

IRENÆUS AND THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

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[Editor's Note: Irenaeus understood Jesus' baptism as both soteriologically necessary, inasmuch as the descent of the Spirit equipped Jesus with divine gifts for his messianic ministry, and christologically effective, inasmuch as this equipping brought about a real development in the divine-human relationship. The author explores these issues in dialogue with the research of Antonio Orbe and Ysabel de Andia, and concludes that Irenaeus understood Jesus' baptism as one of several key filial moments by which the humanity of Christ was progressively deified.]

IRENÆUS OF LYONS in Book 3 of his *Adversus Haereses* (c. 180) displays a remarkable interest in Jesus' baptism and the accompanying anointing by the Spirit. He uses Jesus' baptism primarily to demonstrate that it is the Spirit of God and not some other entity that descends upon Jesus at the Jordan. "Christ did not at that time descend upon Jesus, neither was Christ one and Jesus another; but the Word of God—who is the Savior of all, and the ruler of heaven and earth, who is Jesus, as I have already pointed out, who did also take upon him flesh, and was anointed by the Spirit from the Father—was made Jesus Christ . . ." (*Adv. haer.* 3.9.3).¹ Irenaeus's concern is to affirm the unity of Jesus Christ and the presence of the Word in Jesus' suffering, death, and Resurrection (*Adv. haer.* 3.16.6). Beyond this, however, he claims that Christ, in his human nature, received through

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¹ English citations from *Against the Heresies* [hereafter *Adv. haer.*] are taken (with some adjustments) from Alexander Roberts, W. Rambaut, trans., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. A. Roberts, James Donaldson et al., 10 vols. (Edinburgh: 1867–97; reprint Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950–51) 1.315–567. For Latin text and Greek fragments, see *Irénee de Lyon: Contre les hérésies. Edition critique*, ed. Adelin Rousseau et al., Sources Chrétiennes [=SC] vols. 100, 152–53, 210–11, 263–64, 293–94 (Paris: Cerf, 1965–82). English citations of *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* [hereafter *Demo.*] are taken from *St. Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, Joseph P. Smith, ed. and trans., Ancient Christian Writers 16 (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1952). See also A. Rousseau, ed., *Irénee de Lyon: Demonstration de la prédication apostolique*, SC 406 (Paris: Cerf, 1995). I wish to thank Professor John Egan, S.J., of Regis College, Toronto, for his useful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

the anointing by the Spirit a gift of divine attributes in the interest of the economy of salvation (*Adv. haer.* 3.9.3).

Recently in this journal and elsewhere Kilian McDonnell has demonstrated the importance of Jesus' baptism as "a major mystery in the eyes of the early church."² My purpose in this article is to explore more closely both the soteriological and the christological implications of Irenaeus's theology of Jesus' baptism. I will explore, particularly in dialogue with the work of Antonio Orbe³ and Ysabel de Andia,⁴ the purposes and effects of the anointing, the timing and extent of Jesus' experience of the Spirit, the deification of the humanity of Christ, and the related question of filial adoption. Since Irenaeus's innovation regarding Jesus' baptism is best demonstrated by means of a brief comparison with his closest predecessor, Justin Martyr, I begin with this comparison.

JUSTIN AND IRENAEUS ON JESUS' BAPTISM

Several themes common in the early interpretation of Jesus' baptism occur in the writings of Justin Martyr.⁵ Of particular importance in Justin is the idea that Christ himself had no need of baptism, either for the remission of sins or for the regenerative or empowering anointing by the Spirit. Uneasiness with the fact of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptizer is clear even in Matthew 3:14–15, where the difficulty is with the greater being baptized by the lesser. In other early writings—and Justin (in particular *Dialogue with Trypho* 87–88) is a good example—the problem results from viewing Jesus' baptism in terms analogous to either the baptism of John or the baptism of Christians (that is, for the remission of sins or for regeneration, respectively).⁶ For Justin, since Jesus was clearly not baptized for his own sins, the baptism must have been oriented toward the establishment of our salvation. Just as Christ also had no need of submitting to being born and crucified, and here Justin emphasizes both the pre-existence and the passion, he underwent baptism for the sake of the human race (*Dial.* 88). Thus Justin

² Kilian McDonnell, "Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan," *TS* 56 (1995) 209–36, at 210, and his *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: The Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1996).

³ Antonio Orbe, *La Unción del Verbo*, vol. 3 of *Estudios Valentinianos*, Analecta Gregoriana 113 (Rome: Gregorian University, 1961); "¿San Ireneo Adopcionista? En torno a *adv. haer.* III, 19, 1," *Gregorianum* 65 (1984) 5–52; *Introducción a la teología de los siglos II y III*, 2 vols., Analecta Gregoriana 248 (Rome: Gregorian University, 1987); "El Espíritu en el bautismo de Jesús (en torno a san Ireneo)," *Gregorianum* 76 (1995) 663–99. English translations of the Spanish and French sources are my own.

⁴ Ysabel de Andia, *Homo vivens: Incorruptibilité et divinisation de l'homme selon Irénée de Lyon* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1986).

⁵ Daniel Vigne, *Christ au Jourdain: Le baptême de Jésus dans la tradition judéo-chrétienne*, *Études Bibliques* n.s. 16 (Paris: Gabalda, 1992) 72–75.

⁶ For example, *The Gospel of Philip* 77; *The Gospel of the Nazareans* 2; see McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus* 61. Orbe discusses this theme in later authors, Melito, Clement of Alexandria, Methodius, Hilary and others (*La Unción del Verbo* 46–52).

seems to give the baptism a salvific importance similar to Jesus' Incarnation and death.

The anointing by the Spirit also created a problem for Justin. As Trypho says, "How can you prove that Christ already existed, since he is endowed with those gifts of the Holy Spirit which [Isaiah 11:1-2 attributes] to him as though he lacked them?" (*Dial.* 87).⁷ Justin interpreted the resting of the Spirit upon Jesus as signifying the cessation of prophetic gifts at the coming of the Messiah, an idea current in Jewish apocalyptic literature.⁸ But the possibility that Jesus received spiritual gifts at his baptism would suggest a need on his part, and consequently the Word's pre-existence and divinity would be placed in jeopardy. For Justin held that by virtue of the Incarnation Jesus Christ possessed all divine powers, already from his birth in Bethlehem. The fact that the pagan Magi were able to adore the infant Christ means that they were exorcized by him (*Dial.* 78).⁹ Thus there was no need for a further gift at the baptism, so that the anointing at the baptism becomes only a manifestation of Jesus as the Son of God (*Dial.* 88).¹⁰ As Albert Houssiau has written, "Justin reduced the event of the baptism to a simple sign of Christ's power, because in understanding Jesus' messianic role as a function not of the Spirit but of the divinity of the Word, he eliminated the possibility of any real effect by the Spirit-anointing at the baptism."¹¹

In showing that the baptismal anointing by the Spirit served only to manifest Jesus as the Messiah, Justin drew upon a tradition that adds the latter part of Psalm 2:7 ("today I have begotten you") to the words of the voice from heaven in Luke 3:22.¹² Justin cites the Lukan variant twice, the more significant citation occurring in *Dial.* 88:

The Holy Spirit for the sake of humanity descended upon him in the form of a dove, and at the same instant a voice out of the heavens spoke the same words which had also been uttered by David when he, in the person of Christ, spoke

⁷ English citations from Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* are taken from Thomas B. Falls, trans., *The Writings of Saint Justin Martyr, Fathers of the Church* 6 (New York: Christian Heritage, 1948). For the Greek text, see Georges Archambault, *Justin: Dialogue avec Tryphon. Texte grec, traduction française, introduction, notes et index*, 2 vols. (Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1909).

⁸ See Philippe Henne, "Pourquoi le Christ fut-il baptisé? La réponse de Justin," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 77 (1993) 567-83, at 571-72.

⁹ *Ibid.* 573; see also Albert Houssiau, *La Christologie de Saint Irénée*, Universitas Catholica Lovaniensis Dissertationes 3.1 (Louvain: Publications Universitaires; Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1955) 173.

¹⁰ Henne, "Pourquoi le Christ fut-il baptisé?" 576, 582.

¹¹ Houssiau, *Christologie de Saint Irénée* 184. Orbe credits Justin with a fuller grasp of the implications of the Spirit-anointing for the human nature of Christ ("¿San Ireneo Adopcionista?" 24-26).

¹² The variant occurs in the so-called "Western text," in the *Gospel of the Ebionites*, and in Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Methodius, Hilary, and in Latin manuscripts used by Augustine. Both Vigne (*Christ au Jourdain* 106-32) and McDonnell (*The Baptism of Jesus* 87) suggest that the variant is the original wording of Luke 3:22.

what was later to be said to Christ by the Father: "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee," meaning that his birth really began for the human race when they first realized who he was.

Justin read the text as referring to the manifestation of Jesus as the Son and the beginning of his ministry. He used a play on words to equate the birth (*genesis*) announced by the heavenly voice with the knowledge (*gnosis*) of Jesus as the Son of God. However, Orbe thinks that Justin by his use of the term "birth" had more in mind than merely a metaphor for manifestation. He argues that Justin believed that Jesus received "new birth" at his baptism, first in order to grant it to humanity, and second in order that he might be equipped for divine acts.¹³ As will be seen later, this is essentially the same reading that Orbe gives to Irenæus,¹⁴ but that reading is not necessary. Not only is it better to read *genesis* in light of *gnosis*, but, as I have already noted, Jesus was understood as already equipped for divine acts by virtue of the Incarnation. In addition, Justin also likened the baptism to the entry into Jerusalem: both occurred so that Jesus' true identity could be manifested to humanity (*Dial.* 88.6).¹⁵

Irenæus's reflections on Jesus' baptism are based, as Daniel Vigne has shown, on the idea that Jesus, by virtue of the descent of the Spirit, was consecrated as Messiah at the baptism, an emphasis seen already in the Gospel of Mark.¹⁶ "In the same way as Justin, Irenæus (in *Adv. haer.* 3.9.3) situated the baptism in a soteriological perspective: it is in order that humanity might participate in the messianic fullness that the Spirit descends upon Jesus. The purpose of the anointing is none other than Christ's mission on behalf of humanity."¹⁷ But in Irenæus, Jesus' baptism takes on important christological dimensions, precisely because the gifts of the Spirit (*Adv. haer.* 3.9.3; Isaiah 11:1–4; 61:1–2) are divine endowments by which the humanity of Jesus is equipped for ministry as the Messiah. Hence other christological issues are also raised by Irenæus in his treatment of Jesus' baptism: the effect of the anointing on the humanity of Christ; the timing of Jesus' full posses-

¹³ "Jesus the man was born to new life, gifted with the Spirit for new physically divine acts" (Orbe, "¿San Ireneo Adopcionista?" 26).

¹⁴ Orbe makes Justin the originator of what he calls the "ecclesiastical" solution of the problem of Jesus' baptism, which he argues Irenæus took up (*ibid.* 35–36), but this view is not supported by a comparison of Justin, *Dial.* 87–88 and Irenæus, *Adv. haer.* 3.

¹⁵ See McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus* 42–44.

¹⁶ John P. Meier argues convincingly that the Markan baptism narrative (Mark 1:9–11), probably the earliest interpretation of Jesus' baptism, takes the form of "a Christian 'midrash,' a learned use of various OT texts to present the reader of the Gospel with an initial interpretation of who Jesus is." The texts alluded to include Isaiah 11:2, 42:1, 61:1; Psalm 2:7. "[T]he message of the theophany [is that] the Son of God, the royal Davidic Messiah, is anointed with God's spirit to be the final prophet and servant of the Lord sent to a sinful people" (*A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 2 vols., Anchor Bible Reference Library [New York: Doubleday, 1991–] 2.106–7).

¹⁷ Vigne, *Christ au Jourdain* 79.

sion of the Spirit; the connection between the indwelling of the Spirit in Christ and in humanity.¹⁸

Irenaeus differs significantly from Justin in how he makes soteriology the center of his christological reflection. Justin's soteriological answer to the problem of Jesus' baptism preserves the christological axiom of pre-existence, which is his starting point. Bernard Sesboüé has observed in regard to Justin that "all his meditation on the identity of Jesus comes from his understanding of the passion, Resurrection and ascension."¹⁹ This includes reflection on christological titles (such as Word and Wisdom) and axioms (such as pre-existence).²⁰ In contrast to Christology "from above" or "from below," Sesboüé describes this kind of Christology as a movement "from ahead" (*d'avant en arrière*). As a result of Jesus Christ's full revelation in the Resurrection, certain titles are predicated of his earthly existence, and reflection moves "from the *end* to the *beginning* of Jesus' itinerary" (that is, even beyond his career to his pre-existence).²¹ But, according to Sesboüé, a later shift to Christology beginning with Irenaeus focuses on who Christ must be in order for our salvation to be realized: " 'Such is the reason,' wrote Irenaeus before many others, 'why the Word was made man and the Son of God made the Son of man: so that man [*ho anthropos*], in being mingled with the Word and in receiving in this way the filial adoption, becomes the Son of God' (*Adv. haer.* 3.19.1). If this is the case, everything that calls into question his humanity, his divinity, and his unity immediately attacks the reality of our salvation."²²

What Sesboüé is here referring to is none other than the soteriological principle that "what is not assumed (by Christ) is not saved (by him)." This principle, spelled out in greater clarity by later theologians, is actually already present in the writings of the Gnostics whom Irenaeus opposed.²³ Sesboüé's remarks, as we shall see, apply to Irenaeus's reading of Jesus' baptism in several ways. First, Irenaeus maintained the unity of Jesus Christ by affirming the reality of the Spirit's descent; but then, in order not to compromise the divinity of Christ, he

¹⁸ See the discussion in McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus* 116–23.

¹⁹ Bernard Sesboüé, *Pédagogie du Christ* (Paris: Cerf, 1995) 68.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 67.

²¹ *Ibid.* 46–68, at 58 (emphasis original). Sesboüé also says of the authors from Clement of Rome to Justin that "their arguments begin from the titulature of the glorified Christ . . . to the consideration of the pre-existence of the Word sent by God" (*ibid.* 66).

²² *Ibid.* 69–70. As will be seen below, the text Sesboüé cites is problematic on a number of levels.

²³ Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 115. For example, Irenaeus describes the Gnostic view of the Savior, how as a spiritual (*pneumatikos*) being he assumed an animal or ensouled (*psychikos*) body but had no part in the material (*somatikos*), for the material cannot be saved (*Adv. haer.* 1.6.1). Irenaeus recognized the soteriological principle as a valid theological tactic and, against his opponents, applied it to matter: because he wished to affirm that the material is saved in Christ, he showed that it was assumed by Christ (see *Adv. haer.* 3.18.7; 5.14.2).

stated that the Spirit-anointing affects only the humanity. And because the flesh of Christ is in essence true human flesh, Irenæus held that the presence of the Spirit effects, albeit progressively, its deification. Irenæus used the metaphor of filial adoption to make this point. Thus for him, Jesus' baptism and particularly his anointing by the Spirit become soteriologically important not only because of the external effects on behalf of believers but because of the internal implications for Jesus himself. In other words, although for Irenæus Jesus' baptism is oriented toward the economy of salvation, it is not in his view without christological consequences.

SOTERIOLOGICAL NECESSITY OF JESUS' BAPTISM

The primary concern of Irenæus in his reflections on Jesus' baptism was to affirm the unity of Jesus Christ. He needed only to cite the Gospels to demonstrate that it is the Spirit of God and no other entity that descended upon Jesus at his baptism:

And then, speaking of his baptism, Matthew says, "The heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God, as a dove, coming upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." For Christ did not at that time descend upon Jesus, neither was Christ one and Jesus another; but the Word of God—who is the savior of all, and the ruler of heaven and earth, who is Jesus, as I have already pointed out, who did also take upon him flesh, and was anointed by the Spirit from the Father—was made Jesus Christ . . . (*Adv. haer.* 3.9.3).

When Irenæus affirmed the Spirit's descent, he negated conflicting claims concerning the protagonist of the anointing. Irenæus's Gnostic opponents suggested that it was an aeon, either the Christ or the Savior, that descended upon Jesus (e.g., *Adv. haer.* 3.9.3 and 3.17.1 respectively); other aeons, including the Word and the Only-begotten also figure in different Gnostic doctrines of the descent. The opponents taught that none of these figures were incarnate (*Adv. haer.* 3.11.3), but that such heavenly figures descended upon Jesus at the baptism, to ascend only prior to his passion, thereby retaining their impassibility (*Adv. haer.* 3.17.4).

Irenæus wished above all to preserve two elements of doctrine: first, that the suffering, death, and Resurrection of Jesus is predicated of one who is Christ, Savior, Word incarnate and Only-begotten (*Adv. haer.* 3.9.3; 3.18.3); second, that as the Word made flesh Jesus Christ effected the recapitulation of the human race: ". . . and thus he took up humanity 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" (3.16.6). Irenæus was able to affirm these teachings because, by denying that any other entity than the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus at the Jordan, he maintained the unity of Jesus Christ. Further, he drew material from the four Gospels, the speeches

in Acts, and the letters of Paul, adducing numerous instances where New Testament authors affirm that Jesus, the Christ, the Savior, the Word, and the Only-begotten are all one and the same (*Adv. haer.* 3.9–18).

Another significant implication of Irenaeus's refusal of the Gnostic alternative can be noted. He spoke of Jesus as anointed by the Holy Spirit, rather than as being merely the receptacle of the Christ or the Savior (*Adv. haer.* 3.16.1), thereby implying the agency of a third party, the one who anoints. Irenaeus wrote explicitly of Jesus being anointed with the Holy Spirit by the Father (e.g. *Adv. haer.* 3.9.3),²⁴ thus making the Father the agent or principal cause of the anointing.²⁵ In one place in particular he drew an interesting conclusion, implied in the name "Christ," from the fact of the anointing:

For 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, as the Word declares by Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me,"—pointing out both the anointing Father, the anointed Son, and the unction, which is the Spirit (*Adv. haer.* 3.18.3).

To make God the Father the principal agent of the anointing is to involve the Father directly in the salvation of humanity, an impossibility in the Gnostic schema. Further, this etymology affirms the unity of God's activity in the divine economy; and to affirm this unity is to deny the multiplicity of agents within the Gnostic pleroma. It is tempting to see a trinitarian reference in this passage, but technically this is not possible, for Irenaeus did not appear to conceive of the Spirit as a distinct person, but rather as the Spirit or power of the Father, or (in the case of the conception) as the divinity of the Son.²⁶

The emphasis that Irenaeus placed on the baptism or anointing in terms of the name of Christ also appears in *Adv. haer.* 3.9.3, but with

²⁴ See de Andia, *Homo vivens* 189, who suggests that there is sometimes confusion in Irenaeus as to whether the Father anoints Jesus with the Spirit or whether the Spirit anoints Jesus.

²⁵ Orbe, *Introducción* 2.675.

²⁶ See especially *Adv. haer.* 5.1.3, where Irenaeus saw the Spirit's involvement in the conception of Jesus Christ (Luke 1:35) as the direct activity of the Father ("the Most High God the Father of all, who effected the Incarnation of this being"). Orbe says that "the allusion to the three divine persons is only apparent. . . . The *chris*m is the dynamic *Pneuma* that comes from the substance of the Father (that is, the power of the Father) and is granted to the Son" (*Introducción* 2.677). Similarly, Enrique Fabbri prefers the term "the divine life" to Spirit ("El bautismo de Jesús y la Unción del Espíritu," *Ciencia y Fe* 12/45 (1956) 7–42). Jacques Fantino, on the other hand, argues that the Holy Spirit in Irenaeus is eternal, divine, and (probably) personal, but does not see this text as trinitarian because the eternity of the Spirit makes a temporally fixed anointing impossible. The Spirit-anointing of Jesus occurred only to make possible the gift of the Spirit to humanity (*La théologie d'Irénée: Lecture des Écritures en réponse à l'exégèse gnostique. Une approche trinitaire*, *Cogitatio Fidei* 180 [Paris: Cerf, 1994] 378–81). Both McDonnell (*The Baptism of Jesus* 119) and de Andia (*Homo vivens* 190) consider *Adv. haer.* 3.18.3 trinitarian.

a different nuance. "For Christ did not at that time descend upon Jesus, neither was Christ one and Jesus another; but the Word of God—who is the Savior of all, and the ruler of heaven and earth, who is Jesus, as I have already pointed out, who did also take upon him flesh, and was anointed by the Spirit from the Father—was made Jesus Christ . . ." (3.9.3). The title "Christ" therefore derives from the baptism as the unique designation of the Spirit-anointed Word incarnate. The connection between the baptism and the messianic name "Christ" is repeated later in *Adv. haer.* 3.12.7: "[The apostle Peter] witnessed that Jesus was himself the Son of God, who also, having been anointed with the Holy Spirit, is called Jesus Christ."

Nevertheless, it does not seem quite correct to suggest, as McDonnell does, that Irenaeus believes that Jesus is the Christ only after the descent of the Spirit.²⁷ In *Against the Heresies* 3.16, Irenaeus went to great lengths to prove from the New Testament writings that Jesus did not become Christ or receive Christ at the anointing, but that as the Word incarnate he was the Christ from the time of conception in the womb of Mary. "Matthew might certainly have said, 'Now the birth of *Jesus* was on this wise'; but the Holy Spirit, foreseeing the corruptors and guarding by anticipation against their deceit, says by Matthew, 'Now the birth of *Christ* was on this wise'; . . . so that we should not imagine that Jesus was one, and Christ another, but should know them to be one and the same" (*Adv. haer.* 3.16.2). Thus, although the title "Christ" derives both in etymology and in fact from the anointing, Irenaeus also held that the title is applicable to the entire existence of the Word incarnate.

Up to this point, the significance of Jesus' baptism according to Irenaeus has been seen chiefly as revelatory. In other words, when the baptism is rightly understood, it illustrates certain truths about Christ: the unity of his person, and his role in a unitary divine purpose for salvation. Be that as it may, Irenaeus does affirm that something substantial occurs at the Jordan. The best place to begin is with Irenaeus's view of the purpose of Jesus' baptism.

The Spirit-Anointing as Equipment for Messianic Ministry

Irenaeus described first the purpose of Jesus' anointing in *Against the Heresies* 3.9.3 with the quotation of two passages from Isaiah (11: 1–4 and 61:1–2). The first relates the effect of the anointing—right and just judgment—to the sevenfold nature of the Spirit resting upon the Messiah; the second text sees the manifold ministry of the Anointed One as the result of the anointing by the Spirit of God. The immediate context in which he cites Isaiah 11 is the argument that the Word

²⁷ "From the moment the Spirit descends and anoints the Lord at the Jordan, this Jesus is called 'the Christ'. Before the baptism Jesus is not the Christ. The baptism is a clear messianic boundary" (McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus* 118).

made flesh was made Jesus Christ through the anointing by the Spirit (as opposed to the idea that the Christ descended upon Jesus at the Jordan). Isaiah 11 is used here as a proof-text primarily to support the view, already substantiated by Matthew 3:16, that Jesus' baptism is the occasion of the anointing by the Spirit. But the text also serves to enumerate the special endowments or attributes received in the anointing that are expressly linked to the character of the Spirit who anoints: "The Spirit of God shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, of knowledge and piety, and of the fear of the Lord" (*Adv. haer.* 3.9.3). These endowments are particularly played out in the Messiah's enactment of just judgment (Isaiah 11:4).

In introducing Isaiah 61:1-2, Irenaeus went on to indicate that both Jesus' anointing and its purpose had been predicted by Isaiah. Irenaeus read Isaiah 11 as referring to the multifarious attributes of the anointing Spirit, but his reading of Isaiah 61 emphasized the different ways the ministry of the Anointed One is manifested: in preaching the gospel, healing the broken hearted, proclaiming liberty to captives and sight to the blind, announcing the acceptable day of the Lord and the day of vengeance, and comforting those who mourn. The fact of the Messiah's call to this manifold ministry (61:1) is evidence that the Spirit of God anointed him. Importantly, Irenaeus connected this ministry, particularly the preaching of the gospel to the lowly, with the anointing of the Word incarnate as man. "Inasmuch as the Word of God was man from the root of Jesse, and son of Abraham, in this respect did the Spirit of God rest upon him, and anoint him to preach the gospel to the lowly" (*Adv. haer.* 3.9.3). The Word incarnate as man—that is, in his human nature—receives the anointing by the Spirit of God so that he may be equipped to perform saving acts. As Orbe says, "If the Word wishes to save humanity, the Word must be anointed as a human being."²⁸

In summary, then, whereas Irenaeus cited Isaiah 11 to indicate the divine attributes that Jesus received as a result of his anointing with the Spirit, he cited Isaiah 61 to show that this anointing was received in Jesus' human nature and was directed toward the messianic ministry. Elsewhere, in an implicit reference to Jesus' baptism, Irenaeus noted that the sevenfold gift of Isaiah 11 was received through the Spirit-anointing of Jesus' humanity. "The Spirit of God in his indwelling is manifold, and is enumerated by Isaiah the prophet in the seven charismata resting on the Son of God, that is, the Word, in his coming as man" (*Demo.* 9).²⁹ Yet there seems to be in Irenaeus, as there was in

²⁸ Orbe, *La Unción del Verbo* 510; see also de Andia, *Homo vivens* 191.

²⁹ The alternative here is that "in his coming as man" refers not to the baptism but to the Incarnation; however, Irenaeus, even in two different documents, could not have seen the gifts of the Spirit enumerated in Isaiah 11 as originating both at the conception and at the baptism.

Justin (*Dial.* 88), the idea that Jesus as Word incarnate already possessed as divine attributes proper to the Word certain of the qualities mentioned in Isaiah 11, in particular the exercise of just judgment.

In *Adv. haer.* 3.9.3 Irenaeus wrote of Jesus Christ that “inasmuch as he was God, he did not judge according to glory, nor reprove after the manner of speech.” Following this second allusion to Isaiah 11:4, Irenaeus quotes John 2:25 to emphasize that Christ had no need of human testimony, and Proverbs 5:22 to show that what he brought was liberty from the bonds of sin. “Therefore did the Spirit of God descend upon him . . . so that we, receiving from the abundance of his unction, might be saved.” Irenaeus seems to have viewed the exercise of just judgment, in the context of the citation of John 2:25, as a mark of divinity, a quality proper to the Word inasmuch as he is God.

Orbe, however, considers that for Irenaeus just judgment is a result of the anointing by the Spirit, as the first citation of Isaiah 11:1–4 implies, and not one of the prebaptismal divine qualities of the Word incarnate. He writes: “The baptismal anointing in the Spirit of God . . . anoints Jesus, Son of God according to the flesh for his salvific effort, as man and as God. . . . The sevenfold anointing of the humanity of the Word equips him fully with the seven gifts, for the saving mission, as man and as God.”³⁰ According to Orbe, then, the Word made flesh is anointed with the Spirit as man, but the effects of this anointing are played out in divinely empowered saving acts that are either intrinsically human (preaching the good news) or intrinsically divine (just judgment). Acts such as the latter ought more properly to be seen as activities of the Word incarnate inasmuch as he was God. As Irenaeus wrote elsewhere concerning Isaiah 11:

But the words “He shall not judge according to appearances, nor reprove according to report, but he shall give just judgment to the lowly and have pity on the lowly of the earth” show his divinity more strongly. For to judge without acceptance of persons or partiality, not favoring the noble, but rendering to the lowly what is right and equitable and fair, corresponds to the exaltation and sublimity of God’s justice, for God is not subject to influence, and favors none but the just man; and to have pity is especially proper to God, to Him who can also save out of pity (*Demo.* 60).

In the same passage Irenaeus affirmed that certain attributes are more properly predicated of Christ’s human nature, and others of his divinity: “But in saying ‘His loins shall be girded with justice, and his flanks clad in truth’ [Isaiah] announces his outward human form, and his inward supreme justice.”

It is difficult to arrive at a clear view of Irenaeus’s thought here, especially when *Against the Heresies* 3.9.3 is read with the passages from the *Demonstration* in view. On the one hand, the sevenfold gift and its resulting evidence (just judgment) are available to Jesus, the

³⁰ Orbe, “El Espíritu en el bautismo de Jesús” 670, 672.

Word incarnate, through the anointing by the Spirit (*Adv. haer.* 3.9.3 and *Demo.* 9). This, as noted, is the point of the citation of Isaiah 11:1–4. Furthermore, Irenaeus believed that the baptismal Spirit-anointing only applied to Christ's humanity, since, although Irenaeus noted that "inasmuch as the Word of God was man . . . in this respect did the Spirit of God rest upon him," he did not write that the Word was anointed by the Spirit "inasmuch as he was God." But on the other hand, Irenaeus did write in the same passage that "inasmuch as he was God" Christ exhibited such just judgment; and elsewhere he noted similarly that just judgment "shows his divinity more strongly" (*Demo.* 60). It is difficult to affirm that Christ's ability to judge justly is both a sign of his divinity and one of the gifts of the anointing—especially given that Irenaeus argues the anointing only affected the humanity of Christ.

Orbe's solution is somewhat convoluted: the Word incarnate is anointed "according to the flesh," but Jesus is equipped both "as man and as God" for his salvific mission through the anointing.³¹ In this scenario, Irenaeus is saying that Jesus received the Spirit's gifts as human and God, and as human and God he made use of the gifts for saving acts, although only as human (that is, in his humanity) was the Word incarnate anointed by the Spirit. The difficulty here probably arises from Irenaeus. In spite of his emphasis on the unity of Jesus Christ, Irenaeus separated the two natures in affirming that some activities are more properly human and others more properly divine. Elsewhere in Book 3 he wrote that the Word "remained quiescent" in order that Jesus could be tempted, dishonored, crucified, and put to death, but that the human nature was "swallowed up in the divine" when Christ conquered, endured, performed acts of kindness, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven (*Adv. haer.* 3.19.1). As Richard Norris notes, "In spite of his insistence that the Incarnation means that the Word 'becomes' and so simply 'is' *anthropos*, Irenaeus is clear that Logos and humanity are distinguishable in Christ. Furthermore, he allows that there are things which Jesus does, or which happen to him, in virtue of his humanity alone."³² The emphasis on the reality of Christ's humanity means that imitation is possible for the believer,³³ but the christological problem is that Irenaeus has no sense of a unity of subject in spite of the two natures, an understanding that only developed after the Council of Chalcedon in 451. In the case of Jesus' baptism, Irenaeus seems to have had trouble reconciling his two views: that Jesus is anointed with the Spirit as man, but not as God; and that

³¹ *Ibid.* 670, 672. Orbe notes that for Irenaeus the divine saving acts, for which the anointing equipped Jesus Christ, include his suffering, death, and Resurrection (*ibid.* 692).

³² Richard A. Norris, "The Problems of Human Identity in Patristic Christological Speculation," in *Studia Patristica* 17, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone, 3 vols. (Oxford: Pergamon, 1982) 1.147–59, at 152.

³³ *Ibid.*

some of the seven gifts that result from the anointing are predicated of the Word, and some of the humanity of Christ.

The Baptismal Anointing and the Outpouring of the Spirit

Irenaeus understood the anointing to be soteriologically necessary for a second reason: it makes the gift of the Spirit available to humanity. The outpouring of the Spirit upon humanity is only possible because the Spirit, in the baptismal anointing and indwelling of Jesus, becomes accustomed to dwelling in human flesh.³⁴

For God promised that in the last times he would pour the Spirit upon his servants and handmaids, that they might prophesy; wherefore he also did descend upon the Son of God, made the Son of man, becoming accustomed in fellowship with Him to dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings, 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 (*Adv. haer.* 3.17.1).

Irenaeus emphasized, through a catena of scriptural allusions and quotations,³⁵ that the Spirit who descends upon Jesus at the baptism is the same Spirit who is given to humanity. The Spirit could not dwell in human flesh apart from first becoming accustomed to such a relationship. The flesh of Jesus, by virtue of the Incarnation, was more suitable to the indwelling of the Spirit—as the means of allowing the Spirit to become accustomed to dwelling in human flesh—than was the flesh of any other human being. Only the Word incarnate was conceived by the Spirit, and only the Christ is anointed by the Spirit; thus, “this ‘union’ of Spirit and flesh . . . could only have taken place in the flesh of the Word.”³⁶

Commentators typically use the category of communicability to convey Irenaeus’s view of the necessity of the baptismal anointing to the outpouring of the Spirit. The anointing, seen as the union of the Spirit with Jesus’ flesh, is necessary to the salvation of humanity at the very least because the prior union, of Word and flesh, is incommunicable. De Andia says that “what Christ communicates to us is not his divinity united (hypostatically) to his humanity, but the Holy Spirit who transformed his flesh into glorious flesh. . . .”³⁷ Similarly, Orbe distinguishes between the *Logos-sarx* union that results from the Incarnation, and the *Pneuma-sarx* union that results from the baptismal

³⁴ See also *Adv. haer.* 3.17.2–4.

³⁵ Irenaeus refers to the Synoptic baptismal accounts as well as to Isaiah 11:2; 61:2; Matthew 10:20; 28:19; Joel 3:1–5; and Acts 2:17–18.

³⁶ De Andia, *Homo vivens* 191–92.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 206. De Andia’s reference to the hypostatic union here is not judicious. Irenaeus himself would not have had recourse to this use of *hypostasis* as indicating the union of the two natures in one person; further, as already seen in *Adv. haer.* 3.19.3, Irenaeus seemed to have difficulty maintaining the union in the context of certain activities he believed were proper to one or the other of the two natures.

anointing: the former is "personal" and incommunicable, the latter dynamic and communicable.³⁸

Irenaeus would likewise distinguish between the Incarnation and the baptism; however, he probably would not use Orbe's double framework, for, though inconsistent on this point, he does not depict the baptism as the incarnate Word's first experience of the Spirit. The conception could be seen as a *Pneuma-sarx* union prior to the baptism, but Irenaeus is not consistent in how he interprets Spirit as the agent of the conception. On the one hand, Orbe is correct to read "the power of the Father" for Holy Spirit in the exegesis of Luke 1:35 in *Adv. haer.* 5.1.3.³⁹ "Vain also are the Ebionites, . . . who do not choose to understand that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, and the power of the Most High did overshadow her: wherefore also what was generated was a holy thing, and the Son of the Most High God the Father of all, who effected the Incarnation of this being . . ." (*Adv. haer.* 5.1.3). The parallelism in Luke 1:35 makes natural the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is nothing other than "the power of the Most High." This meaning of Spirit would not be problematic in the situation of the baptism. But on the other hand, Spirit in connection with the Incarnation sometimes connotes the divinity of Christ or the Word (*Demo.* 71; see also *Adv. haer.* 3.10.2),⁴⁰ a meaning Irenaeus could not attribute to the baptismal anointing since he affirmed that the divinity of the Word is already present in Jesus Christ by virtue of the Incarnation (see, for example, *Adv. haer.* 3.9.3). In still other instances, the meaning of "Spirit" is not clear at all (*Demo.* 59). This ambiguity makes it difficult to see how Irenaeus understood the connection between the conception and the baptism as Spirit events. The result is a similar ambiguity among the commentators. The use of Spirit language to describe the beginning of the Incarnation has led some commentators to conclude that Irenaeus held that Christ was in full possession of the Spirit from the time of conception, but in order to do so they must minimize what Irenaeus stated about the baptism and the gifts of the Spirit.⁴¹

³⁸ Orbe, *Introducción* 2.670. Again, Irenaeus did not think of the incarnational union in terms of the category of "person."

³⁹ Antonio Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo: Comentario al Libro V del "Adversus haereses,"* 3 vols., Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos 25, 29, 33 (Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1985-88) 1.94. See also *Demo.* 51: "that the very God himself forms him from the womb, that is, that he would be born of the Spirit of God" (exegeting Isaiah 49:5-6). Yet Irenaeus can also view the conception of Christ as the work of the Word (Orbe, *Introducción* 2.666).

⁴⁰ See also *Demo.* 71, where Irenaeus stated both that Christ is [the?] Spirit and that the flesh of Christ was made by his Spirit.

⁴¹ Fabbri, for instance, stresses the role of the Spirit ("the divine life") in the Incarnation to the exclusion of the baptism. "Jesus is totally perfect through the singular privilege of his divine person. . . . The Spirit completes its function in the moment in which the Word unites personally a human nature with the divinity" ("El bautismo de Jesús" 12; note another anachronistic reference to unity of "person"). If the "divine life" at work in the Incarnation is simply divinity, then an additional gift at the baptism

Since the anointing by the Spirit actually gave new and special empowerment to Jesus in the form of divine attributes, and since these gifts are given to Jesus Christ "inasmuch as he was man," one can say that what is soteriologically necessary has important christological implications, or that soteriological necessity becomes christological necessity. Jesus, as man and in spite of the Incarnation of the Word, had special need of the anointing and indwelling of the Spirit of God, particularly for the accomplishment of the divine economy. "The Son of God needed to be anointed with the Spirit, as man, because of the plan to save humanity."⁴² This is played out in the relationship between the divine Spirit and the humanity of Jesus.

CHRISTOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF JESUS' BAPTISM

Some commentators insist that, for Irenaeus, there is no real or substantial internal effect of the anointing by the Spirit at the Jordan on the incarnate Word. For example, E. Fabbri writes:

The human nature of Christ presents itself as the example of complete renewal. Through its unique union with the Word, it is fully indwelt with the divine life. In Christ's human nature, the Spirit finds its perfect dwelling place. Jesus' baptism is the sign that the Father wishes to communicate this Spirit to human beings, and to realize in them, through participation, that which Jesus Christ had in a full and perfect way by virtue of the union of Word and flesh.⁴³

Fabbri considers that the baptism of the Spirit has no real effect on the flesh of Jesus, for because that flesh was already united with the Word, Jesus Christ was already in full possession of "the divine life." The baptism only manifests Jesus as the true Messiah on whom the Spirit rests in the fullness of its gifts; the gifts result from the Incarnation, not the baptismal anointing, and are only made manifest at the Jordan.⁴⁴ The baptism merely signals the beginning of the messianic ministry, since because of the anointing Jesus is first called Christ at the baptism. Fantino echoes Fabbri's view. "In the Incarnation, the Son as man receives the Holy Spirit in himself and on himself . . . At the virginal conception, in effect, the incarnate Son receives the Holy Spirit in his humanity. Then, the descent of the Spirit on the incarnate Son, at the Jordan baptism, establishes him as the Christ."⁴⁵ The

would be impossible. For Fabbri, while Jesus possesses "the divine life" by virtue of the incarnational union, only at the baptism does he become capable of allowing others to participate in "the divine life as it becomes communicable" (ibid. 13). See, similarly, Fantino, *La théologie d'Irénée* 224–25; McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus* 117–18; and David R. Ruppe, "God, Spirit and Human Being: The Reconfiguration of *Pneuma*'s Semantic Field in the Exchange between Irenaeus of Lyons and the Valentinian Gnosis" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1988) 111.

⁴² Orbe, *La Unción del Verbo* 510.

⁴³ Fabbri, "El bautismo de Jesús" 19.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 11; Fabbri is commenting on *Adv. haer.* 3.9.3.

⁴⁵ Fantino, *La théologie d'Irénée* 224. Fantino thinks that Christ's possession of the

etymological treatment of the name "Christ" (*Adv. haer.* 3.18.3), discussed above, shows that Irenaeus does see the baptism as the time that Jesus is established as the Messiah or Anointed One; but Irenaeus seems to have more in mind than inauguration.

Orbe rightly insists upon a more decisive effect of the Spirit upon (and a more decisive need of) the flesh of Jesus at the baptism. Commenting on Irenaeus's theology, Orbe states:

He distinguishes two events in the life of Jesus: (a) the Incarnation, which took place when the Word assumed (human) *sarx*, whose result is the Word made flesh in the womb of Mary; (b) the anointing or baptism of the Spirit at the Jordan, when Jesus—the Word already incarnate—was anointed with the Spirit according to the flesh, and made Jesus Christ. The baptism does not compromise the personal union—Word and flesh—which is the result of the Incarnation. It affected the flesh (that is, the human nature) of Jesus: until then he was united hypostatically to the Son of God, but not *physically*⁴⁶ (that is, qualitatively) equipped for his saving mission.⁴⁷

Orbe argues that the baptism at the Jordan introduces something truly new in Jesus: whereas the Word incarnate before the baptism was neither anointed by God with the Spirit nor equipped in the flesh for messianic acts, at the baptism Jesus was anointed (or "christened") in his human nature,⁴⁸ receiving a gift of divine attributes in his human nature.

This raises two important questions, concerning the prebaptismal and postbaptismal states of Jesus' humanity. For the first matter, if Orbe is correct, then Irenaeus is approaching here a view held by his Gnostic opponents. Elsewhere Irenaeus attributes to the Gnostics the idea that because no prebaptismal miracles of Jesus are reported, miracles only become possible for him after the baptism; they cited this as proof that Christ (whose power worked the miracles) descended upon Jesus at the baptism (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.14). Here Irenaeus seems only to differ on the protagonist of the descent (the Spirit of God and not the aeon Christ), for Jesus requires the anointing in order to perform the divine acts of the messianic ministry. Yet, although the flesh of Jesus requires an additional gift of divine attributes through the baptismal anointing by the Spirit, Irenaeus's understanding of Jesus' prebaptismal humanity—in spite of the prebaptismal incarnational

Spirit is progressively manifested in his obedient life (*ibid.* 224–25), yet admits that "it is difficult to know whether, in these texts [which concern the indwelling of the Spirit in Christ as man], the Spirit is possessed in fullness from the conception or whether it is received progressively" (*ibid.* 224 n. 40).

⁴⁶ By "physically" (*fisicamente*) Orbe here means "naturally" (*kata physin*): Jesus as human is not naturally (i.e., in his human nature) equipped for his salvific mission. Note another anachronistic reference to the hypostatic union.

⁴⁷ Orbe, *Introducción* 2.666 (emphasis original). See also "¿San Ireneo Adopcionista?" 39. This is the same interpretation Orbe gives to Justin, *Dial.* 88 (*ibid.* 26).

⁴⁸ Orbe, *Introducción* 2.673.

union of Word and flesh—does differ substantially from the Valentinian view of the Jesus of the economy.

Both Irenaeus and his opponents affirmed that Jesus was unique among humans and most well disposed to the indwelling that took place at the baptism, whether by virtue of the incarnational union (Irenaeus) or by virtue of his production (the Valentinians, *Adv. haer.* 1.2.6; the Ophites, 1.30.12). Again, both would agree that in spite of his unique humanity Jesus required a further gift that occurred at the baptism, whether that gift was the indwelling fullness of the Spirit (Irenaeus) or of the Savior/Christ (his opponents). But Irenaeus and his opponents differed on the kind of flesh that Jesus had. The Valentinians believed that Jesus did not have a material body, because the Savior assumed nothing material since matter is incapable of salvation. A spiritual (*pneumatikos*) being, the Savior assumed an animal or ensouled (*psychikos*) body, “yet one constructed with unspeakable skill so that it might be visible and tangible and capable of enduring suffering” (*Adv. haer.* 1.6.1).

“Irenaeus differs absolutely from the Valentinian anthropology. All human beings, according to him, are of the same nature.”⁴⁹ The human race is not divided into the spiritual, the animal, and the material. All share the same nature (and here is where Irenaeus differs in Christology), the nature which the Word assumed (*Adv. haer.* 3.18.7; 5.14.2). Houssiau noted, “The Word realized his Incarnation in taking flesh not of a psychic substance, . . . but of the earthly substance of which every person who descends from Adam is made.”⁵⁰ But although Christ’s body was of identical substance, there remains a distinction between his flesh and sinful flesh: “If, then, anyone allege that in this respect the flesh of the Lord was different from ours, because it indeed did not commit sin, neither was deceit found in his soul, while we on the other hand are sinners, he says what is the fact” (*Adv. haer.* 5.14.3). Given this distinction, the humanity of Christ therefore was of the same substance as all human flesh, yet differed from human flesh in its sinlessness. The anointing by the Spirit was required so that Jesus would be equipped with divine attributes for his messianic ministry, but it cannot be seen as necessary for the moral perfection of Christ’s human nature. Nevertheless, Christ’s humanity was not divine. This leads to the second issue: What is the effect on Jesus’ flesh of the anointing by the Spirit? Or how does Irenaeus understand the postbaptismal state of Christ as man?

Orbe argues that Christ’s humanity is perfected, saved, or sanctified at the baptism. “The Holy Spirit descended on the flesh (= the perfect humanity) of the Word, and ‘saved’ it, awakening it and equipping it for its new mission. . . . The Spirit sent by the Father sanctified Jesus

⁴⁹ Orbe, “¿San Ireneo Adopcionista?” 12.

⁵⁰ Houssiau, *Christologie de Saint Irénée* 244.

in an instant, and, with him as the firstfruits, also the Church."⁵¹ Orbe's dramatic language is not left unqualified, however. He emphasizes that "Jesus himself did not need the anointing for his own individual human perfection."⁵² The "salvation" Orbe has in view here is the deification of Christ's humanity (which, to be sure, is the perfection or sanctification of his individual humanity), which is final and complete at the baptism. As seen above, the anointing by the Spirit of God results in the gift of divine attributes; this establishes Jesus "actually, and not only virtually"⁵³ as the Savior of humanity, for in Orbe's view, "by virtue of this anointing he goes forward to his death on the cross, and rises from the dead, and ascends as man to the Father."⁵⁴ This gift of divine attributes transforms Jesus' flesh. This transformation is necessitated by the economy of salvation. "If Jesus had not been exalted from Nazareth to the natural sonship of God, he would not have been able to save humanity, in the same human nature. . . . Only at the Jordan as such was the human nature of the Word sanctified, with a Spirit destined for the human race. Thus anointed, the man would be able to anoint others, saving like by like."⁵⁵ Although Orbe does not raise this point, it is tempting to see an example of the exchange of attributes or *communicatio idiomatum* in Irenaeus's view of Jesus' baptism. For Irenaeus believed that the baptismal gift, which occurs on the level of divine attributes, is given by the Spirit to Jesus as man but by virtue of the incarnational union (*Adv. haer.* 3.9.3).⁵⁶

The question remains whether for Irenaeus, it is at the moment of his baptism that Jesus' flesh comes into full possession of the Spirit or becomes divinized. This certainly is Orbe's position,⁵⁷ but one that is not without its problems. As Fantino states, "the texts that concern the indwelling of the Spirit in Christ as far as he is human are not always easy to understand."⁵⁸ Some light is shed on this question in *Adv. haer.* 3.19.1, a difficult passage in which Irenaeus hints at the filial adoption of Jesus, and in *Adv. haer.* 3.16.3, where the Resurrection is a decisive filial moment for Jesus.

Filial Adoption and the Deification of Christ's Humanity

Irenaeus discussed the relationship between the Incarnation and the filial adoption of the believer in *Adv. haer.* 3.19.1. Although Jesus'

⁵¹ Orbe, *La Unción del Verbo* 632–33.

⁵² *Ibid.* 632. Orbe means that the moral perfection of Christ is not in view here.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 633 (emphasis original).

⁵⁴ Orbe, "El Espíritu en el bautismo de Jesús" 692.

⁵⁵ Orbe, *La Unción del Verbo* 632–33.

⁵⁶ I thank John Egan for providing me with this insight.

⁵⁷ "The Spirit sent by the Father sanctified Jesus in an instant" (Orbe, *La Unción del Verbo* 633, referring to the baptism). As noted above, Orbe also believes that the gift of divine attributes given at the baptism equips Jesus for the whole of his messianic ministry, which includes his suffering, death, and Resurrection, and the glorification of his humanity ("El Espíritu en el bautismo de Jesús," 692).

⁵⁸ Fantino, *La théologie d'Irénée* 224 n. 40.

baptism is not specifically in view here, this passage is relevant to our study because it can be read as referring to Jesus' adoption (in his human nature) as the Son of God.⁵⁹ The text of *Adv. haer.* 3.19.1 is problematic, for the Latin and Greek texts (a fragment from Theodoret, *Eranistes* 1) differ significantly.⁶⁰ The text reads: "For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and he who was the Son of God became the Son of Man, so that *man*,⁶¹ having been taken into⁶² the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the Son of God." First of all, Orbe rightly says that these words "absolutely permit an orthodox reading,"⁶³ for the "man" (*anthropos*) in question could refer to the human race. In this case, Irenaeus would be arguing that it is through the Incarnation that humanity is taken into the Word, with the result that filial adoption is made available to humanity. The Greek text opens the possibility that Irenaeus has in view here the filial adoption of the human race, for without the addition of "so that [the] man," the following verbs apply only to the Word of God made man. But, on the other hand, the "man" in question could be Jesus, or, more precisely, the human nature assumed by the Word.⁶⁴ The question then becomes how Irenaeus would have understood the adoption of which he wrote; or, to pose the question as Orbe does, whether Irenaeus is an adoptionist.

Two words of caution are necessary. First, concerning terminology. Wickham argues that "adoptionism" is a historian's construct, a collection of beliefs concerning the sonship of Jesus Christ which are never found together in one author.⁶⁵ The term should not be used without further clarifying in what sense or to what kind of sonship Jesus was thought to have been adopted. Second, concerning anachronism. Since it is clear that even within *Adv. haer.* 3.19.1, Irenaeus believed Jesus as the Word incarnate is the Son of God from the moment of conception, adoptionism in this context cannot be understood as referring to the belief that Jesus, son of Joseph and Mary and a mere man, was adopted as Son of God at the baptism. This, the Ebionite position, is exactly what Irenaeus is combating in *Adv. haer.*

⁵⁹ Orbe argues that Irenaeus here, at the end of three chapters on Jesus' baptism, is combating the views of the Ebionites, who understood the baptism as the time of Jesus' adoption as the Son of God ("¿San Ireneo Adopcionista?" 33–44).

⁶⁰ See A. Rousseau, L. Doutreleau, ed., trans., *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les hérésies, Livre III. Edition critique*, 2 vols., SC 210–11 (Paris: Cerf, 1974) 2.374–75.

⁶¹ "So that man" is an addition from the Greek.

⁶² The translation follows the Greek here; the Latin has "commingled with the Word."

⁶³ Orbe, "¿San Ireneo Adopcionista?" [English summary] 51.

⁶⁴ Orbe says, "I do not believe that these lines of 3.19.1 allude with absolute certainty to the adoptive filiation of Christ in the Jordan, but neither the ideology of Irenaeus nor his vocabulary exclude filial adoption" (ibid. 47).

⁶⁵ Lionel Wickham, "Adoptionism," in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, Everett Ferguson, ed., 2 vols., 2nd ed. (New York: Garland, 1997) 1.20. See also John C. Cavadini, *The Last Christology of the West: Adoptionism in Spain and Gaul, 785–820*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1993) 1.

3.19.1.⁶⁶ Thus when Orbe asks if Irenaeus is an adoptionist, he refers to the eighth-century Spanish adoptionism of Elipandus and Felix of Urgel.⁶⁷ It was their belief that although Christ, as the Word incarnate, was the eternal Son of God, "Jesus, considered solely from the point of view of his human nature, was an 'adoptive' Son of God."⁶⁸ Their opponents countered that to predicate sonship of the nature is thus to divide Christ into two persons or two Sons of God.⁶⁹ Thus when Orbe asks, "Is it inconvenient that the divine filiation (regeneration) of Jesus the man, at the Jordan, affects according to Irenaeus the human nature?" he has in mind the eighth-century controversy about whether sonship is rightly predicated of the nature or of the person. The question is anachronistic, and ultimately the charge irrelevant, since in spite of his emphasis on the unity of Jesus Christ Irenaeus did not have the christological ideas of hypostasis and person at his disposal. Orbe concludes that although Irenaeus may have used the ideology and vocabulary of the eighth-century adoptionists, when he distinguishes between the Son of God and the Son of Man he means to express only the idea of the two natures.⁷⁰

Much of Orbe's analysis of *Adv. haer.* 3.19.1 is devoted to contextualizing Irenaeus's understanding of sonship and filial adoption in order to clarify the use of contemporary concepts against the Ebionites. In his polemic against Valentinian anthropological determinism (*Adv. haer.* 4.41.1-4), Irenaeus held that all human beings were made positive or natural children of God (that is, children by position or by nature) through God's creative will. No one is by nature a child of the

⁶⁶ The chapter begins speaking against "those who assert that he was simply a mere man, begotten by Joseph . . ." (*Adv. haer.* 3.19.1). Interestingly, Irenaeus did not use the term "adoption" to characterize their position, probably because he wished to keep the term for his own use.

⁶⁷ Orbe, "¿San Ireneo Adopcionista?" 51. Orbe notes that the Spanish adoptionists nowhere refer to Irenaeus (*ibid.* 38). However, this probably is because the Spanish controversy took place without much reference to the pre-Chalcedonian christological controversies, which to the historian of dogma would provide the obvious framework for understanding it (Cavadini, *The Last Christology* 5-6).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 4. Cavadini says of Elipandus that "there is never, finally, a point at which the Father (e.g.) is said to have 'adopted' the Son or a human nature or a man, etc. The point is much more subtle, namely, that by assuming flesh or a body, etc., the Word, the 'Only-begotten' with regard to nature, becomes the 'First-born' in adoption and grace" (*ibid.* 33, emphasis original). See also Jaroslav Pelikan, who quotes Felix as saying that "we believe that he was adopted by the Father in that nature according to which he was the son of David, but not in that according to which he exists as Lord" (*The Growth of Medieval Theology (300-600)*, vol. 3 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978] 52-59, at 53).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 57. Both Pelikan (*ibid.*) and Cavadini (*The Last Christology* 32, 111) note that Elipandus and Felix tried to retain a unity of subject.

⁷⁰ In fact, Orbe is careful to depict Irenaeus as orthodox in terms of the later standard from which Elipandus and Felix are seen to have departed: "Irenaeus always distinguishes, in the person of Christ, the Son of God—or the Word of God the Father—from the Son of man. However, he does not thereby signify the coexistence of two personal sons" ("¿San Ireneo Adopcionista?" 46).

devil. But just as students often take on the characteristics of their teachers, one can be made or can be reputed to be a child of Satan (or conversely of God), according to one's works. Irenaeus calls this "sonship according to doctrine" (*Adv. haer.* 4.41.2). Orbe compares Irenaeus's views with those of Heracleon the Valentinian (cited in Origen, *In Joh.* 20.213–18 on John 8:44).⁷¹ The two agree, says Orbe, on this kind of sonship by option or merit; but they disagree on anthropology. For the Valentinians, only those who are naturally the offspring of the demiurge Yahweh, the psychic or animal humans, can exercise an option to be made or to be reputed children of God or of the devil, according to whichever will or desire they choose to follow. The others are by nature either children of Sophia (the spiritual humans) or of the devil (the material humans), and have no option. But for Irenaeus, all are positive (or natural) children of God, and all may opt—and this is the sonship according to doctrine, option or merit—to become a child of God or of the devil.⁷²

Both Irenaeus and his opponents, however, would agree that this kind of optional sonship can be characterized as adoption and affects nature.⁷³ Orbe's treatment becomes somewhat confusing at this point because of an overlap in terminology: the term "nature" has two contexts, the second-century discussion of sonship, and the fifth-century (and eighth-century) christological debates. What Orbe calls natural (positive) sonship he says pertains to the person, while the optional or adoptive sonship pertains to nature. He draws this distinction from Irenaeus's view of the sin of Adam and the reconciliation of Christ: neither really changes the human's status as the natural child of God, for that is the immutable result of creation and a status of the human person.⁷⁴ Similarly with Christ, any possible filial adoption could not alter his personal status as the positive or natural Son of God. But just as both Adam's sin and the corresponding reconciliation affect the human nature of the individual, so also does adoption by God affect the nature.⁷⁵

According to Orbe's reconstruction of Irenaeus's views, there are two reasons why he would raise the issue of the filial adoption of Jesus' humanity against the Ebionites in *Adv. haer.* 3.19.1. First, if adoption affects nature and not person, what happens at the baptism cannot be God's adoption of Jesus (mere man, son of Mary and Joseph). Such an

⁷¹ "It is nearly certain that Irenaeus knew the kinds and types of filiation denounced by Origen in the fragments *In Iohannem* of Heracleon" (*ibid.* 13).

⁷² *Ibid.* 5–7.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 5–19.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 35.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* Orbe further complicates the issue a few pages later by raising still more filial terminology: "Confronted by the Ebionites, who maintained only the filial adoption of Jesus (mere man) at the Jordan as the paradigm and origin of human salvation . . . , Irenaeus urges the necessity of two filiations: the radical sonship of the Word made flesh in the virginal womb of Mary, and the complementary sonship of the baptism in the Jordan" (*ibid.* 39).

adoption would bring about, in effect, a new "person," Jesus the Son of God.⁷⁶ Second, Irenaeus would oppose this understanding of Jesus' filial adoption because he clearly wants the sonship obtained to be a communicable one: "But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive the adoption as sons?" (*Adv. haer.* 3.19.1). The exchange of attributes applies here as well: the natural attributes of Christ's humanity, through the gift of the divine attributes of incorruptibility and immortality, are "swallowed up"; the result is the adoption or deification of the believer. Because the union of Word and flesh in Christ is incommunicable, Orbe argues, Irenaeus does not present the Incarnation here in opposition to the Ebionites. Against the Ebionites, who saw at the baptism the beginning of a natural sonship affecting the person of Jesus (a sonship Irenaeus held to be incommunicable), Irenaeus presents Jesus Christ as the possessor of a communicable union. It is the union of Spirit and flesh at the baptism that results in our salvation: "It would be useless against the Ebionites to insist only upon the personal union of the Son of God made Son of man. Such a union, incommunicable, is not sufficient for the deification of humanity. . . . [Irenaeus] insists upon a double union: the personal union of the Word, and the dynamic or natural (qualitative) union of the Spirit of God, with the flesh."⁷⁷ Orbe believes that the adoption referred to in *Adv. haer.* 3.19.1 is the result of the divine qualities or attributes bestowed on Christ's humanity at the Jordan. When this is read together with the rather strong language he uses to depict the anointing (Christ's flesh is "saved," "sanctified"⁷⁸), it becomes clear that for Orbe the humanity of Christ is adopted as Son of God, or deified, at the baptism. Other key moments (e.g. the Resurrection and glorification) are seen by Orbe as resulting directly from the baptismal anointing.⁷⁹

Orbe is correct in understanding the adoption referred to in *Adv. haer.* 3.19.1 as occurring on the level of attributes, because the filial adoption (or deification) of the human nature of Christ is effected through the gifts of the Spirit, which are to be understood as divine attributes. From *Adv. haer.* 3.9.3 it is clear that the gift of divine attributes effects the human nature. But because the adoption takes place on the level of attributes, and thus does not detract from the union, Irenaeus does not run the risk of creating two sons—a charge that Orbe sees as a possibility. The incarnate Word is one Son from the time of conception, and the deification of the human nature does not create another Son. But the chief weakness of Orbe's position is that in

⁷⁶ For Orbe's summary of the Ebionite position, see "¿San Ireneo Adopcionista?" 33–4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 39.

⁷⁸ Orbe, *La Unción del Verbo* 632–33.

⁷⁹ Orbe, "El Espíritu en el bautismo de Jesús" 692.

Adv. haer. 3.19.1 Irenaeus has the Incarnation in view, not the baptism. Orbe uses the Luke 3:22 variant, which cites Psalm 2:7, to frame his discussion of *Adv. haer.* 3.19.1, in spite of the fact that the passage does not appear in this context.⁸⁰ The question therefore arises: If Irenaeus does not explicitly mention Jesus' baptism in *Adv. haer.* 3.19.1, is the baptism the most important filial moment for Jesus' humanity?

There are two alternatives to Orbe's view. First, as Fantino argues, it is the Incarnation that is the decisive moment for the communication of filial adoption. He argues correctly: "A human being can only become a son of God by participating in the filiation of the Son." Fantino is also correct to see the Incarnation as the immediate context of *Adv. haer.* 3.19.1. He states that: "The divine generation of the Son and the filial adoption of human beings are in relation to one another because divine generation and human birth took place in Christ. Irenaeus links in this way the human birth of Christ Jesus to his divine generation, founding the first on the second."⁸¹ But his argument emphasizes the Incarnation to the exclusion of the baptism, and therefore he fails to account for the decisive and substantial nature of the anointing at the Jordan. As for the related question of Jesus' possession of the Spirit, Fantino says only that "it is difficult to know whether, in these passages, the Spirit is possessed from conception or received progressively."⁸²

The other alternative is that of de Andia, who sees the Incarnation, baptism, and Resurrection as "the three key moments of the filial existence of Jesus," to which corresponds a progressive reception of the Spirit.⁸³ To begin with, this position is attractive because it takes into account the fact that Irenaeus (citing Romans 1:3–4) connects the Resurrection with Jesus Christ's divine sonship, which he says is the source of the filial adoption of the believer. "Jesus Christ was appointed Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the Resurrection from the dead, as being the first begotten in all the creation; the Son of God being made the Son of man, that through him we may receive the adoption,—humanity sustaining, and receiving, and embracing the Son of God" (*Adv. haer.* 3.16.3). But this is not to dismiss the significance of the baptism for the filial adoption both of Christ and of the believer.

As already seen, the baptism inaugurates the accustoming of the Spirit to dwelling in humanity, but it is the Resurrection that allows for and begins the outpouring. "Such is the secret unity of the myster-

⁸⁰ Orbe, "¿San Ireneo Adopcionista?" 33–35, 51. In fact, Irenaeus only once referred to the voice from heaven, in *Adv. haer.* 4.5.4, where the emphasis is on the words "beloved son"; and only once did he quote Ps 2:7, in *Demo.* 49, where it is Christ's right, as Son of God, to universal dominion that is in view.

⁸¹ Fantino, *La théologie d'Irénée* 375. ⁸² *Ibid.* 224 n. 40.

⁸³ De Andia, *Homo vivens* 185–201, esp. 186, 201.

ies of the life of Christ: the Word became flesh in order that the flesh might become the bearer of the Spirit. And it is the Spirit that makes the flesh incorruptible."⁸⁴ Therefore, the Incarnation is decisive because as the union of the divine Word and human flesh it is the first moment of filial generation, the moment which makes the following ones possible (*Adv. haer.* 3.19.1). The baptism is decisive because it is there that Jesus Christ as man receives the divine attributes necessary to his salvific role, and the Spirit becomes accustomed to dwelling in human flesh (3.9.3, 3.17.1). The Resurrection is the moment of the full glorification of Christ's humanity (3.16.3). In de Andia's words, "Between the incarnation and the glorification, there is a transformation of the flesh of Christ that corresponds to a greater and greater indwelling of the Spirit: the Spirit who was 'united and mingled with the flesh' [*Adv. haer.* 3.19.1] from Christ's conception, anointed this same flesh at the baptism and raised it from the dead, elevating it to the glory of the Father. And it is only after the glorification of his flesh that Christ gives us the Spirit."⁸⁵ For Irenaeus, Jesus' reception of the Spirit is progressive. For the adoption in view in *Adv. haer.* 3.19.1 is the incarnational union, and Jesus Christ experiences, by virtue of that union, further filial moments at the baptism (through his reception of divine attributes) and at the Resurrection (through his glorification and the conferral of filial adoption on believers).

CONCLUSION

Jesus' baptism is an important locus of Irenaean Christology. Irenaeus used the baptism to affirm the unity of Jesus Christ against those who believed that the aeon Christ descended upon the man Jesus at the Jordan. With reference to the texts alluded to in the Synoptic accounts, he maintained that the descent of the Spirit equips the human nature of Christ for the messianic ministry. He taught that the indwelling of the Spirit in Jesus Christ accustoms the Spirit to dwelling in humanity, so that the anointing at the Jordan prefigures the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. Since the gifts of the Spirit are best understood as divine attributes, he can be seen as affirming the baptism as an instance of the exchange of properties (*communicatio idiomatum*). And, taken together with the Incarnation and the Resurrection, he understood the baptism as a key filial moment in the life of Jesus, an important step in the progressive deification of the human nature of Christ.

At this last point Irenaeus anticipated a question that was not to be

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 186.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 201. De Andia also writes: "There is the mystery of Jesus which is the mystery of a person human and divine, the Word made flesh. And there are the mysteries of the life of Jesus which are the mysteries of the flesh or humanity of the Word, which is more and more possessed by the Spirit to the point where that flesh becomes, in glory, the source of the gift of the Spirit" (*ibid.* 186).

discussed for two centuries: Was the human nature of Christ in full possession of the Spirit, deified from the instant of his conception, or did the process take place progressively, culminating in the Resurrection and glorification? Gregory Nazianzus (d. 389) and Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395), respectively, are two clear examples of the different positions.⁸⁶

Gregory Nazianzus wrote that "the human here below became God, since it was mingled with, and became one with God because it was conquered by the greater part" (*Oration* 29.19).⁸⁷ The sanctification of the humanity of Christ takes place at the union of the two natures, not by the activity of the divinity, but by its presence alone (*ibid.* 30.21).⁸⁸ On the other hand, Gregory of Nyssa saw a progressive deification of the human nature that culminates with the Resurrection: "The divinity is emptied, so that it could be accessible to the human nature; the human is renewed and becomes divine through its union with the divine. When the true life which was in the flesh rushed back to itself after the suffering, the flesh that surrounded it was raised with it, and was pushed up from corruption to incorruptibility by divine immortality" (*Contra Eunomium* 3.3.66). Although "this transformation of manhood into Godhead already begins with Christ's conception in a virgin," "after his earthly life and passion there follows a still more far-reaching transformation."⁸⁹ In fact, as a result of the Resurrection and glorification, "it is just as if someone said that mixing a drop of vinegar in the sea turned it into sea-water, because this liquid's natural quality no longer existed due to the infinity of the greater part" (*ibid.* 3.3.68).

The emphasis Irenaeus placed on Jesus' baptism as a pivotal moment in the progressive deification of Christ's humanity recurs in the work of Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428). Theodore likewise used adoption language to describe the process, but unlike Irenaeus, he connected the filial adoption of Christ's humanity—the *homo assumptus*—with the baptismal Spirit-anointing.⁹⁰ Yet Theodore affirmed both that the Spirit was present with Christ from the beginning and that a

⁸⁶ "Gregory of Nyssa spoke of an apparently ongoing, dynamic perfecting of the humanity of Christ through the divinity," while "Gregory of Nazianzus favored a more static approach, which emphasized the dominant role of the divinity" (Gerard H. Ettliger, *Jesus, Christ and Savior*, Message of the Fathers of the Church 2 [Wilmington: Glazier, 1987] 93).

⁸⁷ English translations from Gregory Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa are taken from Ettliger, *Jesus, Christ and Savior*.

⁸⁸ Donald F. Winslow, *The Dynamics of Salvation: A Study in Gregory of Nazianzus*, Patristic Monograph Series 7 (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979) 86–88.

⁸⁹ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* 1.372. See Bernard Pottier, *Dieu et le Christ selon Grégoire de Nysse: Etude systématique du "Contre Eunome" avec traduction inédite des extraits d'Eunome*, Ouvertures 12 (Paris: Culture et Vérité, 1994) 241–47. Cf. Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocians* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1995) 113.

⁹⁰ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homily* 14.24; see Francis A. Sullivan, *The*

special outpouring occurred at the baptism, as Irenaeus suggests, equipping Christ for the saving ministry.⁹¹ The adopted sonship of the *homo assumptus* is an expression of grace and begins at the baptism, but differs from the filial adoption of other human beings because "his adopted sonship springs from his union with the Word, who is immortal by nature."⁹² Finally, as I have argued concerning Irenaeus, Theodore also sees the deification of Christ's human nature as a process culminating in the Resurrection: "The totality of the divine giving, effected in the grace of the union, implied in the special graces that followed Christ's baptism, is fully manifested in his Resurrection and ascension."⁹³

Parallels such as these demonstrate the innovative character of Irenaeus's theology regarding Jesus' baptism. What began with Irenaeus was taken up by later authors in their attempts to articulate the relationship between the human and divine in Christ.

Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Analecta Gregoriana* 82 (Rome: Gregorian University, 1956) 274–76.

⁹¹ Joanne McWilliam Dewart, *The Theology of Grace of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, *Catholic University of America Studies in Christian Antiquity* 16 (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1971) 86, 89–90.

⁹² *Ibid.* 88. See also Richard A. Norris, *Manhood and Christ: A Study in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963) 213–14.

⁹³ Dewart, *The Theology of Grace* 90–91.