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ALIVE TO THE GLORY OF GOD: A KEY INSIGHT IN ST. IRENAEUS

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A BEAUTIFUL formulation of a key insight in the anthropology of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons late in the second century, is the sentence "gloria enim Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei" (*AH* 4, 20, 7). As such, it is foundational for the spirituality that is dependent on that anthropology. The problem is that too often it is truncated and then interpreted in a humanistic sense: "The glory of God is the living human." This severs the text from its context in *Adversus haereses*.[1] Now a useful purpose may be served when one uses such a text as a departure point to develop one's own insights. For example, "to be alive to the glory of God" can represent the goal of a Christian human-potential movement. On this reading, I must become what I am, I must be myself. When I am alive in this sense, this is to the glory of God. The question is: Is this what Irenaeus meant? And in part the meaning depends on the meaning of the terms. What do I mean by "myself"? That is, what do I understand by "the human"? What does "life" mean here?

Of course, when one adds the second half of the original text, another dimension is introduced: "The glory of God is the living human, and the life of the human is the vision of God." To define life as vision of God is

[1] All references are to the critical edition: Adelin Rousseau, ed., with Bertrand Hemmerdinger, Louis Doutreleau, and Charles Mercier, *Contre les hérésies* 4, tomes 1 and 2 (SC 100; Paris: Cerf, 1965); Adelin Rousseau, Louis Doutreleau, and Charles Mercier, eds., *Contre les hérésies* 5, tomes 1 and 2 (SC 152, 153; Paris: Cerf, 1969); Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau, eds., *Contre les hérésies* 3, tomes 1 and 2 (SC 210, 211; Paris: Cerf, 1974); ibid. 1, tomes 1 and 2 (SC 263, 264; Paris: Cerf, 1979); and ibid. 2, tomes 1 and 2 (SC 293, 294; Paris: Cerf, 1982). Translations are my own. References to the *Demonstration* are to the Ancient Christian Writers edition: Joseph P. Smith, S.J., translator and annotator, *St. Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* (ACW 16; New York: Newman, 1952). For a survey of the literature through 1984, see my "Irenaeus in Recent Scholarship," *Second Century* 4 (1984) 219–41. More recent works include Ysabel de Andia, *Homo vivens: Incorruptibilité et divinisation de l'homme selon Irénée de Lyon* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1986); Jacques Fantino, *L'Homme, image de Dieu chez saint Irénée de Lyon* (Paris: Cerf, 1986); and a series of essays by William P. Loewe: "Irenaeus' Soteriology: Transposing the Question," in Timothy P. Fallon and Philip Boo Riley, eds., *Religion and Culture: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lonergan, S.J.* (Albany: State University of N.Y., 1986) 167–79; "*Christus victor* Revisited: Irenaeus' Soteriology," *Anglican Theological Review* 47 (1985) 1–15; "Myth and Counter-Myth: Irenaeus' Story of Salvation," in J. Kopas, ed., *Interpreting Tradition: The Art of Theological Interpretation* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1984) 39–54.

to shift the emphasis; the center of concern is less the nature of the human, and more the quality of human interaction with God. The key to meaning now becomes questions like "What is this vision of God? Who can 'see' with this vision? And when? And why should this be the key to human life?" Finally, why is the human, understood as alive in this way, the glory of God? There are the real questions posed by this text. They only appear when we look at the complete text. So, too, the Irenaean response to the questions only appears when we look at the complete text in its context.

In this essay I will (1) examine the text in its context, (2) consider the supporting notion of the human person with which Irenaeus works, and (3) show what this teaches us about what it is to be alive to God's glory.

ADVERSUS HAERESES 4, 20

The overarching context here is, of course, that of *Adversus haereses* itself. Irenaeus intends the refutation and, ultimately, the conversion of the Valentinian Gnostics.[2] To this end, in *AH* 1 he sets out to summarize their doctrine, showing that it is "the recapitulation of all heresies."[3] In *AH* 2 he refutes their doctrine point by point,[4] and in *AH* 3 he begins what will be his task in the remaining three books: the exposition of the Christian position on the points controverted by the Valentinians.[5] Consistently, when giving the Valentinian position, Irenaeus claims to work from either their own writings or his notes on conversations with Gnostics.[6] Equally consistently, Irenaeus works from Scripture to present the Church's teaching.

That, for him, is a paramount task of a ruler of the Church.[7] Furthermore, as a second-century writer, he assumes the objective, unchanging

[2] Irenaeus summarizes his plan for the work in the preface to Book 4. That plan is the refutation and overthrow of the Valentinians. He makes clear there that, for him, overthrow includes the conversion of this group of heretics.

[3] *AH* 4, pref., 2 (SC 100, 384).

[4] *AH* 2, pref., 2 (SC 294, 24).

[5] *AH* 3, pref. (SC 211, 16–18).

[6] E.g., *AH* 1, pref., 2 (SC 264, 22). Frederick Wisse has questioned Irenaeus' direct knowledge of other sects than those of Ptolemy and Marcus: "The Nag Hammadi Library and the Heresiologists" (*Vigiliae christianae* 25 [1971] 205–23); Pheme Perkins refutes Wisse on grounds of style and method: "Irenaeus and the Gnostics: Rhetoric and Composition in *Adversus haereses* Book One" (*Vigiliae christianae* 30 [1976] 193–200). A further challenge to the reliability of Irenaeus' reports of Gnostic teaching in *AH* 1, 7, 1 (SC 264, 100–102) has been leveled by Elaine H. Pagels. This challenge has been rejected by Robert M. Grant, who cites in his favor work of Schoedel and Mühlenberg: "Review of Elaine Hiesey Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis* and *The Gnostic Paul*," *Religious Studies Review* 3 (1977) 30–34. In sum, the consensus of scholarship favors the reliability of the Irenaean presentation of the teaching of his Gnostic opponents.

[7] *AH* 1, 10 (SC 264, 154–66).

nature of truth, independent of the interpreter, a truth which is contained in the rule of faith and yet at the same time exceeds the grasp of human reason. So he develops a theological methodology that embraces at once supreme confidence in the truth proclaimed by the Church and a rather full awareness of our limits when we humans attempt to speak of God.[8] It is as if he says to us: "The Lord has trusted himself to the Church in the Spirit. The truth may be found in the Scriptures entrusted to the Church; her rulers teach the truth. But the truth they teach is limited by our poor human capacity. God, who *is* truth, far outstrips the capacity of our grasp." The consequence is that one is asked to accept the Church's interpretation of Scripture, and so Church teaching, as the closest approximation to truth available to the human condition. This position is a proper one for a teaching Church which yet holds for the ultimate transcendence of its God. Granted this position, the heretic is one who presents a distortion of truth, reading Scripture falsely and without the authority of a genuine teacher. In Irenaeus' opinion, this is what the Valentinians have done. How important, then, for the true teacher to refute heresy, not only for the sake of those being led astray but also for the salvation of the false teachers themselves. They are doing a disservice to truth, and so deceiving themselves. Such at least is the conviction impelling Irenaeus.

I turn now from the overarching context of his work to the immediate context of the text here in question. First, let us recall the context of *AH* 4, then specifically the context of *AH* 4, c. 20. Our text is found in *AH* 4; the work of that book is a direct continuation of the work begun in *AH* 3. There Irenaeus worked from Scripture to teach the unity or oneness of God, the Creator and Father of Jesus Christ, and the unity or oneness of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of the Father incarnate. In *AH* 4 his concern continues to be unity. The unity now in question is that of the two Testaments. Philippe Bacq has demonstrated that Irenaeus handles it in three steps: (1) the unity of the two Testaments from what he calls "the clear words of Christ"[9] found in *AH* 4, 1–19; (2) the Old

[8] Irenaeus states his theological principles on the unity and unchangingness of faith (with implications for method) in *AH* 1, 10 (SC 264, 154–66) This needs to be read with *AH* 2, 9–10 (SC 294, 82–90) on the soundness of holding to Christian faith and 2, 25–28 (SC 294, 250–92) on the doctrine of truth, where a question of theological method is again raised. As Schoedel has pointed out, Irenaeus distinguishes with respect to Scripture between assertions (as, there is one God who created matter) and speculation about such assertions (as, when or how God created matter). The problem for Irenaeus is dissatisfaction with knowing "that" and an unhealthy desire to know "how." See William R. Schoedel, "Theological Method in Irenaeus," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 35 (1984) 31–49.

[9] "Clear words of Christ" include for Irenaeus (1) a literal interpretation of words attributed to Christ in any of the four Gospels; (2) the writings of the Pentateuch, accepted

Testament as prophecy of the New, found in *AH* 4, 20–35; and (3) the unity of the two Testaments proved by the parables of Christ, found in *AH* 4, 36–41.[10]

The theme of chapter 20 is that the one God who has created all by His Word and His Wisdom will vivify all who are open to the Spirit.[11] Throughout the chapter his goal in handling the theme is to show that the work accomplished prophetically in the Old Testament is continuous with the work accomplished adoptively in the New. In either case the actual revealer is the Word. The chapter is developed in 12 sections. Sections 1–6 treat the way Father, Son, and Spirit bring us to knowledge or vision of God, and so to life. The first part of section 7 treats human life as the glory of God. The remainder of section 7 through section 12 shows how it is the life-giving vision of the one God that is available prophetically in the OT and adoptively in the NT.

As he turns to chapter 20, Irenaeus has just completed a reflection on the Isaian verse "the heavens are measured out in the palm of His hand" (Isa 40:12), where in a poetic vein he asked how we can ever know God when we do not comprehend the fulness and the greatness of God's hand.[12] The bishop responds to his own question, affirming that the God

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as the writings of Moses but attributed to the pre-existent Christ on Irenaeus' interpretation of Jn 5:46–47. This builds on Irenaeus' understanding of the progressive nature of revelation, e.g. *AH* 4, 9–11 (SC 100, 476–508). With respect to Irenaeus' use of Scripture, it is worth mentioning that Metzger points to *AH* 5, 30, 1 (SC 153, 370–76) as an instance of textual criticism in which we find reference to four different aspects of textual criticism: (1) discrimination between manuscripts as "good and old" or the reverse; (2) acceptance of one reading and rejection of another; (3) confirmation of the same reading by an appeal to internal probability; (4) an attempt to account for the origin of the corrupted reading. See Bruce Metzger, "The Practice of Textual Criticism among the Church Fathers," *Studia patristica* 12 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1975) 341.

[10] P. Bacq, *De l'ancienne à la nouvelle alliance selon s. Irénée: Unité du livre IV de l'Adversus haereses* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1978).

[11] The motif of the one Creator God recurs throughout *AH*, as it must if Irenaeus is to respond adequately to the Valentinian postulate of multiple figures in a Pleroma, with the Supreme God totally removed from any contact with creation. He uses this motif in *AH* 1 to set up the context of his attack on the Gnostic heresy. See esp. *AH* 1, 10, 1 (SC 264, 154–58) and 1, 22, 1 (SC 264, 308–10). In *AH* 2 he again uses this motif to refute that heresy by its themes. See, e.g., *AH* 2, 9, 1 and 2 (SC 294, 82–86) and 2, 25 (SC 294, 250–56). In *AH* 3 Irenaeus handles the unity of God and of Christ again through his understanding of the one Creator God. This is apparent in the structure of all of *AH* 3 and recurs throughout the book; see, e.g., *AH* 3, 6, 1–4 (SC 211, 64–76) on the unity of God, and *AH* 3, 17, 1 and 2 (SC 211, 328–34) on the unity of Christ approached through this motif. Again in *AH* 5 he handles the resurrection of the flesh in Paul, and the identity of the Creator God and the Father from three stories in the life of Christ, always using as his basic presupposition the theme of the one Creator God. For a limited example, see *AH* 5, 25–36 (SC 153, 308–466), esp. 5, 26, 2 (SC 153, 330–38).

[12] *AH* 4, 19, 2–3 (SC 100, 618–22). In the world of late antiquity the notion of the limits

whose greatness defeats our knowing attracts us by divine love. In the act of obeying God we learn the existence of God and that God is the Creator of all things, including ourselves and our world. Genesis 2:7 tells us that God alone—and no one else—formed the human person. In fact, the only help needed was that of the Hands of God.[13] In 20, 2 Irenaeus affirms that this one God is the Father, who delivered all things to the Son. Then in 20, 3 Irenaeus further identifies this Son. The Son, who is the Word, was always with the Father, as was Wisdom, who is the Spirit, to whom Irenaeus attributes the wonderful texts of Proverbs 8:22–31.[14]

Now in 4, 20, 4 Irenaeus collects the major points he has made so far in the chapter and connects them to his notion of "God unknown according to His greatness but known according to His love." He writes that creation is a work of this God, who works by the Word and Wisdom and brings about self-revelation out of love and through the Word. That one same Word who worked in creation spoke through the prophets. They announced that God would be seen by humans, would talk with us, would be present with creation, causing us to serve God in holiness, until finally "humankind, having embraced the Spirit of God, might pass into the glory of the Father."[15]

At the beginning of 4, 20, 5, Irenaeus inserts a short excursus on the meaning of prophecy. For him, prophecy is the setting forth of future things.[16] This is his way of assuring the insight that matters to him: the prophecies do not refer to a different or lesser God, but to the one same God who is Creator and Father, to the Son who is Jesus Christ, and to the one Spirit.

But immediately in the same place the bishop returns a third time, and with another emphasis, to what now appears as a preoccupying question: How do we know God? This preoccupation, of course, is part of his response to the Gnostics, who claim to have a secretly revealed gnosis of God. So Irenaeus asks how we see God and turns for an answer to the public revelation contained in the Scriptures of both Testaments. The Lord has said "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"

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in our ability to speak of God was a commonplace, denoted by the "incomprehensibility" of God. In the Gnostic literature, see, e.g., the *Apocryphon of John* 2.33—4.10 (J. M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977] 100), and *The Tripartite Tractate* 52.34—53.5 (Robinson 56). G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (2nd ed.; London: SPCK, 1969) 5–6, gives examples from the Pythagorean theory of numbers (Hippolytus, *Refutation* 1.2.6) as well as from Clement of Rome (*1 Cor.* 33.3) and Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 5.11, 71.5).

[13] *AH* 4, 20, 1 (SC 100, 626).

[14] *AH* 4, 20, 3 (SC 100, 632).

[15] *AH* 4, 20, 4 (SC 100, 634–36).

[16] *AH* 4, 20, 5 (SC 100, 636).

(Mt 5:8). But we know from Moses that in respect to God's greatness and wondrous glory "no one shall see God and live" (Exod 33:20). So how do we know God? How do we see God? Irenaeus must answer this question if he is to offer an alternative to the Gnostic position. In doing so, he begins here in *AH* 4, 20, 5 the development that will culminate in "The glory of God is the living human, and the life of the human is the vision of God."

First, for emphasis, he repeats that we do not see God according to greatness and glory. In this sense God is truly incomprehensible. Rather, "According to His love and kindness, and because He can do all things, even this He grants to those who love Him, that is, to see God."[17] The sense seems to be that because God is loving, kind, and all-powerful, God acts that way (i.e., as one who is loving, kind, and all-powerful) to enable the lovers of God to see their Beloved. This is strengthened by the way in which Irenaeus continues. We do not see God by our own powers. Rather, when God pleases, God is seen by humans. The selection of those to receive this vision, as well as the time and manner, is at the divine discretion.

Irenaeus then spells out different ways in which God is seen. These differ in kind through time, and also according to which of the Three is acting. As to time, in the past God has been seen prophetically through the Spirit. In the present God is seen adoptively through the Son. In the future God will be seen paternally in the kingdom of heaven. Furthermore, Spirit, Son, and Father play distinct roles in this seeing. The Spirit prepares us in the Son of God, and the Son leads us to the Father. What of the Father? The Father "gives incorruption for life eternal, which comes to everyone from the fact that she/he sees God."[18] The prophetic seeing is a preparatory seeing under the guidance of the Spirit. Adoptive seeing happens through the agency of the Son, and here Irenaeus intends the incarnate Son. Paternal seeing has to do with our state of glory, where the Father gives eternal incorruption, the final gift to those who see God.

That incorruption comes from seeing God is at the heart of the Irenaean teaching here.[19] Why is incorruption a consequence of the divine vision? This seems to be Irenaeus' meaning: as see-ers of light are in light, so see-ers of God are in God. The see-ers of light who are in light share in light's brightness (*claritas*), and in a similar way the see-

[17] *AH* 4, 20, 5 (SC 100, 638).

[18] Ibid. (638–40).

[19] De Andia's work critically examines Irenaeus' notion of incorruptibility as human participation in the divine spirit, a participation which is itself the gift of God. See esp. chap. 12, "Vision et incorruptibilité" 321–32.

ers of God who are in God share in the divine splendor (*claritas*). In both cases the splendor is vivifying. To enable such a vivification, the invisible God became visible; the incomprehensible became comprehensible.[20] This reflects one of the strongest and most beautiful presentations Irenaeus made of the Incarnation, in *AH* 3. There he wrote: "Therefore he recapitulated humanity in himself, the invisible becoming visible, the incomprehensible being made comprehensible, the impassible becoming capable of suffering, and the Word being made a human being, summing up all things in himself . . . ."[21] So, what Irenaeus is saying in 4, 20, 5 is that the Word was made human in order to vivify us. How important is the life the Word gives? It is not possible to live apart from it. Evidently, the life referred to is other than physical and is the true life of humans. The means for that life lies in participation (*participatio*) with God, a participation involving knowing God and enjoying God's goodness. According to God's love God is known in such participation, and human beings in turn enjoy the goodness of God in the same participation.

Now in *AH* 4, 20, 6 Irenaeus begins to explore the stages of entering into participation. To grasp what he is about to do, it is necessary to keep in mind two points already made. First, in his outline of the movement into the vision of God, Irenaeus has portrayed a three-stage process: prophetical, adoptive, and paternal. He will develop these stages. But second, he will do so in the context of his overall goal in *AH* 4. That goal is to establish the unity of the two covenants and—in this middle section of the book—to illustrate that unity by showing that the OT is a prophecy of the NT.

First, Irenaeus restates the content of *AH* 20, 5: "Therefore human beings shall see God that they may live, being made immortal by that sight and attaining even unto God."[22] Then he reminds us that he has already told us that the prophets declared this in figure. Some among them saw the prophetic Spirit and that Spirit's works poured out in all kinds of gifts; others saw the coming of the Lord and the way he did the will of the Father both in heaven and on earth; others saw the glories of the Father adapted to the ones who saw. In all this, Irenaeus insists, the one God was revealed. How so?

Irenaeus uses texts of both the OT (Hos 12:10) and the NT (1 Cor 12:4–7) to make a theological point.[23] This point is that what the Spirit

[20] *AH* 4, 20, 5 (SC 100, 640).

[21] *AH* 3, 16, 6 (SC 211, 312–14).

[22] *AH* 4, 20, 6 (SC 100, 642).

[23] Hos 12:10 reads: "I spoke to the prophets; it was I who multiplied visions, and through the prophets gave parables." In Irenaeus' judgment, Paul interpreted this same text in light of 1 Cor 12:4–7, which refers to diversities of gifts but one Spirit, diversities of ministries

shows us prophetically and in figure is not a different God from the God shown adoptively in the Son. Both in the prophetic seeing and in the adoptive, it is the one Word of God who shows the Father to the ones who accept the guidance of the Spirit. We begin to see that what unites the two Testaments is the similar actions of the one same God who consistently works in the same way for our salvation. If we submit to the guidance of the Spirit, the Word shows us the Father. It is this which has always been the role of the Word: to show us the Father.

At this point Irenaeus is halfway through 4, 20. The way is prepared to explain to us the roles of Son, of Spirit, and of prophet in our coming to the life-giving vision of God. The remaining six sections of the chapter accomplish this. Continuing to move with Irenaeus, we turn to 4, 20, 7.

The Son who was with the Father from the beginning has from the beginning been the revealer of the Father. The prophetic visions, the division of gifts, his own ministries, and the glorification of the Father have been unfolded by the Son to profit humankind. All has been done to show God to the human race, and to show or present the human race to God, while guarding the invisibility of the Father. On the one hand, God is protected from the contempt that can follow overfamiliarity, yet at the same time in multiple ways God is shown to us, lest, lacking God, the human person should cease to be. This is to be avoided, not for our sakes but because it is to the glory of God that we live. Now we come to the text that has been our overriding concern: "gloria enim Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei." The glory of God is the living human being, and the human person has true life only in the vision of God. In fact, Irenaeus adds that if revelation through creation gives life, how much more does the revelation through the Word give life![24] There has been revelation through creation, a creation which is the work of the one God and so reveals its Maker. To the extent that creation shows its Maker to all who live on earth, it is life-giving to them. Here the work of the first six sections of the chapter is joined to that of the last six. Irenaeus goes on to say that if there is some life-giving vision of God in creation, how much more is there in the vision presented in the incarnate Word! Life depends on the vision of God. To be fully alive, a human being must look on God; the human person turned toward God in this seeing *is* the glory of God. The fulness of this seeing, and so of life, comes through the incarnate Word.

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but one Lord, and diversities of operations but one God. The direct relation between the texts is simply verbal consonance, the echoing of similar turns of phrase. It is important to Irenaeus to make the connection in order to affirm clearly that the God known to the OT prophets is the same proclaimed in the NT.

[24] *AH* 4, 20, 7 (SC 100, 648).

If this is so, Irenaeus continues, moving to 4, 20, 8, since the prophets signify the future, and in the future humans will look on God, it is necessary that those predicting this future should themselves see God. But how do the prophets look on God, and how do they communicate what they see? The Irenaean response is that the prophets look on God not directly but "as the Spirit suggests," and they communicate what they receive in word, in vision, in conversation, and in acts.[25] As the bishop develops these ideas through the remainder of the chapter, it becomes clear that in his view the prophets saw in vision the forthcoming life of Christ, proclaimed in word his forthcoming words, and enacted deeds which would be his, at the same time announcing all of this prophetically.

The remainder of the chapter illustrates this from the prophets (i.e., the OT), giving for each text both a literal and a prophetic interpretation, and finally illustrating how the OT texts are showings of future deeds of God, deeds accomplished in the NT.

Thus, Moses' vision of God (Exod 34:6–7) is interpreted on the literal level as indicating the invisibility of God, but at the same time on a prophetic level as indicating that "human beings shall see Him in the last times, in the depth of a rock, that is, in His coming as a man."[26] Elias' experience of the still, small voice (1 Kgs 19:11–12; Isa 42:3) is interpreted on the literal level as teaching the prophet to act more gently, and on the prophetic level as pointing out the Lord's coming as a man, following the law, in a mild and tranquil way, neither breaking the bruised reed nor quenching the smoking flax.[27] Lest the force of these prophetic experiences deceive us, the final words in Ezekiel's account of the chariot of God are recalled: "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God" (Ezek 2:1). Even here the prophet did not see God directly.

What Moses, Elias, and Ezekiel saw, Irenaeus tells us in the beginning of 4, 20, 11, were likenesses of God's glory. How, then, did the prophets see God? The prophetic seeing, like the NT seeing, is through the Word. All the life-giving seeing of God, whether in the incarnate Word of the NT or in the prophetic vision of the OT, is through the agency of the one Word of God. This is a profound argument for the unity of the two Testaments. So Irenaeus repeats the "no one shall see God and live" last quoted from Exod 33:20–22, now quoting Jn 1:18, and goes on to say: "His Word, as He Himself willed it, and for the benefit of those who beheld, showed the Father's brightness and explained His purposes . . . ;

[25] *AH* 4, 20, 8 (SC 100, 650).
[26] *AH* 4, 20, 9 (SC 100, 654).
[27] *AH* 4, 20, 10 (SC 100, 658).

not in one figure, nor in one character, did He appear to those seeing Him, but according to the reasons and effects aimed at in His dispensations . . . ."[28] It is through the Word the prophets see, according to the Father's will, and they see in multiple ways, depending on the purpose of the vision. Irenaeus then goes on to illustrate this from two apocalyptic books, Daniel in the OT and Revelation in the NT.

Although Irenaeus had said that prophecy could be in words, visions, or deeds, all the examples thus far in the chapter have been of words or visions. In the last section he turns to ways in which prophets have shown the future works of God in deeds. So he names Hosea's action in marrying a whore, which he interprets through the words of Paul, "the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the believing husband" (1 Cor 7:14), showing that God will choose from sinners a Church that will be sanctified through fellowship with His Son. Hosea's naming of his children (Hos 1:6–9) is interpreted through the "naming" of the Church in Rom 9:25,26; Moses' marriage with the Ethiopian (Exod 2:21) is interpreted through the grafting of the wild onto the cultivated olive (Rom 11:17). And the story of Rahab the harlot (Josh 2) is interpreted through the saying of Christ: "the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you" (Mt 21:31). What has happened in this section? Irenaeus shows that, on his interpretation, prophetic actions in the OT are understood in the light of the Word spoken in the NT.[29]

This paves the way for the development to come in the next chapters of the section, where Irenaeus will show the parallel between Abraham's faith (and that of all the patriarchs) and ours. He will illustrate that Christ came not just for those living in one age but "for absolutely all humans, who from the beginning, according to their capacity, in their generation have both feared and loved God, and practiced justice and piety towards their neighbors, and have earnestly desired to see Christ and to hear his voice."[30]

Christ came to bring life even to those who lived before him. It is interesting to note what Irenaeus lists as qualifications. He came for those who as far as they were able feared and loved God, were just and pious toward their neighbor, and themselves wanted to see Christ and to hear his voice. This is a fairly comprehensive summary of the two great commandments. The one Christ comes to those who love God and love their neighbor as themselves—the great command of the New Law (Mt 22:34–40) as of the Old (Deut 6:5, Lev 19:18). Even here Irenaeus is consistent in echoing the common teaching of the two covenants. His

[28] *AH* 4, 20, 11 (SC 100, 660).
[29] *AH* 4, 20, 12 (SC 100, 668–74).
[30] *AH* 4, 22, 2 (SC 100, 688).

phrasing of the law of love of neighbor in terms of the exercise of justice strikes a happy note even today.

Here it is necessary to break the presentation of Irenaeus' development of the notion of the OT as prophecy of the NT. It is evident that an understanding of the famous text concerning the human person as the glory of God which is faithful to the insight of Irenaeus requires an accounting for this context. The text is primarily about God and secondarily about us. We are God's glory as living, and our life comes from the vision of God. This vision is enriched in the NT with the coming of the Son as man among us. It is the same Word, the Son made human for us, who reveals the Father in creation and spoke through the prophets in the OT. He made God known to and through the prophets. Each of these actions springs from the loving desire of the invisible Father to manifest Himself to us that we might see God and so might live.

THE HUMAN PERSON IN IRENAEUS

But this reading of Irenaeus' text raises other questions. If he did intend to say that the true life of the human person is the vision of God, we cannot escape asking how he understood the human person. Of what sort are we, if only a sight of the divine brings us alive? Even in this area we must keep in mind the difference between the Irenaean approach and that of the Gnostics. Theodotus, a disciple of the great Gnostic Valentinus, illustrates the Gnostic approach in his list of key questions: "Who were we? What have we become? Where were we? Whither have we been cast? Whither do we hasten? From what have we been set free?"[31] Reflection oriented by such questions takes as its starting point the human dilemma. The accent is on the human being, and the movement of thought is philosophical.

Not so for Irenaeus. His point of departure is the conviction that the human situation is under the hand—or the Hands—of God. The movement of thought is theological. The bishop's examination of this question employs the biblical language of image and likeness. For him, we humans are the image of God. Yet his use of this language is quite nuanced. Jacques Fantino has demonstrated that Irenaeus distinguishes image in its varied senses from likeness and also utilizes two meanings of likeness, depending on whether likeness translates *homoiotēs* or *homoiōsis*.[32] (For convenience, I will use "similitude" for *homoiotēs*, and "likeness" for

[31] Clement of Alexandria, *Ex. Theod.* 78, 2.

[32] Jacques Fantino, *L'Homme image de Dieu chez saint Irénée de Lyon* (Paris: Cerf, 1986). In the course of developing his thesis, Fantino reviews the history of the notion of image prior to Irenaeus (4–44) and addresses the concerns of modern scholarship, e.g. the debate on the interpretation of *AH* 4, pr., 4, turning on a difference between the Latin and Armenian versions (see 118–21).

homoiōsis.) It will help to look, in turn, at Irenaeus' use of image, of similitude, and of likeness.

In the Irenaean schema the image of God in the person is in the flesh. This sense of image corresponds to form, and form inheres only in matter. Both the Gnostics and the later Alexandrian Fathers hold that the image is in the spiritual part of the human being. Irenaeus rejects this possibility explicitly.[33] Consequently the image of God in the human being must exist in matter, that is, in our very flesh.

But image so understood retains its role as revealer of the archetype; the human as human and in its flesh is revelatory of the divine. The very Hands of God modeled human beings in the divine image.[34] Since the divine is by definition formless, and image as form requires a material substratum, the archetype of the image of God in us is the incarnate Son.[35] Once more Irenaeus has called our attention to the centrality of the Incarnation.[36] In fact, Fantino reminds us that "the Son reveals the human form through His incarnation, and He also manifests that the human person is indeed in His image."[37]

The image is thus present, and present as our proper form. But this form calls for works appropriate to it. This points to another of our basic human endowments. As to be human is to bear the divine image in our very flesh, so too to be human is to be free. Irenaeus identifies our freedom of choice with the first sense of our likeness of God, the *homoiotēs*, which here I am calling "similitude."[38] Our similitude to the Creator and Father lies in our inalienable liberty of action. Irenaeus speaks of "the ancient law of human liberty."[39] We are free to do good or evil, to believe or not, and even "to accept or to refuse that gift of the Spirit which is the likeness (*homoiōsis*), which alone is able to make [the human person] pursue conduct pleasing to God."[40] This strong affirmation of human liberty is at the same time a clear rejection of the Gnostic notion of predetermined natures.[41]

To be created free, and so perfectible, is the condition of humanity.

[33] *AH* 2, 7, 6 (SC 294, 176); 2, 19, 6 (SC 294, 192–94). See Fantino, *L'Homme* 87–89.

[34] *AH* 4, 20, 1 (SC 100, 626).

[35] *Dem.* 22 (ACW 16, 61); see Fantino, *L'Homme* 103–6.

[36] Regarding the incarnate Son as salvation, Irenaeus writes: "salvation moreover, since flesh" ("salus autem, quoniam caro"): *AH* 3, 10, 3 (SC 211, 124). With respect to human flesh generally, he typically stresses the capacity of the flesh for the life given by God; see *AH* 5, 3, 3 (SC 153, 48–50).

[37] Fantino, *L'Homme* 105.

[38] *AH* 4, 37, 4 (SC 100, 932).

[39] *AH* 4, 37, 1 (SC 100, 918).

[40] Fantino, *L'Homme* 135, commenting on *AH* 4, 37, 4.

[41] *AH* 4, 37, 2 (SC 100, 922–24).

Not only individually but as a race we begin as children. Children are incapable of bearing the grandeur of God's glory. It is this glory to which the right exercise of freedom will bring us. But it is by practice that we learn to distinguish good and evil. As the process of maturation in the use of human freedom unfolds, Irenaeus tells us, "first nature appears, and then the mortal is conquered and absorbed by immortality and the corruptible by incorruptibility, and humankind becomes in the image and likeness of God, having received the knowledge of good and evil."[42] In Irenaeus' somewhat optimistic view, having discovered that an evil thing, disobedience to God, deprives us of life, we learn not to choose it. In fact, he believes that to shun this twofold knowledge and what he calls "this double faculty of perception" is, unaware, to divest oneself of the character of a human being.[43]

Both the image of the incarnate Son in the body and the similitude of the divine and paternal freedom belong to us as human beings. Yet something more is needed for the mortal to be conquered, for our corruptibility to be swallowed up in incorruptibility, for us to receive the knowledge of good and evil, and so to become in the image *and* likeness of God. We are without the likeness.

For Irenaeus, the Spirit effects the likeness. Until it is there, the human person is not whole. In Irenaean language, such a one is not "perfect." Perfection requires the likeness, and the likeness is connected with the Spirit. The question is: Does Irenaeus intend Spirit or spirit? In some places Irenaeus speaks as if the spirit in our composition is in fact the Spirit of God.[44] The perfect then are those who possess the Spirit. For example, he speaks of us receiving "a certain portion of His Spirit, for our perfection and preparation for incorruption, little by little accustoming us to choose and to bear God."[45] In other places there seems to be a clear distinction between Spirit and the human spirit. He refers to the idea that "our substance, that is, the union of flesh and spirit, receiving the Spirit of God, makes up the spiritual person."[46] Soul in this context is simply "the breath of life."[47] What are we to make of his teaching about the "spirit" in the human person?

In the overall context of the first section of *AH* 5, Irenaeus is presenting Paul's teaching on resurrection. Because of the requirements of his

[42] *AH* 4, 38, 4 (SC 100, 960).

[43] *AH* 4, 39, 1 (SC 100, 960–64).

[44] Here see A. Rousseau, who presents his arguments in a series of notes on the text of *AH* 5, 6, 1 through 7, 1. See his commentary on *AH* 5, in SC 152, 226–37.

[45] *AH* 5, 8, 1 (SC 153, 92).

[46] *AH* 5, 8, 2 (SC 153, 96).

[47] *AH* 5, 7, 1 (SC 153, 86).

methodology, he is compelled to deal with the interpretation of "flesh and blood shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (1 Cor 15:50). It is also true that this text had been used by the Gnostics in a Docetic way. Irenaeus intends to affirm the value of the flesh. He is concerned to retain the Pauline tripartite division of the human person, cited by him from 1 Thess 5:23. His analysis of other Pauline passages (Eph 1:13; 2 Cor 5:4; Rom 8) convinced him that the Spirit dwelling with us is the pledge of salvation which renders us spiritual in the present time.

Moving into *AH* 5, 9, Irenaeus repeats that the complete human being is composed of three things: flesh, soul, and spirit. He then explains that it is the role of the Spirit to save and form the person. The flesh is saved and formed. The soul is "between these two." When the soul follows the Spirit, it is raised up by it; when it sympathizes with the flesh, it falls into earthly desires.[48] In Irenaeus' opinion, the presence of the Spirit brings true life to the flesh. It is as if the capacity of the soul to follow either Spirit or flesh inserts a dynamism into the human constitution, allowing the possibility of growing unto God.[49] The importance of capacity for growth is a fundamental Irenaean insight.[50]

CONCLUSION

This raises the question of the relation between true life as described here, and fulness of life as described in the analysis of *AH* 4, 20. Irenaeus himself does not explicitly relate the two pictures he draws. However, I think that the relation of the two to one another is readily discernable. The picture portrayed in *AH* 4, 20 depicts, first of all, the movement of the economy of salvation. The one God draws all human beings to Godself. The one same God creates all through God's two Hands, the Word and Wisdom, the Son and Spirit. The same one God reveals Godself to humankind through the Son, that we might live. That revelation began in the OT, prophetically in the Spirit. It comes to another visibility in the NT in the Son. It will be completed in the resurrection, when we are in God and receive of the divine splendor. That gradual coming to the vision of God is the call of the race.

But it is also the call of the individual person. Each of us is called to fulness of life in the vision of God. The broad lines of the movement for each of us are traced in a parallel fashion. I would suggest that prior to conversion to Christ one sees God "prophetically" along the lines of the

[48] *AH* 5, 9, 1 (SC 153, 106–8).

[49] *AH* 5, 9, 3 (SC 153, 112–14).

[50] See here his analysis of why humans were not made perfect from the beginning: *AH* 4, 38, 1–4 (SC 100, 942–60). See, too, Irenaeus' comments on the "increase and multiply" of Gen 1:28: *AH* 4, 11, 1–2 (SC 100, 496–502).

OT seeings described by Irenaeus. During the postconversion earthly life one sees God "adoptively," as Irenaeus has shown us. On a daily basis this works out as the Irenaean anthropology describes it. We sense the struggle between the "flesh" and the "spirit." Through experience we learn to "choose life." It is God's dearest hope for us that ultimately in the resurrection we will come to the "paternal vision," the face-to-face seeing of glory. Then truly we will be fully alive to the glory of God.