that is, it

¹²² The-TA, 3:9

was “by his own Word [i.e., the Son] and Wisdom¹²³ [i.e., the Spirit]” that he “made all things”.¹²⁴ What is significant here is the implication of the *propriety* of the Son and Spirit to god, the notion that the Son and Spirit are *intrinsic to god*; “his own Word and Wisdom” are “his own hands”.¹²⁵ Theophilus can liken the relationship between the sun and moon to that of god and man, and further develop the analogy by comparing the first three days of creation with the sun, seeing each day respectively as a type of the Father, Son and Spirit—the implication being that *all three* are included *within* the sun.¹²⁶ That such was indeed the Apologists’ understanding of the relationship of the Son and Spirit to the Father would seem to be further confirmed by the following from Athenagoras—

[W]e acknowledge a god, and a Son his Logos, and a Holy Spirit, united in essence—the Father, the Son, the Spirit, because the Son is the Intelligence, Reason, Wisdom of the Father, and the Spirit an effluence as light from fire . . .¹²⁷

And in this light, even though “to god alone” they “render[ed] worship”,¹²⁸ it is little surprise that the doxological structure of their confession acknowledged not only the Father, but also “the Son of the true god” “in the second place”, and “the prophetic Spirit in the third”.¹²⁹

Prima facie, it would thus appear that the Apologists’ understanding of the Father, Son and Spirit—whatever else may be said of it—recognized the divinity of the latter

¹²³ The identification of the Spirit, *rather than the Son*, as the Wisdom of god is extremely rare in the early Church, though it is to be found also in Irenaeus. While the Nicene confession of the Son’s divinity was grounded principally in identifying him as the *Wisdom* of god, it would be wrong to suppose that the application of this title to the Spirit by Theophilus and Irenaeus indicates a confusion between the ‘persons,’ still less a fundamental discrepancy between themselves and the larger world of Christian confession. In the OT the functions of god’s Word and Wisdom were often viewed as parallel: both were intrinsic to god, and both realized or expressed the purpose of god as the agents of god’s activity. If anything, the fact that it is the Wisdom of god—not the Word—who in the OT is more frequently described in an explicitly *personal* manner would indicate that, like the Son, the Spirit also was understood as a personal reality.

¹²⁴ The-TA, 1:7

¹²⁵ The-TA, 2:18; the identification of the Son and Spirit as the *hands* of god was later to be taken up by Irenaeus.

¹²⁶ The-TA, 2:15; this passage also gives us the earliest known use of the word “Trinity” (*Triados*)—“. . . the three days which were before the luminaries are types of the Trinity, of god, and his Word, and his Wisdom.”

¹²⁷ Athen-PC, 24; cf. Aris-APOL, 15 (Grk. Text)—“For they know god, the creator and fashioner of all things through the only begotten Son and the Holy Spirit; and beside him they worship no other god.”

¹²⁸ JustMart-APOL1, 17

¹²⁹ JustMart-APOL1, 13

two. Athenagoras states, “the deity is uncreated and eternal”, placing it in contrast to “matter”, which is “created and perishable”,¹³⁰ before going on to say—

*[O]ur doctrine acknowledges one god, the maker of this universe, who is himself uncreated (for that which is does not come to be, but that which is not) but has made all things by the Logos which is from him . . . [god is the one] from whom proceed all created things, and by whose Spirit they are governed . . .*¹³¹

Athenagoras clearly delineates a metaphysical dichotomy—all that is uncreated is divine, and all that is created is not—and places the Son and Spirit on the ‘divine’ side.¹³²

This ‘Trinitarian form,’ as we may call it, was the underlying structure not only of the Apologists’ theology, but also of their understanding of the economy of salvation. The Christian, says Justin, is “happy to die” for the name of “the good Rock” which is Christ, for he “causes living Water to burst forth for the hearts of those who by him have loved the Father of all, and which gives those who are will to drink of the Water of life.”¹³³ During the celebration of the Eucharist, “bread and a cup of wine mixed with water” are brought “to the president of the brethren”, who then “gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things”;¹³⁴ afterwards, says Justin, “for all things wherewith we are supplied, we bless the maker of all through his Son, Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit”.¹³⁵ Thus from creation to the sacraments, and from the daily life of the Christian to his death and possible martyrdom, we see that for the Apologists, the form of the Trinity impresses itself upon their lives at all times. As Athenagoras has it, Christians are those who—

[A]re conducted to the future life by this one thing alone, that they know god and his Logos, what is the oneness of the Son with the Father, what the communion of the Father

¹³⁰ The affirmation of the doctrine of creation ex-nihilo is to be found throughout the Apologists (e.g., Tat-AG, 5; The-TA, 1:4, 8; 2:4, 13; Athen-PC, 4; JustMart-DIAL, 5), and in light of the absolute dichotomy implied by such a doctrine, their further affirmations—to be explored in more detail below—that the Son and Spirit participated in creation and are intrinsic to god, heavily imply a genuinely Trinitarian understanding of the very being of god.

¹³¹ Athen-PC, 4f

¹³² Cf. Athen-PC, 6—“If, therefore, Plato is not an atheist for conceiving of one uncreated god, the framer of the universe, neither are we atheists who acknowledge and firmly hold that he is god who has framed all things *by the Logos*, and holds them in being *by his Spirit*.”

¹³³ JustMart-DIAL, 114

¹³⁴ JustMart-APOL1, 65

¹³⁵ JustMart-DIAL, 67

*with the Son, what is the Spirit, what is the unity of these three, the Spirit, the Son, the Father, and their distinction in unity . . .*¹³⁶

From what has been shown thus far, the basic contour of a genuinely Trinitarian understanding of god and soteriology would seem to emerge. Against paganism, there is only one god—the Father—and this god is to be distinguished from all else in that he is eternal, and the creator of that which has come to be. At the same time, the Son and Spirit are understood as being, in some sense, intrinsic to the very being of god—in god as the “hands,” or “Word and Wisdom,” of god. And this Trinitarian theology provides the form for their understanding of salvation. Yet questions still remain: If all three are divine, what significance, or what priority, might be assigned to the one who is Father? Is the Spirit a personal reality, or rather, did the Apologists envisage him as being merely an impersonal conduit through which god (or Christ) was made present to believers? Is the Son truly intrinsic to the very being of the Father, or rather, did the Apologists envisage him as being the first of the things created by god, through whom *the rest of creation* was effected? And finally, did the Apologists in any way see the particular divine persons as having a particular role in the economy of salvation? To these questions I now turn.

That the Apologists assigned a particular dignity and priority to the person of the Father cannot be doubted. The Father is “the father of all” things,¹³⁷ and not only of the Son; “Father,” writes Theophilus, “because he is before all things”.¹³⁸ When Tatian lists the ‘divine properties,’ such as being without beginning, being the cause of all, invisibility and impalpability, it is with reference to the Father that he does so.¹³⁹ But it is in Justin Martyr that we find the singularity of the Father articulated most forcefully. The Father is “unchangeable and eternal”,¹⁴⁰ “the only unbegotten god”,¹⁴¹ “the unbegotten and impassible god”,¹⁴² “the only unbegotten, unutterable god,”¹⁴³ and the one who “remains ever in the supercelestial places, invisible to all men, holding personal

¹³⁶ Athen-PC, 12

¹³⁷ JustMart-DIAL, 32

¹³⁸ The-TA, 1:4

¹³⁹ Tat-AG, 4

¹⁴⁰ JustMart-APOL1, 13

¹⁴¹ JustMart-APOL1, 14

¹⁴² JustMart-APOL1, 25

¹⁴³ JustMart-DIAL, 126

intercourse with none”;¹⁴⁴ when Scripture speaks of “god” “coming down” to the tower of Babel, or “shutting” Noah in the ark, these activities must be applied to the Son, for—
[T]he ineffable Father and Lord of all neither has come to any place, nor walks, nor sleeps, nor rises up, but remains in his own place, wherever that is, quick to behold and quick to hear, having neither eyes nor ears, but being of indescribable might; and he sees all things, and knows all things, and none of us escapes his observation; and he is not moved or confined to a spot in the whole world, for he existed before the world was made.¹⁴⁵

From the Father’s being unbegotten follows the fact that he is without name, since one’s elders give names; yet at the same time, we can use language to refer to the Father, assigning him “appellations derived from his good deeds and functions”.¹⁴⁶ His principal such deed is the creation of the universe, from which follows the principal name by which he is known, Father. Indeed, one of the foremost distinctions between the Trinitarian theology of the Apologists and that of the Nicene era is that, whereas the Nicenes understood the Father’s fatherhood primarily in reference to his being father of *the Son*, the Apologists understood the Father’s fatherhood primarily in reference to his being *the cause and source of all things*, with particular emphasis on his being so in relation to *the cosmos*.¹⁴⁷ The Father is “the Father and creator of *the universe*”,¹⁴⁸ “the Father and maker of *all things*”,¹⁴⁹ “the Father and creator of *all*”,¹⁵⁰ “the god and Father of all”,¹⁵¹ and because of this absolute singularity of the Father, it is primarily with reference to *him* that the dividing line between that which is divine, and that which is not, is drawn, “for god alone is unbegotten and incorruptible, and therefore he is god, but *all other things* after him are created and corruptible.”¹⁵² The scope of the Father’s

¹⁴⁴ JustMart-DIAL, 56

¹⁴⁵ JustMart-DIAL, 127

¹⁴⁶ JustMart-APOL2, 6; cf. JustMart-APOL1, 61—“if anyone dare to say that there is a name, he raves with a hopeless madness”.

¹⁴⁷ See Wid-FGOA for the development of the former notion. The significance of this distinction, and whether or not it constitutes a fundamental, unbridgeable discrepancy between the Apologists and the Nicenes, will be returned to in **section VIII** below.

¹⁴⁸ The-TA, 2:24

¹⁴⁹ Athen-PC, 27

¹⁵⁰ JustMart-APOL1, 8

¹⁵¹ JustMart-DIAL, 133

¹⁵² JustMart-DIAL, 5

fatherhood is universal and grounded in the fact that *he alone* is the ultimate source and cause of all that is: “[I]f I call him Father, I speak of all things as being from him”.¹⁵³

Before moving on we would do well to note two things concerning the Apologists’ affirmation of the monarchy of the Father, for quite often the singularity that they assigned to the Father is taken as a sign of their ‘sub-orthodoxy.’ But in the first place, as we have seen in **section II** and **section III** above, the affirmation of the monarchy of the Father is always clearly assumed, and sometimes explicitly stated, by the Apologists’ predecessors, and aside from the degree of emphasis placed by Justin on the Father’s utter transcendence,¹⁵⁴ there is not the slightest warrant for accusing the Apologists of having departed from Scripture and, by being corrupted by Greek philosophy—particularly middle-Platonism’s notion of the transcendence of god—laying the seeds of an Arianism that was only to blossom and be eradicated a century and a half later. And in the second place, as my study on Athanasius has proven, *orthodoxy itself*—even if we are to recognize ‘orthodoxy’ as what is commonly referred to as ‘*later* orthodoxy’—also affirms the monarchy of the Father, both with regard to the Trinity *ad extra* and the Trinity *ad intra* as well. From the Nicene era—and not only *before*—onward, it has been affirmed in both the East and West. With regard to the ‘immanent’ Trinity, which is our chief concern at present,¹⁵⁵ we find the monarchy of the Father affirmed by, to cite but a few instances, Alexander of Alexandria,¹⁵⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria,¹⁵⁷ Gregory of Nyssa,¹⁵⁸ Ambrose of Milan,¹⁵⁹ Augustine of Hippo,¹⁶⁰ John Damascene,¹⁶¹ Bonaventure,¹⁶² Thomas Aquinas,¹⁶³ and contemporary Orthodox and Catholic theologians.¹⁶⁴ The Apologists’ affirmation of the monarchy of the Father is therefore no idiosyncrasy; in affirming the Father alone to be the father and source and

¹⁵³ The-TA, 1:3

¹⁵⁴ A point which, as concerns its implications regarding whether or not he understood the Son as truly divine, will be returned to below.

¹⁵⁵ The implications concerning the Trinity *ad extra* and ‘later’ orthodoxy will be returned to below.

¹⁵⁶ E.g., Ale-LAT, 47 – 52

¹⁵⁷ E.g., Ath-OCA, 1:14

¹⁵⁸ E.g., GrNys-AE1, 1:35

¹⁵⁹ E.g., Amb-CF, 1:49

¹⁶⁰ E.g., Aug-DT, 15:47

¹⁶¹ E.g., JnDam-OF1, 8

¹⁶² E.g., Bon-DQT, 8:ro:4

¹⁶³ E.g., Aqu-SCG4, 24:9

¹⁶⁴ E.g., Ziz-BC, 40f; Bal-CR, 30

cause of all things, they did nothing more or less than give witness to what has always and ever will be a fundamental affirmation of orthodox Trinitarian confession.

Turning our attention to the Holy Spirit, we can begin by taking note of certain passages that are susceptible to a binitarian interpretation. When articulating the contrast between the way ‘of flesh’ and the way ‘of Spirit,’ Tatian apparently collapses the distinction between the Son and Spirit, claiming that the “Logos, in truth, is the light of god” while going on to say that he who lives according to the flesh will “tend downward towards matter”, but “if [he] enters into union with the divine Spirit, [he] is no longer helpless, but ascends to the regions whither the Spirit guides [him]”.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, from Justin we hear that—

*It is wrong, therefore, to understand the spirit and the power of god as anything else than the Word, who is also the first-born of god, as the foresaid prophet Moses declared; and it was this which, when it came upon the virgin and overshadowed her, caused her to conceive, not by intercourse, but by power.*¹⁶⁶

Also worth mentioning is Justin’s attribution of the inspiration of the Old Testament prophets to “the divine Word”,¹⁶⁷ an office elsewhere attributed to “the prophetic Spirit”.¹⁶⁸

Yet the binitarianism of the Apologists is only surface deep, and there are at least three strong arguments that can be brought against the charge. In the first place, it must be noted that the offices of god’s Word, Wisdom and Spirit were often viewed in parallel in the Old Testament (and, as we’ve seen in **section II** above, in the New Testament as well): all three were understood in terms of being the effective agency whereby the will of god is accomplished, and all three were described as the immanent presence of the transcendent god with his creation and people. In this light, the first and third passages immediately above need be seen as implying no more than that the activities of the Son and Spirit in the economy of salvation are closely aligned, and the second more readily implies that Justin attributed to the Logos—who is *spirit* (i.e., a being whose ‘nature’ is spiritual rather than corporeal)—an office that has more commonly been attributed

¹⁶⁵ Tat-AG, 13

¹⁶⁶ JustMart-APOL1, 33

¹⁶⁷ JustMart-APOL1, 36

¹⁶⁸ JustMart-APOL1, 31

specifically to the Holy Spirit; in other words, Justin has misinterpreted Scripture and confused the *offices* of the Son and Spirit, not the *persons*.

In the second place, the Trinitarian formulae listed above, which can only imply cognizance of the distinction between the persons, must be taken into account. Given the complete absence of passages which *identify* the Son with the Spirit, the relative few which seem to *imply* an identification ought to be read in light of the unambiguous many wherein a distinction is clearly implied, for the latter cannot be coherently understood if the passages which imply identity are not read at a level deeper than the surface, but the former *can* be understood coherently in light of the passages which imply distinction, so long as the similarity in function mentioned immediately above is taken into account. Though Justin’s attribution of closely connected functions to the Son and Spirit may blur the distinction between the two—as when he attributes the inspiration of Scripture to both—the real distinction is always assumed and commonly stated more explicitly elsewhere, as when he claims that “the Spirit of prophecy *speaks from* the person of Christ”.¹⁶⁹

And finally, there are the many passages which attribute distinctly personal actions to the Spirit. According to Theophilus, Christians are “*taught by* the Holy Spirit”;¹⁷⁰ according to Athenagoras, the Spirit is likened to a musician “who moved the mouths of the prophets like musical instruments”;¹⁷¹ according to Justin, the Spirit “*speaks* as predicting things that are to come to pass”,¹⁷² “*intimated* that Christ . . . should reign”,¹⁷³ *accused* wrongdoers,¹⁷⁴ and the Psalms were “*dictated* to David by the Holy Spirit”.¹⁷⁵ Each of these activities presuppose the capacities of intelligence and will, and when viewed in light of the Trinitarian formulae presented at the opening of this section, alongside the considerations offered immediately above, there is solid ground for believing that the Holy Spirit was indeed understood according to personal categories by the Apologists.

¹⁶⁹ JustMart-APOL1, 38

¹⁷⁰ The-TA, 2:33

¹⁷¹ Athen-PC, 7

¹⁷² JustMart-APOL1, 39

¹⁷³ JustMart-APOL1, 41

¹⁷⁴ JustMart-APOL1, 63

¹⁷⁵ JustMart-DIAL, 34

The Spirit's activity in the economy of salvation can be viewed with regard to his epistemic role, and also with regard to his cosmological and soteriological offices. Concerning the former, no activity is more frequently attributed to the Spirit by the Apologists than that of the inspiration of Scripture. According to Theophilus, both "the prophets" and "the gospels" were "inspired by one Spirit of god";¹⁷⁶ according to Justin, the prophets, who "alone both saw and announced the truth to men", "spoke by the divine Spirit".¹⁷⁷ In light of Justin's exclusively identifying 'truth' with god's economy of salvation as articulated by the prophets, the significance of the Spirit's role as he who 'reveals,' or 'speaks' to (and through) the prophets ought not be overlooked, for in doing so, Justin has given to the prophets' words the epistemic ground previously held by the Forms in Plato's thought.¹⁷⁸ In this light, the "Holy Spirit" who "operates in the prophets" can be described by Athenagoras as "an effluence of god, flowing from him, and returning back again like a beam of the sun";¹⁷⁹ according to Theophilus, the Christians' possession of truth is guaranteed by the fact that they "are instructed by the holy prophets, who were possessed by the Holy Spirit of god";¹⁸⁰ and, Justin asks, "Will the mind of man see god at any time, if it is uninstructed by the Holy Spirit?"¹⁸¹ Thus for the Apologists, the Spirit is the epistemological *sine qua non*, the *that within which* is perceived the ontological ground through which truth is known.

The Spirit's cosmological and soteriological activities are closely related to his capacity to reveal god. The Spirit, who is "borne above the waters" in the Genesis creation account, is the "animating" principle "of creation": "For the Spirit is fine, and the water is fine, that the Spirit may nourish the water, and the water penetrating everywhere along with the Spirit, may nourish creation";¹⁸² "his [i.e., god's] breath you breathe", writes Theophilus to the unbelieving Autoclytus, "yet him you know not".¹⁸³ As the Old Testament prophets were "lifted in ecstasy above the natural operation of their minds by the impulses of the divine Spirit", who used them "as a flute player breathes

¹⁷⁶ The-TA, 3:12

¹⁷⁷ JustMart-DIAL, 7

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Osb-IL, 167ff

¹⁷⁹ Athen-PC, 10

¹⁸⁰ The-TA, 3:17

¹⁸¹ JustMart-DIAL, 4

¹⁸² The-TA, 2:13

¹⁸³ The-TA, 1:7

into a flute”,¹⁸⁴ so too the Christian, through the Incarnation of the Son of god, receives “the enumerated powers of the Spirit”—“gifts which, from the grace of his [i.e., Christ’s] Spirit’s power, he imparts to those who believe in him, according as he deems each man worthy thereof”.¹⁸⁵ The Spirit is the impetus and means of fellowship with god: the Christian needs neither the circumcision nor baptism of the Jews, for “[w]hat need have I of that other baptism, who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit?”; the liberation of the soul from corruption is had “if it enters into union with the divine Spirit” and “ascends to the regions whither the Spirit guides it, for the dwelling place of the Spirit is above, but the origin of the soul is from beneath”.¹⁸⁶

Having now come to the Apologists’ doctrine of the Son of god, we can begin with those passages which clearly seem to imply his divinity, before going on to treat of their more ‘suspect’ formulations. “There will be no other god”, says Justin to Trypho, “nor was there from eternity any other . . . but he who made and disposed all this universe”.¹⁸⁷ As mentioned above, the Apologists were ardent monotheists, and the principle means whereby the divine was distinguished from that which is not divine was the dividing line of creation: on the ‘that which was not created’ side lies god, and on the ‘that which was created’ side lies everything else. Thus it is most significant that the Apologists placed the Son on the ‘creator’ side of the line. According to Justin, the Word “was with” god “before the works”, and was the one by whom god “created and arranged all things”:¹⁸⁸ “all living beings were created in the beginning by the Word of god”.¹⁸⁹ Justin’s claim that the Christ who became Incarnate and underwent crucifixion “existed as god before the ages” strikes Trypho as “not merely paradoxical, but also foolish”,¹⁹⁰ but Justin seems to have had little concern to soften his claims concerning the Son before his Jewish interlocutor. The Son, says Justin, is “god coming forth from above, and man living among men”;¹⁹¹ he is the “god and Lord of hosts” of the Old Testament,¹⁹² indeed,

¹⁸⁴ Athen-PC, 9

¹⁸⁵ JustMart-DIAL, 137

¹⁸⁶ Tat-AG, 13

¹⁸⁷ JustMart-DIAL, 11

¹⁸⁸ JustMart-APOL2, 6

¹⁸⁹ JustMart-DIAL, 84

¹⁹⁰ JustMart-DIAL, 48

¹⁹¹ JustMart-DIAL, 64

¹⁹² JustMart-DIAL, 36

“he is the god of Abraham, Isaac, and of Jacob”.¹⁹³ Justin equates the “power of god” with the “power of Christ”¹⁹⁴ and declares the Son to be at the center of Christian doxological praxis, “For next to god, we worship and love the Word who is from the unbegotten and ineffable god”,¹⁹⁵ a practice which utterly shocked Trypho and caused him to accuse Justin of blasphemy.¹⁹⁶

We see the same implications of divinity in the testimony of the other Apologists. According to Tatian, the Son who was “the suffering god”¹⁹⁷ is one and the same as god the Father’s “Logos himself”, who “was in” god before the creation of the world.¹⁹⁸ Likewise, for Theophilus, the Logos was “within [god’s] own bowels” before creation; god had the Logos “as a helper in the things that were created by him”, and by the Logos god “made all things”.¹⁹⁹ According to Athenagoras, “a thing is either uncreated and eternal, or created and perishable”,²⁰⁰ and “the world was not created because god needed it; for god is himself everything to himself—light unapproachable, a perfect world”.²⁰¹ Yet the Son is part of this perfect world, for “deity is uncreated and eternal”, “matter is created and perishable”, and “god, the Maker of this universe . . . made all things by the Logos which is from him”;²⁰² because the Son is intrinsic to god, he participates in the divine rule over the cosmos: “to the one god and the Logos proceeding from him, the Son . . . all things are in like manner subjected.”²⁰³

Of fundamental importance in understanding not only the Apologists’ ability to call themselves monotheists, but also in perceiving their understanding of the manner in

¹⁹³ JustMart-DIAL, 59

¹⁹⁴ JustMart-APOL1, 40

¹⁹⁵ JustMart-APOL2, 13

¹⁹⁶ JustMart-DIAL, 38; cf. JustMart-DIAL, 37—“Exalt the Lord our god [= “Christ,” according to Justin], and worship at his holy hill; for the Lord our god is holy”.

¹⁹⁷ Tat-AG, 13

¹⁹⁸ Tat-AG, 5; cf. DIOG, 7—“The Almighty himself, the creator of the universe, the god whom no eye can discern, has sent down his very own Truth from heaven, his own holy and incomprehensible Word . . . [the one whom god sent] . . . is no other than the universal artificer and constructor himself, by whose agency god made the heavens and set the seas their bounds . . . As a king sending a royal son, so he sent him; as god he sent him; as man to men he sent him . . .”

¹⁹⁹ The-TA, 2:10

²⁰⁰ Athen-PC, 19

²⁰¹ Athen-PC, 16

²⁰² Athen-PC, 4

²⁰³ Athen-PC, 18—Interestingly, Athenagoras, whose *Plea* is addressed to Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus, uses *their* joint rule as an analogy whereby he demonstrates the joint rule of the Father and Son.

which the Son is related to the Father, as well as the Son's role in the economy of salvation, is the fact that they identified the Son, in various ways, as something along the lines of a *property* of god the Father.²⁰⁴ The Son is described as “the heavenly Logos, a spirit emanating from the Father”,²⁰⁵ “the Light of god”,²⁰⁶ god's “Word”, “his Power and his Wisdom”,²⁰⁷ “the Command” of god,²⁰⁸ “the Logos which is from” god,²⁰⁹ “the Intelligence, Reason, [and] Wisdom of the Father”,²¹⁰ “the Seed of god”,²¹¹ “Power of the ineffable Father”,²¹² the “Word, and Wisdom, and Power, and the Glory of the begetter”;²¹³ because he is the Word, First-begotten and Power of god, he is “the only proper Son” of the Father.²¹⁴ Three things resulted from articulating the Son in this manner: in the first place, a strict monotheism is maintained with reference to the doctrine of the monarchy of the Father described above, for as a property of god, the Son (and Spirit) *depends on, or is caused by*, the Father. Secondly, by articulating the Son's divine status in such a manner, the Apologists allowed themselves the ability to distinguish the Son from the Father, even while affirming his unity with the Father. And in the third place, by understanding the Son to be the Father's very *mind*, they quite naturally saw the Son as the universal, gravitational center of god's relationship with the cosmos, the *Realsymbol* towards which the Old Testament points, and the metaphysical ground towards which the various streams of salvation history run.

This latter point is especially significant in light of the fact that the Apologists—as we've seen with Justin—affirmed that the message of Scripture is the definitive locus of truth, for when this is taken into account it becomes immediately apparent that in claiming the Son to be Scripture's *meaning*, and the term of salvation history, ontological implications necessarily follow. Christ is “the eternal and final Law” of god²¹⁵ and “the

²⁰⁴ It is worth noting that this notion was to serve as the point of departure for the Nicene defense of the Son's divinity against Arianism in its various forms in the fourth century.

²⁰⁵ Tat-AG, 7

²⁰⁶ Tat-AG, 13

²⁰⁷ The-TA, 2:22

²⁰⁸ The-TA, 2:13

²⁰⁹ Athen-PC, 4

²¹⁰ Athen-PC, 24

²¹¹ JustMart-APOL1, 32

²¹² JustMart-APOL2, 10

²¹³ JustMart-DIAL, 61

²¹⁴ JustMart-APOL1, 23

²¹⁵ JustMart-DIAL, 11

Logos of whom every race of men were partakers”,²¹⁶ and when “god was born in the form of man”,²¹⁷ the “new Law, and the new Covenant, and the expectation of those who out of every people wait for the good things of god” were fulfilled in truth,²¹⁸ for “the blood of Christ” is the reality of which the Old Testament promises were the symbol.²¹⁹ The Incarnate Son of god is the “Spring of living Water which gushed forth from god in the land destitute of the knowledge of god”,²²⁰ “a divine Fountain”²²¹ through whom “fellowship with” god is made possible.²²²

The Incarnation of the Son of god, which brings to the world “the everlasting Law and everlasting Covenant” promised through the prophets,²²³ is the locus of salvation because through it god has been revealed in the world: “the New Testament, which god formerly announced . . . was then present, i.e., Christ himself”.²²⁴ The Son reveals and makes present to the world the character of god—the “commands and deeds god knows to be eternal”²²⁵—because “he alone taught openly those mighty counsels which the Father designed”,²²⁶ and he has made known “the power and will of the maker of all things”.²²⁷ But more specifically, it is the cross which definitively reveals the mind of god.²²⁸ The “crucified Christ” is “he who existed before all”,²²⁹ and therefore, “You can perceive that the concealed power of god was in Christ the crucified”,²³⁰ for the cross “is the greatest symbol of his power and rule”.²³¹

It is *because* the Son is the Logos of god that he can reveal the very mind of god, and *that* he reveals the mind of god tells us what it means to call him god’s Logos. Thus,

²¹⁶ JustMart-APOL1, 46

²¹⁷ Tat-AG, 21

²¹⁸ JustMart-DIAL, 11

²¹⁹ JustMart-DIAL, 111

²²⁰ JustMart-DIAL, 69

²²¹ The-TA, 2:19

²²² JustMart-APOL1, 10; cf. Aris-APOL, 15 (Grk. Text)—“And being born of a pure virgin, unbegotten and immaculate, he assumed flesh and revealed himself among men that he might recall them to himself from their wandering after many gods”.

²²³ JustMart-DIAL, 43

²²⁴ JustMart-DIAL, 51

²²⁵ JustMart-DIAL, 67

²²⁶ JustMart-DIAL, 76

²²⁷ JustMart-DIAL, 84

²²⁸ JustMart-DIAL, 67

²²⁹ JustMart-DIAL, 96

²³⁰ JustMart-DIAL, 49

²³¹ JustMart-APOL1, 60

just as with the New Testament and Apostolic fathers, so too with the Apologists theology and soteriology are intimately related: the economy of salvation is the epistemic point of departure for the knowledge of god, and the *being* of god is the ontological ground of salvation. But before we can consider this thesis to be secure, we must give attention to those passages in the Apologists that are not infrequently seen as implying the Son to be drastically ‘subordinate’ to the Father, and not truly divine.

The first such group of passages are those wherein the Son is predicated “the Angel of god”²³²—a predication which, in the writings of the Apologists, is found almost exclusively in the works of Justin Martyr. But though these passages have sometimes in the past been taken as evidence that the Apologists (and early Church) adhered to an ‘angel’ Christology, the slightest attention to the context wherein such passages are found strongly implies that this is *not* the sense in which the predicate was intended. When Justin describes Christ as an angel, he not infrequently qualifies the sense in which it is to be understood—“he is called Angel and Apostle; *for he declares* whatever we ought to know”;²³³ “the Angel of god, *i.e., the Power of god sent to us through Jesus Christ*”;²³⁴ “Angel *because he ministered to [the Father’s] will*”²³⁵—making it clear that the word ‘angel’ is being used in its original sense as indicating *a messenger, or one who reveals*. The Son can be called by many *names*, for he is an “*Arkhe*, a certain rational Power from [god]” begotten “before all creatures”, who is “the Glory of the Lord”, “the Son”, “Wisdom”, “an Angel”, “god”, “Lord and Logos”, and “Captain”—“he can be called by all those names, *since he ministers to the Father’s will*”.²³⁶ Indeed, Justin explicitly rejects the notion that the Son is an angel in the *ontological* sense of the word when arguing with Trypho over the meaning of Gen. 1:26 (“Let *us* make man . . .”)—

*For I would not say that the dogma of that heresy which is said to be among you is true, or that the teachers of it can prove that [god] spoke to angels, or that the human frame was the workmanship of angels.*²³⁷

²³² E.g., JusMart-DIAL, 116; for more on the ‘angel’ Christology of the early Church, see Pel-CT1, 182ff; Stu-TI, 37ff; Gri-CCT, 46ff.

²³³ JustMart-APOL1, 63

²³⁴ JustMart-DIAL, 116

²³⁵ JustMart-DIAL, 127

²³⁶ JustMart-DIAL, 61

²³⁷ JustMart-DIAL, 62

The supposed ‘angel’ Christology of Justin Martyr, therefore, is nothing more than an aspect of the Logos Christology of the Apologists; Christ is an Angel *because* as the *Logos* of god he is the one through whom the will of the Father *is revealed*.

To be taken more seriously are those passages in the Apologists wherein the Son is *contrasted with* god the Father as regards transcendence. “The god and Father, indeed, of all”, writes Theophilus, “cannot be contained”, yet “his Word, through whom he made all things . . . went to the garden in the person of god, and conversed with Adam”.²³⁸ The implications underlying this claim are more fully brought out by Justin—

[W]herever god says, “god went up from Abraham,” or, “The Lord spoke to Moses,” and “The Lord came down to behold the tower which the sons of men had built,” . . . you must not imagine that the unbegotten god himself came down or went up from any place. For the ineffable Father and Lord of all neither has come to any place, nor walks, nor sleeps, nor rises up, but remains in his own place, wherever that is, quick to behold and quick to hear, having neither eyes nor ears, but being of indescribable might; and he sees all things, and knows all things . . . and he is not moved or confined to a spot in the whole world, for he existed before the world was made. . . . Therefore neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, nor any other man, saw the Father and ineffable Lord of all, and also of Christ, but [they saw] him who was according to his will his Son . . .²³⁹

With regard to such passages, John Behr expresses the view held by many historians of doctrine when he claims that Justin’s notion of divinity was modified by a “‘middle-platonic’ framework”, according to which “God [the Father] is so totally transcendent to created reality” that “he needs an intermediary, his Word, to act for him and to mediate between himself and creation”.²⁴⁰ And indeed the evidence for such a position is not lacking in Justin’s writings, especially his *Dialogue*. In another place, when again making the point that it was not god the Father who appeared to the Old Testament patriarchs, Justin claims that “there is, and . . . is said to be, *another* god and Lord *subject to* the maker of all things . . . above whom there is no other god”,²⁴¹ and that it was he who appeared to the patriarchs.

Yet, in light of the fact that the central debate concerning the divinity of the Son in the Nicene era was over whether he was eternal (and thus intrinsic to the very being of god), or rather, whether he was a contingent creature created *ex-nihilo* (and thus *not*

²³⁸ The-TA, 2:22

²³⁹ JustMart-DIAL, 127

²⁴⁰ Beh-WN, 103

²⁴¹ JustMart-DIAL, 56

intrinsic to the very being of god), the most incriminating claims to be found in the writings of the Apologists are those wherein they are commonly taken as claiming that the Son did not (properly) exist *until* god “begat” him for the purpose of creating the cosmos. Thus, from Tatian—

*And by [god’s] simple will the Logos springs forth; and the Logos, not coming forth in vain, becomes the first-begotten work of the Father. . . . For just as from one torch many fires are lighted, but the light of the first torch is not lessened by the kindling of many torches, so the Logos, coming forth from the logos-power of the Father, has not divested of the logos-power him who begat him.*²⁴²

Similarly, Justin Martyr speaks of the Son as having been “begat before all creatures”²⁴³ and “the first-begotten of god” because “he proceeded before all creatures from the Father by his [i.e., the Father’s] power and will”²⁴⁴ and, more emphatically, after citing Prov. 8:22ff to Trypho, Justin says—

*You perceive, my hearers, if you bestow attention that the Scripture has declared that this Offspring was begotten by the Father before all things created; and that that which is begotten is numerically distinct from that which begets, anyone will admit.*²⁴⁵

It is the meaning of passages such as these—regarding which, to cite just a few examples, Grillmeier claimed that, “The coming Arian struggles [were] no more than the consequences of the error which was introduced at the time of the Apologists”,²⁴⁶ and Quasten, that, “Justin seems to suppose that the Logos became externally independent only in order to create and govern the world. The personal function gave him personal existence”²⁴⁷—that ultimately determine whether or not the Apologists’ doctrine of the Son was confluent with ‘later’ orthodoxy. For regardless of the common admonition of the historian that it would be unfair to judge the theology of the ante-Nicenes according to the canons of the Nicene era, the fact remains—as we’ve seen—that the Apologists clearly had the capacity to distinguish between that which is divine, and that which is not; and just as with the Arian controversies of the fourth century, so too in the ante-Nicene era, the dividing line was *creation*. To put the matter as simply as possible, is the Son

²⁴² Tat-AG, 5

²⁴³ JustMart-DIAL, 61

²⁴⁴ JustMart-DIAL, 100

²⁴⁵ JustMart-DIAL, 129

²⁴⁶ Gri-CCT, 110

²⁴⁷ Qua-PAT1, 209; cf. Stu-TI, 50f

eternal (and therefore intrinsic to the very being of god), or, is he a contingent creation created ex-nihilo (and therefore not intrinsic to the very being of god)? If the latter, then it must be confessed that the Apologists' doctrine of the Son was substantially that of Arius and those of similar persuasion; if, however, the former, then the Apologists' doctrine of the Son was substantially coincident with that of Athanasius and his followers.

At this point I call the reader's attention to the exegesis of Col. 1:13ff offered in **section II** above. According to this interpretation, the Son, as the Wisdom and Image of god, is eternal, and related to the Father as radiance is related to light, or shine to the sun. This being the case, the relationship between the Son and Father is *both* one of metaphysically necessary co-entailment (i.e., the one exists if, and only if, the other exists: if there is sun, then there will be the sun's shine, and if the sun's shine is not, neither can there be sun) *and* asymmetrical. Both Father and Son exist eternally, yet the former is the source and cause of the latter at every moment at which he exists. Furthermore, according to this interpretation, in this dynamic relationship between the Father and Son, the Son is the *ex-expression* of the Father's very being—his *kharakter*, to use the Greek word employed by the author of Hebrews (Heb. 1:3). From this, it follows quite naturally that the Son should *also* be the *prototokos* of creation: just as the Son is the ex-expression of the Father's being, so too is he the one through and in whom the Father's will *ad extra* is fulfilled. He is fittingly the very locus of creation, for he—being the original Other—is the very ground of *distinction*. And from this also the form of salvation history that we've seen in this and each of the preceding sections follows most naturally. Salvation is participation in the very life of god, and the very locus of salvation is the Son of god himself, through whom man and the cosmos are incorporated into the Son's filial relationship with the Father.

It is in this manner that I propose the Apologists' doctrine of the Son's generation (just prior to the creation of the cosmos) be understood, for only in this manner can *all* of their claims concerning the Son—both those which seem clearly to indicate his eternity and divinity, and those which clearly indicate his temporal generation and 'subordination' to the Father; passages which have given rise to mutually exclusive interpretations amongst historians of dogma—be resolved; and these resolved not only so as to make

clear whether or not their doctrine of the Son was orthodox, but also, resolved in such a manner as to be seen confluent with the doctrines of Son *and salvation* that we've seen in *their own* writings, the writings of those explored in each of the previous sections, and with regard to what we'll soon see in that of their *immediate* successor, Irenaeus. And with that in mind, I submit the following passages for the reader's consideration.

Because the argument in behalf of which they are offered is intended to be taken as a refutation of the almost universal position held by scholars,²⁴⁸ I will cite them at length.

These are the words: "And god said, Behold, Adam has become as one of us, to know good and evil." In saying, therefore, "as one of us," [Moses] has declared that [there is a] number of persons associated with one another, and that they are at least two. . . . But this Offspring, which was truly brought forth from the Father, was with the Father before all the creatures, and the Father communed with him; even as the Scripture by Solomon has made clear, that he whom Solomon calls Wisdom, was begotten as a beginning before all his creatures and as Offspring by god, who has also declared this same thing in the revelation made by Joshua the son of Nave.²⁴⁹

*God was in the beginning; but the beginning, we have been taught, is the power of the Logos. For the Lord of the universe, who is himself the necessary ground of all being, inasmuch as no creature was yet in existence, was alone; but inasmuch as he was all power, himself the necessary ground of things visible and invisible, with him were all things; with him, by logos-power, the Logos himself also, who was in him, subsists. And by his simple will the Logos springs forth; and the Logos, not coming forth in vain, becomes the first begotten work of the Father. Him we know to be the Arkhe of the world. . . . [T]he Logos, begotten in the beginning, begat in turn our world . . .*²⁵⁰

That we are not atheists, therefore, seeing that we acknowledge one god, uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable, who is apprehended by the understanding only and the reason, who is encompassed by light, and beauty, and spirit, and power, by whom the universe has been created through his Logos, and set in order, and is kept in being—I have sufficiently demonstrated. For we acknowledge also a Son of god. Nor let any one think it ridiculous that god should have a Son. For though the poets, in their fictions, represent the gods as no better than men, our mode of thinking is not the same as theirs, concerning either god the Father or the Son. But the Son of god is the Logos of the Father, in idea and in operation; for after the pattern of him and by him were all things made, the Father and the Son being one.

²⁴⁸ A notable exception is the dean (in the English speaking world) of patristics in the latter half of the twentieth century, JND Kelly, whose view is substantially identical with that which I offer; cf. Kel-ECD, 100f.

²⁴⁹ JustMart-DIAL, 62

²⁵⁰ Tat-AG, 5; the phrase "through logos-power" (*dia logikeis dunameos*) could be taken as implying that the Son is not *truly* the Logos of god, but I suggest it simply be understood as referring to the Father's generative capacity, his ever-realized *dunamis* to bring forth the Logos.

*And, the Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son, in oneness of power of spirit, the Understanding and Reason of the Father is the Son of god. But if, in your surpassing intelligence, it occurs to you to inquire what is meant by the Son, I will state briefly that he is the first product of the Father, not as having been brought into existence (for from the beginning, god, who is the eternal mind, had the Logos in himself, being from eternity instinct with Logos); but inasmuch as he came forth to be the idea and energizing power of all material things . . .*²⁵¹

[T]he Word, through whom he [i.e., god the Father] made all things, being his Power and his Wisdom, assuming the person of the Father and Lord of all, went to the garden in the person of god, and conversed with Adam. . . . But what else is this voice but the Word of god, who is also his Son? Not as the poets and writers of myths talk of the sons of gods begotten from intercourse, but as truth expounds, **the Word, that always exists, residing within the heart of god. For before anything came into being he had him as a Counselor, being his own Mind and Thought. But when god wished to make all that he determined on, he begot this Word, uttered, the first-born of all creation, not himself being emptied of the Word, but having begotten Reason, and always conversing with his Reason. . . . The Word, then, being god, and being naturally produced from god, whenever the Father of the universe wills, he sends him to any place; and he, coming, is both heard and seen, being sent by him, and is found in a place.**²⁵²

In each of these passages the eternity of the Son (as Logos) is clearly stated, and this alongside the assertion that the Logos proceeded (temporally) for the purpose of creation; the Son exists as god's Word, Wisdom, Mind, etc., eternally, and as proper to the being of god the Father, and 'then' is begotten *outward*. Later Arians, when arguing that there was 'a beginning' of the Son's existence, were forced to argue that god's *real* Logos was *not* the Son, but the Apologists—and this point is crucial—*never* made such a claim, but rather, *identified* the Logos in god prior to creation *as* the Logos expressed *at* creation and *in* salvation history. And as such, just as with the New Testament and

²⁵¹ Athen-PC, 10

²⁵² The-TA, 2:22; the fact that this very text is the *locus classicus* and supreme proof offered in support of the notion that the Apologists held to a distinction between the *Logos endiathetos* (the Word in god, being as yet 'unpersonal') and the *Logos prophorikos* (the Word spoken by god, becoming 'at that point' personal), is indeed significant. For in the first place, even disregarding the fact that Theophilus here speaks of the Father and Son in communion prior to the Son's 'generation' before creation, what grounds could there possibly be for claiming that *Logos* becomes *personal* at the moment at which it is expressed? *Why, if the Apologists had wished to make the point that it was at this moment that the Logos became personal, would they put the matter thus? How does such in the least imply the acquisition of personhood? For logoi are impersonal, and were not understood otherwise in antiquity. If the Son—a person—were identified as the Logos of god, there seems no ground for considering the personal nature of this Logos to be contingent upon whether he is 'in the mind' or 'uttered outward;'* the distinction is one of 'audibility,' not personality.

Apostolic fathers who preceded them, and Irenaeus who came after, theology and soteriology were beheld in a single, unified vision.

So, if my interpretation is correct, what are we to make of the passages cited above which seem to imply either that the Son was not eternal, or that he is radically ‘subordinate’ to the Father, and thus not truly divine? Concerning those passages which seem to imply the Son’s non-eternality, the answer, quite simply, is that the Son’s temporal procession at the moment of creation ought not—indeed, as the passages immediately above indicate, *cannot*—be seen as implying that he didn’t exist *before* ‘then.’ The Son is “he who existed before all”,²⁵³ yet *because* he is the Logos and Wisdom of the Father (and *as such* he “has an ineffable origin”)²⁵⁴ and his very person is the ex-pression of the Father, he can be spoken of as having been “begotten” at certain key moments in salvation history, such as the creation of the cosmos, or, while incarnate, at his baptism, for the Father has declared “that his generation would take place for men”²⁵⁵ when “David predicted that he would be born from the womb before sun and moon according to the Father’s will”,²⁵⁶ and it “is *he* after whom and by whom the Father will renew both the heaven and the earth; this is *he* who shall shine an eternal light in Jerusalem”,²⁵⁷ “[f]or Christ, being the first-born of every creature, became again the chief of another race regenerated by himself through water, and faith, and wood, containing the mystery of the cross”.²⁵⁸

Regarding those passages which seem to imply that the Son is drastically ‘subordinate’ to the Father, and thus not truly divine, two points must be kept in mind. First, too much ought not be read into the fact that Justin spoke of the Son as “another god” than the Father. His essential unity with the Father is understood by reference to the fact that he is the Logos, Wisdom, etc., of god; that Justin spoke of him as “another god” is most probably to be understood not only in light of the fact that the Old Testament sometimes speaks of ‘god’ being more than one, but also in light of the fact that Justin was very concerned to make clear that the Father and Son were not *identical*—a point

²⁵³ JustMart-DIAL, 96

²⁵⁴ JustMart-APOL1, 51

²⁵⁵ JustMart-DIAL, 88

²⁵⁶ JustMart-DIAL, 76

²⁵⁷ JustMart-DIAL, 113

²⁵⁸ JustMart-DIAL, 138

which he makes on several occasions, including the ‘suspect’ passage cited above.²⁵⁹ And as regards the Son’s being “subject” to the Father, and the one who comes into contact with created reality (opposed to the Father, who cannot), it is at this point worth reiterating that according even to ‘later’ orthodoxy, it *must be the Son* who ‘comes to’ creation. The idea is found in Athanasius of Alexandria,²⁶⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem,²⁶¹ Gregory Nazianzus,²⁶² Hilary of Poitiers,²⁶³ Augustine of Hippo,²⁶⁴ Bonaventure,²⁶⁵ Thomas Aquinas,²⁶⁶ and modern Catholic and Orthodox theologians such as Karl Rahner²⁶⁷ and Vladimir Lossky.²⁶⁸ Again, the Son *ex-presses* the will of the Father *ad extra* because, being *simpliciter* the *ex-expression* of the Father in eternity, it is *fitting that* he should do so. And while I cannot agree with Kelly’s attempt to explain away the apparent ‘subordinationism’ of the Apologists when he asserts that “for all of them, the description ‘God the Father’ connoted, not the first Person of the Holy Trinity, but the one Godhead considered as author of whatever exists”,²⁶⁹ his claims that “their object was not so much to subordinate” the Son to the Father “as to safeguard the monotheism which they considered indispensable”, and that the “Logos as manifested must necessarily be limited as compared with the Godhead Itself”,²⁷⁰ seem to me to be very close to the truth. Even in those passages wherein Justin seems so severely to contrast

²⁵⁹ JustMart-DIAL, 129—“that that which is begotten is numerically distinct from that which begets, anyone will admit”—the point is not that the Logos *becomes* distinct *when* he is ‘spoken’, but that in his being outwardly expressed, his being distinct is *made manifest*; cf. JustMart-APOL1, 63—“For they who affirm that the Son is the Father are proved neither to have become acquainted with the Father, nor to know that the Father of the universe has a Son”; JustMart-DIAL, 56—“distinct from him who made all things— numerically distinct, I mean, not [distinct] in will”; JustMart-DIAL, 128—“[some Christians wrongly] maintain that [the Son] is indivisible and inseparable from the Father, just as they say that the light of the sun on earth is indivisible and inseparable from the sun . . . as when it sinks, the light sinks along with it; so the Father, when he chooses, say they, causes his power to spring forth, and when he chooses, he makes it return to himself . . . [rather, the Son] is indeed something numerically distinct”.

²⁶⁰ E.g., Ath-OCA, 3:67

²⁶¹ E.g., Cyr-CL, 11:22

²⁶² E.g., GrNaz-TO4, 11

²⁶³ E.g., Hil-DT, 4:21

²⁶⁴ E.g., Aug-DT, 4:27; cf. Marius Victorinus’ *Adversus Arium*, 4:1f—“What it is *to be* is the Father; what it is *to act*, the Logos” (*Quod est esse, pater est, quod est operari, logos*).

²⁶⁵ E.g., Bon-DQT, 8:ro:7

²⁶⁶ E.g., Aqu-SCG4, 42:1, 3

²⁶⁷ E.g., Rah-TR, 86

²⁶⁸ E.g., Los-ILG, 91f

²⁶⁹ Kel-ECD, 100; there is no support whatever for this claim in the writings themselves of the Apologists. Yes, by “Father” they meant the source of all things, but this source was understood precisely as the Father of Jesus Christ.

²⁷⁰ Kel-ECD, 101

the transcendent Father with the Son who is sent, the *properties* which he ascribes to the Father in justification of his transcendence (i.e., not confined to place, and existence before the world) he elsewhere ascribes to the Son. And while I do not wish to claim that Justin's emphasis of the distinction between Father and Son as regards transcendence is entirely confluent with that of the Nicene and post-Nicene eras—still less to defend it—it can certainly be claimed that the formal insight underlying this notion is grounded in a genuine perception of the relationship between Father and Son that has ever been held by orthodoxy, and lies at the center of Trinitarian theology.

Thus, in light of the arguments advanced above, and the evidence presented in this and preceding sections—and alongside what we'll see below when we come to treat of Irenaeus' doctrine of the Trinity—I submit against the view commonly held by historians of dogma that the Apologists' doctrine of the Logos of god is substantially confluent with that of 'later' orthodoxy, being the Nicene and post-Nicene eras. While it is the consensus of scholarship that the Apologists' (and ante-Nicene in general) doctrine of the Son was *not* that of the 'Arians,' still, the fact that the Apologists (and many ante-Nicenes) distinguished between the *internal* Logos and *uttered* Logos, and spoke of him as being generated prior to creation, is almost universally taken as grounds for holding them to have denied the eternity of the Son, thus being, although not heretics, 'sub-orthodox' in some undefined, yet significant sense. But I claim that, if one properly attends to the evidence, and gives a careful ear to their message, it is precisely at this point—this point wherein they have grasped both the identity and distinction between the eternal Logos and the Logos proceeding into time—that their theological genius is manifest, and the christological theocentricism which dominated their thought as a whole, whereby the sight of god and the understanding of salvation history are held together in a single, harmonious vision, is explicitly declared as though in summary form.

God, for the Apologists, is the center of all things, and at the center of god is the incarnate, crucified and risen Son. It is through and in the incarnate Christ that the goal of salvation has been consummated, for he is the eternal Logos of god, through whom man and the cosmos were fashioned at the dawn of creation, and through whom they may now participate in the Son's filial relationship with the Father, thus participating in the

very life of god. “Beautiful without doubt is the world”:²⁷¹ the variegated splendors of the cosmos have “all the harmony of a concert of music in their arrangement”,²⁷² and “the air and all that is under heaven is in a certain sort anointed by light and spirit”.²⁷³ This ‘anointing’ of the cosmos reveals the Father through the Son, who is fittingly called Christ “in reference to his being anointed and god’s ordering all things through him”.²⁷⁴ And so too with regard to the renewal of all things through the incarnate Son of god, for it is with the advent of Christ that god has been fully revealed, and it is through participation in the Son that the very life of god is partaken of. The Church is the “robe” of the slain Lamb washed “in the blood of the grape”,²⁷⁵ and being thus taken “out from the bowels of Christ”,²⁷⁶ She communicates to man the life of god through the sacraments of baptism, “the water and laver of regeneration” through which men “are born again, and receive blessing from god”,²⁷⁷ and the eucharist, which “is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh”.²⁷⁸ And it is through this participation in the incarnate Son of god that man will be raised again, clothed with immortality²⁷⁹ and made worthy of “fellowship with” god.²⁸⁰

In the writings of the Apologists of the second century, when we realize that, for them, the *eternal* Logos of god through whom all things were created is he in whom all things are made new, we realize also that god, the cosmos, and salvation history are united in a single vision, which is rendered into a coherent harmony through the lens of Jesus the Christ, the eternal Logos of god, the *Arkhe* of all creation, the Son of god

²⁷¹ Athen-PC, 16

²⁷² Tat-AG, 12

²⁷³ The-TA, 1:12

²⁷⁴ JustMart-APOL2, 6

²⁷⁵ JustMart-APOL1, 32

²⁷⁶ JustMart-DIAL, 135

²⁷⁷ The-TA, 2:16; cf. JustMart-APOL1, 66—“Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves generated”; JustMart-DIAL, 86—“our Christ, by being crucified on the tree, and by purifying [us] with water, has redeemed us, though plunged in the direst offences which we have committed, and has made [us] a house of prayer and adoration”.

²⁷⁸ JustMart-APOL1, 66; connected with this, concerning the empirical, historical nature of the one Church, cf. The-TA, 2:14—“god has given to the world which is driven and tempest-tossed by sins assemblies—we mean holy churches—in which survive the doctrines of the truth, as in the island harbors of good anchorage; and into these run those who desire to be saved”, in contrast to “other islands, rocky and without water, and barren, and infested by wild beasts, and uninhabitable . . . doctrines of error—I mean heresies”; Tat-AG, 25—“You who receive from your predecessors doctrines which clash with one another, you the inharmonious, are fighting against the harmonious”.

²⁷⁹ JustMart-APOL1, 52

²⁸⁰ JustMart-APOL1, 10

become Son of man, the crucified Lord of glory, the resurrected one, alive forever more, through whom all things are fashioned anew. The Incarnate Son of god is the center of the Apologists' theological vision, the one through whom god the Father and creator of all has been revealed, the one in whom the Holy Spirit has been given to the world for the renewal of all things. It was upon the ground of this same center that Irenaeus of Lyons was to declare a unified vision of salvation history, the explicitly Trinitarian form of which has rarely been equaled in the history of theology, and never surpassed. To him we now turn.

V Irenaeus: Prolegomena

If Ignatius of Antioch can rightly be seen as the great door that opens upon the Christian *kerygma* of the second century, then Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 135 a.d. – ca. 200 a.d.) must be seen not only as the great door which closes that century, but also, as the theological floodgate which opens upon all subsequent eras of the Church. Like Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, his extant writings may be understood in the first instance as pastoral, in that they are intended to preserve and maintain the unity of the Church in the face of heresy and schism; unlike them, however, the extent of his vision is unbounded, and to a far greater extent he employs classical patterns of thought to achieve this end, illuminating *every* aspect of Christian life and thought by viewing them through the lens of the Incarnate, crucified, and risen Son of god. And unlike what we see in the extant works of the Apologists of the second century, his goal is not to convert the intellectual culture of the Roman Empire; yet, like them, a distinctively intellectual approach is adopted, and it is to the heart of the Christian message that he appeals in making his case, believing that the degree to which the truth is presented corresponds to the degree to which it is itself vindicated, and falsehood conquered. In Irenaeus we see the pronounced convergence of all forms of Christian thought which preceded him—both spiritual and intellectual, both pastoral and philosophical, both doxological and confessional, both exegetical and image-laden.

Because he combined all of these in expounding the *kerygma* of the Church (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*) and refuting the heresy of various gnostic sects (*Against Heresies*), and because in both of these works he gives a full expression to the Christian faith that is universal in scope, he is rightly recognized as the first theologian proper in the history of the Church. The extraordinary sharpness of his intellect is today perhaps most commonly understood with reference to his many aphorisms, such as:

“[T]hey do not believe in that which really exists, and they have fallen away into [the belief of] that which has, in fact, no existence”;²⁸¹ “For, as much as god is in want of nothing, so much does man stand in need of fellowship with god”;²⁸² “[F]or the Father is the invisible of the Son, but the Son the visible of the Father”;²⁸³ “For the glory of god is a living man, and the life of man consists in beholding god”.²⁸⁴ Yet the pithy wit of sayings such as these, which greet the reader on nearly every page of his writings, reveals not only the pointed sharpness of his thought; it reveals also the extent to which his soul was saturated in the faith of the Church, as well as the fact that his mind ever-dwelted in the vital center itself of that faith. Every paragraph of his work has the freshness and sparkling vivacity of a youthful garden, and in Irenaeus we see what has been seen only in the greatest theologians who came after him: a theology that is not only universal in scope, but also emphatically *centered*, and this in such a manner that the center consciously determines the particulars, and can be readily recognized as doing so.²⁸⁵ This center is itself twofold: god, the source of all things; and the Incarnate Son of god, through whom all things are made new, and participation in the Trinitarian life of god is made possible. Irenaeus, it will be argued below, sees these two in unity, as though two concentric circles: the former is the ontological ground of the latter, and the latter is the epistemic point of departure for perceiving the former; the former is expressed in the latter, and through the latter all things are drawn into the former. And from the heart of this two-fold unity, Irenaeus brings forth a theological vision that embraces the whole of salvation history, not—as with Aquinas and later systematic theologians—a concatenation of heavenly declaratives deduced from revelation, but rather, a spontaneous light bursting forth from the primal font of radiance, shining everywhere, and with the pattern of the crucified Son of god impressed on all things as though morning dew adorning a meadow. The nucleus is declared in all the radii, and the sun itself shines forth in each of its rays. There is no difficulty in finding the pulse of

²⁸¹ Ire-AH, 2:10:2

²⁸² Ire-AH, 4:14:1

²⁸³ Ire-AH, 4:6:6

²⁸⁴ Ire-AH, 4:20:7

²⁸⁵ And I mention in passing that it is for this reason that the interpretation and summarization of Irenaeus’ theology is so very challenging—not because Irenaeus’ thought *itself* is confused, but rather, because every statement pulls in many directions at once, and is such that, to a far greater degree than is commonly the case, it cannot be properly understood in isolation.

Irenaeus' theological vision; the heart itself is present in every line. Having neither the speculative boldness of an Origen of Alexandria, who although ever faithful to the Church, was nonetheless compelled to peer into every aspect of the faith out of a love of, and pure desire for, the truth; nor having the almost exclusively analytic proclivities of an Anselm of Canterbury, who sought to illumine and justify before the mind the truth held in the heart through a rigorous application of logic; the fact remains that with regard to the spontaneity of its voice, the vividness of its presentation, the theological *and* cosmic scope of its doctrine of the incarnation, the explicit Trinitarian coordination of all its particulars, and the conscious, consistent manner in which all of the above are seamlessly interwoven—as though its author had been able to deliver this variegated message as an integrated unity with all of the effortlessness of breathing—the theology of Irenaeus of Lyons has never been surpassed, and equaled only by Bonaventure in the thirteenth century, and Hans Urs von Balthasar in the twentieth.

The works upon which we will draw in order to explore this theology will be Irenaeus' brief *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* (ca. 190 a.d.),²⁸⁶ and *Against Heresies* (ca. 180 – 190 a.d.), which consists of five books.²⁸⁷ Concerning the textual history of these works, the Latin translation of *Against Heresies*—which perhaps may be dated as early as 200 a.d.—is extant in its entirety, and according to Quasten, nearly enough Greek fragments remain that “almost the whole of the complete text can be reconstructed”.²⁸⁸ In addition to these, there remain a number of fragments available in Syriac, and an Armenian translation of the fourth and fifth books. As regards the *Proof*, though Eusebius mentioned it in his *Ecclesiastical History*, no manuscript was available until an Armenian translation was discovered in 1904. In spite of questions which remain concerning the translation or original rendering of certain passages, the overall integrity of both works is recognized by scholars.

In both of these works, the distinctively unified, coherent, and universal theological vision of Irenaeus shows forth—a vision which was both metaphysical (god

²⁸⁶ Though it includes a reference to *Against Heresies*, some, such as Behr (Beh-WN, 112), would give the *Proof* an earlier date, and place it before *Against Heresies*.

²⁸⁷ In addition to these works, Irenaeus also authored a number of no longer extant works which are either cited or referred to by Eusebius, including *That God is not the Author of Evil*, *On the Ogdoad*, *Concerning Knowledge*, and a letter to Victor, bishop of Rome, concerning the celebration of Easter.

²⁸⁸ Qua-PAT1, 291

and creation) and cosmic (god vis-à-vis creation in the history of salvation) in scope. As mentioned above, the epistemic center of this theological vision is the Incarnate, crucified and risen Christ, through whom participation in the life of the god who is both Father and Son is made possible through the Spirit. Yet the one god of the Christian faith is the *metaphysical* center of Irenaeus' theological vision, being both the ground and expressed content of the historical reality which constitutes the epistemic ground. In the succeeding sections of the present work, it will be my argument that, in light of the explicit connection between these two in Irenaeus' theology—the doctrine of god on the one hand, and the Trinitarian form of salvation on the other—the implicit presupposition of Irenaeus' theological vision is something rather like Nicene Trinitarian theology *ad intra*; more specifically, it is my claim that the theology expounded in the exegesis of Col. 1:13 offered in **section II** above, and through which I proposed the Apologists' doctrine of the generation of the Son be understood in the previous section, is the necessary and sufficient postulate for explaining the coherence of the Trinitarian form of salvation as expounded by Irenaeus. Only the Nicene theology of the Trinity *ad intra* can comprehend Irenaeus' (as well as all who preceded him) doctrines of soteriology and the economy of salvation, and *only* a Trinitarian form of salvation, such as that found in Irenaeus, renders coherent the fact that the Triune god has authored creation, and interacted with it throughout its history *as triune*.

The evidence for these claims will be offered in each of the two following sections of this work. In the next section, we'll explore several texts from Irenaeus which at most explicitly declare, and at the very least necessarily imply, that both the Son and Spirit were recognized by Irenaeus as fully divine, both eternal and proper to the being of god the Father. In the following section—**section VII**—Irenaeus' soteriology will be explored, and particular emphasis will be given to the distinctively Trinitarian form of Irenaeus' understanding of salvation history—a form that is, as we'll see, so all-encompassing that, unless one finds it necessary to erect a dichotomy between Irenaeus' theology and soteriology (and, in light of his doctrine of theosis, thereby render the latter altogether incoherent), it certainly requires a theology of the 'immanent' Trinity as its ground, and *itself* provides the ground *for* the perception of the Trinity *ad intra*. The concluding section of this work will bring together the findings of the preceding sections,

and in light of these theses stated in the introduction of this work will be explicitly vindicated—that the Trinitarian theology of the ante-Nicene Church was *not* ‘sub-orthodox’ (in light of ‘later’ orthodoxy), and that, when this is understood, the grandeur of its Trinitarian vision is seen not only to possess an inherent brilliance, but also, that this brilliance is such that it offers future theologians a treasure of immeasurable worth, a luscious garden providing a harvest for our own generation. We are commonly told that the history of Trinitarian theology is that of ‘development’ (by which is meant ‘change,’ and that in a not insignificant sense), that it was the Church of the fourth century that ‘discovered’ (or ‘made’) Trinitarian orthodoxy, and that in the writings of the ante-Nicene Church, one can find a coherent and thorough understanding *only* of the ‘economic’ Trinity; when the ante-Nicenes *did* have something to say concerning the ‘immanent’ Trinity, we are told, their comments were either unfortunately (though ‘understandably’) defective, or remarkable ‘anticipations’ of *some aspects* of the Trinitarian theology of ‘later’ orthodoxy. It is my claim that this understanding of the history of Trinitarian theology is at some points overly exaggerated, and at others simply false, and these to such an extent that the estimation of the theological worth of ante-Nicene Trinitarian theology in particular is very much in need of revision by both historians of dogma and Trinitarian theologians as well.

But before all this, a brief word on the basic form of Irenaeus’ theology and theological method is in order. Like nearly all great theological achievements in the history of the Church, the spur of which Irenaeus’ own theology was the consequence was at bottom apologetic, taking as its point of departure his encounter with the heresy of gnosticism. Though it is beyond the scope of the present work to offer a detailed analysis of gnosticism in its various forms,²⁸⁹ a few of its main features deserve to be mentioned insofar as they stand in antithesis to certain of the most fundamental affirmations of Irenaeus which will be treated in detail in what follows. First, though nominally Christian, the gnostics departed from the Rule of Faith and praxis of the Catholic Church; second, the gnostics denied the (theological) verity of the Old Testament, thereby denying the unity of salvation history; third, the gnostics denied that the *demiurge*—the

²⁸⁹ The whole of Ire-AH, 1 offers Irenaeus’ presentation of gnosticism in its various forms. For more on gnosticism, cf. Bal-GLTA2, 33 – 44; Don-ORR, 25 – 58; Osb-IL, 265 – 273; Qua-PAT1, 254 – 277.

god to whom the Old Testament attributes both the creation of the cosmos, and the authorship of salvation history—was the one god, the Father of Jesus Christ; fourth, they scorned physical reality and held either an extremely low view of the cosmos, or that it was itself the basis of evil; fifth, they denied the unity of the one Lord Jesus Christ, consequently denying the incarnation and passion of the Son of god; and sixth, they denied the eschatological affirmation of the salvation of the flesh and renewal of the cosmos.

Thus, aside from its denial of the unity of god (and awkward, mythological metaphysical speculations, which need not concern us here), it will be readily apparent that the gnosticism which Irenaeus faced had a crucial element in common with what we know of the docetism that Ignatius of Antioch faced several decades earlier, grounded in the repudiation of the physical, from which follows the denial of the incarnation of the Son of god, alongside all soteriological consequences following from it (and *also*, as Irenaeus was at pains to make clear, in the case of the gnostics, the entire understanding of the cosmos and cosmic history which are understood *in light of* it). And like Ignatius who preceded him, Irenaeus' reaction to this anti-incarnational understanding of Jesus the Christ was one of absolute horror. "Their doctrine is homicidal",²⁹⁰ the denial of the incarnation constitutes not only the vitiation of the Christian faith, but also an assault upon reality itself in scorning the work of god, refusing and maligning his involvement with creation, and abnegating the very possibility of communion with him. The Christian is one who lives for and within god, but because of their blasphemous doctrines, the gnostics have embraced "the shadow" and dwell in "the void". Still, Irenaeus' repudiation of their teachings is not merely a display of invective, but rather, it "may be compared to a severe remedy", "for it puts an end to their pride and haughtiness"; in refuting heresy and vindicating truth, Irenaeus understood himself to be "loving [the heretics] better than they seem to love themselves. For our love, inasmuch as it is true, is salutary to them, if they will but receive it".²⁹¹

Against the teaching of the gnostics, Irenaeus proclaimed the faith of the Church, and taking as his point of departure the Incarnate Son of god, he developed a coherent

²⁹⁰ Ire-AH, 3:16:8

²⁹¹ Ire-AH, 3:25:7

theology which affirms the dignity of the cosmos and physical reality; the recapitulation of all things through Christ crucified; the unity of god, Christ and salvation history; and the authority of the Church and integrity of her rule of faith. The gnostics presented a highly developed mythology, defined on the one hand by their denial of the one god, and on the other by their contempt for the cosmos. As Irenaeus rightly saw, they corrupted the historical gospel of Jesus the Christ by subverting it to their mythology. Irenaeus, on the other hand, begins with the faith of the Church, the light of the Incarnate, crucified and risen Son of god, and he points to the presence of this light in all things, thereby overcoming the claims of the gnostics at every point.

Thus, according to Irenaeus, god himself created the very “substance of matter”;²⁹² it is the one god who has fashioned the cosmos, causing the “lights of heaven” to shine, adorning with “flowers and trees” the “sublunary world”, and forming the “multitude of animals . . . some rational, and others irrational, but all adorned with beauty”.²⁹³ As a locus of beauty and harmony, the world itself brings forth an ethical imperative, and god will bring judgment upon those who “have led lives not corresponding to the dignity of his bounty”.²⁹⁴ God himself is revealed in the cosmos, and “the manifestation of god which is made by means of the creation, affords life to all living in the earth”;²⁹⁵ it is the Son of god who reveals god the Father, yet the Son did not begin “to manifest the Father” *only* “when he was born of Mary”, for “the Son, being present with his own handiwork from the beginning, reveals the Father to all”.²⁹⁶ And likewise, against “the heretics, despising the handiwork of god, and not admitting the salvation of their flesh”,²⁹⁷ Irenaeus affirms the dignity and salvation of the human body, for in the eucharist, the Incarnate Son of god “has acknowledged the cup (which is part of creation) as his own blood, from which he bedews our blood; and the bread . . . he has established as his own body, from which he gives increase to our bodies”.²⁹⁸

The basis for this affirmation of the cosmos and physical reality is Irenaeus’ doctrine of recapitulation, which is rightly the principal point of emphasis in

²⁹² Ire-AH, 2:28:7

²⁹³ Ire-AH, 2:30:3

²⁹⁴ Ire-AH, 3:25:4

²⁹⁵ Ire-AH, 4:20:7

²⁹⁶ Ire-AH, 4:6:7

²⁹⁷ Ire-AH, 5:31:1

²⁹⁸ Ire-AH, 5:2:2

contemporary treatments of Irenaeus' theology.²⁹⁹ Briefly stated, Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation is the thesis that the center-point of the cosmos and salvation history is the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Son of god, and that the whole of the cosmos and history converge upon this center-point and are fashioned anew by the salutary and creative power that are present within it, and which it imparts to all. Thus the life and death of Christ are both the *presentation* of salvation history as in summary form, and also the ontological *ground* of the reality of salvation. In a characteristic passage, Irenaeus presents the matter thus—

*There is therefore, as I have pointed out, one god the Father, and one Christ Jesus, who came by means of the whole dispensational arrangements [connected with him], and gathered together all things in himself. But in every respect, too, he is man, the formation of god; and thus he took up man into himself, the invisible becoming visible, the incomprehensible being made comprehensible, the impassible becoming capable of suffering, and the Word being made man, thus summing up all things in himself: so that as in super-celestial, spiritual, and invisible things, the Word of god is supreme, so also in things visible and corporeal he might possess the supremacy, and, taking to himself the pre-eminence, as well as constituting himself Head of the Church, he might draw all things to himself at the proper time.*³⁰⁰

As this understanding of salvation history—according to which all things are rightly proportioned one to another, arranged harmoniously under, and understood with reference to, a single head—would suggest, Irenaeus' theology was one of synthesis, wherein the unity of all things is clearly affirmed. Against the gnostics' denial of the identity of the one god of creation and salvation history with the Father of Jesus Christ, Irenaeus affirms that “god and the Father are truly one and the same . . . the maker of heaven and earth, and of all things therein”,³⁰¹ for “god is all mind, all reason, all active spirit, all light, and always exists one and the same, as it is both beneficial for us to think of god, and as we learn . . . from the Scriptures”;³⁰² and against their claim that “Jesus was merely a receptacle of Christ, upon whom the Christ, as a dove, descended from

²⁹⁹ For more on Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation, see Bal-GLTA2, 45 – 55; Beh-WN, 123 – 130; Osb-IL, 97 – 140; Qua-PAT1, 294 – 313.

³⁰⁰ Ire-AH, 3:16:6—the reader ought bear in mind the fact that, in this characteristic summary statement of his theology, Irenaeus both clearly ascribes divine predicates to Christ, and also clearly alludes to the Colossians passage given so much emphasis in prior sections of this work. The intimate connection between these two (i.e., theology and soteriology) in the person of the Son of god will receive further attention in **section VII** below.

³⁰¹ Ire-AH, 3:10:5

³⁰² Ire-AH, 2:28:4

above”;³⁰³ Irenaeus proclaims one Lord Jesus Christ, for “John knew the one and the same Word of god, and that he was the only begotten, and that he became incarnate . . . Jesus Christ our Lord”, Matthew clearly affirmed “that the Son of god was born of a virgin, and that he himself was Christ the Savior whom the prophets foretold”,³⁰⁴ and Paul confessed faith only in “one Jesus Christ our Lord . . . the Son of god being made the son of man”,³⁰⁵ for “he who was the Son of god became the son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word . . . might become the son of god”.³⁰⁶ And from the unity and identity of god and Christ follows the principle of the harmony of all things, whether faith and reason,³⁰⁷ goodness and justice,³⁰⁸ or the unity in the human being of body and soul, and faith and works.³⁰⁹

Though Irenaeus is universally recognized as the Church’s ‘first’ theologian, and his doctrine of recapitulation is commonly regarded as a brilliant theological ‘development’ which drew upon and surpassed the theology of those who came before him, it is imperative to realize that Irenaeus did not see his own *teaching* as being ‘original,’ and in point of fact he would have found such a suggestion to be repugnant. As regards the veracity of Irenaeus’ stance on this point, we will see in what follows that he was—provided the exegesis and application of Col. 1:13ff offered in preceding sections of this study are indeed close to the mark—stating the truth. In other words, the brilliance of his theological vision is nothing more than a series of footnotes appended to the faith of the Catholic Church, being anchored in the very heart of that faith, with all of the particulars which he speaks of being conditioned by it, and rendered harmonious one with another as determined by its own inherent rhythm. Yet the principal impetus for Irenaeus scorning of ‘originality’ is based upon his conviction that the truth is had by the one body of Christ—the one, historical, public, and Catholic Church. The role of innovator belongs to the heretic, “For prior to Valentinus, those who follow [him] had no existence; nor did those from Marcion exist before Marcion”, nor were there any adherents to the various schools of heresy “previous to the initiators and inventors of their

³⁰³ Ire-AH, 3:16:1

³⁰⁴ Ire-AH, 3:16:2

³⁰⁵ Ire-AH, 3:16:3

³⁰⁶ Ire-AH, 3:19:1

³⁰⁷ Ire-AH, 2:28:3

³⁰⁸ Ire-AH, 3:25:2

³⁰⁹ Ire-PAP, 2

perversity”.³¹⁰ And following directly from the novelty of the various heresies is their discord and lack of agreement, not only with the one Catholic Church, but with one another as well. Because “they differ so widely among themselves both as respects doctrine and tradition”, and “make it their effort daily to invent some new opinion, and to bring out what no one ever before thought of”, it is a burdensome task even “to describe all their opinions”.³¹¹

This novelty and discord stands in stark contrast to the historical continuity and harmony in faith of the one Catholic Church. The apostles “simply, and without respect of persons, deliver[ed] to all what they had themselves learned from the Lord”.³¹² This, which is “the only true and life-giving faith”,³¹³ has been transmitted to the Church, and “though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth”,³¹⁴ it has been maintained in its integrity from the Church’s founding into perpetuity, for “the Church, having received . . . this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world . . . as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it”,³¹⁵ and therefore it “is permanent among us”.³¹⁶ The faith of the one Catholic Church is grounded in “that tradition which originates from the apostles”,³¹⁷ and “the apostolic tradition has been preserved continuously . . . everywhere” by the succession of bishops.³¹⁸ And when offering his most sustained defense of the historical continuity of the one Catholic Church—which is the guardian and possessor of the apostolic faith by which She is herself nourished—it is to the succession of bishops in “the very great, the very ancient, and universally known church found and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul” that Irenaeus turns.³¹⁹ In basing a defense for the unity of the Church on the succession of bishops, Irenaeus follows closely in the footsteps of Clement of Rome (and Ignatius of Antioch), and as we’ve seen above, the particular recognition of a certain pre-eminence of the Roman church (or the office of Peter) was also implied, to a certain extent, in the

³¹⁰ Ire-AH, 3:4:3

³¹¹ Ire-AH, 1:21:5

³¹² Ire-AH, 3:14:2

³¹³ Ire-AH, 3:pref.

³¹⁴ Ire-AH, 1:10:1

³¹⁵ Ire-AH, 1:10:2

³¹⁶ Ire-AH, 3:5:1

³¹⁷ Ire-AH, 3:2:2

³¹⁸ Ire-AH, 3:3:3

³¹⁹ Ire-AH, 3:3:2f

New Testament, Clement, and Ignatius.³²⁰ Irenaeus adds further testimony to this recognition of a certain preeminence with regard to the Roman church when he claims that “it is a matter of necessity that every church should agree with this church, on account of its preeminent authority”.³²¹

Such is the general contour of Irenaeus’ theology. In the face of widespread heretical movement which denied the one god, the one Christ, the history of salvation, and the dignity of the cosmos and physical reality, Irenaeus affirmed the faith of the Catholic Church by viewing the whole of salvation history and the cosmos through the lens of the Incarnate, crucified and risen Christ. There is one god, the creator of all things, author of salvation history, and Father of the one Lord Jesus Christ. The cosmos, though fallen, is good, and its beauty declares the greatness of its fashioner. The ground and term of salvation history and the cosmos is the incarnation of the Son of god, through whom all things are recapitulated and will be fashioned anew. Participation in the salutary work of the Son of god is had only within the one Catholic Church, which faithfully preserves the apostolic faith, and is unified in faith and origin in contrast to the various heresies, which are novelties and discordant with one another.

In defending this theology in the face of heresy, Irenaeus utilizes a three-fold theological method. First, Irenaeus employs logic—both analytic and ontological—in critiquing the claims of the gnostics and articulating the faith of the one Church. Second, Irenaeus turns again and again to the Rule of Faith, or “rule of truth,” as a basis for his exposition of the historicity, integrity, and content of the Church’s faith. Third, Irenaeus’ articulation of the Rule of Faith is marked by a sense of aesthetic coherence, according to which all things—whether in the cosmos, salvation history, or the various books of Scripture—harmoniously fit one with another according to the wise designation of the creator, and this in a manner which can be recognized by the mind as fitting and proper.

Irenaeus was not content simply to dispute the claims of the heretics from a safe distance, for he “who would undertake their conversion, must possess an accurate

³²⁰ For Ignatius’ stance, cf. pg. 52, n. 47 above.

³²¹ Ire-AH, 3:3:3—of course, the interpretation of this claim has been a subject of endless disputation, but it may be doubted whether the passage itself warrants such. As is the case with those who preceded him, Irenaeus’ testimony concerning the Roman church indicates—and definitely so—the recognition of *a certain* preeminence; only this much can be claimed with certainty from the text itself.

knowledge of their systems or schemes of doctrine”.³²² At the same time, the very recognition of the heretics’ teachings provides sufficient refutation of them, for “simply to exhibit their sentiments is to obtain a victory over them”.³²³ The doctrines of the gnostics can be so readily dismissed because of their irrationality and lack of coherence. Irenaeus engages many forms of logic in order to make this point clear. Some times he establishes the *ad hoc* nature of certain of their claims, such as, e.g., their highly developed numerology. The gnostics find significance in the fact that the (Greek) name of Jesus consists of six letters, indicating “at other times ‘the Plentitude of the Ogdoads,’ as containing the number eight hundred and eighty eight”.³²⁴ Irenaeus points out that, not only is it bad enough that this speculation on their part is based on ignoring the rendering of Jesus’ name in its original language, but also, even granting the use of the Greek language as a basis for metaphysical speculation, the gnostics are inconsistent, for they “pass over in silence” Christ’s “[corresponding] Greek name, which is *soter* . . . because it does not fit in with their system, either with respect to numerical value or as regards its letters”.³²⁵ Furthermore, what is the *basis* for recognizing the particular significance of this or that number, and what warrants the gnostics to build grand speculations upon such? Irenaeus answers that it is wholly arbitrary, and proves this by detecting, upon whim, a significance based upon “that number which is called *five*, which agrees in no respect with their argument, and does not harmonize with their system, nor is [it] suitable for a . . . manifestation of . . . the Pleroma”.³²⁶ The scriptural terms ‘*soter*,’ ‘*pater*,’ and ‘*agape*’ all consist of *five* letters; when Jesus miraculously fed the multitude, it was a multitude of *five* thousand, and they were fed with *five* loaves of bread. *Five* was the number of both the wise and foolish virgins (Mt. 25:2), as was the number of men who witnessed the transfiguration of the Lord—“namely, Peter, and James, and John, and Moses, and Elias”. And when he raised the young girl back to life, was Jesus not “the *fifth* person” to enter the home in which she lay (Lk. 8:51)? Did not the rich man in hell have *five* brothers (Lk. 16:28); was not the number of porches at the pool where the paralytic was healed *five*? Does not the hand have *five* fingers? Are there not *five*

³²² Ire-AH, 4:pref.

³²³ Ire-AH, 1:31:3

³²⁴ Ire-AH, 2:24:1

³²⁵ Ire-AH, 2:24:1

³²⁶ This and all further references in this paragraph are from Ire-AH, 2:24:4

senses? Did Moses not deliver the law in *five* books? Did not each of the tablets upon which the decalogue had been inscribed contain *five* commandments? Irenaeus goes on at even greater length before finally pointing out that “[a]nyone, in fact, might collect many thousand other things of the same kind, both with respect to this number and any other”, yet—

[A]lthough such is the case, we do not therefore affirm that there are five Aeons above the Demiurge; nor do we consecrate the Pentad, as if it were some divine thing; nor do we strive to establish things that are untenable, nor ravings . . . by means of that vain kind of labor; nor do we perversely force a creation well adapted by god . . . to change itself into types of things which have no real existence; nor do we seek to bring forward impious and abominable doctrines, the detection and overthrow of which are easy to all possessed of intelligence.

The above is indicative not only of an adamant defender of orthodoxy, but also, a fertile, creative mind that was firmly grounded in rationality. And alongside revealing the vacuous basis of the heretics’ claims by reference to their arbitrariness, Irenaeus frequently reduces their position to absurdity with a series of disjunctive and hypothetical syllogisms. A number of the pre-Socratics advanced doctrines coincident with those of the gnostics, and in light of this, Irenaeus asks—

*Did all those who have been mentioned, with whom you have been proved to coincide in expression, know, or not know, the truth? If they knew it, then the descent of the Savior into this world was superfluous. For why [in that case] did he descend? Was it that he might bring that truth which was [already] known to the knowledge of those who knew it? If, on the other hand, these men did **not** know it, then how is it that, while you express yourselves in the same terms as do those who knew not the truth, you boast that yourselves alone possess that knowledge which is above all things, although they who are ignorant of god [likewise] possess it?³²⁷*

Likewise with regard to the gnostics’ claims concerning the procession of all things from, and inherence within, the Pleroma, which they claimed to be impassible. For if “the Aeons were derived from Logos, Logos from Nous, and Nous from Bythus”, and because of this derivation, are “of the same substance with the author of their production”, the Pleroma, it necessarily follows that “they must either all remain forever impassible, or their father himself must participate in passion”.³²⁸

³²⁷ Ire-AH, 2:14:7

³²⁸ Ire-AH, 2:27:3f

Yet Irenaeus most focused application of logic comes when he defends the unity and being of the one creator god. The god and source of all things is not, as the gnostics held, one who can be wholly comprehended by reference to the mundane connotations of words, for he is “above [all] these properties, and therefore indescribable”—he is “understanding”, but not after the manner of human reason; “light”, but “nothing like that light with which we are acquainted”.³²⁹ The one god is the stopping point of explanation; there cannot be anything *beyond* god, for “if there *is* anything beyond him, he is not then the Pleroma of all, nor does he contain them”, and “that which is wanting, and falls in any way short, is not the Pleroma of all things”.³³⁰ Yet because the gnostics indeed *do* affirm that there is something beyond the Pleroma and first principle of all things, Irenaeus points out that—

*[I]t is in every way necessary that the Pleroma either contains that which is beyond, yet is contained (for otherwise, it will not be beyond the Pleroma; for if there is anything beyond the Pleroma, there will be a Pleroma within this very Pleroma which they declare to be outside of the Pleroma, and the Pleroma will be contained by that which is beyond: and with the Pleroma is understood also the first god); or, again, they must be an infinite distance separated from each other—the Pleroma [I mean] and that which is beyond it. But if they maintain this, there will then be a third kind of existence, which separates by immensity the Pleroma and that which is beyond it. This third kind of existence will therefore bound and contain both the others, and will be greater both than the Pleroma, and that which is beyond it . . . In this way, talk might go on forever . . . so that their thoughts would never rest in one god, but, in consequence of seeking after more than exists, would wander away to that which has no existence, and depart from the true god.*³³¹

In a similar manner Irenaeus proves that the one god must be credited with the creation of the cosmos. Against the gnostics’ desire to separate the (imperfect) cosmos and physical reality from the (perfect) first principle, Irenaeus points out that if the creation of the cosmos is to be attributed to an inferior being, even still, *this* (inferior) creator “is not the [real] author of this work”, but rather, it is “he who allows and approves of the productions of defect”. But *if* “these things were formed” by the inferior being “without the permission or approbation of the Father of all”, then it necessarily follows that this inferior being “must be more powerful, stronger, and more kingly” than the Father, since

³²⁹ Ire-AH, 2:13:4

³³⁰ Ire-AH, 2:1:2

³³¹ Ire-AH, 2:1:3

he “made these things within a territory which properly belongs” to the Father.³³²

Because of their incoherence and inability to withstand the light of reason, the doctrines and teachings of the gnostics, claims Irenaeus, cannot be maintained.

While Irenaeus readily employed the tools offered by logic to refute the theology of the heretics, and to vindicate the affirmation of one only creator god, his own theology was *not* based on metaphysical speculation, but rather, the faith of the one Catholic Church—a faith towards which the Old Testament pointed, a faith that was realized in the life and teachings of the Incarnate Word of god, and a faith that stretches back to the preaching of the apostles, having been maintained in its integrity ever since by the Church. Thus, against the gnostics’ claim to a *scientia occulta*, the true and apostolic faith is not, and never has been concealed, for from its inception it was proclaimed “in public”,³³³ and it is therefore “within the power of all” “to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles”.³³⁴

Irenaeus frequently recapitulates the tradition of the apostles and faith of the one Church in short, creed-like passages,³³⁵ the content of which he identifies as the Rule of Faith, or “rule of truth.” The following passages are adequate instances in illustration of this rule, and its place in Irenaeus’ theology—

*The Church, though dispersed throughout 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 Savior, 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 . . .*³³⁶

³³² Ire-AH, 2:5:3

³³³ Ire-AH, 3:1:1

³³⁴ Ire-AH, 3:3:1

³³⁵ For more on Irenaeus’ Rule of Faith *vis-à-vis* the creeds of the ante-Nicene Church, cf. Kel-ECC, esp. pgs. 76 – 82.

³³⁶ Ire-AH, 1:10:1

*The rule of truth which we hold is that there is one god almighty, who made all things by his Word, and fashioned and formed, out of that which had no existence, all things which exist. . . . There is no exception or deduction stated; but the Father made all things by him . . . For god needs none of all these [other beings, such as angels, to whom the gnostics attribute the creation of the cosmos], but is he who, by his Word and Spirit, makes and disposes, and governs all things, and commands all things into existence . . . he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .*³³⁷

*[W]e must keep strictly, without deviation, the rule of faith, and carry out the commands of god, believing in god, and fearing him, because he is Lord, and loving him, because he is father. . . . faith is given by truth, since faith rests upon reality: for we shall believe what really is as it is, and, believing what really is, as it is forever, keep a firm hold on our assent to it. Since, then, it is faith that maintains our salvation, one must take great care of this sustenance, to have a true perception of reality. Now, this is what faith does for us, as the elders, the disciples of the apostles, have handed down to us. First of all, it admonishes us to remember that we have received baptism for remission of sins in the name of god the Father, and in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of god, who became incarnate and died and was raised, and in the Holy Spirit of god; and that this baptism is the seal of eternal life and is rebirth unto god, that we be . . . children of . . . the eternal and everlasting god; and that the eternal and everlasting one is god, and is above all creatures, and that all things whatsoever are subject to him; and that what is subject to him was all made by him . . . and all things are god's; that god, therefore, is the almighty, and all things whatsoever are from god.*³³⁸

Though there is variation in these three passages, at least four common elements may be detected in each. In the first place, this rule is *the* faith—it is not the formulation of any single member of the Church, but is the common property of the *whole* Church, and it was *received from the founders* of the Church. In the second place, there is a clear *metaphysical distinction* between the one god and all other things. As indicated in the writings of the Apologists, Christians affirmed that the dividing line of *creation* serves as the index according to which the ontological status of all things may be determined, by referring to which ‘side’ of that line on which they lie. In the third place, there is the *affirmation of the Trinity*. The one god—the Father—created all things by his Son and Spirit, and it is through them that he administrates his providence and rule. And in the fourth place, there is *the acknowledgment of the economy of salvation*—the *plan* of god extending from creation to the recapitulation of all things through the Incarnate, crucified

³³⁷ Ire-AH, 1:22:1

³³⁸ Ire-PAP, 3

and risen Lord Jesus Christ, and through him, the outpouring of god's Spirit upon humankind and creation.

The rule of faith is not an exhaustive exposition of the Christian faith; it is, rather, a summary of the faith according to its principal elements. And, more importantly for our purposes, nor still is it hardened into an immutable and exact series of declaratives, which is clearly proven by the alterations in each of the three passages cited above. Though it is highly unlikely that Irenaeus had read Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* or Plato's *Cratylus*, he was nevertheless—because of his experience with the various gnostic interpretations of Scripture—familiar with an epistemic principle advanced in both. And that principle is this: there is not a one-one correspondence between *words* and *concepts* or *things*. Language, in other words, is conventional,³³⁹ and its capacity to become transparent to the truth to which it points therefore depends upon its being interpreted within a living, vital context. For Irenaeus, this context, the point of departure for *expounding* the Rule of Faith, consists of Scripture (both the Old Testament *and* the gospels, as well as *at least* most of the other books contained in the New Testament) and Tradition; at the same time, the proper *interpretation* of *either* Scripture *or* Tradition can *only* be had *by being grounded in* the Rule of Faith of the one Catholic Church.

Scripture is the lens and circulatory system of Irenaeus' theology. All truths necessary for human salvation “are clearly and unambiguously in express terms set forth in the Sacred Scriptures”,³⁴⁰ and even though in places the meaning of Scripture may be difficult to perceive, this neither vitiates the status of Scripture, nor does it grant license for speculation *beyond* what *is* clearly set forth in it, for “the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of god and his Spirit”.³⁴¹ That which has been passed down “in the Scriptures” is “the ground and pillar of our faith”.³⁴²

But although Irenaeus' theology was biblical, and he held Scripture in the highest regard as the authoritative word of god, it would be impossible to see in Irenaeus a theologian ‘of the book;’ Irenaeus was not, in other words, an adherent of the Reformation's notion of *Sola Scriptura*. Indeed, the very notion of ‘the bible *alone*’

³³⁹ For the recognition of this principle in Aristotle, see caps. 1 and 2 of his *De Interpretatione*; for Plato, see 438b – 439c of his *Cratylus*.

³⁴⁰ Ire-AH, 2:27:1

³⁴¹ Ire-AH, 2:28:2

³⁴² Ire-AH, 3:1:1

would have been—literally—unthinkable for Irenaeus: it is *because* “the *tradition* from the apostles does thus exist in the Church” that the Church can *therefore* “revert to the Scriptural proof furnished by those apostles”.³⁴³ Indeed, the heretics themselves use Scripture in support of their claims, “but keeping fast hold of the mere expressions by themselves, they die in consequence of their influence”.³⁴⁴ Following in the path of Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus’ regards the bishops and elders of the churches as the foremost spokespersons regarding Tradition; thus “it is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church”, for they “have received the certain gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father”, and thus also is it necessary “to hold in suspicion others who depart from the primitive succession”, for “all these have fallen from the truth”.³⁴⁵ The “tradition which originates from the apostles” has been “preserved by means of the successions of presbyters in the churches”,³⁴⁶ and concerning Scripture, if any believer seeks to understand its meaning, “every word” will “seem consistent to him, if he for his part diligently read the Scriptures in company with those who are presbyters in the Church, among whom is the apostolic doctrine”.³⁴⁷ “True knowledge is the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient constitution of the Church” “according to the successions of the bishops”.³⁴⁸

The Rule of Faith, Scripture, and Tradition, are intrinsic to one another, and the theology of Irenaeus may be described as the exposition of the first through the lens of the second according to the third. Any notion to the effect that Tradition is above Scripture, or Scripture above Tradition, would have made no sense to Irenaeus, for whom the two were understood as an essential unity, flowing from the single source of the Incarnate Son of god. Yet, for Irenaeus, in the final analysis it is *the Church itself*—the one, living, historical and Catholic body of Christ existing in space and time, and in many and divers places—which is the ultimate bearer of Christian truth. To be *in* the Church is to be in the very heart of Christ, wherein the truth of the Rule of Faith, Scripture, and Tradition *subsides*—

³⁴³ Ire-AH, 3:5:1

³⁴⁴ Ire-AH, 5:13:2

³⁴⁵ Ire-AH, 4:26:2

³⁴⁶ Ire-AH, 3:2:2

³⁴⁷ Ire-AH, 4:32:1

³⁴⁸ Ire-AH, 4:33:8

For how stands the case? Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary to follow the course of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the churches?

To which course many nations of those barbarians who believe in Christ do assent, having salvation written in their hearts by the Spirit, without paper or ink, and carefully preserving the ancient tradition . . . Those who, in the absence of written documents, have believed this faith . . . as regards doctrine, manner, and tenor of life, they are, because of faith, very wise indeed, and they do please god . . . If any one were to preach to these men the inventions of the heretics, speaking to them in their own language, they would at once stop their ears, and flee as far as possible, not enduring even to listen to the blasphemous address.³⁴⁹

Finally, the third principal component of Irenaeus' theological method was his notion of aesthetic coherence. For Irenaeus, the harmony, balance and propriety of all things proclaim the wisdom and goodness of the one creator god, and just as the heavenly bodies turn round the earth in an harmonious, rational manner, and the seasons follow upon one another in concord and proportion with respect to earth, so too with regard to theology, the narrative of the history of salvation and coherence of the Church's doctrines are possessed of an inherent beauty, declaring to humankind an authority which is perceived by intuition, and thus being—in its own way—rationally compelling, bringing with itself an imperative of sorts that it be recognized as such.

This sensitivity to aesthetic coherence may well have been the initial impetus for Irenaeus' disputation with the gnostics. To regard the cosmos as "the fruit of defect, and the production of ignorance, is to be guilty of great blasphemy",³⁵⁰ and "to pronounce the creator of the world void of understanding" is to "rush into an abyss of madness".³⁵¹ For Irenaeus, the gnostics' holding the cosmos in contempt cannot but have the consequence of scorning the very heart itself of reality, for such is grounded in a despising of the one, true god who created it.³⁵² But not only are the gnostics guilty of maligning creation, and failing properly to 'read' its message, which is proclaimed through its beauty, but also,

³⁴⁹ Ire-AH, 3:4:1f

³⁵⁰ Ire-AH, 2:3:2

³⁵¹ Ire-AH, 2:6:3

³⁵² Ire-AH, 2:19:8f

they “inflict injury on the Scriptures, while they build up their own hypothesis”.³⁵³

Scripture itself, for those who interpret it in accordance with the Tradition of the Church and Rule of Faith, is seen to possess a harmonious proportionality, and thus it is only “by garbling passages of Scripture”³⁵⁴ that the gnostics are able to use it as a basis for their own doctrines, doctrines which are themselves aesthetically repugnant—

*Such, then, is their system, which neither the prophets announced, nor the Lord taught, nor the apostles delivered, but of which they boast that beyond all others they have a perfect knowledge. . . . In doing so, however, they disregard the order and the connection of the Scriptures, and so far as in them lies, dismember and destroy the truth. By transferring passages, and dressing them up anew, and making one thing out of another, they succeed in deluding many through their wicked art in adapting the oracles of the Lord to their opinions. Their manner of acting is just as if one, when a beautiful image of a king has been constructed by some skilful artist out of precious jewels, should then take this likeness of the man all to pieces, should re-arrange the gems, and so fit them together as to make them into the form of a dog or of a fox, and even that but poorly executed; and should then maintain and declare that **this** was the beautiful image of the king which the skilful artist constructed, pointing to the jewels which had been admirably fitted together by the first artist to form the image of the king, but have been with bad effect transferred by the latter one to the shape of a dog, and by thus exhibiting the jewels, should deceive the ignorant who had no conception what a king’s form was like, and persuade them that that miserable likeness of the fox was, in fact, the beautiful image of the king.*³⁵⁵

Against this, the one who is grounded in the faith of the Church rightly perceives an inherent harmony and fittingness present throughout the cosmos and history of salvation as recorded in Scripture, and from these rightly recognizes the wisdom of the one creator god, the Father of Jesus the Christ. God the Father “is the former of all things, like a wise architect, and a most powerful monarch”,³⁵⁶ and because “his will is the substance of all things” and “[h]e has fitted and arranged all things by his wisdom”,³⁵⁷ not a single thing in the cosmos escapes his knowledge, for “through his providence every one of them has obtained its nature, and rank, and number, and special quantity”, and thus “nothing whatever either has been or is produced in vain or accidentally, but with exceeding suitability”.³⁵⁸ The cosmos, being “one harmonious and consistent

³⁵³ Ire-AH, 1:9:3

³⁵⁴ Ire-AH, 1:19:1

³⁵⁵ Ire-AH, 1:8:1

³⁵⁶ Ire-AH, 2:11:1

³⁵⁷ Ire-AH, 2:30:9

³⁵⁸ Ire-AH, 2:26:3

whole”,³⁵⁹ “reveals him who formed it”,³⁶⁰ and “those things which, through his super-eminent kindness, receive growth and a long period of existence, do reflect the glory of the uncreated one”.³⁶¹ Furthermore, “since god made all things in due proportion and adaptation, it was fit also that the outward aspect of the gospel should be well arranged and harmonized”,³⁶² just as “there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds”, “it is fitting that” the Church “should have four pillars”—the gospels—“breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh”.³⁶³

Thus, for Irenaeus, beauty, or harmony, is a transcendental termination of being itself, and the artistry of god is manifest not only in the grandeur of the cosmos, but in the history of salvation as well. The cosmos is “suited to man”, and throughout its history god has been “preparing and rendering it more adapted for” its eschatological consummation in Christ,³⁶⁴ for with god “there is nothing purposeless, nor without signification, nor without design”.³⁶⁵ The signs in the Old Testament which constitute the history of salvation “were given by a wise Artist”,³⁶⁶ indicating that god has been “accustoming man to bear his Spirit”, “sketching out, like an architect, the plan of salvation”.³⁶⁷ Because of the distinctively aesthetic emphasis placed on *time itself* by Irenaeus, he is—and rightly so—recognized as, in principle, having expounded an *evolutionary* understanding of the cosmos and salvation: history is punctuated by the many *kairoi* of god’s chronological artistry, ever developing towards its eschatological *telos*. The successive covenants were given that humans “might always make progress through believing in” god, and “gradually attain to perfect salvation”;³⁶⁸ beauty and harmony adorn *all* that god does, and for that reason man was not created *perfectus* from the beginning, but rather, he “was a little one; for he was a child and had need to grow so

³⁵⁹ Ire-AH, 4:38:3

³⁶⁰ Ire-AH, 2:9:1

³⁶¹ Ire-AH, 4:38:3

³⁶² Ire-AH, 3:11:9

³⁶³ Ire-AH, 3:11:8

³⁶⁴ Ire-AH, 5:29:1

³⁶⁵ Ire-AH, 4:18:2

³⁶⁶ Ire-AH, 4:16:1

³⁶⁷ Ire-AH, 4:14:2

³⁶⁸ Ire-AH, 4:9:3

as to come to his full perfection”.³⁶⁹ The dynamism permeating the history of human salvation is *itself* part of god’s artistry.³⁷⁰

Bringing this section to a conclusion, let us briefly summarize the main points in the preceding. Irenaeus’ theology was developed in response to gnosticism, a movement in the early Church which, though made up of many distinct sects, shared in common a rejection of traditional Church belief and praxis, a denial of Christian monotheism, a contempt for the cosmos and physical reality, and a denial of the incarnation and passion of the one Lord Jesus Christ. Against this, Irenaeus affirmed the unity and indefectibility of the one Catholic Church, the identity of the one creator god with the Father of Jesus Christ, the dignity of the cosmos, and the recapitulation of all things through the Incarnate, crucified and risen Christ. In refuting the gnostics and articulating and defending the faith of the Church, Irenaeus developed the first theology in the history of the Church—a theology which is not systematic, but nevertheless universal in scope, and such that each of its particulars are coherent one with another and determined by a common center-point, the Incarnate Son of god, through whom god the Father has been revealed to the world, and in whom all things are gathered together and made new. The principal methodological tools employed by Irenaeus in developing this theology are logic, through which he demonstrates the incoherence of gnostic theology, and vindicates the affirmation of one only creator god; the Rule of Faith, the outline of the Christian faith in summary form, to which he turns again and again, and according to which he interprets both Scripture and Tradition; and aesthetic coherence, according to which the propriety of all things, from the cosmos to Scripture to salvation history, are recognized as fitting, harmonious, and well-proportioned one to another, thereby revealing the goodness and wisdom of the one creator god and convincing the intellect of the correctness of the faith of the Church. The foundations being thus laid, we are now prepared to explore Irenaeus’ doctrine of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and following this, his doctrine of salvation, through which is perceived the extent to which his theology was Trinitarian.

³⁶⁹ Ire-PAP, 12

³⁷⁰ Ire-AH, 4:20:7

VI Irenaeus: The Immanent Trinity

The overriding theme of the previous sections in this work that dealt with the New Testament, Apostolic fathers, and Apologists of the second century has been the *unity* between, on the one hand, theology (i.e., the doctrine of god), and on the other, soteriology (i.e., the doctrine of salvation). More specifically, I have argued that the evidence that we've seen thus far suggests not simply that the ante-Nicene understanding of *salvation* was understood in Trinitarian terms (*according to which* no conclusions about the *eternal being of god* need necessarily follow), but rather, that this Trinitarian understanding of *salvation* was itself, at least implicitly, grounded in a Trinitarian understanding of *god*. In other words, salvation history takes a Trinitarian form *because* the god who is its source *is* triune. This notion, because it posits an affirmation of a doctrine of (what is now known as) the 'immanent' Trinity on behalf of the ante-Nicene fathers—and what's more, an affirmation that is substantially confluent with that of the Nicene and post-Nicene eras—is at substantial odds with the general understanding of the history of Trinitarian theology found in contemporary scholarship. Thus, in this and the following section on Irenaeus, it is my claim that the evidence to be explored offers strong confirmatory power for the above mentioned claim concerning the unity between theology and soteriology in the ante-Nicene Church, and it is in these sections that the principal theses of the present work—that the ante-Nicenes were *not* 'sub-orthodox' (when contrasted with 'later' orthodoxy), and that ante-Nicene Trinitarian theology possess an inherent brilliance, such that it offers theologians of our own day an abundant harvest—will be brought to a head and vindicated.

The goal of the present section, which in its turn provides the necessary foundation for properly understanding the following section, is to prove that Irenaeus' definitely affirmed a doctrine of the 'immanent' Trinity, according to which the Son and

Spirit are recognized as eternal, and intrinsic to the very being of god the Father. While most contemporary interpreters of Irenaeus rightly praise his ‘developed’ Trinitarian theology, and in general acknowledge his affirmation of the eternity of the Son and Spirit, the evidence for an affirmation of a genuinely ‘immanent’ understanding of the Trinity in Irenaeus has not in my opinion received the degree of emphasis which it deserves, especially in light of the abundance of evidence present in numerous explicit passages of his writings. This lack of emphasis on the part of contemporary scholarship can perhaps be explained in light of two factors, of which it is necessary briefly to engage before moving on to Irenaeus’ Trinitarian theology.

In the first place, as intimated in the preceding, there is the common notion amongst scholars that theology of the ‘immanent’ Trinity was primarily the result of the speculations of the Church of the fourth century, and that prior to that time, the Church’s doctrine of the Trinity was all but exhausted by their understanding of the Trinity *ad extra*;³⁷¹ “a clear and express distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity [had] not yet been reached”, and even the generation of the eternal Logos from the Father was “still seen more or less as the prerequisite of creation”.³⁷² Aside from the possible implications invited by the claim concerning the Son’s temporal generation, which have been treated at length above, there is a sense in which this contention is true. The ante-Nicenes did not treat of the eternal procession of the Son from the Father to nearly the extent of the Nicenes, nor—at least prior to Tertullian—did they have much to say along the lines of what the fourth century understood by the terms *ousia* or *hypostases*. There was not, in other words, the recognition of “a clear and express distinction” between the immanent and economic Trinity. But on the other hand, there *was* a clearly expressed distinction—that was consciously recognized—between the divine and *creation*, and that the ante-Nicenes *did* speak of the persons of the Trinity in light of such a distinction *necessarily implies* a doctrine of the ‘immanent’ Trinity, and this because the dividing

³⁷¹ On this point, see especially Lac-GFU. Though this work is rightly recognized as playing a pivotal role in the contemporary movement in Trinitarian theology which seeks to understand the doctrines of the Trinity and salvation in close unity, it is my opinion that LaCugna went too far, not only in her bringing the two so close together that it would appear as though the Trinity is contingent upon salvation history, but also with regard to her estimation of the connection between the Trinity and soteriology in *both* the ante-Nicenes (where she doesn’t give due attention to a distinction that *is* there, albeit implicitly) *and* the Nicenes and post-Nicenes (where she posits a dichotomy that *isn’t* there).

³⁷² Stu-TI, 97

line of creation was *itself* the principal point distinction during the debates of the Nicene era, when orthodoxy was—supposedly—born.

This ties into the second factor, namely, that the phrases ‘immanent Trinity’ and ‘economic Trinity’ are themselves theological designations constructed in the modern era, and therefore, supposedly, to analyze the ante-Nicenes in light of such categories is to be guilty of anachronism. Yet, granting that there indeed are differences between the Trinitarian theology of the modern era and that of preceding ages, and that one must be conscious of these differences when investigating the Trinitarian theology of any particular generation, to suppose that a lesser emphasis on a matter, or the absence of a particular *phrase* in any generation implies an absence of the corresponding *concept*, is to be guilty of an unwarranted literalism. Neither Plato nor Aristotle used the word ‘metaphysics;’ does it thereby follow that neither of them *had* a metaphysics? The gospel of John (and, indeed, the entire New Testament, as well as the vast majority of Christian writings of the second century) never uses the word ‘trinity;’ are we on that account to infer that the Johannine community, in no sense whatever, had a doctrine of the Trinity? Can we *not* investigate the logic of Parmenides’ *Way of Truth* because Aristotle—when Parmenides wrote it—hadn’t yet written the *Prior Analytics*? Was Gregory of Nyssa *not* a ‘pro-Nicene’ theologian because historians of the 20th century hadn’t yet invented the term and invested it with the particular significations it bears today? If Cicero was the first to describe a particular form of juridical oration as *Phillipics*, does it thereby follow that Demosthenes himself offered nothing similar which we could investigate alongside the relevant works of Cicero?

The answer to all of the above, of course, is no, and it thus follows, by analogy, that the objection to the study of the ‘immanent’ Trinity in the ante-Nicene era has no substantial force. Of course, it is anachronistic to interpret the ante-Nicenes according to the particulars which constitute the conceptual framework of the terminology of the Nicene era; it is equally anachronistic to suppose dogmatically that an author in any given historical period thought exclusively within those conceptual categories that later historians have imposed upon him. We can be quite certain that Irenaeus—or the Apologists, for that matter—was just as unconscious of the latent presuppositions of twenty-first century historians of dogma when he wrote as he was of the Nicene

controversies. Of course, from this it does not follow that one has license to approach the Trinitarian theology of the ante-Nicenes as one would that of, e.g., Rahner. But stating the problem in such a way as this misses the point. As we've seen, the ante-Nicenes *did* make statements about god *ad intra*—most frequently in connection with the distinction between the created and uncreated—and furthermore, the ante-Nicenes *both did* talk of god's interaction with creation *and also did* speak of this interaction in a manner *more than* one dimensional: the Logos who reveals god *is* the Logos *of* god, and it is *because* he is the latter that he does the former. It cannot be doubted that the Trinitarian theology of the Nicene and following eras was distinct from that of the ante-Nicene era as regards technical terminology and specific points of emphasis; at the same time, it cannot be doubted that a fundamental dichotomy between the created and uncreated was recognized by both, nor still can it be denied that one can find—whether implicitly or explicitly—recognition of the corresponding notion as to whether the Son (or Logos) and Spirit are intrinsic to god, or not. And because these points were indeed the primary grounds for debate in the fourth century, such that one can in general safely distinguish the orthodox from the heretical on the basis of these two, it follows that there is indeed much that can be said in this regard as concerns the ante-Nicenes.

The real question, therefore, is not, Are the material statements constituting the ante-Nicene understanding of the Trinity literally equivalent with what we see in, e.g., the Athanasian Creed's material statements concerning the Trinity *ad intra*? Rather, the question is, Did the ante-Nicenes teach that the Son is eternal and proper to god (the Father) *as god*, or did they think him a contingent creature created *ex nihilo*? And this question can indeed be answered. The most significant differences between the Trinitarian theology of the ante-Nicenes and their posterity, and the import of these differences, will be returned to in **section VIII** below. For now, I take the argument laid out above as providing sufficient warrant, so long as we apply due caution when needed, for allowing the exploration of an explicitly 'immanent' Trinitarian theology of Irenaeus. As with the Apologists above, we will not explore Irenaeus' teaching of the Father, Son and Spirit *through the lens* of the categories of later generations; rather, our conclusions will be had by examining those things which Irenaeus *did* say that are *relevant to* those categories, making *this* the basis of comparison, and comparing *on those points* where

comparison is allowed. That said, we are now prepared to explore Irenaeus' doctrine *ad intra* of the Father, Son and Spirit.

Following the lead of the Apologists (who, on this point, were following upon the path of a classical tradition which extends to the pre-socratic Xenophanes),³⁷³ Irenaeus has a substantial amount of things to say concerning the properties which constitute the divine nature, and it is primarily with reference to the person of god *the Father* that he does so—a fact not the least surprising given what we've seen in those who preceded him. God, according to Irenaeus, “is all mind, all reason, all active spirit, all light, and always exists one and the same”, and to think of god as such “is both beneficial for us” and consistent with what “we learn regarding him from the Scriptures”.³⁷⁴ Because “as soon as he thinks” he “also performs what he has willed; and as soon as he wills, thinks that which he has willed”, god must be recognized as “the one entire fountain of all good things”.³⁷⁵ Against the gnostics, it cannot be imagined that “he sits after the fashion of a man, and is contained within bounds”,³⁷⁶ for the being of “the Father of all is at a vast distance from” that of man—“a simple, uncompounded being, without diverse members, and altogether like, and equal to himself”—and because “god is not as men are”, it follows that he is above all such “properties, and therefore indescribable”.³⁷⁷ Because, says Irenaeus to the gnostics, their “Former cannot be contained within limits”, it follows that neither they, nor any person, will “be able to think him fully out”;³⁷⁸ god “is alone beyond grasp”.³⁷⁹ Anticipating the theology of Gregory of Nyssa, Irenaeus emphasizes the *infinitude* of god, who “cannot be measured in the heart, and incomprehensible is he in the mind”.³⁸⁰

Yet, as we'll see especially when we come to treat of Irenaeus' soteriology in the following section, Irenaeus' doctrine of god did not have an exaggerated apophatic emphasis, and the foremost positive component of his understanding of god was grounded in the fact that the one god—the Father—is the *creator* of all that is, “[f]or all

³⁷³ Cf. KirRav-PP, 168ff

³⁷⁴ Ire-AH, 2:28:4

³⁷⁵ Ire-AH, 1:12:2

³⁷⁶ Ire-AH, 4:3:1

³⁷⁷ Ire-AH, 2:13:3f

³⁷⁸ Ire-AH, 2:25:4

³⁷⁹ Ire-PAP, 4

³⁸⁰ Ire-AH, 4:19:2

things originate from one and the same god”.³⁸¹ Irenaeus clearly affirmed the doctrine of creation ex-nihilo: “in all things god has the pre-eminence, who alone is uncreated, the first of all things, and the primary cause of the existence of all” things,³⁸² including “matter itself”,³⁸³ for “he himself called into being the substance of his creation, when previously it had no existence”.³⁸⁴ Both “things visible and invisible, and, in short, all things that have been made” were created “by god alone, the Father”,³⁸⁵ and the first thing to be affirmed by the Christian is that “there is one god, the Father, who made and fashioned everything and brought being out of nothing”.³⁸⁶

But more still, god the Father is known as the *author of salvation history*, extending from creation to its defining moment in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, and onward to the eschatological consummation of things. Not only is the Father the “creator of heaven and earth and the whole world”, but also, it is he “who upholds all things, and by whom everything is sustained”, and “to the faithful he is a Father, for in the end of times he has opened the testament of adoption of sons”.³⁸⁷ From the beginning, “the Father” has “exercise[d] his providence” on behalf of “all men altogether”,³⁸⁸ showing forth his saving plan by the dispensations revealed to the patriarchs,³⁸⁹ and calling humankind “upwards from lesser things to those greater ones which are in his own presence, just as he brings an infant which has been conceived in the womb into the light of the sun”;³⁹⁰ “accustoming man to bear his Spirit”, “he adjusted the human race to an agreement with salvation”.³⁹¹ The revelation of god in the incarnation of the Son was according to “the good will of the Father”,³⁹² and the fulfillment of the Old Testament’s promises in “Jesus the crucified one” was the work of

³⁸¹ Ire-AH, 2:25:1

³⁸² Ire-AH, 4:38:3

³⁸³ Ire-AH, 2:10:3

³⁸⁴ Ire-AH, 2:10:4

³⁸⁵ Ire-AH, 2:35:4

³⁸⁶ Ire-PAP, 4

³⁸⁷ Ire-PAP, 8

³⁸⁸ Ire-AH, 4:22:2

³⁸⁹ Ire-AH, 3:15:3

³⁹⁰ Ire-AH, 2:28:1

³⁹¹ Ire-AH, 4:14:2

³⁹² Ire-AH, 4:7:3

“the same god that had sent the prophets”, and who “being god himself, raised up, and gave in [Christ] salvation to men”.³⁹³

It can be safely inferred from the above that Irenaeus’ theology had a clear affirmation of the monarchy of the Father. For Irenaeus, it is the one god—the Father—who is the source of *all* things, and he is also the author of salvation history. This is the first point that must be recognized concerning Irenaeus’ doctrine of the immanent Trinity. Though, as we’ll see presently, he affirmed the eternity of the Son and Spirit *as well as* that of the Father, and though he held that the activity of the Father always entails a corresponding activity on the part of the Son and Spirit, in the final analysis *there is only one first principle*: the Father, the one god, the sole font of all that has been created and the author of salvation history.

As with the Apologists, Irenaeus’ clear affirmation of the uniqueness of the one god (i.e., the Father) on the one hand, and his recognition of the absolute dichotomy between that which is created and that which is not on the other, did not—according to his understanding—entail the non-eternity of the Son (or Spirit), and from this it necessarily follows that he saw him (and the Spirit) as intrinsic to the Father, and proper to the very being of god. The Son “always co-exist[ed] with god” as “his own Word”;³⁹⁴ “the Word, namely the Son, was always with the Father”,³⁹⁵ “eternally co-existing with the Father, from of old, yea, from the beginning”.³⁹⁶ As the very Word of god, the Son is not one of the angels, nor is he “any Power remotely distant from the Father of all things”,³⁹⁷ for god’s “thought is Logos, and Logos is [in] Mind, and [the] Mind comprehending all things is the Father himself”, and as such, the Logos is not “separated from god”.³⁹⁸ As the ‘content’ itself of the Father’s thought, the Son “is the measure of the Father, since he also comprehends him”,³⁹⁹ and thus the Father did not “stand in need of other instruments for the creation of those things which are summoned into

³⁹³ Ire-AH, 3:12:4

³⁹⁴ Ire-AH, 2:25:3

³⁹⁵ Ire-AH, 4:20:3

³⁹⁶ Ire-AH, 2:30:9

³⁹⁷ Ire-AH, 4:20:1

³⁹⁸ Ire-AH, 2:28:5

³⁹⁹ Ire-AH, 4:4:2

existence”,⁴⁰⁰ for he “formed all things that were made by his Word that never wearies”.⁴⁰¹

Irenaeus’ articulation of the Son’s divinity is more sustained and explicit than that of any of his predecessors. The Son—the “only-begotten” of the Father—is “the former of all things” and he “by whom all things were made”,⁴⁰² and “not one of created and subject things, shall ever be compared to the Word of god, by whom all things were made, who is our Lord Jesus Christ”.⁴⁰³ The Son has “all things” of the Father, who has “kept back” nothing from him,⁴⁰⁴ and for this reason he “is perfect in all things”.⁴⁰⁵ The Son, being “always one and the same”,⁴⁰⁶ is immutable, and as he is the “hand” of god who “lays hold of all things”,⁴⁰⁷ he is omnipresent. The Son is “invisible”, “incomprehensible” and “impassible”;⁴⁰⁸ “Christ himself, therefore, together with the Father, is the god of the living”⁴⁰⁹ and he is “called god” in the absolute sense,⁴¹⁰ for “he indeed who made all things can alone, together with his Word, properly be termed ‘god’ and ‘Lord’”.⁴¹¹

But it would be wrong to conclude from the above that Irenaeus’ understanding of the Father and Son was such that the (causal) relationship between the two was seen as symmetrical—a fact that is equally implied by Irenaeus’ implicit affirmation of the monarchy of the Father, explored above. Though—and this no doubt in large part due to his being repulsed by the various gnostic theories of the ‘emanations’ of all things from the first principle—he is a good deal more reserved in speaking on the subject than the Nicenes (or even certain of the ante-Nicenes, such as the Apologists and, most especially, Origen), Irenaeus did affirm the notion of the Son’s generation from the Father. The generation of the Son is “that pre-eminent birth which is from the Most High Father”;⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁰ Ire-AH, 2:2:5

⁴⁰¹ Ire-AH, 2:2:4

⁴⁰² Ire-AH, 1:9:2

⁴⁰³ Ire-AH, 3:8:2

⁴⁰⁴ Ire-AH, 4:20:2

⁴⁰⁵ Ire-AH, 5:1:1

⁴⁰⁶ Ire-AH, 4:36:4

⁴⁰⁷ Ire-AH, 4:19:2

⁴⁰⁸ Ire-AH, 3:16:6

⁴⁰⁹ Ire-AH, 4:5:2

⁴¹⁰ Ire-AH, 3:19:2

⁴¹¹ Ire-AH, 3:8:3

⁴¹² Ire-AH, 3:19:2

it is “a generation which cannot be declared”⁴¹³ because “his lineage” is “beyond declaration and expression”,⁴¹⁴ and if anyone inquires into this birth of the Son from the Father, “we reply to him, that no man understands that production, or generation”, for it is “altogether indescribable”.⁴¹⁵ In remarkable contrast to the Trinitarian theology of the Nicene era, Irenaeus’ understanding of the Son’s generation from the Father is understood in a static, rather than dynamic manner. Whereas it was to the scriptural image of light and radiance in Heb. 1:3 (and, derived from this, the natural image of the sun and its shine) that Athanasius turned when articulating the manner in which the Son is eternally related to the Father, for Irenaeus, it is Jn. 1:1 (“In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was toward the god, and god the Logos was”) which most perfectly describes the Son’s “original, effectual, and glorious generation from the Father”.⁴¹⁶ On the other hand, given that the very manner whereby Irenaeus refutes the gnostics’ doctrine of emanations is based upon the *principle* that “the torch which has been kindled subsequently cannot be possessed of a different kind of light from that which preceded it”,⁴¹⁷ and that “those productions which proceed from” something “are of the same substance with” it,⁴¹⁸ the Nicene doctrine that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father is strongly—if not necessarily—implied in Irenaeus’ own understanding of the Father and the Son.

Another noteworthy point at which Irenaeus’ doctrine of the Son and Father implicitly coincides with later theology—a tradition given its earliest emphatic treatment by Origen, but reaffirmed by many after him, and given an especially strong emphasis in certain contemporary theologies of the Trinity—is his affirmation of the eternal *communion* (and, directly related to this, *perichoresis*) of the Father and Son. God did not *need* to create Adam that he might have a partner in fellowship, for “before all creation, the Word glorified his Father, remaining in him; and was himself glorified by the Father”;⁴¹⁹ the Father is he “who has fellowship with the Son in all things”.⁴²⁰ We

⁴¹³ Ire-AH, 4:33:11

⁴¹⁴ Ire-PAP, 70

⁴¹⁵ Ire-AH, 2:28:6

⁴¹⁶ Ire-AH, 3:11:8

⁴¹⁷ Ire-AH, 2:17:4

⁴¹⁸ Ire-AH, 2:17:7

⁴¹⁹ Ire-AH, 4:14:1

know that “the Son of god” existed prior to his incarnation “from the fact that the Father spoke with him” before then,⁴²¹ when “the Father address[ed] the Son, as Wonderful Counselor of the Father”.⁴²² From this it is clear that Irenaeus did not regard the eternal Logos of the Father as a merely impersonal power, latent within the Father, who later (somehow) “became personal” when he was brought forth for the purpose of creating the cosmos (as though there is some obvious, causal connection between an [impersonal] *logos*’ being outwardly expressed, and its becoming *personal*), and however commonplace the notion has become in contemporary scholarship that ‘personhood’ is itself a distinctively modern concept—unknown, presumably, to the ancients—it must be recognized that Irenaeus’ description of the manner of the Son’s relationship with the Father prior to creation *cannot* be understood absent *at least* some of the notions included in (what is now known as) the concept of personhood.

It will have been noticed by this point that Irenaeus, following the Johannine tradition and that of the Apologists, frequently identified the Son as the Logos of god. In this regard, two points are worthy of mention before moving on. First, Irenaeus—more clearly than certain of the Apologists—identifies the Logos *as* the Son in an absolute sense (i.e., to speak of he who was the Logos of god prior to creation as ‘the Son of god’ is *not* merely to be speaking proleptically). The fashioner of all creation is “the Word who was in the beginning with the Father, and that is his Son”,⁴²³ and “the Son of god” is “the Only-Begotten, who is also the Word of Father”.⁴²⁴ The second point which needs to be mentioned concerning Irenaeus’ doctrine of the Son as god’s Logos is the fact that his *being* the Logos of god *explains* his capacity to reveal the Father and be the effective agent of the Father’s will. This theme will be explored more thoroughly in the remaining

⁴²⁰ Ire-AH, 2:18:8—In passing, it is worth mentioning that this passage offers the strongest *prima facie* evidence of ‘subordinationism’ in Irenaeus’ writings, namely, “The Father, therefore, has been declared by our Lord to excel with respect to knowledge”. Yet, when viewed in context, the ring of ‘subordinationism’ vanishes. Irenaeus’ point is *not* that the Son is equal to the Father in all things *except for* knowledge, but rather, Irenaeus sees the Son’s “not knowing the hour” *when human* as an exemplary, pedagogical device, so “that we, too, as long as we are connected with the scheme of things in this world, should leave perfect knowledge, and such questions . . . to god”. In other words, Irenaeus identifies the *cause* of the Son’s ignorance as his *kenosis* for the sake of humankind; he does not consider it to be *proper* to the Son—in an ontological sense—to have “less knowledge” than the Father *as* the Son and Logos of the Father.

⁴²¹ Ire-PAP, 51

⁴²² Ire-PAP, 55

⁴²³ Ire-PAP, 43

⁴²⁴ Ire-AH, 3:17:4

sections of this work, but it is worth bringing to attention even now, given our emphasis upon the connection between the ‘immanent’ and ‘economic’ Trinity. The “Word, our Lord Jesus Christ”, is he “who in the last times was made a man among men, that he might join the end to the beginning, that is, man to god”.⁴²⁵ While the patriarchs saw only “similitudes of the splendor of the Lord”, *because* the Son *is* the Word of god, he “did show the Father’s brightness” throughout the course of salvation history,⁴²⁶ for “he is himself the voice of god”.⁴²⁷ The Son’s activity *ad extra* is confluent with his Trinitarian identity *ad intra*, and it is *because* the Son *is* what he is that he can, and does, reveal the Father.

While Irenaeus has less to say about the Spirit *ad intra* than the Father or the Son, he nonetheless says enough to allow us to answer the fundamental question posited above (i.e., is he, or is he not, understood as eternal and intrinsic to the very being of the Father?) with certainty, alongside offering many remarkable metaphors for the Spirit, which perhaps allow one better to understand *why* he—in particular—performs the particular offices ascribed to him throughout the history of salvation. Finally, Irenaeus’ comments on the Spirit in general imply—and certain comments demand—that he be seen as having understood the Spirit in a personal, rather than impersonal manner.

Concerning his doctrine of the Spirit’s divinity, there can be no doubt where Irenaeus stood. The prophet Isaiah, says Irenaeus, declared the Spirit to be “peculiar to god”, and whereas the “breath” of life is “temporal”, “the Spirit is eternal”.⁴²⁸ Irenaeus sometimes refers to the Spirit in light of the Old Testament’s motif of the “finger of god”,⁴²⁹ but more frequently he identifies the Spirit as the Wisdom of god, or—together with the Son—a Hand of god. Just as “the Word” who is “the Son” was “always with the Father”, so too “Wisdom also, which is the Spirit, was present with him, anterior to all creation”,⁴³⁰ and when Irenaeus says of god the Father that he made all “things by himself”, he qualifies it—“that is, through his Word and his Wisdom”;⁴³¹ “god did not stand in need of” any of the inferior beings recognized by the gnostics for the purpose of

⁴²⁵ Ire-AH, 4:20:4

⁴²⁶ Ire-AH, 4:20:11

⁴²⁷ Ire-AH, 5:17:1

⁴²⁸ Ire-AH, 5:12:2

⁴²⁹ E.g., Ire-PAP, 26

⁴³⁰ Ire-AH, 4:20:3

⁴³¹ Ire-AH, 2:30:9

creating the cosmos “as if he did not possess his own hands. For with him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by and in whom, freely and spontaneously, he made all things”.⁴³²

God the Father accomplished the creation of humankind “by his hands, that is, by the Son and Holy Spirit”,⁴³³ and just as man was “molded at the beginning by the hands of god, that is . . . the Son and . . . the Spirit”, so too “throughout all time” these two realize the will of the Father on behalf of the human race, which even still is being fashioned “after the image and likeness of god”.⁴³⁴ While identifying the Son and Spirit as the “hands” of god might seem to imply an identity of function between the two, Irenaeus’ pneumatology is more subtle than this, and as is the case with all of his theology—not the least his doctrine of the ‘immanent’ Trinity itself—it is with reference to the Incarnate Son of god that Irenaeus’ most particular insights concerning the Spirit show forth, “[f]or in the name of Christ is implied, he that anoints, he that is anointed, and the unction itself with which he is anointed. And it is the Father who anoints, but the Son who is anointed by the Spirit, who is the unction”.⁴³⁵ As we’ll see in the following section, when Irenaeus thus identifies the Spirit as “the oil of anointing”, he understands this predication not only in light of the baptism of Christ, but rather, with reference to the whole of the Spirit’s action for “all who receive [the] fellowship of [Christ’s] kingdom”,⁴³⁶ and the whole of creation as well. In other words, it is not simply an arbitrary fact that the Spirit *in particular* does the *particular* things that he does; rather, his *activity* is reflective of his relatedness *ad intra* to the Father (and Son).

Concerning the personhood of the Spirit, in addition to sharing all of the implicit affirmations explored in the writings of the Apologists in **section IV** above, two other factors peculiar to Irenaeus’ pneumatology are worth mentioning at this point. First, while it was in the Church of the second century (alongside the Church of all following generations) commonplace to attribute the inspiration of Scripture to the Spirit in an especial sense, Irenaeus makes the further affirmation that, throughout the Old Testament, “the Spirit of god, taking form and shape in the likeness of the person

⁴³² Ire-AH, 4:20:1

⁴³³ Ire-AH, 4:pref.:4

⁴³⁴ Ire-AH, 5:28:4

⁴³⁵ Ire-AH, 3:18:3

⁴³⁶ Ire-PAP, 47

concerned, spoke in the prophets; sometimes he spoke on the part of Christ, sometimes on that of the Father”.⁴³⁷ The Son represents the Father, and the Spirit represents the Father *and* the Son. The second factor is more remarkable still. It was noted in passing above that amongst the fathers of the early Church, the identification of the Spirit—*rather than the Son*—with the Wisdom of god was idiosyncratic to Theophilus of Antioch and Irenaeus. Yet, whereas Theophilus simply applies the predicate to the Spirit, Irenaeus does so while explaining the *meaning* of this predication with *explicit* reference to Prov. 8:30 (“I was he in whom he rejoiced, and throughout all time I was daily glad before his face”)⁴³⁸—one of the most clear verses in the entire Old Testament concerning the *personal* nature of god’s Wisdom. Just as much as with his doctrine of the eternal Logos and Son of god, a full understanding of Irenaeus’ doctrine of the Spirit—the Wisdom of god—cannot be had to the exclusion of personal categories.

It would be well at this point to summarize the principal points of emphasis explored above. According to Irenaeus, to speak of the one god of the Christian faith is to speak, in the first place, of god *the Father*. It is with reference to the Father that the divine properties are ultimately grounded, and it is the Father who is recognized as the ultimate cause of all that has been created, and the author of salvation history. Yet, for Irenaeus both the Son and Spirit are *included within* and *proper to* the reality of the Father. The Son is the Logos of the Father; Irenaeus explicitly affirms that the Son is generated by the Father, and while he no doubt understood some manner of existential priority to be had by the Father, he does not—as did Origen and the Nicenes—speak of the Son’s *generation* in a dynamic, causal manner. And while Irenaeus is less specific still with regard to the Spirit *ad intra*, he certainly affirms the eternity and personhood of the Spirit, and many of the metaphors which he applies to the Spirit perhaps imply a more definite understanding of his manner of existence with relation to the Father and Son *ad intra*. To the extent allowed by the evidence, this possibility will be explored in the following sections.

Yet more than simply affirming a genuine doctrine of the ‘immanent’ Trinity, we have seen also that Irenaeus, it would seem, sees particular *activities* as being especially

⁴³⁷ Ire-PAP, 49

⁴³⁸ Ire-AH, 4:20:3

appropriate to particular *persons*. The Father is the source of all things and the artist who has fashioned salvation history, and the Son and Spirit are the Father's *hands*—the effective agents whereby his will is realized. But more specifically, the Son who is the Logos of the Father and content of the very *mind* of god, is *also* the one who *ex-presses* the Father in salvation history, thereby *revealing* god in truth. And similarly, one begins to detect a more exact understanding of the person of the Spirit from the fact that, whereas the Father is he who anoints and the Son he who is anointed, it is the Spirit himself who is the *ointment*. Such considerations as these imply that Irenaeus' theology (doctrine of god) was intimately connected with his soteriology (doctrine of salvation), and our final task before moving on to the next section will be to begin to confirm this suggestion by offering an initial exploration of the basic contour of Irenaeus' doctrine of the Trinitarian form of salvation.

According to Irenaeus, “those who are saved” “ascend through the Spirit to the Son, and through the Son to the Father”,⁴³⁹ and he prays of “the only and true god” that he “grant, by our Lord Jesus Christ, the governing power of the Holy Spirit” that the believer may know him.⁴⁴⁰ The Son became Incarnate that humans might “become accustomed to eat and drink the Word of god” and “be able also to contain in ourselves the bread of immortality, which is the Spirit of the Father”;⁴⁴¹ the climax of salvation history was achieved “according to the Spirit of holiness” when the Incarnate Son of god was resurrected from the dead, “being the first begotten of all creation; the Son of god being made the Son of man, that through him we may receive the adoption”⁴⁴² by virtue of his “joining and uniting the Spirit of god the Father with what god had fashioned, so that man became according to the image and likeness of god”.⁴⁴³ The Church, “knowing always the same god, and always acknowledging the same Word of god”, and “acknowledging also at all times the same Spirit of god”,⁴⁴⁴ receives life “from the same god who made all things by the Word, and adorned them by [his] Wisdom”⁴⁴⁵ through the Son of god, who became man “that man, having embraced the Spirit of god, might pass

⁴³⁹ Ire-AH, 5:36:2

⁴⁴⁰ Ire-AH, 3:6:4

⁴⁴¹ Ire-AH, 4:38:1

⁴⁴² Ire-AH, 3:16:3

⁴⁴³ Ire-PAP, 97

⁴⁴⁴ Ire-AH, 4:33:15

⁴⁴⁵ Ire-AH, 4:20:2

into the glory of the Father”,⁴⁴⁶ “the Spirit truly preparing man in the Son of god, and the Son leading him to the Father, while the Father, too, confers [upon him] incorruption for eternal life”.⁴⁴⁷

In the economy of salvation, therefore, god has been “revealed; for god the Father is shown forth through all” his many interactions with his creation, with “the Spirit indeed working, and the Son ministering, while the Father was approving, and man’s salvation being accomplished”.⁴⁴⁸ Thus the Trinitarian confession of the Church is not simply a dry, nominal recognition of Father, Son, and Spirit, but rather, of the Father “of whom are all things”, the Son “by whom are all things”, and “the Spirit of god, who furnishes us with a knowledge of the truth, and has set forth the dispensations of the Father and Son”.⁴⁴⁹ As the Father is the author of salvation history, so too is he its goal; as the Son is he through whom all things were fashioned at the dawn of creation, so too it is in the Son that all things are made new; and as the Spirit is he who prepared the way and announced beforehand the incarnation of the Son of god, so too is it the Spirit who leads all things to the Son of god. The Church does not merely confess a Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit; rather, the form of its salvation is determined by this Trinity *as triune*—

*Therefore the baptism of our rebirth comes through these three articles, granting us rebirth unto god the Father through his Son, by the Holy Spirit. For those who are bearers of the Spirit of god are led to the Word, that is, to the Son; but the Son takes them and presents them to the Father; and the Father confers incorruptibility. So without the Spirit there is no seeing the Word of god, and without the Son there is no approaching the Father; for the Son is knowledge of the Father, and knowledge of the Son is through the Holy Spirit.*⁴⁵⁰

The very form of the Church’s life is thus seen to be consciously and explicitly Trinitarian, and with “the Father planning everything well and giving his commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing”, Her members “day by day” ascend “towards the perfect” and

⁴⁴⁶ Ire-AH, 4:20:4

⁴⁴⁷ Ire-AH, 4:20:5

⁴⁴⁸ Ire-AH, 4:20:6

⁴⁴⁹ Ire-AH, 4:33:7

⁴⁵⁰ Ire-PAP, 7

are “rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated god”.⁴⁵¹ And as the life itself of the Church is emphatically according to the Trinity *as triune*, the corrupt doctrines of the heretics all arise by means of vitiating in some way the Trinitarian faith of the Church. Some of the heretics are “blasphemers against their creator and Father”, others “despise the coming of the Son of god and the dispensation of his incarnation”, and others still “do not admit the gifts of the Holy Spirit”,⁴⁵² “[f]or either they despise the Father, or they do not accept the Son, [speaking] against the dispensation of his incarnation, or they do not accept the Spirit”.⁴⁵³

Thus, according to Irenaeus, in eternity there are three: the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Similarly, in the act of creation, there are three, and this action is itself threefold: from the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. So too, in the history of salvation, there are three, and the form of salvation history is itself determined, in a particular, threefold manner, according to these three: all things proceed from the Father through the Son in the Spirit to the world, and the world is led by the Spirit through the Son to the Father. Having thus both established Irenaeus doctrine of the immanent Trinity and articulated the basic contour of the Trinitarian form of his doctrine of salvation, we are now prepared to move on to the next section, and offer a more thorough treatment of this latter.

⁴⁵¹ Ire-AH, 4:38:3

⁴⁵² Ire-PAP, 99

⁴⁵³ Ire-PAP, 100

VII Irenaeus: The Trinitarian Form of Salvation

We have now arrived at the heart of the present work—Irenaeus’ doctrine of salvation. The principal goals of this section will be three. First, we shall explore Irenaeus’ doctrine of salvation *according to its Trinitarian form*, and having done this, we will then see that Irenaeus’ doctrine of salvation—especially in light of his doctrine of recapitulation, which determines the latter at *every point*—*cannot* be properly understood *unless* this Trinitarian form is consciously recognized as being its ground. In the second place, and following from the above, we shall give special attention to the *particular* offices of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit throughout the course of salvation history. And third, in light of the evidences explored in this regard, it will be my argument that one of the claims advanced toward the conclusion of the last section—namely, that the particular offices of the Trinitarian persons *ad extra* must be seen as implying an *at least* nascent recognition of the form of relatedness of the persons *ad intra* as its corollary—receives strong confirmation. In the following section, we will conclude our investigation by summarizing our conclusions from all preceding sections, and explicitly vindicate the theses stated in the introduction of this work—that the Trinitarian theology of the ante-Nicenes is *not* ‘sub-orthodox’ when compared with ‘later’ orthodoxy, and that certain aspects of the ante-Nicene Trinitarian confession offer to contemporary theologians a wealth of insights that can yield fruit for our own generation.

But before engaging Irenaeus’ doctrine of salvation, it would be well at this point to draw attention once again to perhaps the most controversial (and necessary) argument advanced in the preceding—the exegesis of Col. 1:13ff., offered in **section II** above and frequently returned to thereafter. According to this interpretation, the most remarkable aspect of the passage is its *chiastic* structure, and by allowing this structure to guide our reading of the passage, we saw that it sets forth the notion that the doctrines of god on the one hand, and salvation on the other, are *integrally linked*, such that the former

determines the latter, and the latter can only be properly understood when it is seen as being grounded in the former. Furthermore—and this point had an especial significance for our investigation of the place of the Son in the Trinitarian theology of the Apologists—we have seen that *if* one so interprets the passage according to its chiasmic structure, the Son’s being “the Image of the invisible god” on the one hand, and “the firstborn of all creation” on the other, indicate two distinct ‘states’ of the Son which, though indeed distinct, are nonetheless *confluent* with one another. The former, it will be recalled, echoes Wis. Sol. 7:25ff, and as such it denotes the Son as the eternal Radiance of god, and the eternal term and source of the Father’s self-giving love and joy. The latter, on the other hand, is based on passages from the Old Testament Wisdom literature which speak of the Wisdom of god as having come forth, in a particular sense, at the moment, and for the purpose of the creation and governance of the cosmos. By further grounding our interpretation of the remaining sections of the hymn in the triune communion of god intimated in section B, we arrived at the following chiasmic schema: 1) ‘immanent’ Trinity and the eternal communion which defines god → 2) creation → 3) Incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of the Son of god ← 4) new creation in Christ ← 5) participation of the new creation in the very life of god via the Son and Spirit.

As we’ll see presently, this exegesis bears an almost shockingly strong resemblance to the principal theme in Irenaeus’ own theology—the doctrine of recapitulation, which was given brief treatment in **section V** above. According to this doctrine, *the whole* of salvation and cosmic history converge upon the center-point of the Incarnate, crucified and risen Son of god, and from this center-point, all things are ‘generated outward’ as it were, and fashioned anew *by participation* in the very life of god. But more still, from this center-point, the whole of cosmic and salvation history is *also* seen to have a particular balance, structure and harmony—a fact not in the least surprising giving the especially aesthetic tendency that guides Irenaeus’ thought as a whole. Significantly, as we’ll see shortly, this very balance is *itself* chiasmic in form. Every particular point in salvation history to which Irenaeus turns—every principal theme which he highlights—is grounded in the center-point of the Incarnate, crucified and risen Son of god, and shown to be—*by virtue* of this center-point—the counter-point of some prior moment in salvation history, with which it is itself organically connected.

The implications of this form—which determines *the whole* of his theology—for Irenaeus’ doctrine of the Trinity will be a recurrent theme in what follows.⁴⁵⁴ That said, we are now prepared to explore the Trinitarian form of Irenaeus’ doctrine of salvation. Our treatment of this doctrine will be thematic, beginning with creation, moving on to the old covenant, Mary, the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the Church and the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, and ending with the eschatological consummation of all things.

According to Irenaeus, the ontological chasm between the creator and the creation must be emphasized, for god does not “derive his being from things made, but things made from god. For all things originate from one and the same god”.⁴⁵⁵ God is eternal and exists of metaphysical necessity, but “all things that have been made had a beginning when they were formed”, “endure as long as god wills that they should have an existence”,⁴⁵⁶ and “are inferior to him who formed them, inasmuch as they are not unbegotten”.⁴⁵⁷ On the other hand, this emphasis of the superiority of god to creation must not be seen as implying a low valuation of creation, for according to Irenaeus, the cosmos is good, and its creation is to be attributed to the super-abundant goodness⁴⁵⁸ and will of god. Though in one sense Irenaeus confesses that we cannot know “whence or in what way [god] produced” the cosmos,⁴⁵⁹ he is nonetheless certain that “his will is the substance of all things”.⁴⁶⁰ Creation was brought forth by god “according to his pleasure, in the exercise of his own will and power”,⁴⁶¹ the cosmos “is an attribute of the goodness of god”,⁴⁶² and “those things which, through his super-eminent kindness, receive growth

⁴⁵⁴ In passing, it is worth mentioning at this point the work of Mary Ann Donovan, who argues persuasively that *even the exegetical method* of Irenaeus was chiasmic (cf. Don-ORR, esp. 79 – 90). Of course, chiasm was by no means an uncommon literary or rhetorical technique in antiquity, and Donovan herself does not connect Irenaeus’ use of chiasm with his doctrine of the Trinity. Yet I for my part cannot help but to imagine that this use of chiasm by Irenaeus may well have been more than simply the adoption of a common literary practice, and the reason why his writing was so determined by this form was because his *thought itself* was defined by it, and his thought, in turn, was defined by it *because* it was so totally submerged in a *reality* which *itself* bears this form.

⁴⁵⁵ Ire-AH, 2:25:1

⁴⁵⁶ Ire-AH, 2:34:3

⁴⁵⁷ Ire-AH, 2:34:2

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. Ire-AH, 4:14:1—“In the beginning, therefore, did god form Adam, not as if he stood in need of man, but *that he might have [someone] upon whom to confer his benefits.*”

⁴⁵⁹ Ire-AH, 2:28:7

⁴⁶⁰ Ire-AH, 2:30:9

⁴⁶¹ Ire-AH, 2:10:2

⁴⁶² Ire-AH, 4:39:2

and a long period of existence, do reflect the glory of the uncreated one, of that god who bestows what is good ungrudgingly”.⁴⁶³

Thus, according to Irenaeus, the *reason that* the cosmos exists is to be explained by reference to the will and goodness of god. The *fact that* it exists—as was intimated briefly in the preceding section—is to be explained by reference to the Trinity, for “all things . . . were both established and created by him who is god over all, through his Word”,⁴⁶⁴ and who also “adorned them by [his] Wisdom”.⁴⁶⁵ The Word and Wisdom of god are “the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom . . . he made all things”;⁴⁶⁶ by them god “is glorified”, and through them god has established the angelic powers who maintain the order of the universe through “laws, that each one keep to his place and overstep not the bound laid down by god, each accomplishing the work marked out for him”.⁴⁶⁷

The distinctly triadic form whereby, according to Irenaeus, the cosmos was created, ought not be overlooked, for it is more nuanced than simply the notion of one person (the Father) being the cause, with the other two (the Son and Spirit) being mere (interchangeable) conduits through which he operates. Although the activity of the one god is itself a unity, this unity is such that it comprehends each of the *particular* persons performing a particular *aspect* of that action, and the creation and governance of the cosmos, alongside the unfolding of salvation history, occur *in accordance with* their relatedness to the triune god *as triune*. Because “the Word ‘establishes,’ that is, works bodily and consolidates being” he “is fitly and properly called the Son”, but “the Spirit” is identified as “the Wisdom of god” because he “disposes and shapes the various ‘powers’”, and thus “‘above all’ is the Father”, “‘with all’ is the Word”, and “‘in us all’ is the Spirit”.⁴⁶⁸ The “forms of those things which have been made”,⁴⁶⁹ forms which account for “all things” being arranged “in due proportion and adaptation”,⁴⁷⁰ are thus located emphatically in the persons of the Son and Spirit, for “[god’s] hand lays hold of

⁴⁶³ Ire-AH, 4:38:3

⁴⁶⁴ Ire-AH, 3:8:3

⁴⁶⁵ Ire-AH, 4:20:2

⁴⁶⁶ Ire-AH, 4:20:1

⁴⁶⁷ Ire-PAP, 54

⁴⁶⁸ Ire-PAP, 5

⁴⁶⁹ Ire-AH, 2:7:5

⁴⁷⁰ Ire-AH, 3:11:9

all things, and that it is which illumines the heavens, and lightens also the things which are under the heavens”.⁴⁷¹ The Son is fittingly called “Christ” “because through him the Father anointed and arrayed all things” and “because he was the Anointed by the Spirit of god his Father”;⁴⁷² because the Son is the Word of god and the Spirit the Wisdom of god, the Father “of his own power, and from himself . . . obtained the model” of the cosmos’ “formation”.⁴⁷³ Being the ex-pression and representation of the very mind of god, it is the Word “through whom the wood fructifies, and the fountains gush forth, and the earth gives first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear”.⁴⁷⁴ The “earthly things, indeed, which are spread all around us” are “types of the celestial”;⁴⁷⁵ the cosmic Logos declares the Father to all things,⁴⁷⁶ and *because* the Word of god *is* present to the cosmos, “creation reveals him who formed it, and the very work made suggests him who made it, and the world manifests him who ordered it”.⁴⁷⁷ As with Plato’s *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*, Irenaeus maintains *both* that earthly realities point beyond themselves to a higher level of being *and* that the existence itself of earthly realities is ultimately grounded in those higher realities. Unlike Plato, however, Irenaeus does not need a doctrine of pre-existence in order to account for our perception of higher realities, for the Logos of god is present *in* the cosmos and the Wisdom of god is present *to* man, nor is Irenaeus unable to account for the fact that the ‘Forms,’ so to speak, bear an actual, causal influence upon the physical world, for the Son and Spirit of god, in and by whom the cosmos subsists, are *themselves* present *in* the Father.

After creation, the next stage in the history of salvation is the old covenant, which itself begins with the creation of man and consists of the various dispensations set forth in what is today known as the Old Testament. Irenaeus strongly opposes the gnostics’ contempt for physical reality and the human body, and by understanding the latter in light of the Incarnate Son of god, he develops an extraordinarily high doctrine of human being. When god fashioned man, “he gave his frame the outline of his own form, that the visible appearance too should be godlike—for it was as an image of god that man was fashioned

⁴⁷¹ Ire-AH, 4:19:2

⁴⁷² Ire-PAP, 53

⁴⁷³ Ire-AH, 2:16:1

⁴⁷⁴ Ire-AH, 4:18:4

⁴⁷⁵ Ire-AH, 4:19:1

⁴⁷⁶ Ire-AH, 4:20:6

⁴⁷⁷ Ire-AH, 2:9:1

and set on earth”,⁴⁷⁸ and more specifically, “the ‘Image’ is the Son of god, in whose image man was made”.⁴⁷⁹ At first glance it would seem difficult to understand in what sense Irenaeus is so able to identify explicitly the physical, spatial human body as being (quite literally) the image of the omnipresent, spiritual Word of god, yet this difficulty disappears—I suggest—if we take into account two factors. In the first place, as the Word is essentially the ex-pression of god, so too is the body ex-pression, both of the very person whose body it is, and *also* of the artistry and will *of god*. In the second place, the measure and canon of human being is revealed in the *Incarnate* Son of god;⁴⁸⁰ if, in accordance with one of the principal arguments of this section, the Son’s activity in the economy of salvation is indeed confluent with his particular hypostasis—his being the Word of god and the Son of the Father—then his incarnation *in truth* expresses both himself and the Father, who sent him. The human body, therefore, “is not destitute [of participation] in the constructive Wisdom and Power of god”,⁴⁸¹ and it is not the *psukhe* or *pneuma* alone which confer upon humans their particular dignity. Following Paul’s benediction in 1 Thess. 5:23, Irenaeus understands the constitution of the human being to be essentially triadic—

*But when the spirit here blended with the soul is united to [god’s] handiwork, the man is rendered spiritual and perfect because of the outpouring of the Spirit, and this is he who was made in the Image and Likeness of god. But if the spirit be wanting to the soul, he who is such is indeed of an animal nature, and being left carnal, shall be an imperfect being, possessing indeed the image [of god] in his formation, but not receiving the similitude through the Spirit; and thus is this being imperfect. Thus also, if any one take away the Image and set aside the handiwork, he cannot then understand this as being a man, but as either some part of man, as I have already said, or as something else than a man. For that flesh which has been molded is not a perfect man in itself, but the body of a man, and part of a man. Neither is the soul itself, considered apart by itself, the man; but it is the soul of man, and part of a man. Neither is the Spirit a man, for it is called the spirit, and not a man; but the commingling and union of all these constitutes the perfect man.*⁴⁸²

Thus, the very constitution of the human being has an explicitly Trinitarian *orientation*, and it requires participation in each of the divine persons for the human fully

⁴⁷⁸ Ire-PAP, 11

⁴⁷⁹ Ire-PAP, 22

⁴⁸⁰ I am indebted to Fr John Behr for making clear to me the significance of this point with regard to Irenaeus’ anthropology.

⁴⁸¹ Ire-AH, 5:3:3

⁴⁸² Ire-AH, 5:6:1

to realize human being. But this realization of human being on the part of man is something that must be *achieved*, and it is not simply a given. All things were created good,⁴⁸³ but because “there is no coercion with god”, and “in man, as well as in angels, he has placed the power of choice” that they might have the capacity of their own accord justly to “possess what is good, given indeed by god, but preserved by themselves”,⁴⁸⁴ the *possibility* of the fall is itself a *necessity*. “The Light does never enslave anyone by necessity; nor, again, does god exercise compulsion upon anyone unwilling to accept the exercise of his skill”,⁴⁸⁵ and god therefore “laid down for [man] certain conditions: so that, if he kept the command of god, then he would always remain as he was”, yet were he to disobey, “he would become mortal, melting into earth, whence his frame had been taken”.⁴⁸⁶ Because “god is possessed of free will”, the possession of freedom by man is the very thing which signifies his being made according to the “likeness” of god himself, and the vocation of the human being, namely, “to keep fast the good, which thing is done by means of obedience to god”,⁴⁸⁷ essentially depends upon the right exercise of this freedom. Yet even after abusing this freedom, god has not forsaken man, for “by his prescience he knew the infirmity of human beings, and the consequences which would flow from it”, but “through [his] love and [his] power, he shall overcome the substance of created nature”.⁴⁸⁸

Such being the case, the successive dispensations of the old covenant constitute the history of man’s *attunement* to god “by means of persuasion”,⁴⁸⁹ with each dispensation pointing forward to the perfect fulfillment of this attunement in the incarnation of the Son of god, through whom god’s glory will be revealed, humanity being fashioned anew as participation in the life of god is realized in the Church⁴⁹⁰ —

This, therefore, was the [object of the] long-suffering of god, that man, passing through all things, and acquiring the knowledge of moral discipline, then attaining to the resurrection from the dead, and learning by experience what is the source of his deliverance, may always live in a state of gratitude to the Lord, having obtained from him

⁴⁸³ Ire-AH, 4:41:1

⁴⁸⁴ Ire-AH, 4:37:1

⁴⁸⁵ Ire-AH, 4:39:3

⁴⁸⁶ Ire-PAP, 15

⁴⁸⁷ Ire-AH, 4:37:4

⁴⁸⁸ Ire-AH, 4:38:4

⁴⁸⁹ Ire-AH, 5:1:1

⁴⁹⁰ Ire-PAP, 26; Ire-AH, 4:32:2

*the gift of incorruptibility, that he might love him the more . . . For the glory of man [is] god, but [his] works [are the glory] of god; and the receptacle of all his Wisdom and Power [is] man. Just as the physician is proved by his patients, so is god also revealed through men.*⁴⁹¹

The history of this attunement of man to god throughout the course of the Old Testament is determined by the three persons of the Father, Son and Spirit, with the Father being the author of the salvation of man, and the Son and Spirit being the effective agents whereby the Father's will is realized. All the successive dispensations of the old covenant, accomplished in the proper "order, season, and hour", are the expression of the Father's will, for "all these things were foreknown by the Father; but the Son works them out at the proper time in perfect order and sequence".⁴⁹² As such, the Father is "by no means unknown: for all things learn through his Word that there is one god the Father";⁴⁹³ the Son receives the power to realize the Father's will "from the Father, who is Lord over all",⁴⁹⁴ and through the Son, god "appeared to Abraham, manifesting himself through the Word as through a Ray of light".⁴⁹⁵ With "the Spirit truly preparing man in the Son of god, and the Son leading him to the Father",⁴⁹⁶ the history of salvation anticipates its climax, "the Word of god foretelling from the beginning that god should be seen by men, and hold converse with them upon earth", thus gradually "becoming capable of being perceived by" his creation.⁴⁹⁷

The Son is the content of god's revelation and the exact expression of the very being of the Father. It is *within* the Son that are located "the various *forms*,⁴⁹⁸ as it were, of the dispensations of the Father, teaching us the things pertaining to god",⁴⁹⁹ and it is not the Father, nor the Spirit, who is in the fullest sense the 'point of contact' (for lack of a better word) between god and the cosmos, "but the Word of god, who was always with mankind", stood "circumscribed in space", conversing with the patriarchs and revealing

⁴⁹¹ Ire-AH, 3:20:2

⁴⁹² Ire-AH, 3:16:7

⁴⁹³ Ire-AH, 4:20:6

⁴⁹⁴ Ire-PAP, 44

⁴⁹⁵ Ire-PAP, 24

⁴⁹⁶ Ire-AH, 4:20:5

⁴⁹⁷ Ire-AH, 4:20:4

⁴⁹⁸ The word used in the Latin text is *species* ("form, shape, outward appearance," and even "beauty").

⁴⁹⁹ Ire-AH, 4:20:11

god to humankind.⁵⁰⁰ The Son “is always present with the human race”,⁵⁰¹ “being with men in a close and intimate communion”.⁵⁰² Even from the dawn of creation, “the Word of god was constantly walking in” the Garden of Eden, where “he would walk round and talk with the man, prefiguring what was to come to pass in the future” and “how he would become man’s fellow”.⁵⁰³ Ruling the cosmos, “the entire house of his Father”,⁵⁰⁴ the Son was known by the patriarchs⁵⁰⁵ and followed by the righteous ones of old;⁵⁰⁶ it is the Son who is both the messenger of god and the content itself of the message—a content which in its turn would be fully revealed only in his coming incarnation.⁵⁰⁷

And just as both the Father and Son were present to humankind in the old testament, with each of them acting in a particular capacity that is *confluent with* their relatedness to one another *ad intra*, so too with the Holy Spirit. Although the Spirit was “poured out upon us after a new fashion in these last times”, “even from the creation of the world to its end” he has flowed forth upon all things,⁵⁰⁸ for “the Spirit [of god] is truly [like] many waters, since the Father is both rich and great”, and it is by the Spirit that god has “adjusted the human race to an agreement with salvation”.⁵⁰⁹ The Spirit, “who was from the beginning, in all the dispensations of god, present with mankind”, “announced things future, revealed things present, and narrated things past”,⁵¹⁰ and it is he “through whom the prophets prophesied and the patriarchs were taught about god and the just were led in the path of justice”;⁵¹¹ it was “in the Spirit” that Abraham saw “the day of the Lord’s coming”,⁵¹² and only “having embraced the Spirit of god” can humans “pass into the glory of the Father”.⁵¹³ The patriarch David asked for the Spirit in the Psalms, for it is the Spirit who joins us to god, and to the prophet Elias, the “mild and peaceful repose” following upon the advent of Christ “was indicated likewise”, for—

⁵⁰⁰ Ire-PAP, 45

⁵⁰¹ Ire-AH, 3:16:6

⁵⁰² Ire-PAP, 52

⁵⁰³ Ire-PAP, 12

⁵⁰⁴ Ire-AH, 4:9:1

⁵⁰⁵ Ire-AH, 4:7:2

⁵⁰⁶ Ire-AH, 4:5:4

⁵⁰⁷ Ire-AH, 4:9:2f

⁵⁰⁸ Ire-AH, 4:33:15

⁵⁰⁹ Ire-AH, 4:14:2

⁵¹⁰ Ire-AH, 4:33:1

⁵¹¹ Ire-PAP, 6

⁵¹² Ire-AH, 4:5:5

⁵¹³ Ire-AH, 4:20:4

[A]fter the wind which rends the mountains, and after the earthquake, and after the fire, come the tranquil and peaceful times of his kingdom, in which the Spirit of god does, in the most gentle manner, vivify and increase mankind.⁵¹⁴

The history of the old covenant, therefore, is emphatically Trinitarian in the theology of Irenaeus, and furthermore, this Trinitarian constitution of god's interaction with his people before the advent of Christ is Trinitarian *as triune*. In other words, it is *not* the case that Irenaeus simply assigned the various activities of the one god to the Father, Son and Spirit *indiscriminately* because, willy nilly, the Church (for some reason) did in fact confess faith according to the three names 'Father,' 'Son,' and 'Spirit.' Rather, each of the persons—*fittingly*, and *by virtue of* their being the particular persons they are *as related to* the other persons—performs a particular *aspect* of an activity of the one god. The Father is source and author, the Son is expression and revelation, and the Spirit is the vivifier, indwelling the cosmos, uniting the human race and leading it toward the Son. It is only according to this Trinitarian form that the old covenant is properly able to be understood, and though the revelation of god's being triune came explicitly only with the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Son of god, the Trinity was itself nonetheless present to, and manifested in, the old covenant. The three spies who took refuge in the home of Rahab, says Irenaeus, were “doubtless [a type of] the Father and the Son, together with the Holy Spirit”, signifying the Church's participation in the life of the Trinity.⁵¹⁵

Any account of Irenaeus' perception of the transition from the old covenant to the incarnation of the Son of god cannot overlook the crucial figure of Mary, the Mother of god Incarnate,⁵¹⁶ and the bridge whereby the Word of god passes over to the human race and cosmos. According to Irenaeus, Mary is the *New Eve*, for “just as it was through a virgin who disobeyed that man was stricken and fell and died, so too it was through the virgin, who obeyed the word of god, that man resuscitated by life received life”,⁵¹⁷ and “thus also it was that the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary . . . what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary

⁵¹⁴ Ire-AH, 4:20:10

⁵¹⁵ Ire-AH, 4:20:12

⁵¹⁶ The word, in the Latin text, that Irenaeus uses to describe Mary's relationship to the Son is the third person singular, imperfect subjunctive active of the verb *portare* (“to carry, bear”); cf. Ire-AH, 5:19:1.

⁵¹⁷ Ire-PAP, 33

set free through faith”.⁵¹⁸ As such, it is in the figure of Mary that one first begins to perceive Irenaeus’ doctrine of recapitulation. Since “death ruled in the body, it was necessarily through the body that it should be done away with” and human being should be set free,⁵¹⁹ and just as “the substance of the first man” came “from virgin earth”, so too “the Lord, summing up afresh this man” was “born of a virgin”;⁵²⁰ because “Adam had necessarily to be restored in Christ, that mortality be absorbed in immortality”, so too did “Eve in Mary, that a virgin, become the advocate of a virgin, should undo and destroy virginal disobedience by virginal obedience”.⁵²¹ Just as “the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin”, so too “is it rescued by a virgin”,⁵²² and had not the Son “descen[d] into Mary”,⁵²³ he would not have “receive[d] the substance of flesh from a human being”, in which case he “neither was made man nor the Son of man”.⁵²⁴ But when the Son of god became in truth the Son of man, Mary became “the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race”,⁵²⁵ with “the Pure One opening purely that pure womb which regenerates men unto god, and which he himself made pure”⁵²⁶ for “that regeneration which flows from the virgin through faith”,⁵²⁷ for this reason, those “who allege that [the Son] took nothing from the virgin do greatly err”.⁵²⁸

In arriving now at Irenaeus doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of god, we have come to the theme in his theology which bears more weight than any other; and fittingly so, for it is upon precisely this point which all others—creation, the old covenant, and (depending on one’s perspective) the crucifixion, resurrection, and eschaton as well—converge and draw their distinctive significance. In the incarnation of the Son of god, the Word himself of god, who is both the content of god’s mind and the principle whereby the Father is expressed, both reveals god to man and unites man to god, imparting the Spirit of the Father upon humankind and the entire cosmos. All prior moments in the

⁵¹⁸ Ire-AH, 3:22:4

⁵¹⁹ Ire-PAP, 31

⁵²⁰ Ire-PAP, 32

⁵²¹ Ire-PAP, 33

⁵²² Ire-AH, 5:19:1

⁵²³ Ire-AH, 3:22:2

⁵²⁴ Ire-AH, 3:22:1

⁵²⁵ Ire-AH, 3:22:4

⁵²⁶ Ire-AH, 4:33:11

⁵²⁷ Ire-AH, 4:33:4

⁵²⁸ Ire-AH, 3:22:1

history of salvation are summed up and given their definitive shape in the incarnation, and it is the incarnation which imparts vital meaning to all *subsequent* moments in salvation history; in relation to the cosmos, the Incarnate Word of god passes through space and time as though both a gravitational center and also a dynamo radiating life outward in all directions. In the incarnation of the Son of god, salvation history, executed in the old covenant in a balance and proportion befitting the temporal artistry of god, reaches its climax—

By this arrangement, therefore, and these harmonies, and a sequence of this nature, man, a created and organized being, is rendered after the Image and Likeness of the uncreated god—the Father planning everything well and giving his commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made], but man making progress day by day, and ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One. For the uncreated is perfect, that is, 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. For god is he who is yet to be seen, and the beholding of god is productive of immortality, but immortality renders one nigh unto god.⁵²⁹

Given what we've seen in this and preceding sections of the present work, one ought easily be able to discern why it should be—according to Irenaeus—most fitting that it should be *the Son* (rather than the Father or the Spirit) who becomes Incarnate and reveals god to man. Following the New Testament, Irenaeus' understanding of the Son's hypostasis is determined by the Wisdom tradition, and just as much as the Apologists before him, Irenaeus understands the Son's being the Logos of god to have *both* immanent (the Father's mind, in eternity, with god) *and* economic (the agent through whom the Father is expressed *ad extra*) implications—

[T]hrough [god's] Word, who is his Son, through him he is revealed and manifested to all to whom he is revealed; for those [only] know him to whom the Son has revealed him. But the Son, eternally co-existing with the Father, from of old, yea, from the beginning, always reveals the Father to angels, archangels, powers, virtues, and all to whom he wills that god should be revealed.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁹ Ire-AH, 4:38:3

⁵³⁰ Ire-AH, 2:30:9

And thus, just as when in the Garden of Eden, “god spoke to Adam at eventide, searching him out”, so too “in the last times, by means of the same Voice, searching out [Adam’s] posterity, he has visited them”.⁵³¹ In “no other way could we have learned the things of god” than through the very Word of god becoming man, for “no other being had the power of revealing to us the things of the Father, except his own proper Word”,⁵³² and “no one can know the Father, unless through the Word of God, that is, unless by the Son revealing [him]”.⁵³³ And thus we see clearly why it should be the Son *in particular* who becomes man: the Son becomes man because he is the Logos of god—that is, the Son’s becoming man is to be explained by reference to *the manner in which he is related to the Father ad intra*. And likewise, it is not simply the case that the Son is ‘sent’ by the Father; rather, the Son is the *that by which* the Father himself *ex-presses himself*. It is not a matter simply of the Father sending to men and the Son announcing to men, but rather, “the Son indeed leading them to the Father, but the Father revealing to them the Son”.⁵³⁴ Thus the Son is both the messenger *and the message* of the Father.

In light of the above we understand why, *should* one of the divine persons have **become** Incarnate, it most fittingly *would* have been the Son. But the extent of Irenaeus’ doctrine of the incarnation must also give attention to why the Son became **Incarnate**, that is, why the Son, in order to restore all things and redeem the fallen human race, should have become a human being of flesh and blood. This question is especially relevant in our contemporary culture, according to which ‘God’ is largely conceived of in a deistic manner, the cosmos is seen as a machine rather than a living organism, and salvation is understood largely along ‘Platonic’ lines. The ‘soul’ (or ‘spirit’) is what counts, and—presumably—it is the ‘soul’ which will be with ‘God’ in ‘heaven.’ Whence the need for the Word to become flesh (or, for that matter, as it is the ‘soul’ that is the ‘essential’ portion of the person, is not the human body *itself* rather superfluous)? Could ‘God’ not have fixed the problem in another way—even by mere *fiat*? And furthermore, what import does the incarnation of the Son of ‘God’ have upon *our* salvation? Is it not ‘faith’ (= “assent to an intellectual proposition lacking sufficient evidence”) that counts,

⁵³¹ Ire-AH, 5:15:4

⁵³² Ire-AH, 5:1:1

⁵³³ Ire-AH, 4:6:3

⁵³⁴ Ire-AH, 3:13:2

and would this ‘faith’ not be—for those of us who have never in fact seen the Incarnate Son of ‘God’—be essentially the same had ‘God’ simply announced from heaven that henceforth he will forgive humans, provided they have ‘faith’ in him?

While the manner in which such questions as these have been posed may seem overly facetious, the fact remains that these questions in fact emerge and inevitably present themselves to the mindset of contemporary, popular Christianity (and distinctly American religion in particular) to the extent to which that mindset is of an inquisitive nature with regard to its beliefs. Yet, from what we’ve seen above, these questions would have made absolutely no sense whatever to Irenaeus, and indeed the very premises upon which they are based are antagonistic to certain of his most fundamental convictions. It will be recalled that Irenaeus’ understanding of the cosmos is remarkably high—the universe is the artwork of god, and the physical world manifests the glory of god. Similarly, the physical body cannot be abstracted from Irenaeus’ understanding of human being, for not only is the body an essential ‘component’ of the whole man, but also, the body is *godlike*, and expressing in its form he who fashioned it, is *itself* that whereby man exists according to the *Image* of god. It is only by bearing in mind such considerations as these that Irenaeus’ doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of god can be made understandable to contemporary culture. Salvation, according to Irenaeus, does not pertain simply to the intellectual aspect of the human being. Rather, if we are to think of salvation in a manner appropriate to Irenaeus’ theology, we must conceive it as an organic unity, with all things—both within the human being, and within the cosmos in which human being subsists—connected with, and bearing influence upon, one another. And staying with this image, one can think of the Incarnate Son of god as though a radiant flower blossoming forth from the earth, such that one can only pull it from the ground by pulling the world and the cosmos in their entirety along with it.

When Incarnate, therefore, the Son of god “was a real and substantial man”,⁵³⁵ for “how shall man pass into god, unless god has [first] passed into man”?⁵³⁶ The Son of god “united man with god and brought about a communion of god and man”, there not being

⁵³⁵ Ire-AH, 5:21:2

⁵³⁶ Ire-AH, 4:33:4

“any other wise to have part in incorruptibility, had it not been for his coming to us”,⁵³⁷ and “summing up in himself” the whole of salvation history “in order to give us his own life, the Word of god was made flesh through the instrumentality of the Virgin, to undo death and work life in man”;⁵³⁸ in the incarnation of the Son of god, the “one god is shown forth”,⁵³⁹ and “by means of communion with himself, the Lord has reconciled man to god the Father, in reconciling us to himself by the body of his own flesh, and redeeming us by his own blood”.⁵⁴⁰ When the Word became flesh, salvation history “had entered upon a new phase, the Word arranging after a new manner the advent in the flesh, that he might win back to god that human nature which had departed from god”.⁵⁴¹ The law of Moses “has been fulfilled in Christ” that we may “go free in newness by the Word”,⁵⁴² “calling man back again into communion with god, that by communion with him we may have part in incorruptibility”.⁵⁴³ It was “impossible” for man, of his own accord, to “reform himself” and—having “fallen under the power of sin”—“attain to salvation”, but “the Son effected both these things, being the Word of god, descending from the Father” and “becoming incarnate, stooping low, even to death, and consummating the arranged plan of our salvation”.⁵⁴⁴ The “paternal light” of the Father “rest[ed] upon the flesh of our Lord” and has in turn “come to us from his resplendent flesh”,⁵⁴⁵ and “as those who see the light are within the light, and partake of its brilliance; even so, those who see god are in god, and receive of his splendor”, and this “splendor vivifies” those who behold it.⁵⁴⁶

Thus the incarnation of the Son of god accomplishes two things, which are inextricably related to one another in Irenaeus’ thought. On one hand, the Incarnate Son of god *unites* man to god, “that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of god”.⁵⁴⁷ Though the Son has indeed *always* been

⁵³⁷ Ire-PAP, 31

⁵³⁸ Ire-PAP, 37

⁵³⁹ Ire-AH, 3:10:4

⁵⁴⁰ Ire-AH, 5:14:3

⁵⁴¹ Ire-AH, 3:10:2

⁵⁴² Ire-PAP, 89

⁵⁴³ Ire-PAP, 40

⁵⁴⁴ Ire-AH, 3:18:2

⁵⁴⁵ Ire-AH, 4:20:2

⁵⁴⁶ Ire-AH, 4:20:5

⁵⁴⁷ Ire-AH, 3:19:1

present to the human race, his presence while Incarnate is of a higher significance still, and indeed, it is precisely his incarnation which constitutes the ontological ground, so to speak, both of his prior presence to man, and of the very being of man itself—

*And then, again, this Word was manifested when the Word of god was made man, assimilating himself to man, and man to himself, so that by means of his resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father. For in times long past, it was **said** that man was created after the Image of god, but it was not [actually] **shown**; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created. Wherefore also he did easily lose the similitude. When, however, the Word of god became flesh, he confirmed both these: for he both showed forth the Image truly, since he became himself what was his image; and he re-established the similitude after a sure manner, by assimilating man to the invisible Father through means of the visible Word.*⁵⁴⁸

On the other hand, and directly related to the above, the Incarnate Son of god *expresses* god to man, “revealing god indeed to men” and “preserving at the same time the invisibility of the Father”,⁵⁴⁹ for “through the Word himself who had been made visible and palpable was the Father shown forth”, and “the Father is the invisible of the Son, but the Son the visible of the Father”.⁵⁵⁰ Though “no one has ever seen god” (Jn. 1:18), “the Son who is in his bosom declares to all the Father who is invisible”, and “the Father, by means of the Son, gives knowledge of his Son to those who love him”,⁵⁵¹ with “the incomprehensible [revealed] by means of the comprehensible, and the invisible by the visible, since there is none beyond him, but he exists in the bosom of the Father”.⁵⁵² With regard to “his greatness” god “is indeed unknown”, yet “as regards his love, he is always known through him by whose means he ordained all things”, “his Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, who . . . was made a man among men, that he might join the end to the beginning, that is, man to god”.⁵⁵³

Thus far, we have considered the incarnation of the Son of god with regard to the Father and Son, but a full appreciation of Irenaeus’ doctrine of the incarnation requires one also to take into account the person and activity of the Spirit. The “flower” which is the “body” of the Son “was made to bud forth by the Spirit”,⁵⁵⁴ and the Word made flesh

⁵⁴⁸ Ire-AH, 5:16:2

⁵⁴⁹ Ire-AH, 4:20:7

⁵⁵⁰ Ire-AH, 4:6:6

⁵⁵¹ Ire-AH, 3:11:6

⁵⁵² Ire-AH, 3:11:5

⁵⁵³ Ire-AH, 4:20:4

⁵⁵⁴ Ire-PAP, 59

is he “on whom rested the Spirit of god, united with his body”.⁵⁵⁵ Inasmuch as the work of the Spirit cannot be separated from that of the Son, the Son became Incarnate in order that, by descending upon the Incarnate Son, the Spirit might be conferred upon humankind, and for this reason, the incarnation of the Son of god has a fundamentally pneumatic orientation: “Therefore did the Spirit of god descend upon him . . . so that we, receiving from the abundance of his unction, might be saved”.⁵⁵⁶ By descending upon the Incarnate Son of god at his baptism, the Spirit was “accustomed in fellowship with him to dwell in the human race” and “to dwell in the workmanship of god, working the will of the Father in them, and renewing them from their old habits into the newness of Christ”.⁵⁵⁷ Through his incarnation, the Son “pour[ed] out upon the human race the life-giving seed—that is, the Spirit”;⁵⁵⁸ “believing in the name of the Lord, and receiving his Spirit”, the faithful “have washed away” that manner of life which separates man from god, and are “made alive by working the works of the Spirit”.⁵⁵⁹ The “Spirit of god in his indwelling is manifold” as “resting on the Son of god, that is, the Word, in his coming as man”,⁵⁶⁰ and because the very body of the Incarnate Son is the locus of communion between god and man, the members of the Church—the body of Christ—“possess prophetic gifts, and . . . through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light . . . the hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of god”.⁵⁶¹ Because, as we’ve seen above, the very being of man is fundamentally Trinitarian in orientation, god is “glorified in his handiwork”, the human body, when it is “conformable to, and modeled after, his own Son”, and “the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the Spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was molded after the Image of god”.⁵⁶²

Seeing Irenaeus’ doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of god according to its Trinitarian dimensions, one is able fully to account for the *scope* of his doctrine of recapitulation, which is *itself* grounded in the incarnation. The Incarnate “Word has

⁵⁵⁵ Ire-PAP, 41

⁵⁵⁶ Ire-AH, 3:9:3

⁵⁵⁷ Ire-AH, 3:17:1

⁵⁵⁸ Ire-AH, 4:31:2

⁵⁵⁹ Ire-AH, 5:11:2

⁵⁶⁰ Ire-PAP, 9

⁵⁶¹ Ire-AH, 5:6:1

⁵⁶² Ire-AH, 5:6:1

saved that which was [created, namely,] humanity which had perished, effecting by means of himself that communion which should be held with it”, and the same Lord who took “dust from the earth” and fashioned the human body “had himself, therefore, flesh and blood, recapitulating in himself . . . the original handiwork of the Father, seeking out that which had perished”.⁵⁶³ In becoming flesh, the Word “caused man to cleave to and to become one with god”, and “unless man had been joined to god, he could not have become a partaker of incorruptibility”.⁵⁶⁴ As it was through Adam that the human race fell and the image and likeness of god was obscured, “the Lord, summing up afresh this man, reproduced the scheme of his incarnation, being born of a virgin”, so that “he too might copy the incarnation of Adam, and man might be made, as was written in the beginning, according to the Image and Likeness of god”.⁵⁶⁵ The beginning of history is joined to the end, and man is united to god. Just as the Son was the Counselor who held communion with the Father before the world began, so too is the Son now the Counselor of the human race.⁵⁶⁶ The innermost heart of the Father, within which always existed the plan of creation and redemption, as well as the love whereby it is effected, has been expressed outward that it might lay hold of all things and draw them back within itself. In realizing the full meaning of what it means to say that man was made according to the Image of god, we realize, though it would be untrue to say that he *could* not but create, god is such that he *would* not but create. The meaning itself of human being is realized only when the Son of god becomes Incarnate, and at the same time, that very love whereby the Word condescended to become flesh was given perfect expression in doing so—

*Hence also was Adam himself termed by Paul “the figure of him that was to come,” because the Word, the maker of all things, had formed beforehand for himself the future dispensation of the human race, connected with the Son of god; god having predestined that the first man should be of an animal nature, with this view, that he might be saved by the spiritual One. For inasmuch as he had a pre-existence as a saving being, it was necessary that what might be saved should also be called into existence, in order that the being who saves should not exist in vain.*⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶³ Ire-AH, 5:14:2

⁵⁶⁴ Ire-AH, 3:18:7

⁵⁶⁵ Ire-PAP, 32

⁵⁶⁶ Ire-PAP, 55

⁵⁶⁷ Ire-AH, 3:22:3

Turning our attention now to the crucifixion of the Son of god, we would do well to make clear at the outset that the same organic understanding of salvation which one discerns in Irenaeus' understanding of the incarnation bears equal influence upon his understanding of the crucifixion, and such being the case, Irenaeus can rightly be seen as a faithful successor of Ignatius of Antioch, who adamantly insisted that the Word made flesh did indeed suffer bodily on the cross. Against the gnostics' claim that the Son of god "continued free from all suffering, since", they claimed, "it was not possible that he should suffer who was at once incomprehensible and invisible",⁵⁶⁸ Irenaeus insists that "the Lord, our Christ, underwent a valid, and not merely accidental passion", and that precisely by doing so, "not only was he himself *not* in danger of being destroyed, but he also established fallen man by his own strength, and recalled him to incorruption".⁵⁶⁹ Had Christ not suffered bodily, then human being—which *is* bodily—would not have been able to have been recapitulated *in* him.

Interconnected with Irenaeus' doctrine that the recapitulation of human being (and indeed, all things) is effected by the cross is his notion that the cross is the summing up in a single event the meaning of the old covenant. The Son of god Incarnate is both "the treasure" hidden in the *world* and also "the treasure hid in the Scriptures"; the message of the Old Testament "could not be understood prior to the consummation of those things which had been predicted", namely, "the advent of Christ", for "every prophecy, before its fulfillment, is to men [full of] enigmas and ambiguities", but Scripture is "brought to light by the cross of Christ, and explained . . . showing forth the wisdom of god, and declaring his dispensations with regard to man".⁵⁷⁰ Regarding this passage, Behr rightly comments that "for Irenaeus, the crucified Jesus Christ . . . was present prior to the Passion as the veiled content of Scripture, the Word of God hidden in the words of Scripture".⁵⁷¹ If, as was asserted above, the Incarnate Son of god is for Irenaeus the center of cosmic and salvation history, then the cross of Christ must be understood as the center of this center—grounded in space and suspended in time as the soteriological and cosmic bull's-eye of all things.

⁵⁶⁸ Ire-AH, 1:7:2

⁵⁶⁹ Ire-AH, 2:20:3

⁵⁷⁰ Ire-AH, 4:26:1

⁵⁷¹ Beh-WN, 119f.

The cross not only recapitulates the old covenant, but also, it *reveals god*, and it is by and through this revelation of god that the cross pours upon the world an effusion of the very life of god. By “the will of the Father” the Son “was to undergo the Passion”,⁵⁷² and as “where there exists an increase of love, there a greater glory is wrought out by the power of god”,⁵⁷³ “the Lord manifested himself . . . by means of his passion”,⁵⁷⁴ for “when strength was made perfect in weakness, it showed the kindness and transcendent power of god”.⁵⁷⁵ The passion of the Incarnate Word of god “destroyed death”, “put an end to corruption, and destroyed ignorance” because through it, the Son “manifested life and revealed truth”;⁵⁷⁶ the cross is “the tree, set up from earth even to heaven; for by it those who believe in” the Incarnate Word “mount to heaven, for his Passion is our raising on high”,⁵⁷⁷ and through the face of the Incarnate and crucified Son of god, “we speak with the Father and stand face to face with him” as the goodwill of god is impressed indelibly upon our souls.⁵⁷⁸ This communion with the Father through the crucifixion of the Son is itself effected by the operation of the Spirit. The Word became flesh “in order that man, having embraced the Spirit of god, might pass into the glory of the Father”,⁵⁷⁹ and it is through the cross that “the dew, which is the Spirit of god”, is “diffused throughout all the earth” and “confer[ed] upon the Church”.⁵⁸⁰

The cross, according to Irenaeus, binds all things together through the love of god, and as such the cross is the expression of god’s very governance of the cosmos. Isaiah’s cryptic remark that “authority rests upon” the “shoulders” of the coming messiah (Isa. 9:6) “means allegorically the Cross, on which he held his back when he was crucified”, for “the Cross” is “his government, that is, a sign of his empire”.⁵⁸¹ As such, the cross is that by which the Father’s plan of salvation is effected, and its form is impressed upon all things through the cosmic Logos, thereby revealing the Father—

⁵⁷² Ire-PAP, 75

⁵⁷³ Ire-AH, 5:3:1

⁵⁷⁴ Ire-AH, 5:16:3

⁵⁷⁵ Ire-AH, 3:20:1

⁵⁷⁶ Ire-AH, 2:20:3

⁵⁷⁷ Ire-PAP, 45

⁵⁷⁸ Ire-PAP, 96

⁵⁷⁹ Ire-AH, 4:20:4

⁵⁸⁰ Ire-AH, 3:17:3

⁵⁸¹ Ire-PAP, 56

*So by the obedience, whereby [the Son] obeyed unto death, hanging on the tree, he undid the old disobedience wrought in the tree. And because he is himself the Word of god Almighty, who in his invisible form pervades us universally in the whole world, and encompasses both its length and breadth and height and depth—for by god’s Word everything is disposed and administered—the Son of god was also crucified in these, imprinted in the form of a cross on the universe; for he had necessarily, in becoming visible, to bring to light the universality of his cross, in order to show openly through his visible form that activity of his: that it is he who makes bright the height, that is, what is in the heaven, and holds the deep, which is in the bowels of the earth, and stretches forth and extends the length from East to West, navigating also the Northern parts and the breadth of the South, and calling in all the dispersed from all sides to the knowledge of the Father.*⁵⁸²

The Incarnate Word, “having been firmly united to flesh, and in its mechanism fixed with pins, has reclaimed the savage earth”,⁵⁸³ and that “which we had negligently lost by means of a tree, and were not in the way of finding again” we have “receive[d] anew by the dispensation of a tree”.⁵⁸⁴ The “sin that was wrought through the tree was undone by the obedience of the tree”, namely, the “obedience to god whereby the Son of man was nailed to the tree, destroying the knowledge of evil, and bringing in and conferring the knowledge of good”.⁵⁸⁵ “Adam had necessarily to be restored in Christ, that mortality be absorbed in immortality”,⁵⁸⁶ and “for this reason it was that” the Son “graciously poured himself out, that he might gather us into the bosom of the Father”.⁵⁸⁷ Just as the form of the cross, spreading outward in all directions from Golgotha, is everywhere impressed upon the cosmos, so too does it draw back into to the heart of the Incarnate Son of god all things, wherefrom they are, being brought into communion with god the Father and infused with his Spirit, recapitulated and made new.

The significance of both the incarnation and crucifixion of the Son of god is an integral unity in Irenaeus’ doctrine of salvation, and it was suggested above that, if the incarnation be understood as the ‘center’ of his theology, the cross ought be understood as the center within this center—the bull’s-eye around which the earthly ministry of the Incarnate Son is circumscribed. Yet, at the risk of overusing this illustration, we must

⁵⁸² Ire-PAP, 34

⁵⁸³ Ire-AH, 4:34:4

⁵⁸⁴ Ire-AH, 5:17:3

⁵⁸⁵ Ire-PAP, 34

⁵⁸⁶ Ire-PAP, 33

⁵⁸⁷ Ire-AH, 5:2:1

expand it further still when taking account of Irenaeus' doctrine of the resurrection of the Son of god, for the Word became flesh not only that he might live as man and dwell amongst his own handiwork, nor still only that he might bear the burden of fallen human being. As should be abundantly clear from the several allusions to his doctrine of recapitulation in the preceding, the Word of god—according to Irenaeus—became Son of man that the sons and daughters of man may become the children of god. The work of the Incarnate one, therefore, did not simply restore the pristine condition of human being. The Seed that fell to the ground and died—drawing into itself all things, first human being, and subsequently the earth and the cosmos in its entirety—rose again from the same soil thereby making all things new, and this is indeed is the very reason why it fell in the first place. If the incarnation is the center of Irenaeus' theology, and the cross the bull's-eye within that center, the resurrection may safely be understood as the single point at which the cross-hairs of the bull's-eye intersect, and from which they spread outward.

Just as much as with Ignatius, the fact that the Son was raised *bodily* is of fundamental significance for Irenaeus, and this not only because he battled opponents of a similar persuasion to those of Ignatius, but also, because his very understanding of salvation as an organic whole, the principle of which is *participation*, quite obviously entailed such—

*So, if he was not born, neither did he die; and if he did not die, neither was he raised from the dead; and if he was not raised from the dead, he has not conquered death, nor is its reign abolished; and if death is not conquered, how are we to mount on high into life, being subject from the beginning to death?*⁵⁸⁸

The gnostics, by “despising the handiwork of god, and not admitting the salvation of their flesh”, “treat the promise of god contemptuously” and “disallow a resurrection affecting the whole man”, and if their disdain for the physical body is in fact valid, “the Lord himself, in whom they profess to believe, did not rise again upon the third day”.⁵⁸⁹ Against this, Irenaeus points out that while there is “nothing more ignoble than dead flesh”, on the other hand, there is nothing “more glorious than the same when it arises and partakes of incorruption”⁵⁹⁰ “by the power of god”.⁵⁹¹ Fittingly, and in “the same

⁵⁸⁸ Ire-PAP, 39

⁵⁸⁹ Ire-AH, 5:31:1

⁵⁹⁰ Ire-AH, 5:7:2

⁵⁹¹ Ire-AH, 5:6:2

manner, therefore . . . Christ did rise in the substance of flesh”.⁵⁹² The bodily resurrection of the Incarnate Word of god is precisely that which reveals his “glory, for it was when he was raised that he was glorified as god”⁵⁹³ and became the “head and source also of life unto god”,⁵⁹⁴ “setting us free to the Father” by having “raised in himself prostrate man, being lifted up to the heights of heaven” and placed “at the right hand of the glory of the Father”.⁵⁹⁵

The resurrection of the Son of god is inextricably linked to the resurrection and salvation of all human beings, and if the Son’s being raised be likened to the pedals on a bicycle and human beings to the wheels, the Spirit must be recognized as the chain which unites these two, transferring the power in the latter to the former. Raised from the dead and glorified in the body of human being made new, the Son “has poured forth rivers in abundance, to disseminate the Holy Spirit upon earth”⁵⁹⁶ that “in the resurrection”, humankind may “receive that life which is granted by the Spirit”.⁵⁹⁷ It is “the Spirit of the Father, who purifies man, and raises him to the life of god”,⁵⁹⁸ and just as the body of the resurrected Son of god Incarnate is a “spiritual body” endowed with the glory of god, so too our bodies, though now corruptible, “through the Spirit’s instrumentality” will “become spiritual bodies, so that by the Spirit they possess a perpetual life”,⁵⁹⁹ and indeed, even now we “receive a certain portion of his Spirit, tending towards perfection, and preparing us for incorruption, being little by little accustomed to receive and bear god”.⁶⁰⁰

The resurrection and glorification of the human body is of an especial significance to Irenaeus, for the human body is the issue of the artistry of god, and it is the perfection of human being which consummates god’s perfected artwork, thereby glorifying him. The Catholic Church anticipates the “salvation of the complete man, that is, of the soul and body”,⁶⁰¹ whose “transformation” is effected by “the Lord, who is able to invest the

⁵⁹² Ire-AH, 5:7:1

⁵⁹³ Ire-PAP, 61

⁵⁹⁴ Ire-PAP, 39

⁵⁹⁵ Ire-PAP, 38

⁵⁹⁶ Ire-PAP, 89

⁵⁹⁷ Ire-AH, 5:13:4

⁵⁹⁸ Ire-AH, 5:9:2

⁵⁹⁹ Ire-AH, 5:7:2

⁶⁰⁰ Ire-AH, 5:8:1

⁶⁰¹ Ire-AH, 5:20:1

mortal with immortality, and the corruptible with incorruption”.⁶⁰² Death is not the ‘liberation’ of the soul from the body in which it is ‘imprisoned,’ nor—as the gnostics held—does ‘heaven’ consist of the disembodied spirits of human beings dwelling in the presence of god, but rather, “receiving their bodies, and rising in their entirety, that is, bodily, just as the Lord arose, they shall come thus into the presence of god”.⁶⁰³ And in light of this, we are now able to understand the full extent of what is perhaps the most famous phrase ever to escape from Irenaeus’ hand, that “the glory of god is a living man, and the life of man consists in beholding god”.⁶⁰⁴

Thus, just as with the incarnation and crucifixion of the Son of god, so too does Irenaeus’ doctrine of the resurrection of the Incarnate Word bear a Trinitarian form, and it is only in light of this form that the scope of Irenaeus’ perception of the recapitulation of all things through the resurrected Son can be justified. The Son of god “came on to death itself” in order to become “the first-born from the dead, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence, the Prince of life, existing before all, and going before all”.⁶⁰⁵ Raised from the dead, the Incarnate Word “recapitulated in himself the ancient formation of man, that he might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man”,⁶⁰⁶ and “in order that god might not be conquered, nor his wisdom lessoned”,⁶⁰⁷ “it is fitting that he who was created the original man”—Adam—“should be saved”.⁶⁰⁸ In “commending to his Father that human nature which had been found” and “making in his own person the first-fruits of the resurrection of man”, the Son of god has gathered all human beings of all times into a single, unified body, and “as the Head rose from the dead, so also the remaining part of the body” will “arise, blended together and strengthened through means of joints and bands by the increase of god”; “there are many mansions in the Father’s house, inasmuch as there are also many members in the body”.⁶⁰⁹ By “summing up in himself the whole human race from the beginning to the end, he also summed up its

⁶⁰² Ire-AH, 5:13:3

⁶⁰³ Ire-AH, 5:31:2

⁶⁰⁴ Ire-AH, 4:20:7

⁶⁰⁵ Ire-AH, 2:22:4

⁶⁰⁶ Ire-AH, 3:18:7

⁶⁰⁷ Ire-AH, 3:23:1

⁶⁰⁸ Ire-AH, 3:23:2

⁶⁰⁹ Ire-AH, 3:19:3

death”—the *day itself* of the fall was recapitulated in the resurrection of the Son of god.⁶¹⁰

The incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of god is the threefold centerpiece of Irenaeus’ soteriology. These three are contained one within another as though concentric circles, with the incarnation as the outermost and circumference, and the resurrection—at the center of the cross—the innermost point. The life itself of god is present within the nucleus of this threefold center, and expands outward to the limit of both space and time, drawing all things back *into* the center in order to fashion them anew and generate them back outward. According to Irenaeus, therefore, salvation history is distinctly organic—it is, in a quite literal sense, *contact with* the Son of god which effects the salvation of the human being, yet *because* the Son of god Incarnate is the cosmic Logos and eternal Word of god, this contact, which in the first place is located in the *physical*, reaches outward and takes hold of all things and, *through the body of* the Son of god Incarnate, communicates the very life of god. And just as the life of god is the *issue* of the threefold center of Irenaeus’ soteriology, so too is it its ontological ground. In eternity were the Father, Son, and Spirit; the cosmos was created by the Father through the Son and Spirit; man was fashioned by the Father not only *through*, but also *according to* the Son and Spirit, and as such human being itself is fundamentally Trinitarian in both origin and orientation; the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ was the will *and expression* of the Father through the Son, and in receiving the Spirit, the Incarnate Word imparts the life of god to the world by absorbing and abolishing sin, and rising—by virtue of the Spirit of the Father—from the dead. Thus we see that Irenaeus’ doctrine of salvation is remarkably similar to that outlined in our interpretation of Col. 1:13ff in **section II** above, both as regards their chiastic *form*, and also as regards what is their center—the Son of god—who himself *determines* the contour of that form *in accordance with* the *Trinitarian* character of his hypostasis.

And just as with our interpretation of the Colossians hymn, so too for Irenaeus, it is his distinctive position *within* the Trinity *as related to* the Father and Spirit that *explains why* the Word was made flesh. The Son of god became the Son of man because he is the Logos of the Father—the content *and ex-pression* of the very being of god—

⁶¹⁰ Ire-AH, 5:23:2

through whom fittingly god is revealed, and his love rendered present to his creation. And as we'll now see, according to Irenaeus, this *particular* presence of god to creation through his Incarnate Son did not cease when the Son ascended into heaven, but rather, through the activity of the Spirit, remains in the world to this day—the Church, constituted through sacraments and the Spirit as the body of Christ.

According to Irenaeus, not only has the Son “by his advent” “fulfilled all things”, but also, he “does still fulfill in the Church the new covenant foretold by the law, onwards to the consummation” of all things.⁶¹¹ The Church is the body of Christ—“his robe, as also his garment”—and it is comprised of those who have been cleansed and redeemed by his blood,⁶¹² and because of this vital connection with the blood of the very Word of god, “the Church bears fruit in so great a number of saved, for it is no more by an intercessor . . . that we are saved, but by the Lord himself, who grants more children to the Church than to the Synagogue of the past”.⁶¹³ Since the Church’s ontological ground is the *body* of the *Incarnate* Son of god, she exists in space and time as a visible, historical entity. The “preaching of the Church” of *today* is that “which Christ brought to perfection” and “the apostles have handed down, from whom the Church, receiving” their teachings, “and throughout all the world alone preserving them in their integrity, has transmitted them to Her sons”.⁶¹⁴ Through the charity, “sympathy, and compassion, and steadfastness, and truth” of Her members, the Church manifests “the divine nature” in the world,⁶¹⁵ and unlike the various schools of the heretics and schismatics, She is Catholic, a body unified in faith and praxis throughout the whole world, and in Her alone subsists the salutary Light of the Incarnate Word—

It follows, then, as a matter of course, that these heretics aforementioned, since they are blind to the truth, and deviate from the [right] way, will walk in various roads; and therefore the footsteps of their doctrine are scattered here and there without agreement or connection. But the path of those belonging to the Church circumscribes the whole world, as possessing the sure tradition from the apostles, and gives unto us to see that the faith of all is one and the same, since all receive one and the same god the Father, and believe in the same dispensation regarding the incarnation of the Son of god, and are cognizant of the same gift of the Spirit, and are conversant with the same commandments,

⁶¹¹ Ire-AH, 4:34:2

⁶¹² Ire-PAP, 57

⁶¹³ Ire-PAP, 94

⁶¹⁴ Ire-AH, 5:pref.

⁶¹⁵ Ire-AH, 2:31:3

*and preserve the same form of ecclesiastical constitution, and expect the same advent of the Lord, and await the same salvation of the complete man, that is, of the soul and body. And undoubtedly the preaching of the Church is true and steadfast, in which one and the same way of salvation is shown throughout the whole world. For to her is entrusted the light of god; and therefore the Wisdom of god, by means of which she saves all men, “is declared in [its] going forth . . .” For the Church preaches the truth everywhere, and She is the seven-branched candlestick which bears the light of Christ.*⁶¹⁶

Were we to inquire as to what exactly Irenaeus understands by the “light of Christ” and the “light of god” which subsists in the Church, we would be on sure ground in supposing these predications to refer to the Spirit, by the “works” of whom the Church’s members are “made alive”,⁶¹⁷ and who bears and confers upon them “the image and superscription of the Father and the Son”.⁶¹⁸ The Spirit is the source of unity within the Church. Just as “a compacted lump of dough cannot be formed of dry wheat without fluid matter, nor can a loaf possess unity”, so too, “neither could we, being many, be made one in Christ Jesus without the Water from heaven”—the Spirit—whom the Incarnate Word, “receiving . . . as a gift from his Father, does himself also confer . . . upon those who are partakers of himself”.⁶¹⁹ The Spirit of god constitutes the Church, for “where the Church is, there is the Spirit of god”, and those “who do not partake of him are neither nourished into life from the Mother’s breasts, nor do they enjoy that most limpid fountain which issues from the body of Christ”.⁶²⁰ The Spirit is the internal circulation of the Church, and ever preserves Her in truth—

*[T]hat well-grounded system which tends to man’s salvation, namely, our faith; which, having been received from the Church, we do preserve, and which always, by the Spirit of god, renewing its youth, as if it were some precious deposit in an excellent vessel, causes the vessel itself containing it to renew its youth also. For this Gift of god has been entrusted to the Church, as breath was to the first created man, for this purpose, that all the members receiving it may be vivified; and the [means of] communion with Christ has been distributed throughout it, that is, the Holy Spirit, the earnest of incorruption, the means of confirming our faith, and the ladder of ascent to god.*⁶²¹

The above may seem to imply that the working of the Trinity in the salvation of man is so pronounced that there is no room left for the exercise of human *freedom*, or,

⁶¹⁶ Ire-AH, 5:20:1

⁶¹⁷ Ire-AH, 5:11:2

⁶¹⁸ Ire-AH, 3:17:3

⁶¹⁹ Ire-AH, 3:17:2

⁶²⁰ Ire-AH, 3:24:1

⁶²¹ Ire-AH, 3:24:1

that if there is such, it cannot be of any significant consequence. Yet such an understanding of Irenaeus' soteriology comes at the expense of overlooking his anthropology. Though he does indeed affirm that man "receives incorruptibility not of himself, but by the free gift of god",⁶²² it must be recalled that for Irenaeus, the human being, *by virtue of* its Trinitarian orientation—the very orientation which is *realized* in salvation—is essentially *free*. Just as, within the human being, the soul and body constitute a unity, and do not stand in antithesis to one another, so too in the believer, faith and works are not *opposed*, but *integrated*, for "through faith" in the Son of god "we learn to love god with our whole heart, and our neighbors as ourselves; but the love of god is without all sin, and love of one's neighbor works no evil to the neighbor".⁶²³ The works of charity naturally issue forth from that faith which unites one to god through his Spirit, and at the same time, the works of unrighteousness *separate* one from the Spirit of god and vitiate one's faith. If one's soul is "still feeble and undisciplined in the practice of things pertaining to god", he is "not capable of receiving" the Spirit,⁶²⁴ and as the Spirit "is given by" the Son "in baptism", he "is kept by him who has received him by the practice of truth and holiness and justice and patience".⁶²⁵ Irenaeus doctrine of salvation, therefore, does not abnegate the place of freedom in the human being. The ontological ground and possibility of salvation lay wholly in god, yet this offering of god is realized by the human only if he properly—according to the exercise of his *receptive capacity*—cooperates with the gift that has been offered. The aspect of human being which is of the highest consequence according to Irenaeus, therefore, is its capacity *rightly to appropriate* that which *god has freely offered* to it, and because of this difference in form and operation, the freedom of god and the freedom of man do not stand in antithesis to one another.

And in thus coming to a proper understanding of the harmonious interaction between man and god, and the Spirit and the Church, we are able to follow Irenaeus as he—yet again—grounds his ecclesiology in his doctrine of recapitulation. The Incarnate Son of god, being "man, the formation of god", "gathered together all things in himself"

⁶²² Ire-AH, 5:21:3

⁶²³ Ire-PAP, 95; cf. Ire-PAP, 96

⁶²⁴ Ire-AH, 4:38:2

⁶²⁵ Ire-PAP, 42

and “took up man into himself, the invisible becoming visible, the incomprehensible being made comprehensible” and “the Word being made man, thus summing up all things in himself” and “constituting himself the Head of the Church” that “he might draw all things to himself at the proper time”;⁶²⁶ and the one who “has gone forward to the better things, and has brought forth the fruit of the Spirit, is saved altogether because of the communion of the Spirit”, yet the one who “has continued” in the ways of unrighteousness is “truly reckoned as carnal, because he did not receive the Spirit of god”, and therefore, such a one “shall not have power to inherit the kingdom of heaven”.⁶²⁷ Once again, a fundamental aspect of Irenaeus’ theology is grounded in recapitulation and, as we saw above, understood according to its Trinitarian dimensions. But as the Trinity itself accounts for the fact that the Son of god became the Son of man, and as the Church itself is grounded in the *body* of Christ, we must turn once again to the Incarnate Word in order to grasp the manner whereby the Son is related to the Church and established as its Head.

The short answer to this question is that the members of the Church *receive* the Son of god. As we saw above, the notion of the *receptive capacity* of human beings plays a significant role in Irenaeus’ soteriology and anthropology. “If, then, thou art god’s workmanship”, urges Irenaeus, “await the hand of thy Maker which creates everything in due time”, and “[o]ffer to him thy heart in a soft and tractable manner”.⁶²⁸ The Christian is the one who is “receptive of the perfect Father” that he might “be created [again] after the Image and Likeness of god”.⁶²⁹ Thus, just as was the case with those figures who were treated in preceding sections of the present work—and most especially Paul, John, and Ignatius of Antioch—and just as his doctrine of recapitulation would suggest with an almost irresistible force, Irenaeus understands salvation to be the *participation* of the human being *in* the life itself of god. And the means whereby this participation is rendered present to the human being are the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, which in their turn communicate to humans the Spirit of god through the Incarnate Word of god.

⁶²⁶ Ire-AH, 3:16:6

⁶²⁷ Ire-AH, 5:11:1

⁶²⁸ Ire-AH, 4:39:2

⁶²⁹ Ire-AH, 5:1:3

The significance of baptism in Irenaeus' soteriology is most properly understood by reference to the incarnation—and most especially, the baptism—of the Son of god, explored above. The Son of god was baptized *so that* he might receive the Spirit, for only by doing so could the Spirit become “accustomed to” man and poured forth upon the Church. As such, “baptism is the seal of eternal life and is rebirth unto god, that we be no more children of mortal men, but of the eternal and everlasting god”.⁶³⁰ To perceive Irenaeus' understanding of the significance of baptism for the members of the Church, therefore, one must locate them in the very *person* of the Incarnate Word of god, and see them—in him—submerged in the River Jordan, and then rising, with the Spirit descending upon them, and god the Father himself casting his gaze affectionately upon them as he says, “You *are* my sons, you *are* my daughters—you are *my* child—in whom I am well pleased; this day I have begotten you.”

Similarly, we must refer to the Incarnate Son of god—the *body* of the Word made flesh—in order rightly to perceive Irenaeus' understanding of the eucharist. The eucharist is that pure and universal sacrifice, acceptable to god the Father, that was foretold long ago by the prophet Malachi (Mal. 1:10f.),⁶³¹ and as “the name of the Son belongs to the Father” and “in the omnipotent god the Church makes offerings through Jesus Christ”,⁶³² when the Church offers “a gift at the altar”, it must be understood that the “altar, then, is in heaven”.⁶³³ The “bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation from god” is “no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly”, and thus “our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity”.⁶³⁴ Again, as we saw above, Irenaeus' understanding of the efficacy of god is not understood in a simply *mechanical* manner, according to which human being is an inanimate reality that is, willy nilly, infused with the power of god. The efficacy of the eucharist, though undeniably affirmed in Irenaeus' soteriology, is contingent upon man, who must *rightly appropriate* it, receiving it “in a pure mind, and in faith without

⁶³⁰ Ire-PAP, 3

⁶³¹ Ire-AH, 4:17:5

⁶³² Ire-AH, 4:17:6

⁶³³ Ire-AH, 4:18:6

⁶³⁴ Ire-AH, 4:18:5

hypocrisy, in well-grounded hope” and “in fervent love”.⁶³⁵ Regardless of the disposition of the recipient, the eucharist is the body and blood of the Incarnate Son of god, but received in faith and a spirit of truth, it incorporates the members of the Church into the body of Christ and, infusing them with the Spirit of god, renders them incorruptible and capable of eternal life, the gift of god the Father—

*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, how can [the heretics] affirm that the flesh is incapable of receiving the gift of god, which is life eternal, which [flesh] is nourished from the body and blood of the Lord, and is a member of him?—even as the blessed Paul declares in his epistle to the Ephesians, that “we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” He does not speak these words of some spiritual and invisible man, for a spirit has not bones nor flesh; but [he refers to] that dispensation [by which the Lord became] an actual man, consisting of flesh, and nerves, and bones,—that [flesh] which is nourished by the cup which is his blood, and receives increase from the bread which is his body. And just as a cutting from the vine planted in the ground fructifies in its season, or as a corn of wheat falling into the earth and becoming decomposed, rises with manifold increase, by the Spirit of god, who contains all things, and then, through the Wisdom of god, serves for the use of men, and having received the Word of god, becomes the Eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ; so also our bodies, being nourished by it, and deposited in the earth, and suffering decomposition there, shall rise at their appointed time, the Word of god granting them resurrection to the glory of god, even the Father, who freely gives to this mortal immortality, and to this corruptible incorruption . . .*⁶³⁶

Once more, then, in Irenaeus’ doctrine of the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, we perceive the same Trinitarian form we have discerned throughout the rest of his soteriology, which in its turn makes the sacraments the means whereby human being is recapitulated in the Son of god. The Incarnate Word of god “gladdens those who drink him, that is, who receive his Spirit”,⁶³⁷ and the body of the one who is in the Son of god is “the inheritance” of the Spirit; this “is the reason for” the Son “wishing the temple”—that is, the human body—“to be clean, that the Spirit of god may take delight therein, as a bridegroom with a bride”.⁶³⁸ The Father has sent his Son for the life of the world, which is effected by the Son, having received him from the Father, infusing creation with the Spirit, and the Christian life, through baptism and the eucharist, is thereby drawn toward

⁶³⁵ Ire-AH, 4:18:4

⁶³⁶ Ire-AH, 5:2:3

⁶³⁷ Ire-PAP, 57

⁶³⁸ Ire-AH, 5:9:4

the Source of life, for “those who are bearers of the Spirit of god are led to the Word, that is, to the Son; but the Son takes them and presents them to the Father, and the Father confers incorruptibility”.⁶³⁹

In one sense, Irenaeus’ eschatology brings his doctrine of recapitulation to a conclusion, for in the New Jerusalem wherein all things have been made new, the work of the Incarnate Son of god is consummated as having been fully realized in man and the cosmos. In another sense, however, *because*—as has been argued above—the form *itself* of recapitulation is determined by the form of the *eternal* Trinity, the reality of recapitulation remains to all eternity, in its essential form, in Irenaeus’ theological vision. For in the New Jerusalem, creation has been not simply restored to its pristine *state*, but being infused with the immediate presence and life of god himself, its highest capacity and deepest meaning *is* realized unto eternity.

The point of departure of Irenaeus’ eschatological vision is the Church. The eternal Word of god, who “is inherent in the entire creation” and “governs and arranges all things” “came to his own in a visible manner, and was made flesh” in order to “sum up all things in himself”⁶⁴⁰ through his Church, which “has been planted as a garden in this world”, and into which the Son “has introduced those who obey his call, summing up in himself all things which are in heaven, and which are on earth”.⁶⁴¹ The physical has thus been brought to perfect harmony with the spiritual, for “by uniting man to the Spirit, and causing the Spirit to dwell in man”, the Incarnate Son “is himself made the head of the Spirit, and gives the Spirit to be the head of man”, and thus through the Spirit “we see, and hear, and speak”.⁶⁴² “Thus, then, he will himself renew the inheritance of the earth, and re-organize the mystery of the glory of [his] sons”;⁶⁴³ just as the ‘forms’ of god’s artistry, being the creation of the cosmos, and the temporal dispensations constituting salvation history, are located *in* the hands—the Word and Wisdom, the Son and Spirit—of the Father, so too, concerning the new heaven and new earth, the Father proclaims, “I have depicted your walls upon my hands, and you are always in my sight”, and the New Jerusalem, “which has been delineated on [god’s] hands” is realized

⁶³⁹ Ire-PAP, 7

⁶⁴⁰ Ire-AH, 5:18:3

⁶⁴¹ Ire-AH, 5:20:2

⁶⁴² Ire-AH, 5:20:2

⁶⁴³ Ire-AH, 5:33:1

according to perfect harmony and balance by the presence of the Son and Spirit.⁶⁴⁴ The antagonistic pattern of existence now present on earth, wherein creatures stand against one another and sentient beings are sustained at the expense of other sentient beings, will come to an end. Just as man was in the beginning sustained by vegetation rather than sentient animals,⁶⁴⁵ so too shall it be in eternity, and when Christ has become “king of all”, this also will be the case “as regards the union and concord and tranquility of animals of different kinds” who are now “mutually hostile and inimical”;⁶⁴⁶ all nations in their entirety will be established “in harmony”, and because “god is rich in all things”, the “creation is restored” and the lion lies in peace with the lamb, both nourished by the “rich quality of the fruits” which the earth yields forth.⁶⁴⁷ And with all things thus co-inhering within the Son of god and infused with the Spirit, humankind “shall always go on towards god. For neither does god at any time cease to confer benefits upon, or to enrich man; nor does man ever cease from receiving the benefits, and being enriched by god”.⁶⁴⁸

The human race, therefore, has become universal eucharist, and gathered into the “seed” of Christ, which is “the Church”, it “receives the adoption to god through the Lord” and participates immediately in the life of god.⁶⁴⁹ The Word of god, “our Lord Jesus Christ”, “through his transcendent love” became “what we are, that he might bring us to be even what he is himself”:⁶⁵⁰ the physical body becomes “immortal and incorruptible”⁶⁵¹ by receiving “that life which is granted by the Spirit”,⁶⁵² for the Son has “poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of god and man, imparting indeed god to men by means of the Spirit”, “attaching man to god by his own incarnation and bestowing upon us at his coming immortality” “by means of communion with god”.⁶⁵³ And “communion with god is life and light, and the enjoyment of all the benefits which he has in store”.⁶⁵⁴ Human beings shall “partake of the divine nature” and

⁶⁴⁴ Ire-AH, 5:35:2

⁶⁴⁵ Ire-PAP, 22

⁶⁴⁶ Ire-PAP, 61

⁶⁴⁷ Ire-AH, 5:33:4

⁶⁴⁸ Ire-AH, 4:11:2

⁶⁴⁹ Ire-AH, 5:32:2

⁶⁵⁰ Ire-AH, 5:pref.

⁶⁵¹ Ire-AH, 5:13:3

⁶⁵² Ire-AH, 5:13:4

⁶⁵³ Ire-AH, 5:1:1

⁶⁵⁴ Ire-AH, 5:27:2

“behold god in this creation which is renovated”.⁶⁵⁵ God will be seen “by men who bear his Spirit”,⁶⁵⁶ and in the physical face of the glorified Son of god Incarnate, “our face shall see the face of the Lord, and shall rejoice with joy unspeakable—that is to say, when it shall behold its own Delight”.⁶⁵⁷

The cosmos, “having been renovated and set free, shall fructify with an abundance of all kinds of food, from the Dew of heaven”, the Spirit, “and from the fertility of the earth”.⁶⁵⁸ Creation will be consummated as all things “ascend through the Spirit to the Son, and through the Son to the Father”,⁶⁵⁹ for the cosmos shall be renewed through “the Wisdom of god, by means of which his handiwork, confirmed and incorporated with his Son, is brought to perfection”,⁶⁶⁰ and the harmonious ‘forms’ delineated on the Hands of god will become reality in “the New Jerusalem”, the renewed material cosmos that has been “as a bride adorned for her husband”⁶⁶¹ —

*For as it is god truly who raises man, so also does man truly rise from the dead, and not allegorically, as I have shown repeatedly. And as he rises actually, so also shall he be actually disciplined beforehand for incorruption, and shall go forwards and flourish in the times of the kingdom, in order that he may be capable of receiving the glory of the Father. Then, when all things are made new, he shall truly dwell in the city of god. For it is said, “He that sitteth on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ And the Lord says, ‘Write all this; for these words are faithful and true.’ And he said to me, ‘They are done’.” And this is the truth of the matter.*⁶⁶²

With the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of god at its center, recapitulation and the Trinity completely pervade Irenaeus’ doctrine of salvation. By the will and super-abundant goodness of god the Father, the cosmos was ‘outlined’ within the Son and Spirit, and brought into being by means of their agency; as such, the world is the artwork of god and it manifests his glory. Human being was fashioned by the Father according to his own Image (the Son) and Likeness (the Spirit); the physical body itself, being the image of the Image of the Father, is godlike in form, and the soul and spirit of the human person are orientated toward the Spirit, through whom the human being

⁶⁵⁵ Ire-AH, 5:32:1

⁶⁵⁶ Ire-AH, 4:20:6

⁶⁵⁷ Ire-AH, 5:7:2

⁶⁵⁸ Ire-AH, 5:33:3

⁶⁵⁹ Ire-AH, 5:36:2

⁶⁶⁰ Ire-AH, 5:36:3

⁶⁶¹ Ire-AH, 5:35:2

⁶⁶² Ire-AH, 5:35:2

participates in the life of god. But as god is free, and man is made according to the Likeness of god, so too is man free. The proper use of this freedom entail living in accordance with the Word of god the Father through the reception of his Spirit, and because of Adam's transgression, the image and likeness of god in the human being has been obscured. Yet god is love and perfect beauty, and refusing that his artwork should be forever flawed, he chose through Abraham to bring forth in the world a nation that was to stand as a light to the world, and through which he would—gradually, and in perfect sequence, as befits the artistry of god—accustom man to god. The Spirit was ever with the patriarchs and prophets of old, showing them in figures and types the forthcoming revelation of the Father in the Incarnate Word of god. And just as it was through the virgin Eve that all was lost, so it was through the virgin Mary that all was regained, that as all had died in Adam, all might be made alive in Christ. In the crucifixion of the Son of god, all human beings and the cosmos in its entirety are drawn into the physical heart of the omnipresent and eternal Word of god that they might be regenerated from within him as he rises on the third day. As Mary is She through whom all things are drawn within the compass of the Incarnate Word, so is the Church She through whom all things are regenerated outward from the heart of the Word made flesh, partaking of the life of god through the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, and living ever toward the Father through the presence of the Son and Spirit. And just as the 'forms' of the original creation and salvation history subsist within the Son and Spirit, so too is the renewed creation delineated on the very Hands of the Father, and in the New Jerusalem, in the immediate presence of the glorified body of the Son of god, all people will look upon his face and behold the glory of the Father, and infused with Spirit, partake of the life of god. The Word became flesh to make all things new.

Bringing this section to a conclusion, we have clearly seen—by means of his doctrine of recapitulation—that the *form* of Irenaeus doctrine of salvation is emphatically Trinitarian. It is the argument of this section that in the preceding we have also seen that the doctrine of recapitulation is *itself* determined by Irenaeus' doctrine of the Trinity *as triune*. That the activities of the three persons vis-à-vis the economy of salvation are not interchangeable is shown clearly by reference to four undeniable facts. In the first place, we have the clear affirmation of the notion of the Father as being the universal *source* and

end of all things. In the second place, we have the clear connection between the Word's being the Son of god on the one hand, and his *becoming* the Son of man on the other; it is *because* the Son is the Logos of god that *he*—rather than the Father or Spirit—expresses and reveals god to creation. In the third place, we have the *consistent* attribution of *specific* offices to the person of the Spirit. The Spirit reveals the Father *and* the Son, and it is the Spirit specifically who is identified as the principle of vivification through which the life of god is communicated to creation, and by which things are gathered into unity and harmony. And in the fourth place, we have the *taxis* of the divine persons, the order whereby Irenaeus consistently describes the interaction of god with creation: from the Father in the Son through the Spirit to the world, and from the world through the Spirit in the Son to the Father.

In light of this, it is my claim that we are warranted in concluding that the basis of Irenaeus doctrine of recapitulation, and therefore, his soteriology and theology as a whole, is his *perception* of the **immanent** Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit. In the preceding section we saw clearly that Irenaeus indeed *did* have a doctrine of the 'immanent' Trinity: god alone is eternal, and the Son and Spirit are proper to his very being—they are 'his *own*.' In this section, we have seen *both* that god is revealed to creation *through* his activities in the economy of salvation, and *also*—most especially in the case of the incarnation of the Son of god—that these activities are in their turn *accounted for* by reference to *the way that* a particular divine person is *related to* the other divine persons *ad intra*. These points are extremely significant, especially in light of the fact that the ante-Nicene Trinitarian confession is so commonly understood exclusively with reference to the 'economic' Trinity—as though nothing of the 'immanent' Trinity could be inferred from their doctrine of the 'economic' Trinity, and the latter were in no way grounded upon the former. But were this so, then it would necessarily be the case that the four points expounded in the preceding paragraph are nothing more than a happy coincidence which, for no reason whatever, just so happen to correspond more or less exactly with the 'immanent' Trinity that was 'discovered' by the later Church. For if there is no connection between the Trinity *ad intra* and the Trinity *ad extra* in Irenaeus, then *why* does the Son reveal the Father, rather than the Father reveal the Spirit? *Why* is the Father both the source and term of all things, rather than simply

being the source, with the Spirit being the term? *Why* is it that the Father sent the Son to pour forth the Spirit upon the world, rather than that the Spirit sent the Father to pour forth the Son? And, most tellingly of all, *why* is the Son, literally, the *center* of *both* the Trinity *and* salvation history? The only satisfactory answer to questions such as these is that Irenaeus' articulation of the operations of the divine persons in the world was grounded in his perception of their inter-relatedness in eternity, and thus, just as was the case in our interpretation of the Colossians hymn in **section II** above, so too in Irenaeus, theology and soteriology are seen in a single, unified vision, with the latter being the point of departure for the perception of the former, and the former being the ontological ground of the latter.⁶⁶³

⁶⁶³ And, if this is indeed so for Irenaeus, then it follows that his talk of the Spirit's activities in the economy of salvation is itself based on the Spirit's relatedness to the Father and Son *ad intra*, and as such, provides warrant for an attempt to perceive the particular form of that relatedness. But even having explored Irenaeus' doctrine of the Spirit in this light, an 'answer' to the precise manner of the Spirit's procession does not avail itself. In point of fact, Irenaeus' pneumatology is such that it can comfortably coincide with the moderate positions held (with regard to the *filioque*) by both the East and West, and cannot coincide with the more exaggerated positions held by either side. That the Father is the source of the Spirit in an exclusive sense is made clear by: 1) the Father's sending the Spirit to the Son, and 2) the identification of *both* the Son *and* the Spirit as the 'hands' of the Father; that the Son is *in some way* intrinsic to the Spirit's subsistence is strongly suggested by three factors: 1) the Spirit represents *both* the Father *and* the Son, 2) it is *from* the Son that the Spirit is communicated to creation, and 3) the basic *form* whereby Irenaeus understands god to interact with creation (i.e., Father → Son → Spirit → creation → Spirit → Son → Father).

VIII Conclusions

The evidence explored in the preceding has led to the conclusion that, for the ante-Nicenes, the Son and Spirit are understood as intrinsic to the very being of the Father, and because of this, they were able to see both the doctrine of god and the doctrine of salvation in a single, unified vision. God, *as triune*, is the ground and vivifying presence of salvation history, and salvation history, in its turn, is the epistemic point of departure for the perception of god. The definitive revelation of god comes in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of the Son of god, which both fulfills the promises set forth in Scripture, and also constitutes the matrix through which the Scriptures are able properly to be understood. Furthermore, the incarnation of the Son of god is the locus of contact between god and creation. It is through the Incarnate Son that the Father is revealed to creation, it is in the Incarnate Son that creation is gathered and presented to the Father, and it is by the Incarnate Son that the Spirit is poured forth upon creation. As such, the Incarnate Son of god is the ontological ground of the Church, and all theology finds its basis in the Incarnate, crucified and resurrected Son of god.

In bringing this study to a conclusion, there are three final points which we shall briefly treat of. First, we shall draw attention to the more significant distinctions between the Trinitarian theology of the ante-Nicene and that of the Nicene (and post-Nicene) eras. Following this, we shall briefly recall certain of the evidences laid out in the preceding sections of this work, and explicitly vindicate the claim that ante-Nicene Trinitarian theology is *not* 'sub-orthodox' when compared with that of the Nicene and post-Nicene eras. And finally, we shall draw attention to those aspects of ante-Nicene Trinitarian confession which are distinctly worthy of commendation to our own generation, thereby vindicating the second principal thesis of this study.

At first glance, the differences between the Trinitarian theology of the Nicenes and that of the ante-Nicenes would seem abundant. The ante-Nicene Trinitarian confession—at least as regards those figures treated in the present study—is scattered throughout their writings in more or less disconnected passages, and it must for the most part be inferred from an abundance of implicit statements in conjunction with relatively few explicit statements. The Trinitarian confession of the Nicenes, on the other hand, is immediately apparent, and this for the obvious reason that the doctrine of the Trinity was a topic of heated dispute throughout nearly the whole of the Catholic Church for three quarters of a century. This generation has left us with an abundance of lengthy works devoted to the doctrine of the Trinity, which are full of technical terminology and distinctions which are lacking to preceding generations. The whole of what every figure covered in the present work *explicitly* said concerning the eternal relationship between the Father and Son could quite probably be presented in no more than ten pages; Athanasius' treatment of the same topic in his *Orations Against the Arians* fills three books. And whereas Augustine gives the subject of the procession of the Spirit rigorous and sustained treatment throughout his *De Trinitate*, of the figures treated above, we at best get a few lines from Athenagoras that explicitly touch upon the matter. And so on.

But when it is recalled that the disputations of the Nicene era were focused principally on the issue of whether or not the Son is eternal and intrinsic to the very being of the Father, the differences between the Nicenes and their predecessors with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity are seen to be not so great as the difference in literary output would suggest. And when one further takes into account the fact that the struggle of those who stood on behalf of Nicene theology was largely advanced in order to uphold the vision of salvation we've seen outlined in the preceding sections of the present work, the differences are seen to be fewer still. In fact, the most significant differences between the Trinitarian confession of the Nicenes and that of the ante-Nicenes can be reduced to two.

First, although both understood the Son's sonship in light of the Wisdom tradition, the Nicenes understood the Father's fatherhood with explicit reference to the person of the Son, whereas many of the figures in the preceding (most notably the Apologists) understood the Father's fatherhood with reference to creation. The

significance of this distinction is easily understood with reference to Athanasius' doctrine of the Trinity. For him, it is *because* the Father is eternally the father of the Son—and, as such, an ever-fecund and inexhaustible fountain of life—that the Father *is able* to be the source of the cosmos; indeed, the whole of Athanasius' theology can be traced to his doctrine of the Father *as such*. Yet when the Apologists spoke of god as 'Father,' though by this designation they did indeed intend to be understood the *person* who is the Father of the Son, they did so almost exclusively with reference to the cosmos. The Nicene predication of the first person of the Trinity as 'Father,' therefore, was *literal* in the sense that the Father's fatherhood was seen as being the basis of all other forms of fatherhood—the reality which invests all other instances falling under the same predication with their significance—and the human instantiation of fatherhood being seen as a somewhat weak metaphor for the divine; the Apologists, on the other hand, would seem to have understood the Father's fatherhood primarily in a metaphorical sense, just as is the case in Plato's great cosmological work, the *Timaeus*.⁶⁶⁴

Second, though both affirmed the Son to be eternal, and the basis of this affirmation for both was the Wisdom tradition, the Nicenes—following Origen—spoke of the Son's *eternal* generation from the Father in a *dynamic* manner, whereas when many of the figures covered in the preceding treated of the Son's generation, they did so either with reference to a *particular* going forth at the moment, and for the purpose of creation, or, in a static sense. This difference, I suggest, is to be explained by a single fact: the Nicenes—again, following Origen—made Heb. 1:3 (which itself follows Wis. Sol. 7:26), which speaks of the Son as the 'Radiance' of the Father, the basis of their understanding of the Son's causal relationship to the Father, and the principal means whereby they defended his eternity. The whole of their appropriation of the Wisdom tradition is subsumed under this passage, and it can quite literally be recognized as the fountainhead of what is the Nicene era's greatest achievement. According to Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (5:26), Irenaeus wrote a short work in which he commented upon Hebrews and *Wisdom of Solomon*. In light of the above, and in light also of the fact that Irenaeus consistently identifies the Spirit, rather than the Son, as the Wisdom of god, it is most regrettable that this work is no longer extant.

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With regard to both of these points of difference, it can rightly be claimed that the Nicenes significantly advanced the Trinitarian theology of their predecessors. But because the figures treated in this volume indeed did affirm the Son (and Spirit) to be eternal and intrinsic to the being of the Father, it is my claim that this difference ought not to be seen as essential, and this advancement ought not to be seen as a departure. The two views are not necessarily antithetical, and the Nicene confession does not abnegate, but expands upon and makes fuller of sense of that which had been clearly set forth and affirmed by their predecessors.

Turning our attention to the alleged ‘sub-orthodoxy’ of ante-Nicene Trinitarian theology, the evidence explored in the preceding suggests that this charge ought to be dropped. The claim that the Apologists affirmed the Son to have been, in some sense, not eternal is based on a misunderstanding of their claim that the Son was ‘generated’ at the moment, and for the purpose of creation. This claim on their part, as we’ve seen, was not understood in exclusion to the affirmation of the Son’s eternity. The Son is the eternal Logos of god, and god is eternally in communion with him, but *because* the Son is the Logos of the Father, and, as such, the content and ex-pression of the very *mind* of god, ‘when’ god creates that which is other, it will *of course* be through and in the Son. Concerning the allegation that the ante-Nicenes either maintained a ‘binitarian’ understanding of god (in which case the Spirit is identified with the Son), or that they denied the personhood of the Spirit, we have seen not only that the evidence warrants no such charge, but further, that certain explicit passages, and many implicit passages, demand that the reverse be held. And as regards the claim that the ante-Nicenes ‘subordinated’ the Son and Spirit to the Father to an extent that is antithetical to the Trinitarian confession of Nicene and following eras, we have seen that this charge is either exaggerated or false, and is itself based on a misunderstanding of the Trinitarian theology of the Nicene and following eras. The Nicene confession that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father was never intended to identify the two with the *person* that is ‘God,’ but rather, to affirm that the Son *is the son of* the Father, and that the Father *is the father of* the Son. And just as they understood this sonship with reference to the metaphor of light and radiance, and sun and shine, they quite naturally maintained that the Son ex-presses the Father in the economy of salvation. Unless Athanasius of

Alexandria and Basil of Caesarea are Arian, the ante-Nicenes were not unorthodox in their articulation of the Son's relationship to the Father vis-à-vis the operations of the Trinity *ad extra*.

Both the Nicenes and the ante-Nicenes maintained the Son and Spirit to be intrinsic to god, and both affirmed that the 'economic' Trinity is *confluent with* the 'immanent' Trinity. The supposed chasm between the two is the consequence, in the first place, of misunderstanding Nicene Trinitarian theology itself—as though it denied the notion of causal or active asymmetry between the two (which it did not), and misreading certain of the claims of the ante-Nicenes—as though they affirmed the Son to be a latent capacity within god which became personal only when he was generated for the creation of the cosmos (which they did not). Rather, in both can be discerned the same basic unified vision of theology and salvation. The Son, being the Logos of god, is the eternal ex-pression of the Father, and *therefore* he is the active agent whereby the will of the Father is realized, and the content of god's ex-pression *ad extra*. For both, the economy of salvation is the epistemic point of departure for perceiving god, and for both, it is the perception of god *as triune* that *explains* why, e.g., the Father sends the Son rather than the Spirit sending the Father. Because the ante-Nicenes indeed *did* make an absolute ontological distinction between god and creation, and placed the Son and Spirit with the Father, and because of their unified perception of theology and salvation history, it is my claim that there is no essential difference between the Trinitarian theology of the ante-Nicenes and that of the Nicenes and their posterity. Aside from the two points of difference mentioned above, which are indeed themselves further elaborations based on principles and affirmations contained within the ante-Nicene doctrine of the Trinity, the Trinitarian confession of the Nicenes is in a very real sense simply a series of lengthy footnotes appended to that of the ante-Nicenes—this is the case even with regard to the Nicene doctrine of the Son's being *homoousios* with the Father (the meaning and significance of which are commonly misunderstood and exaggerated by contemporaries). We can therefore speak, without anachronism, of the Nicene faith of the ante-Nicene Church.

So far, we've discussed the ways in which the Nicenes furthered the Trinitarian confession of the ante-Nicenes, as well as the sense in which their Trinitarian confession

is substantially congruent. Is there any sense, however, in which the Trinitarian theology of the ante-Nicenes reached a peak that has rarely, if ever, been reached by their posterity? It is my claim that this is indeed the case, and that there are four principal aspects of the Trinitarian confession of the figures treated in the preceding, interconnected one with another, that offer an especially rich inheritance to our own generation.

The first such aspect will be familiar to contemporary readers, but it is nonetheless worth bringing to our attention. As we saw in **section II** above, for both Paul and John, the basis of the perception of god the Father, and indeed, the ground of all theology whatever, is the Incarnate, crucified and risen Son of god. The Incarnate Son of god is the key which unlocks *both* the treasure-house of Scripture, *and* the meaning of human existence and the cosmos, and the cross is the lens through which the very face of the Father is beheld and the fountainhead from whence the Spirit of god rushes forth upon the world. While the connection between the ‘immanent’ Trinity and the ‘economic’ Trinity is a lively theme in the theology of our generation, it can nevertheless be questioned to what degree the connection between these two has been rightly set forth by contemporaries. Neither Paul nor John *collapse* the distinction between the two any more than they separate them into unconnected spheres. The economy of salvation, for them, is the point of departure *for the perception of* the infinitude, the love, the *kharakter*, and indeed the very nature of god, but it does not for that *exhaust* the reality of god. It would be wrong to mistake the doorway that enters upon the house for the house itself. Like John, our understanding of the connection between the ‘economic’ and ‘immanent’ Trinity must be such that we perceive the infinity of the latter within the former. In the Son of god crucified, we should see not the *constituting of* god’s nature, but the *expression of it*. God is love—the Son dwells forever in the innermost heart of the Father, *therefore* the cross. Any reversal of this order renders the economy of salvation groundless and makes trivial the *revelation* of god in Christ.⁶⁶⁵

Connected with this is the second point. As we saw with both Clement and (especially) Ignatius in **section III** above, the Church and the believer are to be

⁶⁶⁵ For more on the relationship of the ‘immanent’ and ‘economic’ Trinity, see Kas-GJC, 273 – 277. In my opinion, Kasper does an excellent job of pointing out both the unity of, and distinction between, these two.

understood in an essentially *organic* connection with the *In-carnate* Son of god. Too often in contemporary culture and the more ‘popular’ forms of Christianity, salvation is understood merely in intellectual terms. Faith is understood as the mere assent to an intellectual proposition that has less epistemic warrant than most of the propositions to which we grant our assent, and salvation is understood almost exclusively in terms of a relationship between the god who is wholly Spirit and the incorporeal soul; a ‘church’ is merely a building where like-minded individuals gather in order to praise their god and nourish their souls by being fed with intellectual propositions pertaining to that god. What is lost in this understanding of Christian existence is a connection with—and recognition of the *significance of*—the Incarnate Son of god. Yet for the ancients, the Incarnate Word was absolutely the basis of the existence of the Church, and to be Christian was understood without reservation as being *in* the Church. Salvation was understood as *participation* in the life of god, and the basis of this participation was understood to be the *physical body* of the Incarnate Word, which is the locus of contact between god and the world, and the font through which the Spirit is made vitally present to the believer. If the *In-carnate* Son of god is not given a determinative place in our theological considerations, then the faith that is posited in Jesus the Christ becomes trivial—a mere variable that could just as easily be replaced by any number of intellectual propositions that god might have proposed to the human race. But if we *do* grant the *fact* of the incarnation its full significance, of its own accord it immediately spreads its influence until it embraces the full extent of Christian existence, determining from the vital center of the Incarnate Word’s heart the contour of Christianity in its entirety according to the form of the Trinity. And indeed, this is precisely what we find in the theology of the figures treated in the preceding.

For the third point, and what is likely to be the most controversial of all, we must turn to the Apologists’ doctrine of the generation of the Logos, explored in **section IV** above. As we saw in our interpretation of the Colossians hymn in **section II**—which in turn was posited as the interpretive matrix for our understanding of the Apologists’ doctrine of the temporal generation of god’s Logos—the affirmation of the Son’s procession from the Father in a singular sense for the purpose of creation *in no way* implies the non-eternity of the Son, but rather, *it makes clear the Trinitarian dimensions*

of the act of creation as triune. According to the Apologists, the Son is the Logos of the Father, and as such, he is eternally within the being of god; as god's Logos, the Son is the *res* of god's mind *ad intra*, the locus of god's activity *ad extra*, and the content of god's self-revelation and ex-pression. Fittingly, therefore, the Son *in some sense* goes forth 'from' the Father 'when' the act of creation is effected. And furthermore, notice how this understanding of the Trinity vis-à-vis creation immediately opens up the possibility of a Trinitarian cosmology (such as one finds, rigorously developed, in Bonaventure), alongside making clear the cosmological dimensions of the incarnation (such as one finds in Maximus Confessor, and indeed, Irenaeus).

Of course, the notion of the Son's proximity to creation in an especial sense has never been altogether abandoned in the Church's Trinitarian confession. "If there be a Son," says Athanasius, "*of necessity through that Son* all things originate were created,"⁶⁶⁶ and because the Father "is always generative by nature" and the Son is related to the Father "as Radiance from Light", "*in the Word is*" the Father's "will also, and *through him the objects of will are carried into effect*".⁶⁶⁷ According to Gregory Nazianzus, the Father "*impressed the ideas*" of his will upon the Son, "and the Word *brings them to pass*";⁶⁶⁸ according to John Damascene, the activities of the one god find their origin in the Father, and are effected through the Son, who is the Father's "natural and subsistential *force*";⁶⁶⁹ according to Thomas Aquinas, the Son "has a kind of essential kinship" with "the whole of creation, since the Word *contains* the essences of all things created by god", just as "man the artist in the conception of his intellect comprehends . . . all the products of art";⁶⁷⁰ according to Vladimir Lossky, every "energy" and "every manifestation" of the Trinity "comes from the Father" and "is *expressed in the Son*";⁶⁷¹ and according to Hans Urs von Balthasar, the creation of the cosmos can only be explained by reference to the "*inner divine fruitfulness*" of the Father, and the Son, who is the 'original Other' and the exhaustive issue of this fruitfulness.⁶⁷² It is my belief that a

⁶⁶⁶ Ath-OCA, 1:33

⁶⁶⁷ Ath-OCA, 3:67

⁶⁶⁸ GrNaz-TO4, 11

⁶⁶⁹ JnDam-OF1, 8

⁶⁷⁰ Aqu-SCG4, 42:3

⁶⁷¹ Los-ILG, 91f., emphasis mine

⁶⁷² Bal-CR, 30ff., emphasis mine; see also Bal-CR, 38f—"We already give him [i.e., the Son] the names that he received upon the occasion of his Incarnation. Is it thus really the case that, simultaneously with his

return to the ante-Nicenes on this point can yield much fruit for contemporary theologians. Just as the Nicenes made true advances on certain points that were nascent in the Trinitarian confession of their immediate predecessors *by focusing on* the heart itself of that confession, perhaps *by returning* to the most pristine sources in our Tradition, we also we might be able to advance the Trinitarian confession of our most immediate predecessors, bringing those aspects of their thought which are latent and scattered as promising, dazzling intuitions into a coherent unity which, in its turn, casts its light upon the whole of theology.

The fourth and final aspect of the Trinitarian theology of the ante-Nicenes which I wish to commend to our own generation is directly connected with this latter. As we saw in **section VII** above, for Irenaeus, the *whole* of salvation history—from the creation of the cosmos and human being to the eschatological consummation of all things—is perceived through the lens of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of the Son of god, and thereby understood fully according to distinctly Trinitarian dimensions. The form of the Trinity, for Irenaeus, is located within the Incarnate Son of god crucified, and bursts forth in his resurrection, laying hold of all things, drawing them back within his heart, and, through it, into the bosom of the Father, from whence they are born forth anew and infused with the divine Spirit. This Trinitarian perception, universal in scope, is for Irenaeus neither *ad hoc*, nor still is it the consequence of controversy. It is nothing more nor less than the articulation of the faith of the Church *from* the center, and it is *because* Irenaeus speaks from this vantage point that his own theology takes the distinctly Trinitarian shape that it does. And just as Irenaeus, dwelling within and writing from the heart of this center, advanced the theology of the second century to a height before then unknown and unseen, so too theologians of our own generation, by turning their gaze to the center itself of the Christian faith, ought strive to advance the understanding and perception of god had by the Church of today. For it is from this center—the Incarnate, crucified and resurrected Son of god—that the Spirit of god *is* poured forth upon creation.

eternal emergence out of the Father, this questionable, at once both magnificent and tragic world is also included in God's sight? It cannot be otherwise, for God has no ideas that 'subsequently' occur to him. . . . The 'Other' is, in the first instance, the Son, and therefore other beings can be created only in the Son". This insight on von Balthasar's part is clearly to be attributed to his thoroughgoing familiarity with, and love of, the theologians of the patristic and medieval eras, most notably in this instance Origen (e.g., *De Principiis*, 1:2:2ff) and Bonaventure (e.g., Bon-SJG, 2:7; 6:2; Bon-DQT, 8:ro:7).

It is through this center that the Father *is* revealed, even as it is written, “the knowledge of god’s mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

Thus, when it is understood that the Trinitarian theology of the ante-Nicenes was *not* ‘sub-orthodox,’ the richness and brilliance of their Trinitarian confession shows forth and commends itself to our own generation. The ground of this confession is Jesus the Christ, to whom the New Testament bears witness. Upon this ground, Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch claim the foundation of the Church to have been laid, and the Apologists testify that this is the ground not only of the Christian faith, but of the cosmos and all things that have been made. But it is Irenaeus who arranges into a unity the scattered jewels of all who preceded him, and placing them upon this ground according to the dictates of its own inherent rhythm, advances them further, laying the cruciform foundations, and raising the bedazzled walls, of Christian theology. Of Irenaeus’ theology, Hans Urs von Balthasar rightly claimed, “The height of the spring betrays the force of the pressure which drives it up”.⁶⁷³ The argument set forth in the present work suggests that the vital font of this “force” and “pressure” is Irenaeus’ doctrine of the Trinity—of god perceived, according to the Scriptures and Tradition of the apostles, from within the heart of the Catholic Church, and through the face of the Incarnate, crucified and risen Son of god, *as triune*, making all things new.

⁶⁷³ Bal-GLTA2, 32