

St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (c. 177-200)

Some central ideas:

1. The raising of humans into full participation in divine life (*theosis*) was the purpose of creation from the start.
2. The Spirit and Word have been intimately involved with human beings since the beginning of creation.
3. The fall was not a deliberately evil and radically corrupting act, but an understandable stumble.
4. The work of Jesus as the Christ was not to bear punishment but to restore us and reunite us with God by uniting humanity and divinity in human personhood.

The raising of humans into full participation in divine life (*theosis*) was the purpose of creation from the start.

“In the beginning God fashioned Adam, not because he had need of man, but that he might have a being on whom to bestow his benefits Nor did he order us to follow him because he needed our service, but because he thus conferred on us salvation.... Our service of God does not afford God anything..., but he has granted to those who follow him and serve him, life and incorruption and eternal glory.” (Adversus Haereses. IV. xiv. 1)

“...God from the beginning fashioned man with a view to displaying his bounty. He chose the patriarchs with a view to their salvation; he prepared a people, teaching them, obstinate as they were, to follow God; he set up prophets on the earth, thus accustoming man to hear his Spirit and have fellowship with God....” (AH. IV. xiv. 2)

The Spirit and Word have been intimately involved with human beings since the beginning of creation.

“Man is a blend of soul and flesh. He was fashioned in the likeness of God and was formed by the hands of God, that is, by the son and the Spirit, to whom he said ‘Let us make man.’” (AH IV. preface. 3)

“Angels did not make us or fashion us. Angels could not have made the image of God, nor could any other have done this but the Word of God, nor a power much less than the Father of all. In carrying out his intended work of creation, God did not need any help from angels, as if he had not his own hands. For he has always at his side his Word and Wisdom, the son and the spirit. Through them and in them he created all things of his own free will.” (AH IV. xx. 1)

“For Adam of old had experienced the ‘hands’ of God; for it was to them that the Father said, ‘Let us make man in our image.’” (AH. V. i. 2-3)

“The Spirit prepares man for the Son of God; the Son leads man to the Father; the Father gives immortality (AH IV. xx. 4)

“There are three elements of which...the complete man is made up, flesh, soul, and spirit...” (AH V. ix. 1)

“The complete man is a mixture and union, consisting of a soul which takes to itself the spirit of the Father, to which is united the flesh which was fashioned in the image of God.... A man with soul only, lacking spirit, is ‘psychic’; such a man is carnal, unfinished, incomplete; he has, in his created body, the image of God, but he has not acquired the likeness to God through the spirit.” (AH V. vi. 1) [N.B.: There were no lower case letters at that time, hence no orthographic differentiation of spirit and Spirit, and there is nothing to indicate Irenaeus would have had such a differentiation in mind.]

The fall was not a deliberately evil and radically corrupting act , but an understandable stumble.

Addressing the question, “Could not God have made man perfect from the beginning?” (Augustine’s assumption):

“But contingent things have their beginning in the course of time, and for this reason they must needs fall short of their maker’s perfection.... And being newly created they are therefore childish and immature, and not yet fully trained for an adult way of life. (AH IV. xxxviii. 1)

“But man was a child; and his mind was not yet fully mature; and thus he was easily led astray by the deceiver.” (Apostolic Preaching, xii)

“We were not made gods at our beginning, but first we were made men, then in the end, gods. God does this out of the purity of his goodness ... ‘I have said, “You are gods, and all of you children of the Highest.”’ So he speaks, but since we are not able to bear the power of divinity, he goes on to say, ‘But you will die like men.’ Thus he expresses both the generosity of his giving, and our weakness....” (AH IV. xxxvii. 4)

The work of Jesus as the Christ was not to bear punishment but to reunite us with God by uniting humanity and divinity in human personhood.

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, the word of God, of his boundless love, became what we are that he might make us what he himself is.” (AH V. preface)

“As he was man that he might be tempted, so he was the Word that he might be glorified.” (AH III. xix. 3)

He sanctified each stage of life:

“He came to save all through his own person... infants, children, boys, young men and old. Therefore he passed through every stage of life. He was made an infant for infants, sanctifying infancy; a child among children, sanctifying childhood... ; a young man among young men, becoming an example to them, and sanctifying them to the Lord. So also he was a grown man among the older men, that he might be a perfect teacher for all, not merely in respect of revelation of the truth, but also in respect of this stage of life.... And thus he came even to death, that he might be ‘the first-born from the dead, having the pre-eminence in all things’ [Col. 1:18], the author of life, who goes before all and shows the way.” (AH II. xxii. 4)

“He ‘consummated all things in himself’ [Eph. 1&2] by joining man to spirit and placing spirit in man. He himself became the source of spirit, and he gives spirit to be the source of man’s life. For it is through spirit that we see and hear and talk.” (AH V. xx. 2)

“He effected the consummation [ανακεφαλαιωσις], and declared war on our enemy, and crushed him who in the beginning had led us captive in Adam....” (AH V. xxi. 1)

“When the Spirit of Rebellion [apostasia] unjustly held sway over us and ... unnaturally alienated us from God and made us his own disciples, then the Word of God, powerful in all things, who never fails in justice, acted justly even in dealing with the Spirit of Rebellion. For it was by persuasion, not by force, that he redeemed his own property.” (AH V. i. 1)