

# **Growing into Humanity's True Identity to Fulfill God's Purpose: *Imago Dei* in Irenaeus of Lyons**

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*Abstract:* Some popular interpretations of *imago Dei* are solely based on Genesis. This results in a limited view of salvation as it results in the church merely “saving souls” and neglecting spiritual growth. Likewise, an anthropology that explains *imago Dei* without examining Jesus is incomplete because it ignores the Second Adam who is the true image of God. Instead, one must begin with the end in mind. The *telos* of *imago Dei* in Scripture demonstrates that God created mankind so that we can grow into an eternal communion with Him. While theologians have long debated what *imago Dei* means, this paper will describe the teleological explanation of Irenaeus of Lyons which gives the church its impetus today: to form a people like God, that is, to shape us into the character of Christ.

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Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons from 177-202, countered the heretical teachings of several Gnostic groups of the second century in order to preserve what the Bible and the Apostles taught. This paper will demonstrate that Irenaeus' view of *imago Dei* directly derived from his Christology. Instead of only looking at Genesis 1 and 2 to define *imago Dei* as many other theologians have done, Irenaeus primarily viewed Jesus Christ and the eschaton to explain what the image and likeness means. Irenaeus wrote that God created mankind *in* the image and likeness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit so that man could grow into an eternal communion with Him. However, Adam broke that communion, so the Father sent the Son who *is* the image to show mankind what it is to truly be human and to restore the relationship. This conformity into His image, our true identity, will ultimately bring us to become like Him to fulfill God's eternal purpose. Both Scripture and many subsequent theologians have affirmed Irenaeus' teaching on *imago Dei*.

## Historical Background

Irenaeus lived in the mid- to late-second century. It is unknown exactly when he was born; estimates range from 140 to 160,<sup>1</sup> to as early as 115, with his death c. 202.<sup>2</sup> Irenaeus met Polycarp when he was young, and Polycarp had direct contact with the apostles. He was a presbyter/bishop (those words were synonyms at the time he lived); we know him as “Irenaeus of Lyons” because of a mission to that city.<sup>3</sup>

Irenaeus wrote two works that survive today: *Against the Heresies* and *On the Apostolic Preaching*.<sup>4</sup> In *Against the Heresies*, a five-volume book, Irenaeus defines the position of the Gnostics in order to refute them, including their concept of *imago Dei*. The first Gnostic group he described were the Valentinians.<sup>5</sup> Their name for the creator was Demiurge. The Valentinians had a dualistic worldview of body *versus* flesh:

After the world had been created, Demurge in turn made the earthly element of man. He did not make him from this dry earth, but from the invisible substance, from the fusible and fluid matter; then, they decree, into this part he breathed the ensouled element. This is he who was made *after the image and likeness*. The material element is *after the image*, by which it comes near to God, though it is not of the same substance as he; the ensouled element is *after the likeness*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes Quasten, *Patrology: The Beginnings of Patristic Literature*, vol. 1 (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1950), 287.

<sup>2</sup> Mary T. Clark, “Irenaeus,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990), 471.

<sup>3</sup> Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. John Behr (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 1–2.

<sup>4</sup> Sara Parvis and Paul Foster, eds., *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), xi. These books go by various names. The full name to *Against the Heresies* (abbreviated *AH* in this paper) is *Refutation and Overthrow of the Knowledge Falsely So Called, or Against the Heresies*, which is why some refer to that work as the *Refutation*. The second work, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, has also been called *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* (or *Proof* for short) and *Demonstration (Epideixis) of the Apostolic Preaching*. This paper will not abbreviate this work.

<sup>5</sup> Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, trans. Dominic J. Unger, vol. 1, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation* 55 (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Unger, 35, emphasis original.

The Valentinians understood the image to be what we can see, and the likeness to be “the Spirit of life”.<sup>7</sup> This fueled their understanding of the flesh as evil, something we need to get rid of, and that only the spirit is good. Their belief was a “speculative dualism” that “denied qualitative goodness” to the human realm.<sup>8</sup> Irenaeus spoke against additional groups, both Gnostic and non-gnostic groups (e.g. the Ebionites and Nicolaites),<sup>9</sup> yet his aim in all of his writings was the same: to preserve and reiterate the truth of who Jesus is and who we are in Him, after all, “This tradition is the source and the norm of the faith. It is the canon of truth.”<sup>10</sup>

Irenaeus countered this dualistic worldview to preserve the teachings he inherited from the apostles and from the Scriptures for two reasons. First, his emphasis, according to Nielsen, was that God saves the entire human being, not just the soul. The Gnostics taught that only the spiritual part of man receives salvation. Irenaeus insisted that human beings are holistic beings, “a commixture and union of the ‘soul’ (anima), which has absorbed the Spirit of the Father, with that flesh which was created after the image of God.”<sup>11</sup> Second, God entered the world to offer salvation to all, not just to the “pneumatic” class of human beings that the Gnostics said could be saved in contrast the “sarkic” humans who could not receive salvation.<sup>12</sup> While countering these two false teachings, Irenaeus also presented *imago Dei* in a positive light through the lens of the Incarnation.

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<sup>7</sup> Unger, 35.

<sup>8</sup> Steenberg, Matthew Craig, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 33.

<sup>9</sup> Ulrich Hamm, “Irenaeus of Lyons,” in *Dictionary of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Siegmund Döpp and Wilhelm Geerlings, trans. Matthew O’Connell (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), 301.

<sup>10</sup> Quasten, 300.

<sup>11</sup> Jan Tjeerd Nielsen, *Adam and Christ in the Theology of Irenaeus of Lyons: An Examination of the Function of the Adam-Christ Typology in the Adversus Haereses of Irenaeus, against the Background of the Gnosticism of His Time* (Assen, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Van Gorcum & Comp. N.V., 1968), 18–19. See *AH* 5.6.1.

<sup>12</sup> Gustaf Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation: A Study in the Biblical Theology of Irenaeus*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), xii.

## The Understanding of *Imago Dei* in Irenaeus

Irenaeus rooted his understanding of *imago Dei* not with Adam, but with the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. In *On the Apostolic Preaching*, he wrote: “For <I made> man <in> the image of God, and the image of God is the Son, according to whose image was man made; and for this reason He appeared in the last times, to render the image like himself.”<sup>13</sup> It is in the Incarnation that we see “both what God is and what Adam is meant to be”.<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus wrote:

And then, again, this Word was manifested when the Word of God was made man, assimilating Himself to man, and man to Himself, so that by means of his resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father. For in times long past, it was *said* that man was created after the image of God, but it was not [actually] *shown*; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created, Wherefore also he did easily lose the similitude. When, however, the Word of God became flesh, He confirmed both these: for He both showed forth the image truly, since He became Himself what was His image; and He re-established the similitude after a sure manner, by assimilating man to the invisible Father through means of the visible Word.<sup>15</sup>

Nielsen makes the following observation about the above passage. God did not show the image in Adam, even though he created Adam in His image. At that time the Word was not physically present. However, at the Incarnation, two things occurred: “the Word showed the true image, by itself becoming that which its image was, and the Word secured the likeness for once and all, by making man entirely like to the invisible Father by means of the visible Word.”<sup>16</sup>

Steenberg said that Irenaeus starts with Jesus Christ as the beginning of his theology, not with creation. Adam could not be the fullness of the image, because as Irenaeus demonstrates at the end of *Against the Heresies*, the complete image is the one found at the end. Many Bible commentators assume that Adam is the basis of our anthropology; Steenberg says, to the

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<sup>13</sup> *On the Apostolic Preaching* 22.

<sup>14</sup> Parvis and Foster, 9.

<sup>15</sup> *AH* 5.16.2.

<sup>16</sup> Nielsen, 22.

contrary, Irenaeus made it clear that the Incarnation is the basis.<sup>17</sup> “Adam is God’s image because he has been fashioned after the physical form of the Son’s future incarnation, and because the life visible in his person is the life of God.”<sup>18</sup> At the very end of *Against the Heresies*, Irenaeus summed up his entire presentation from the Scriptures:<sup>19</sup>

For there is the one Son, who accomplished His Father’s will; and one human race also in which the mysteries of God are wrought, ...that His offspring, the First-begotten Word, should descend to the creature (*facturam*), that is, to what had been moulded (*plasma*), and that it should be contained by Him; and, on the other hand, the creature should contain the Word, and ascend to Him, passing beyond the angels, and be made after the image and likeness of God.<sup>20</sup>

This presentation will traverse this understanding of the Incarnate image through creation, Jesus Christ, the church, and the eschaton.

### *The Work of Creation: Created Like Children in the Image and Likeness*

The Garden of Eden was not perfect. Wingren helps illuminate this concept: “Irenaeus never speaks of man as being ‘perfect’ in his ‘original state’” but he also never suggests “that there was any weakness, want, or mortality in Adam” before Genesis 3.<sup>21</sup> Irenaeus wrote that “Adam and Eve” were “innocent and childlike”.<sup>22</sup> Irenaeus presented them like children because of God’s intention for them to grow; it is assumed that children will grow up.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 33.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew Craig Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 91 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), 135.

<sup>19</sup> John Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity*, Christian Theology in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 77.

<sup>20</sup> *AH* 5.36.3.

<sup>21</sup> Wingren, 28.

<sup>22</sup> *On the Apostolic Preaching* 14.

<sup>23</sup> Wingren, 32, 100. See *On the Apostolic Preaching* 12.

Irenaeus countered a deficient understanding of creation present in his surrounding culture.<sup>24</sup> Irenaeus presented one creation account, combining Genesis 1:26 and 2:7 together. He combined the ideas of “making” and “fashioning”:<sup>25</sup>

But he fashioned man with His own Hands, taking the purest, the finest <and the most delicate> [elements] of the earth, mixing with the earth, in due measure, His own power, and because He <sketched upon> the handiwork His own form—in order that what would be seen should be godlike, for man was placed upon the earth fashioned <in> the image of God—and that he might be alive, ‘He breathed into His face a breath of life’: so that both according to the inspiration and according to the formation, man was like God. Accordingly, he was free and master of himself, having been made by God in this way, [in order] that he should rule over everything upon earth. And this great created world, prepared by God before the fashioning of man, was given to man as [his] domain, having everything in it.<sup>26</sup>

Steenberg explains Irenaeus’ presentation of the image and likeness as a prototype in the Garden and the fullness in the eschaton.<sup>27</sup> But there is a slight difference between the image and the likeness as revealed in the next chapter of Genesis. In sin, says Wingren, both in Genesis 3 and for us, man “fails to achieve his destiny. It is the opposite which he achieves—disobedience to God’s will and enmity with God—allied as he is with God’s chief enemy.”<sup>28</sup> As a result, our relationship (or communion) with God is broken, thus no longer attached to the author of life.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, God’s purpose is temporary thwarted. Because of sin, man lost the likeness and the Spirit.<sup>30</sup> “It is specifically the Spirit who enables humanity to exist according to the image and likeness,” wrote Steenberg.<sup>31</sup> It is the work of Christ that shows us the true image, and the work

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<sup>24</sup> Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 87.

<sup>26</sup> *On the Apostolic Preaching* 11. See also *AH* 5.28.4.

<sup>27</sup> Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 138.

<sup>28</sup> Wingren, 51.

<sup>29</sup> Wingren, 52.

<sup>30</sup> Wingren, 55.

<sup>31</sup> Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 137. “For if the earnest, gathering man into itself, does even now cause him to cry, ‘Abba, Father,’ what shall the complete grace of the Spirit effect, which shall be given to men by God? It

of the Spirit in our lives that reestablishes the likeness as we participate in the life of the church.

The full concept of the image and likeness links humanity to the work of the Trinity:

To be created in the ‘image’ of this God-made-incarnate (and Irenaeus is clear that humanity is created not in the image of God generally, but in the image of the Son who is known incarnationally as the living Image in its fullness), is to be made an iconic representation of, and thus an active participant in, this full divine life of God as Father with his Son and Spirit. . . . To be ‘in the image’ is to speak of the fabric of creation; to be ‘in the likeness’ is to realize economically the life that creation enables – the likeness of the incarnate Son, in obedience to his Father through the Spirit.<sup>32</sup>

The image reveals to us more about God as much as it reveals what humanity is.<sup>33</sup> To the work of Christ we now turn.

### *The Work of Christ: Recapitulation*

Irenaeus wrote that humanity never lost the image. If we had lost the image, we would no longer be human. However, humans “easily lost the likeness” but regained that in Christ.<sup>34</sup>

It was necessary, therefore, that the Lord, coming to the lost sheep, and making recapitulation of so comprehensive a dispensation, and seeking after His own handiwork, should save that very man who had been created after His image and likeness, that is, Adam, filling up the times of His condemnation, which had been incurred through disobedience,—[times] “which the Father had placed in His own power.” [This was necessary,] too, inasmuch as the whole economy of salvation regarding man came to pass according to the good pleasure of the Father, in order that God might not be conquered, nor His wisdom lessened, [in the estimation of His creatures.]<sup>35</sup>

One cannot speak of the image without talking about the work of Christ. Not only *is* Jesus the true image, He also accomplishes God’s purpose of recapitulation. This word, *recapitulation*, is

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will render us like unto Him, and accomplish the will of the Father; for it shall make man after the image and likeness of God.” *AH* 5.8.1.

<sup>32</sup> Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 37–38.

<sup>33</sup> Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 53.

<sup>34</sup> *AH* 5.16.2. See Wingren, 26.

<sup>35</sup> *AH* 3.2.

the word Irenaeus uses to sum up everything Jesus accomplished into a single term.<sup>36</sup>

“Recapitulation means the accomplishment of God’s plan of salvation, and this accomplishment is within history, in a time-sequence, and is not an episode at one particular point of time.”<sup>37</sup>

The image and likeness lost in Adam could only be restored in the divine Incarnation.<sup>38</sup> Irenaeus’ doctrine of recapitulation, according to Steenberg, hinges on the Word becoming flesh to “become this image and reveal this likeness”.<sup>39</sup> “The human person has lost his life; but further, since he was created in the image and likeness of the Son, the Son has a ‘vested interest’ in saving him.”<sup>40</sup> Irenaeus said that Jesus had to be born into the same creation to accomplish this union with God and humans, “by both destroying our adversary, and perfecting man after the image and likeness of God.”<sup>41</sup> Jesus *is* the very image of God, whereas humanity was created *in* the image.<sup>42</sup> Humankind, as made *in* the image, had to be saved by the One who *is* the image.

Irenaeus said:

Now this [blood] could not be required unless it also had the capability of being saved; nor would the Lord have summed up these things in Himself, unless He had Himself been made flesh and blood after the way of the original formation [of man], saving in his own person at the end that which had in the beginning perished in Adam.<sup>43</sup>

Irenaeus wrote against the Ebionite heresy along these same lines:

Therefore do these men [Ebionites] reject the commixture of the heavenly wine, and wish it to be water of the world only, not receiving God so as to have union with Him, but they remain in that Adam who had been conquered and was expelled from Paradise: not considering that as, at the beginning of our formation in Adam, that breath of life which proceeded from God, having been united to what had been fashioned, animated the man, and manifested him as a being endowed with reason; so also, in [the times of] the end, the Word of the Father

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<sup>36</sup> Wingren, 80.

<sup>37</sup> Wingren, 81.

<sup>38</sup> Behr, *Identifying Christianity*, 143-4.

<sup>39</sup> Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 136.

<sup>40</sup> Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 136.

<sup>41</sup> *AH* 5.21.2.

<sup>42</sup> Wingren, 21.

<sup>43</sup> *AH* 5.14.1.

and the Spirit of God, having become united with the ancient substance of Adam's formation, rendered man living and perfect, receptive of the perfect Father, in order that as in the natural [Adam] we all were dead, so in the spiritual we may all be made alive. [1 Cor. 15:22] For never at any time did Adam escape the *hands* [viz., the Son and the Spirit] of God, to whom the Father speaking, said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." And for this reason in the last times (*fine*), not by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, but by the good pleasure of the Father, [John 1:13] His hands formed a living man, in order that Adam might be created [again] after the image and likeness of God.<sup>44</sup>

Steenberg explains that Irenaeus was "able...to coordinate Christ's active relation to the Father, and particularly the Holy Spirit, with the concept of the 'image' into which humanity is created, since this Image is conceived as the Son anointed by the Spirit to bring about the Father's will for creation."<sup>45</sup> Jesus "is the image of the Father" because He is "the living actualization of the Father's will."<sup>46</sup> By this the eternal Word demonstrates that God, from the very beginning, destined human beings for the Son.<sup>47</sup> And likewise, the Son was to become a human, the true Son of Man.<sup>48</sup>

As the Son of Man, Jesus reversed Adam's defeat in the Garden. Irenaeus compared Gen 3 with Matt 4 to demonstrate that Adam did not acknowledge his true identity before God.<sup>49</sup> This passage is not primarily to show us how to defeat temptation, that is a secondary purpose. Instead, Jesus' defeat of the tempter shows us that Jesus was made like us, tempted, and yet did not sin in order that He could accomplish his work of recapitulation.<sup>50</sup> Choi's analysis of the temptations concludes, "Adam did not persist in self-understanding, but Christ did and reveals that human

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<sup>44</sup> AH 5.1.3.

<sup>45</sup> Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 34.

<sup>46</sup> Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 35.

<sup>47</sup> Wingren, 90.

<sup>48</sup> Wingren, 96.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Jin Choi, "Irenaeus on Adam's Sin," *The Expository Times* 130, no. 12 (September 2019): 521–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524619851269>.

<sup>50</sup> Heb 2:17-18; 4:14-15.

beings live and grow into perfection only when their identity is firmly rooted in their relation to God.”<sup>51</sup>

Ultimately, Jesus had to become incarnate so that humanity can become like God. In *On the Apostolic Preaching*, Irenaeus wrote, “He united man with God and wrought a communion of God and man, we being unable to have any participation in incorruptibility if it were not for His coming to us, for incorruptibility, whilst being invisible, benefitted us nothing: so He became visible, that we might, in all ways, obtain a participation in incorruptibility.”<sup>52</sup> This work, accomplished by the historical Incarnation of the eternal Word, is made real to us through the work of the Spirit in the life of the church.

#### *The Work of the Spirit in the Church: To Conform Man to the True Image*

It is in the church that God is forming the true human, that is, to form Christ into humans.<sup>53</sup> This happens as the Spirit conforms human beings into the true image and likeness, in other words, to graft the church into Christ to make humanity complete.<sup>54</sup> The eternal destiny of humanity is in the Son, as he was “created through the Son and *for* the Son.”<sup>55</sup> In the fourth volume of *Against the Heresies*, Irenaeus stated:

God thus determining all things beforehand for the bringing of man to perfection, for his edification, and for the revelation of His dispensations, that goodness may both be made apparent, and righteousness perfected, and that the Church may be fashioned after the image of His Son, and that man may finally be brought to maturity at some future time, becoming ripe through such privileges to see and comprehend God.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Choi, 529.

<sup>52</sup> *On the Apostolic Preaching* 31.

<sup>53</sup> Wingren, 159.

<sup>54</sup> Wingren, 154.

<sup>55</sup> Wingren, 5, emphasis his.

<sup>56</sup> *AH* 4.37.7, see Rom 8:29.

As the work of Christ restores believers back into communion with God, Christ's life becomes our life.<sup>57</sup> We no longer live by our former lives, for indeed, life without God is death.<sup>58</sup> Non-believers remain in that orientation of death because they do not have the likeness; it is the Spirit that gives the missing likeness back to the believer to become holy and righteous.<sup>59</sup> The work of the Son and Spirit gives humans immortality.<sup>60</sup>

However, this growth into the image of Christ does not happen automatically for Christians. Even though God's design is for us to advance toward Him, and God gave gifts for us to be blessed, we still need the right attitude and to submit ourselves to God in order for Him to remake us into His image and likeness.<sup>61</sup> As we are in the image of God, we have freedom to turn toward Him or against Him.<sup>62</sup> We grow into the likeness and fulfill God's economy by gazing upon the perfect image, Jesus Christ.<sup>63</sup> This also allows us to fulfill our true humanity.<sup>64</sup>

According to Wingren, Irenaeus closely links the church to ministry and to the image and likeness of God. After all, the church is Christ's body. "The Church is the way by which the risen Lord moves out into the world of men, who thereby regain their freedom. And the way outwards to men is at the same time the way forwards to the Parousia. As the Church has to expand spatially, it has also a time in which it has to grow—to grow up to Him who is the head,

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<sup>57</sup> Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 45; Wingren, 148.

<sup>58</sup> *AH* 5.27.2.

<sup>59</sup> Daniel Simango, "The Imago Dei (Gen 1:26-27): A History of Interpretation from Philo to the Present," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 42, no. 1 (2016): 173–74, <https://doi.org/10.17159/2412-4265/2016/1065>.

<sup>60</sup> M. David Litwa, "The God 'Human' and Human Gods. Models of Deification in Irenaeus and the Apocryphon of John," *Zeitschrift Für Antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity* 18, no. 1 (January 30, 2014): 72, <https://doi.org/10.1515/zac-2014-0006>.

<sup>61</sup> Simango, 173–74.

<sup>62</sup> Behr, *Identifying Christianity*, 166–67.

<sup>63</sup> Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 48; Wingren, 179.

<sup>64</sup> Wingren, 24, quoting *AH* 5.10.1-2.

namely, Christ.”<sup>65</sup> We become more in the image and likeness of God by our participation in the church, His body.<sup>66</sup>

Even after the Consummation, Irenaeus said that we will continue to learn and to grow into Christ. We will not *become* God, but we will continue to become more *like* God.<sup>67</sup> God’s pedagogy will continue for eternity.<sup>68</sup> This sounds like the Eastern Orthodox concept of deification, but Irenaeus never used that word in his writings.<sup>69</sup> What Irenaeus wrote about later developed into the idea of *theosis*.<sup>70</sup>

It is the image and likeness of God that is the basis for human nature, the reason for the Incarnation, and the destiny of humanity with God. We understand the connectedness of humanity with God, and our purpose for life both today and tomorrow, in Christ.<sup>71</sup>

### Conclusion

Irenaeus’ contribution to Christology and anthropology made an impact for hundreds of years of church history. Irenaeus reminds us that our search for the image and likeness of God is not found within ourselves, or only from the first few chapters of Genesis, but is found in the Word-made-flesh, Jesus Christ. Not only is Jesus our perfect example of showing us what it means to be human, Jesus also shows us the way to the Father and what it means to live by His eternal life. This eternal life begins now and will continue even after eschaton in an eternal growing into the likeness of God.

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<sup>65</sup> Wingren, 169.

<sup>66</sup> Wingren, 164. See *AH* 3.18.2; Lk 10:35; Matt 15:15-30.

<sup>67</sup> Litwa, 87.

<sup>68</sup> *AH* 2.28.3.

<sup>69</sup> Wingren, 209.

<sup>70</sup> Johan De Smedt and Helen De Cruz, “The Imago Dei as a Work in Progress: A Perspective from Paleoanthropology,” *Zygon* 49, no. 1 (March 2014): 136, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12066>.

<sup>71</sup> Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 51.

In conclusion, Irenaeus' explanations of theology offer a salutary correction to several contemporary misunderstandings of salvation. First, Irenaeus' theology shows why saying that Christ came to "save souls" is insufficient. Irenaeus' exposition of Scripture teaches us that the image of God includes our corporality, and that all of us—our bodies as well, not just our souls—are subject to salvation in Christ. The resurrection of the body affirms the worth of the physical aspect of humanity, and the humanity of Christ also demonstrates the way that there is salvific importance to our being embodied. It is the body that is the visible part of the creation of man, and through it the image the must be made visible to the rest of creation.<sup>72</sup>

Second, Irenaeus stresses the importance of growth. This makes spiritual formation all the more important. The ability to go deeper in our faith is not just a side benefit of participating in the life of the church or only a command of discipleship to continue following Jesus, it is the very reason we need the church; through the church, as we grow together, God will accomplish His purpose. This growth is not automatic, as we still need to submit our free will to the work of the Spirit. Future research could posit a theory of Christian education based on the theology of Irenaeus and compare that to how the church actually did educate in the centuries that followed him. This aspect of Irenaeus' theology would help correct the salvationism common in revivalist traditions which, while rightly valuing conversion to Christ, can value the event of conversion in a way that effectively devalues our need for growth in Christ.

We look to Christ as the author and finisher of our faith—and the author of our image who brings us back to His likeness so God can accomplish His work. We only find our full meaning as humans in a true, restored relationship with God, which is the purpose of *imago Dei*.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 33.

<sup>73</sup> Kim, 107.

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