

## Neuroscience and the Theological Anthropologies of Irenaeus and Origen

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### Introduction: The Brain and the Mind

Phineas Gage is one of the great medical-scientific curiosities of all time. On September 13, 1848, the twenty-five year old Gage was working with a team of men blasting rock to clear away the roadbed for the Rutland & Burlington Railroad in Vermont. Gage inadvertently put his head into line with a blast hole at the unfortunate moment that an unexpected spark set off blasting powder and sent a tamping iron – a metal rod 1.25 inches in diameter and 3 feet, 7 inches long – out of the rock with great force. The tamping iron passed through Gage’s open mouth, passed behind his left eye, went through his brain and skull completely, and landed some 80 feet away, ‘smeared with blood and brain.’<sup>1</sup> Gage fell onto his back, briefly convulsed his arms and legs, but spoke after a few minutes, got to his feet with little assistance, and sat upright in an oxcart for the ride to his lodgings less than a mile away. Gage suffered other physical effects from his injury, but there were reports that his personality and even his moral character were touched by the accident, albeit temporarily. Dr. J.M. Harlow, a physician who cared for Gage, published observations after Gage’s death in 1860 saying that,

‘He is fitful, irreverent, indulging at times in the grossest profanity (which was not previously his custom), manifesting but little deference for his fellows, impatient of restraint or advice when it conflicts with his desires, at times pertinaciously obstinate, yet capricious and vacillating, devising many plans of future operations, which are no sooner arranged than they are abandoned in turn for others appearing more feasible.’<sup>2</sup>

Even if questions are raised about how permanently or consistently these changes in his personality occurred, Gage’s experience raises the question of how ‘the mind’ is, at least, ‘tethered’ in the physical structure of the brain.

Subsequent findings in neuroscience and related scientific fields have confirmed that our experiences of consciousness, physical and mental health, emotions, and even morality are related to the physical brain and affected by many factors that have a physical impact on the brain. Children in Flint, Michigan who were exposed to lead in drinking water will likely be more prone to become violent as young adults because of improper neural development.<sup>3</sup> Men who watch pornography create neural pathways in their own brains which make them more inclined towards escapist-fantasy activities like porn-watching, but also drug use and excessive video gaming, curiously enough.<sup>4</sup> People who are given solitary treatment while imprisoned for crimes will experience decreased activity in their amygdalas, which makes further anti-social behavior more likely.<sup>5</sup> People who are afflicted with ADD, ADHD, autism, Alzheimer’s, and other brain diseases, have more difficulty praying and studying Scripture, and relating to people.

At every stage of human development, important questions can be asked about how our experiences and choices impact the human brain. These scientific findings require Christians to be more clear about the soul-body union and what we mean by it. While the soul and body can be considered to be conceptually distinct from each other, in light of what we now observe about the physical brain, they cannot be held to be separable in principle, especially in any way where the soul is regarded to be ontologically superior to the body. In that light, in this paper, I argue that the theological anthropology of Irenaeus of Lyons is not only more biblically faithful than that of Origen of Alexandria, it is better suited to address the concerns of our scientific understanding of human beings.

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<sup>1</sup> John Martyn Harlow, ‘Recovery from the Passage of an Iron Bar through the Head,’ *Publications of the Massachusetts Medical Society* (1868), 2 (3): 327–47.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Beyond Harlow’s report, various sensational rumors about Gage circulated later about his social and emotional states, which we must regard as suspect.

<sup>3</sup> Jessica Wolpaw Reyes, ‘Environmental Policy as Social Policy? The Impact of Childhood Lead Exposure on Crime,’ *NBER*, May 2007, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w13097>

<sup>4</sup> William Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009)

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Riesel, ‘The Neuroscience of Restorative Justice,’ *TED Talks*, February 2013, [https://www.ted.com/talks/daniel\\_reisel\\_the\\_neuroscience\\_of\\_restorative\\_justice?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/daniel_reisel_the_neuroscience_of_restorative_justice?language=en)

## **Irenaeus of Lyons and Origen of Alexandria on Body and Soul**

Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130 – 202 AD) was the disciple of Polycarp of Smyrna, disciple of the apostle John, who became bishop of Lyons. His surviving writings, *Against Heresies* and *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, attest to his intimate knowledge of the Scriptures, skill at observation and ability to research his gnostic opponents, and thoughtful approach to Christian catechesis. Eusebius of Caesarea named Irenaeus as one of two writers whose theology was eminently reliable: ‘Who does not know the books of Irenaeus and Melito which proclaim Christ as God and Man?’<sup>6</sup> Origen of Alexandria (c.185 – c.253 AD) was the brilliant son of a Christian professor of Greek literature, Leonidas of Alexandria; Origen became a student of Ammonias Saccas the Middle Platonist teacher of Alexandria, and later became one of the early church’s most prodigious scholars and theologians. Although some opposed Origen’s influence, and although his legacy has been much debated, Origen’s commentaries circulated broadly and were quite influential.

Irenaeus and Origen both describe human beings by referring to the biblical phrase, ‘the image of God.’ They define it quite differently, however. In debating his ‘gnostic’ opponents with their low view of matter, Irenaeus seems to revel even in the physical earth from which God formed Adam. In the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, dated circa 195 AD, meant to summarize Christian teaching for new converts, Irenaeus writes:

‘But man He formed with His own hands [i.e. the Word and the Spirit], taking from the earth that which was purest and finest, and mingling in measure His own power with the earth. For He traced His own form on the formation, that that which should be seen should be of divine form: for (as) the image of God was man formed and set on the earth. And that he might become living, He breathed on his face the breath of life; that both for the breath and for the formation man should be like unto God. Moreover he was free and self-controlled, being made by God for this end, that he might rule all those things that were upon the earth. And this great created world, prepared by God before the formation of man, was given to man as his place, containing all things within itself.’<sup>7</sup>

Irenaeus is clearly reading Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 as referring to the physical planet earth, because he says that ‘this great created world, prepared by God before the formation of man, was given to man.’ He differs from Origen in reading the same material. Irenaeus celebrates two aspects of humanity: (1) the physical form of the human as somehow mirroring the divine form, which seems to be Irenaeus’ conception of the theophanic appearance taken by the Son in the creation prior to his incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth;<sup>8</sup> (2) participation in the divine ‘breath.’

By contrast, Origen uses the phrase ‘the image of God’ to define its metaphysical, ontological content. This difference leads him down a very different path than Irenaeus. Origen says that the human soul alone is in the image of God, and specifically denies that the body is part of the image. His rationale is that the body is physical, visible, changeable, and mortal, which cannot be attributed to God as ontological properties:

‘But it is our inner man, invisible, incorporeal, incorruptible, and immortal which is made ‘according to the image of God.’ For it is in such qualities as these that the image of God is more correctly understood. But if anyone suppose that this man who is made ‘according to the image and likeness of God’ is made of flesh, he will appear to represent God himself as made of flesh and in human form. It is most clearly impious to think this about God.’<sup>9</sup>

In this passage, Origen suggests that the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:16 and Romans 7:22 spoke of an ‘outer human nature’ in reference to the body, and an ‘inner human nature’ in reference to the soul. Origen, asserting that Paul is more precise than the Genesis account on this point, reads this soul and body duality back into the Genesis accounts.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.28.5, cited by Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p.75

<sup>7</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 11

<sup>8</sup> Dragoş Andrei Giulea, ‘Simpliciores, Eruditi, and the Noetic Form of God: Pre-Nicene Christology Revisited,’ *Harvard Theological Review* 108:2 (2015), p.263 – 288 discusses how ‘anthropomorphic’ descriptions of God were perfectly acceptable in the pre-Nicene period, but became problematic afterwards.

<sup>9</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Genesis*, translated by Ronald E. Heine, edited by Hermigild Dressler, Robert P. Russell, Robert Sider, Thomas P. Halton, Sister M. Josephine Brennan, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press), p.63

<sup>10</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Dialogue with Heraclides*, translated by Robert J. Daly, edited by Walter J. Burghardt, Thomas Comerford Lawler, and

‘In creation, therefore, the human being first created was the one in the image (Gen.1:26) in whom is nothing material. For what is made in the image is not made from matter.’<sup>11</sup>

Summing up his understanding of how Genesis 1 describes the creation of the human soul, made in God’s image, and how Genesis 2 and 3 describes the creation of the human bodies we now experience, Origen says, ‘There are therefore two human beings in each of us.’<sup>12</sup>

### **Irenaeus on Human Free Will, Human Nature, and Infinite Human Growth**

To Irenaeus, being in ‘the image of God’ has a functional orientation and content. I suspect that Irenaeus was thinking of the Hebraic, physical understanding of the oneness of male and female in marriage as being in the image of God, since it is that oneness which is life-bearing and life-giving, as reflected in the grammar of Genesis 1:27 and also the literary concern of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 where God makes all living beings to be life-bearing ‘after its kind.’ In his explanation of human creation in the *Demonstration* passage quoted above,<sup>13</sup> Irenaeus seems to be thinking this way because he happily commingles phrases from the Eden story in Genesis 2:4 – 25 (‘from the earth’; ‘breathed on his face’) and the creation hymn of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 (‘image of God’; ‘be like unto God’; ‘rule all those things that were upon the earth’). Hence, Irenaeus has a relational (in fact, marital, it would seem<sup>14</sup>), spiritual, and *physical* understanding for what it meant for human beings to be in ‘the image of God.’

Irenaeus appears to have in mind a functional parallel with respect to creation between the Son of God and the human being. Notably, Irenaeus quotes the blessing-command to rule and have dominion over all things ‘upon the earth,’ from Genesis 1:28. To the extent that he set about to answer the question of how an individual human being – and not just a married couple – was in ‘the image of God,’ Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* appealed to the identity of the Word-Son as the archetypal image of God. Irenaeus says that ‘the Son of God, after whose image man was created,’ was the archetype God used to create humans.<sup>15</sup> As the Son of God has always been the true image of God through whom the Father is made known (Col.1:15, Heb.1:3), human beings were formed in the image of the eternal Son of God to similarly make God known specifically *in the creation* (Gen.1:26 – 27).

Each human being was meant to be in relation to God by the Son and the Spirit, in some sense reproducing God’s presence in creation by His Son and His Spirit. Irenaeus famously takes the biblical, Hebraic language for creation as ‘the work of His hands’ (e.g. Isa.5:12; Ps.102:25), and inserts the Son and the Spirit into the phrase; they are the two ‘hands’ of God.<sup>16</sup> Irenaeus uses this expression pointedly, and often in contrast to the idea that angels were intermediaries in creation.<sup>17</sup> Irenaeus denies the latter idea, seeing in it a danger of separating God from His creation, which would affect the Christian vision of redemption also directly involving God. Irenaeus’ opponents, who have been broadly categorized as ‘gnostic,’ wanted to keep God ‘unsullied’ by the material world, which they regarded as dreadful and impure. They attributed the creation to angelic beings, or intermediaries, who did the work of creation. In response, Irenaeus maintained that the ‘two hands’ of God – the Son and the Spirit – were God directly involved in the creation. Thus, the relation that human beings were intended to have with God, representing God by the Spirit, the Son of God originally does by the Spirit. For Irenaeus, human beings had first and foremost a functional role in creation, as developers of the creation, and also as agents of revelation of God’s wisdom and

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John J. Dillon, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation* No.54 (New York, NY: Paulist Press), p.66 says, ‘The Apostle everywhere maintains each of these two human natures in distinction from each other. But it seems to me that this doctrine was not due to Paul’s bold initiative. Rather, having drawn it from the Scriptures where it was expressed somewhat unclearly, he conceived and formulated it more clearly.’

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.69

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.70

<sup>13</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 11. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.preface.4, says, ‘Now man is a mixed organization of soul and flesh, who was formed after the likeness of God, and moulded by His hands, that is, by the Son and Holy Spirit, to whom also He said, ‘Let Us make man.’ Since Irenaeus quotes Genesis 1:26, it is clear he interpreted Genesis 1 as a whole to be the physical world and the physical bodies of human beings.

<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Fragment* 14 concerns why the serpent attacked Eve first, arguing that Eve was the stronger of the two, and Satan therefore attacked her before Adam. See <http://newadvent.org/fathers/0134.htm>. This is remarkable in its own right. But it attests to Irenaeus’ understanding that the marital oneness of Genesis 1:26 – 28 is reflected in Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:4 – 25.

<sup>15</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies* 4.33.4, ‘But who else is superior to, and more eminent than, that man who was formed after the likeness of God, except the Son of God, after whose image man was created? And for this reason He did in these last days exhibit the similitude; [for] the Son of God was made man, assuming the ancient production [of His hands] into His own nature.’

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 4.preface.4; 4.20.1

<sup>17</sup> Ibid 4.7.4; 4.20.4; 5.1.3; 5.5.1; 5.6.1; 5.28.4; cf.5.18; *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 10, 11, 26

goodness. This means, for Irenaeus, that body and soul were composite but inseparable parts, not only of the human being, but of the *image of God*.

Irenaeus asserts that God designed humans to make ‘progress day by day... ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One. For the Uncreated is perfect, that is, God.’<sup>18</sup> Logically, an infinite God creating, relating to, and developing finite human beings requires that humans would infinitely make progress, ‘ascending towards the perfect.’ In connection with this progress, Irenaeus asserts that human free will is vital. ‘God has always preserved freedom and self-government in man.’<sup>19</sup>

Irenaeus explains why God gave humans free will, and how that fact relates to God’s image. If God is free from coercion by forces outside Himself (as distinguished from being good within Himself), then it follows that God would endow human beings with that type of freedom as well, that we might experience some of the goodness God is, has, and knows: ‘Man is possessed of free will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free will, in whose likeness man was created.’<sup>20</sup> Irenaeus also relates free will to the power to ascend to God via the acquisition of virtue. If the power of free will were not given to human beings, then we would not be able to keep the virtue God invested in us, and develop it.<sup>21</sup> Irenaeus encourages his readers to be like soft clay which retains moisture to remain tractable to the potter, as opposed to hardened clay. Softened clay, Irenaeus says, can be shaped by the potter and adorned with even more beauty.

Moreover, Irenaeus understood the fall as a corruption of human body and soul in their respective capacities. In a comment on Genesis 3, Irenaeus held that the corruption in humanity is an expression of sinfulness in us, and stresses our physical bodies:

‘Wherefore also He drove him out of Paradise, and removed him far from the tree of life, not because He envied him the tree of life, as some venture to assert, but because He pitied him, [and did not desire] that he should continue a sinner for ever, nor that the sin which surrounded him should be immortal, and evil interminable and irremediable. But He set a bound to his [state of] sin, by interposing death, and thus causing sin to cease, putting an end to it by the dissolution of the flesh, which should take place in the earth, so that man, ceasing at length to live to sin, and dying to it, might begin to live to God.’<sup>22</sup>

An analogy might be drawn to fetal alcohol syndrome: Because of her mother’s choice to drink alcohol while pregnant, a baby inherits from her mother a physical arrangement of brain neurons which will cause her cognitive and developmental struggles. Similarly, when Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge, they took into their bodies and souls the power to define good and evil – and the desire to do so – from within their own selves. They implanted into themselves and their descendants a desire to be a relativistic absolutist – that is, the desire to define good and evil (to be an absolutist) but from within one’s own self (to be relativistic) by being the standard and measure of all things, rather than allowing God to define good and evil for us. So human death was an ontological consequence they *forced upon God*. God had to withdraw the tree of life from human reach so we would not eat from it while in a corrupted state, and immortalize sinfulness in ourselves. This is a remarkable insight which other Greek fathers repeat.<sup>23</sup> God, being love, and having love for Adam and Eve and all the children who would come

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid 4.38.3; John E. Toews, *The Story of Original Sin* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), p.50 is an example of a historian who credits Theophilus of Antioch (d.183 – 185 AD), *Letter to Autolycus* 25 with being the first to write that Adam had been *nepios*, ‘a child,’ and needing to properly mature. Irenaeus shares that view in *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 11, 14. But it is just as reasonable to suspect that prior to Theophilus, some kind of view of Adam as not being static, but needing to mature in some way, was present in Christian thought.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid 4.15.2

<sup>20</sup> Ibid 4.37.1 – 2, see the whole chapter; cf. 4.4.3; 4.39; 5:37

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. In 4.39.2, Irenaeus’ discussion of Romans 2 would be worth an expanded discussion, because his logic argues against the popular Calvinist interpretation of the ‘potter and clay’ passage of Romans 9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid 3.23.6

<sup>23</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.8 makes a general principle, ‘Wherefore I will grant that He punishes the disobedient... for correction; but I will not grant that He wishes to take vengeance. Revenge is retribution for evil, imposed for the advantage of him who takes the revenge. He will not desire us to take revenge, who teaches us to pray for those that spitefully use us. [Mt.5:44]’ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.16 says, ‘But as children are chastised by their teacher, or their father, so are we by Providence. But God does not punish, for punishment is retaliation for evil. He chastises, however, for good to those who are chastised, collectively and individually.’ Methodius of Olympus (died circa 311 AD), *From the Discourse on the Resurrection*, Part 1.4 – 5, says, ‘In order, then, that man might not be an undying or ever-living evil, as would have been the case if sin were dominant within him, as it had sprung up in an immortal body, and was provided with immortal sustenance, God for this cause pronounced him mortal, and clothed him with mortality... For while the body still lives, before it has passed through death, sin must also live with it, as it has its roots concealed within us even though it be externally checked by the wounds inflicted by corrections and warnings... For

from them, was confronted by two options. Would God allow the rather likely possibility that human beings would immortalize the corruption of their human nature within themselves? Or would God instead interpose mortality as an instrument by which this fate could not happen? God chose the latter, because death could be overcome later by resurrection, and human beings could choose to receive into themselves the healing in Christ for their corruption. So mortality, though tragically unpleasant, was a type of mercy and pity.

Some disorder has set into us which, Irenaeus says, needs to be dissipated as our bodies return to the earth through our bodily mortality.<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting that this view requires Irenaeus to interpret the creation hymn of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 as referring to a material creation, with human beings constituted bodily from creation and prior to the fall, and the fall impacting at least the human body and investing it with a disorder. The body is now fallen and fragile, though it was not initially created by God that way. All that is logically required by Irenaeus' teaching that the death of the body, while tragic, serves one constructive purpose. This exposes a difficulty for Origen's view of the body. For if the soul preceded the body, as Origen taught, and if the soul fell prior to having a body, and if the body is God's accommodation to the fallen soul, then God would be the direct, sole, mechanical cause of a malfunctioning human body, and the goodness of God would be jeopardized. The only way to preserve the goodness of God in light of the current state of the body is to make the body as we currently experience it – fallen and fragile – to be the result of human disobedience to an originally, unadulteratedly *good* plan of God where the body was unfallen and had more physical protections (i.e. the garden; the angels?; etc.). For Irenaeus and those who follow in his interpretation of Genesis 3, the body must be as original as the soul for the purpose of constituting the human being, and originally untarnished. If mortality plays a constructive purpose, as Irenaeus states, it is only because the human body participates in the original corruption of sin from the fall, which must be undone through death – in fact, by dying and rising in Christ. The body, therefore, must be ontologically equal to the soul.

Moreover, the other consequences of the fall – pain in childbearing and futility in gardening (Gen.3:16 – 19) – were ontological as well, and dependent on the human body being originally part of the image of God. They were not additional punishments or retribution from God. They are simply the outgrowth of Adam and Eve's choice to try to separate themselves from God, the source of life. Human beings are wholly dependent on God for life and the production of more life; we are unable to be bearers of life and caretakers of life without Him. Anything having to do with producing more life became difficult and frustrating.

Does the corporeal, changing, finite body pose a problem for Irenaeus, in terms of identifying it as part of the image of God, equally with the soul? No, on two counts. First, Irenaeus, like many patristic writers,<sup>25</sup> understands the theophanies of God in the Old Testament as appearances of the pre-incarnate Son. The pre-incarnate Son appeared in the form of an angel or a man, albeit sometimes as something other than that, such as the fire in the burning bush. 'And the Word spake to Moses, appearing before him.'<sup>26</sup> 'And all such visions point to the Son of God, speaking

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the present we restrain its sprouts, such as evil imaginations, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble us, not suffering its leaves to unclothe and open into shoots; while the Word, like an axe, cuts at its roots which grow below. But hereafter the very thought of evil will disappear.' Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 8.1 says, 'For the Word, perceiving that no otherwise could the corruption of men be undone save by death as a necessary condition...' Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 45, writes, 'Yet here too he makes a gain, namely death and the cutting off of sin, in order that evil may not be immortal. Thus, his punishment is changed into a mercy, for it is in mercy, I am persuaded, that God inflicts punishment.' Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassios*, Question 44.5 says, 'And now, lest he put forth his hand and take from the Tree of Life and live forever,' providentially produces, I think, the separation of things that cannot be mixed together, so that evil might not be immortal, being maintained in existence by participation in the good.'

<sup>24</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Fragment* 12 says, 'We therefore have formed the belief that [our] bodies also do rise again. For although they go to corruption, yet they do not perish; for the earth, receiving the remains, preserves them, even like fertile seed mixed with more fertile ground. Again, as a bare grain is sown, and, germinating by the command of God its Creator, rises again, clothed upon and glorious, but not before it has died and suffered decomposition, and become mingled with the earth; so [it is seen from this, that] we have not entertained a vain belief in the resurrection of the body. But although it is dissolved at the appointed time, because of the primeval disobedience, it is placed, as it were, in the crucible of the earth, to be recast again; not then as this corruptible [body], but pure, and no longer subject to decay: so that to each body its own soul shall be restored; and when it is clothed upon with this, it shall not experience sorrow, but shall rejoice, continuing permanently in a state of purity, having for its companion a just consort, not an insidious one, possessing in every respect the things pertaining to it, it shall receive these with perfect accuracy...'

<sup>25</sup> Justin Martyr of Rome, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* 55 – 67 and 126 – 128. Athenagoras of Athens, *Plea for the Christians* 10. Tertullian of Carthage, *Against Praxeas* 14 – 16. Clement of Alexandria, *Against the Judaizers* (*Fragment* 3). This understanding appears to come most directly from Paul's dictum that the Son of God followed Israel in the wilderness in the form of a rock granting water (1 Corinthians 10:4), and a manuscript variant of Jude's letter, where Jude says that 'the Lord *Jesus*' – and not simply 'the Lord' – saved a people out of Egypt (Jude 1:5). Often quoted is John's declaration that 'No one has seen God [the Father] at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him' (John 1:18). This requires that the appearances of God in the Old Testament were not the Father, but the Son.

<sup>26</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.20.9

with men and being in their midst. For it was not the Father of all, who is not seen by the world.’<sup>27</sup> This patristic understanding holds that the Father is spatially transcendent above the creation, whereas the Son makes appearances in the creation, most of the time taking a form that appears to be the template for our physical human bodies.

Second, Irenaeus frames his theological anthropology by positing an *analogy* between God and human beings. Irenaeus’ framework is to position human growth – in both soul and body – as an analogy to the infinity of God. Furthermore, if the Son’s *eternal*, relational choice to be loved and love the Father in the Spirit *reflects and constitutes* His very nature and personhood, then this impacts how we define human beings. We are also beings who are *becoming*, where our *temporal*, relational choice to be loved by God and love God in return will reflect and *constitute* our nature and personhood.

To demonstrate that Irenaeus held this understanding, consider Irenaeus’ treatment of the question, ‘Could not God have exhibited man as perfect from beginning?’ and answers with, ‘It was possible for God Himself to have made man perfect from the first, but man could not receive this [perfection], being as yet an infant.’<sup>28</sup> Immediately afterwards, he says again, ‘God had power at the beginning to grant perfection to man; but as the latter was only recently created, he could not possibly have received it, or even if he had received it, could he have contained it, or containing it, could he have retained it.’<sup>29</sup> Irenaeus is unusual among patristic writers in that he tried to answer this question. Perhaps he relies overly much on the analogy of infancy for Adam. For the question can still be asked, ‘So if God could have created Adam as ‘an adult,’ with already perfected love for God based on perfect knowledge of God, why did He not do so?’<sup>30</sup> To this Irenaeus has no answer. This silence is strange, because Irenaeus himself says, ‘With God there is nothing without purpose or due signification.’<sup>31</sup> If God *could* have done something better *but did not*, what explanation can be offered for that? Can Irenaeus maintain his conviction, ‘With God there is nothing without purpose or due signification’?<sup>32</sup> I argue that he can, and does, in large part through his theological anthropology.

Although he did not say this in *Against Heresies*, perhaps Irenaeus might have said, ‘It was not possible for God to exhibit human beings perfect from the beginning.’ Irenaeus already had the framework for saying that. If God has a non-coercive love towards humanity, as Irenaeus has already said,<sup>33</sup> and even *is* non-coercive love in God’s own being, then He *could not possibly* create Adam and Eve with an already perfected love for Him, for that would not be a love they had personally chosen. Nor could God create them with an already perfect knowledge of Himself, for that would entail God implanting in them false memories about a past relationship with Him, and God cannot lie (Heb.6:18), or somehow sharing the mind of God directly, and it is doubtful that the finite could comprehend the infinite in such a way. So God had to create them with the desire to receive from Him and an inclination to love Him, but yet at one small step removed from Himself.

If this is so, then God actually *had* to create the tree of life in the garden. He *had* to *invite without coercion* Adam, Eve, and their descendants to participate more deeply in His own divine life in a physically immortal and spiritually ever-increasing mode, which Irenaeus had already deduced of the tree of life.<sup>34</sup> To an unfallen human being, the tree of life would have had the effect of sealing our will for God and uncorrupted human nature with divine life and the orientation of our personhood as directed outwards towards God, such that we would perfect our ontological freedom as relational creatures designed to depend on God and to constantly ascend intellectually and spiritually towards Him. In other words, under the necessity of authentic love, God *had* to create humanity so they might *freely* choose to *always* choose Him forever. It could not be automatic.

God also *had* to create the tree of knowledge of good and evil to invite us to let Him define good and evil, and not take that power into ourselves. God already ‘implanted’ human beings with the knowledge of good and evil, says Irenaeus.<sup>35</sup> Adam and Eve would have grown in goodness, and then understood evil conceptually, by imagining

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<sup>27</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 45 – 46

<sup>28</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.38.1

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid* 4.38.2.

<sup>30</sup> Steenberg, p.41, offers an answer which does not fully suffice, nor does he answer the objection I raise here.

<sup>31</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.21.3

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid* 4.21.3

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid* 4.4.3; 4.37; 4.39; 5:37

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* 3.23.6

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid* 4.15.1 says, ‘For God at the first, indeed, warning them by means of natural precepts, which from the beginning He had implanted in mankind, that is, by means of the Decalogue...’ If God implanted the Decalogue within all humankind, then to Irenaeus, the tree of the

what life would be like if they decreased in goodness. Adam experientially knew what being ‘alone’ had been like, after seeing all the animals parade by him in male-female pairs: ‘not good,’ by God’s own assessment (Gen.2:18). Eve could imagine the aloneness even if she had never experienced it personally herself. If while unfallen, they had a child, and felt the joy of parenthood, they could imagine losing that child and the impoverishment of loss. But they did not have to actually abandon, harm, or alienate that child in reality. They could, Irenaeus says, simply imagine<sup>36</sup> reversing their growth in relationship, love, and goodness. Adam could wonder, ‘What if I did something to alienate Eve and return to a state of ‘not-good’ aloneness?’ Eve could wonder, ‘What if I did something to harm my children and return to a state before children?’ So growth in the *awareness* of good and evil was *not dependent on actual disobedience*. In fact, as the Genesis 3 – 4 narrative suggests, and human observation indicates, when we do evil, we run the risk of *losing* understanding of how evil it is, because we rationalize it, blame someone else, etc. God’s goodness is such that He designed a world that was not pedagogically dualistic.

What, then, was the purpose of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? Why was it *necessary*? Irenaeus does not directly answer this question. But he leaves open the following possibility. God is a life-giver, and a law-giver. His law-giving serves His life-giving. Just as two points make a line, the two trees form a line, but not just a line: a vector; a directional movement. The two trees signify the invitation to trust God to define good and evil, and progress infinitely into God’s life. In other words, the second tree would have given human beings the knowledge that God alone defines good and evil. In effect, the Trees represent God: they are larger than us, older than us, are more firmly rooted than us, and can offer us something without perishing. If Adam and Eve grew in goodness and rejected the evil, and left the power to define good and evil in God’s domain. The one heinous act by which God’s loving and good authority could be rejected was taking the fruit from the tree of knowledge. And that, too, God had to offer as a non-coerced choice. It was bound up in His love for us.

In order for human love to be genuine, human beings would have to choose to love God in an uncoerced manner, *to perfect our natures and our love* in a uncoerced act of love for God to be united with Him. In other words, God *had* to create human beings as human *becomings*, called to be lovingly united with Himself, so that in that union, we could henceforth be ever-deepening as finite creatures experiencing infinite love. For God to do the impossible, and create human nature already fixed from the start, and human personhood as already determined in an orientation of other-love, would mean that human love would not be a true choice. In such a situation, human love would be something less than love. And human beings would be something less than human. If we are ultimately only acted upon, and not actors ourselves, then we would ultimately be indistinct from the rocks and grass of the created universe – a mirror passively reflecting objects, but not the image of God. Again, the garden of Eden, the two trees, and the necessity of a personal narrative of development are all *logical necessities resulting from God’s free, spontaneous, and unconditioned choice to create us*. In Irenaeus’ theological anthropology, we had to make a free, uncoerced choice to impact the direction of our own development – soul and body – and perfect our own nature, through love for God.

### **Origen on Human Free Will and Human Nature**

Origen reaches his conclusion that the soul, and not the body, is the image of God by comparing certain attributes of the human soul to God. That is, Origen’s comparison is ontological. Whereas the human body obviously does physically grow and change, eventually suffering disease, pain, and death, in Origen’s view the human soul is ‘incorruptible.’ By this, Origen appears to mean that the soul cannot be dismembered or disintegrated into constituent parts, as anyone investigating a corpse over time would notice.

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knowledge of good and evil was not the only source of the awareness of good and evil. It was related, and supplemented human moral awareness. But it did not encompass the totality of cognitive moral awareness. It represented God’s authority to define good and evil.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid 4.39.1 stresses the role of the mind to think through the options of good and evil. Irenaeus says that through ‘mental power man knew both the good of obedience and the evil of disobedience.’ But he does not mean that we must do evil in order to know it. Irenaeus refers to ‘the eye of the mind, receiving experience of both, may with judgment make choice of the better things...’ But again, Irenaeus is referring to the activity of ‘the mind.’ The mind receives experience of both, by revelation and by growth in goodness, as I have suggested above. This is why Irenaeus can also say of the ‘evil thing which deprives him of life, that is disobedience to God, [he] *may never attempt it at all.*’ (italics mine) Irenaeus then says that the tongue tastes sweet and bitter, the eye sees black and white, the ear hears different sounds, and ‘so also does the mind, receiving through the experience of both the knowledge of what is good, become more tenacious of its preservation, by acting in obedience to God: in the first place, casting away, by means of [mental, intellectual] repentance, disobedience, as being something disagreeable and nauseous; and afterwards coming to understand what it really is, that it is contrary to goodness and sweetness, *so that the mind may never even attempt to taste disobedience to God.*’ (italics mine) The intellectual, reflective, and imaginative activities of the mind are evident. Irenaeus does not believe in a dualistic pedagogy where human beings must do and experience evil personally in order to appreciate goodness. God is good and wise enough to design a world and human nature so that evil is never logically necessary.

However, the soul does appear to be ‘corruptible’ in a moral sense. The soul also grows in experience, memory, emotional depth, moral strength or weakness, virtues and vices, and so on. Do not these qualities pose a problem for Origen in thinking about how the soul alone is in the image of God? Either human growth is part of humanity’s creation in the image of God because of some kind of analogy to God, which Irenaeus asserted, as I explore below, or human growth or deterioration in any dimension poses an irreconcilable challenge to any theological system.

It is not clear how Origen thinks about the human soul’s finiteness, even its apparent residence in, and operation through, a body. Irenaeus, along with Tertullian, was content to think about the human soul as experiencing growth along with the body.<sup>37</sup> This is an important question to ask of Origen because the Alexandrian denies that God is to be thought of as ‘made of flesh and in human form’ because God would then be the opposite of the characteristics Origen had just named. God would be visible, corporeal, corruptible, and implicitly mortal. True enough, if and only if there were a univocal comparison straightaway between God and the human body. The human soul, however, is nevertheless tethered to a human body, rendering it locatable, confined, and limited in its powers of perception and movement. The soul may not be corporeal per se, but it is certainly tied to corporeality. It is not omnipresent.

Moreover, Origen attributed the fall to souls, or minds, as distinct from ensouled bodies. It is noteworthy that Origen posited a primordial fall of all rational minds other than the Son. The degree of their fall from God constituted their initial starting point as bodies of various types: angels, humans, demons. Those who fell the farthest were either ‘stationed’ or ‘located’ or ‘embodied’ – if the term can be used in this sense – in demonic ‘bodies.’ Those who fell the least were stationed into the various ranks of angels. Those who fell somewhere in-between became embodied human beings. Origen believed in the transmigration of souls, that is, the reincarnation of souls into new bodies after death based on their responsiveness and attentiveness towards the good, that is, God.<sup>38</sup> It is unknown how Origen would answer the question of whether there have always been a fixed number of rational minds, when we observe that the number of human beings has vastly increased in recent decades, and in his cosmology, every human being is attended by a demon and an angel.

What was the nature of the fall, according to Origen? Corresponding to the true nature of rational beings as minds without bodies, Origen uses the analogy of a geometer or physician who stops practicing their craft and staying familiar with their body of knowledge:

‘According to our point of view, then, so long as that geometer or physician continues to exercise himself in the study of his art and in the practice of its principles, the knowledge of his profession abides with him; but if he withdraw from its practice, and lay aside his habits of industry, then, by his neglect, at first a few things will gradually escape him, then by and by more and more, until in course of time everything will be forgotten, and be completely effaced from the memory. It is possible, indeed, that when he has first begun to fall away, and to yield to the corrupting influence of a negligence which is small as yet, he may, if he be aroused and return speedily to his senses, repair those losses which up to that time are only recent, and recover that knowledge which hitherto had been only slightly obliterated from his mind.’<sup>39</sup>

Two aspects of Origen’s analogy deserve special comment. First, Origen’s analogy is informed by a Platonic view of the soul-body union which is difficult to sustain given what we understand from modern neuroscience. Is Origen exaggerating when he says that ‘knowledge’ of a long-practiced discipline like medicine can be ‘obliterated’? For today, we understand that certain habits and experiences have the effect of hard-wiring patterns into the physical brain: motor skills used in the practice; memories of the smells of chemicals; emotions like shock and fear when first confronting a bone protruding from the skin; use of specialized terms; and problem-solving skills. A long-

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<sup>37</sup> Matthew Craig Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009), ch.1. notes that Irenaeus and Tertullian shared the view that the human soul grows in some sense with the human body, and that the Spirit of God gives life to the soul which mediates life to the body.

<sup>38</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *On First Principles* 2.9.8 says, ‘It is therefore possible to understand that there have been also formerly rational vessels, whether purged or not, i.e., which either purged themselves or did not do so, and that consequently every vessel, according to the measure of its purity or impurity, received a place, or region, or condition by birth, or an office to discharge, in this world. All of which, down to the humblest, God providing for and distinguishing by the power of His wisdom, arranges all things by His controlling judgment, according to a most impartial retribution, so far as each one ought to be assisted or cared for in conformity with his deserts. In which certainly every principle of equity is shown, while the inequality of circumstances preserves the justice of a retribution according to merit.’

<sup>39</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *On First Principles* 1.4.1; cf. 1.6.2 – 4



neglected discipline or practice might take some time to revive in its full capacity – that is true. But, given a healthy, functioning brain, the exercise of that discipline or practice will be revived. This is true for other areas of learning: a child who is exposed to a second or third language when she is young will have an easier time learning it when she is older, compared to the child who was never exposed to that language. And so on. The mind-brain-body connection which we understand from modern neuroscience makes Origen’s analogy problematic to various degrees. This would seem intuitively true regarding intimate relational connection: our eye-contact, touch, experience of nursing, etc. with our mothers and fathers shape our brains, our habits of mind, our immune systems, and our physical health. Exactly how, science has not been able to fully quantify or describe, if such a thing is possible, not to mention ethical. But it is undoubtedly substantial. Even the phrase ‘intimate relational connection’ requires physical bodies and brains – not at the expense of the mind or the soul, of course, but rather in vital connection with them.

Second, Origen here suggests that the primordial fall most closely corresponds to switching one’s object of contemplation from God to something else. It was accordingly not the ingestion and internalization of a problematic element that alters or disorders one’s very constitution, as it is in Irenaeus. For Origen, the fall started ‘habits’ of mind based fundamentally on ‘neglect.’ The slippage of knowledge comes about ‘gradually.’ With enough time, the mind forgets ‘everything.’ The skills and habits are ‘completely effaced from the memory.’ A quicker recovery, by contrast, means that the geometer or physician can more quickly ‘recover that knowledge’ which was ‘only slightly obliterated from his mind.’ While this is only an analogy, Origen nevertheless places great weight on the notion that the fall constituted a loss of cognitive knowledge about God.

How then do now-embodied souls regain knowledge of God, which in Christian discourse constitutes ‘salvation’? To explain the reestablishment of now-embodied minds or souls with God, Origen frequently uses the language of purging and purifying. He refers to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the only being or beings which remain utterly pure:

‘...spotless purity exists in the essential being of none save the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but is an accidental quality in every created thing; and since that which is accidental may also fall away, and since those opposite powers once were spotless, and were once among those which still remain unstained, it is evident from all this that no one is pure either by essence or nature, and that no one was by nature polluted. And the consequence of this is, that it lies within ourselves and in our own actions to possess either happiness or holiness; or by sloth and negligence to fall from happiness into wickedness and ruin, to such a degree that, through too great proficiency, so to speak, in wickedness (if a man be guilty of so great neglect), he may descend even to that state in which he will be changed into what is called an opposing power.’<sup>40</sup>

The attraction of such a view is that we human beings are indeed fascinated by the possibility that we had ‘knowledge’ of some sort which we have lost, for one reason or another. Origen’s placement of Christian terminology over that schema has a certain kind of resonance. Another attractive point about Origen’s theological cosmology is his view that there is no logical reason why a ‘mind,’ after the body perishes, might not turn back to God. This led Origen to speculate that even the devil and his demons might repent. Modern day universalists celebrate this possibility, with some even arguing that it is a certainty. Origen writes:

‘But whether any of these orders who act under the government of the devil, and obey his wicked commands, will in a future world be converted to righteousness because of their possessing the faculty of freedom of will, or whether persistent and inveterate wickedness may be changed by the power of habit into nature, is a result which you yourself, reader, may approve of, if neither in these present worlds which are seen and temporal, nor in those which are unseen and are eternal, that portion is to differ wholly from the final unity and fitness of things. But in the meantime, both in those temporal worlds which are seen, as well as in those eternal worlds which are invisible, all those beings are arranged, according to a regular plan, in the order and degree of their merits; so that some of them in the first, others in the second, some even in the last times, after having undergone heavier and severer punishments, endured for a lengthened period, and for many ages, so to speak, improved by this stern method of training, and restored at first by the instruction of the angels, and subsequently by the powers of a higher grade, and thus advancing through

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<sup>40</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *On First Principles* 1.5.5

each stage to a better condition, reach even to that which is invisible and eternal, having travelled through, by a kind of training, every single office of the heavenly powers. From which, I think, this will appear to follow as an inference, that every rational nature may, in passing from one order to another, go through each to all, and advance from all to each, while made the subject of various degrees of proficiency and failure according to its own actions and endeavours, put forth in the enjoyment of its power of freedom of will.<sup>41</sup>

The cumulative weight of his own cosmology leads Origen to the universalist position with certainty, since Origen also shared the patristic view that God is by nature goodness and love. Accordingly, God does not erect any barrier to rational minds from pursuing Him or returning to Him. Origen apparently believes that all rational beings will tire of embodiment, and even grow bored or frustrated with bodily sensations. Thus, for Origen, all minds will eventually desire to ascend beyond the limits of embodiment. And embodiment will serve the pedagogical and punitive purpose which God designed for it.

However, what prevents individual minds from being ‘negligent’ of God again? What caused these minds to grow bored with God before, apparently, especially in such a simultaneous way? Origen’s theological system does not answer this question, in part because it is very difficult to explain how ‘knowledge’ of God impacts a disembodied mind. It is not clear how a created mind might ‘participate’ (2 Pet.1:4) in God, who is a ‘mind.’ Even if God is not simply an object of contemplation, but a rational being with whom other rational beings are intuitively familiar, does Origen have an answer? Perhaps rational language and discourse is one way, based on the notion that the Son-Word of God is divine rationality itself, who undergirds the rationality of all things. But even if that is so, what, for Origen, constitutes the difference between using rational language to merely discuss God, and rationally worshiping and loving God and allowing His Spirit to permeate our being? Put again, from the other more pertinent angle, what prevents such a massive, catastrophic fall from happening again? Nothing in Origen’s theological anthropology suggests a barrier to such a tragedy.

Hence, Origen’s system actually collapses back into the endless cycles of the karma-dharma system of Hinduism. Whether this resemblance reflects logic or an intuition shared by various Indo-European peoples (Greeks and Indians are both Indo-European) is intriguing. The Origenist system holds out an appealing (on some level) universalism with apparent and inevitable certainty, but it cannot actually deliver on that certainty. For the theological anthropology built into it, supporting it, and required by it strongly suggests the cycle will repeat itself. In fact, Origen’s system requires a deliberate openness to the uncertainty: Evil could start again, at any point. Origen himself expresses this idea.<sup>42</sup> Hence, Origen’s universalism, as with any universalism, actually ceases to be a real option. At best, it is a misnomer disguising a cyclical view of time.

The ‘Irenaeus’ – or, dare I say, more traditionally Christian – view of the human being and salvation remains: God has entrusted us with a choice about whether we will love Him freely and eternally, and each person’s choice, whenever we make it, will have an eternal impact on our very bodies and souls. If God is a being who is constituted by love, then we, too, are beings constituted by love in a derivative and creaturely sense. We, too, are *human becomings*, defined by who and what we choose to love.

### **The Interpretation of Genesis in Irenaeus and Origen**

From the standpoint of biblical exegesis, which of these two theologians had the better reading of Genesis? Can we say? Irenaeus of Lyons reaches his conclusion that the body is in the image of God by reading the creation hymn of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 and the first *toledot* unit of Genesis, ‘the generations of the heavens and the earth’ in Genesis 2:4 – 4:26, as two complementary units of material. As I mentioned above, taking Irenaeus’ *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 11, which I quoted above,<sup>43</sup> Irenaeus commingles phrases from the creation hymn of Genesis

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid 1.6.3

<sup>42</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on Matthew* 13.12; *On First Principles* 3.1.23. Jean Daniélou, *History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea, Volume 2: Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, translated and edited by John A. Baker (London: Dartman, Longman, and Todd, 1973), p.423 describes Origen’s system this way: ‘Since spiritual creatures must always be free, and since freedom always implies mutability, new falls will be possible to all eternity; and it was this point in his system which Gregory of Nyssa most severely criticized, comparing it to the Platonist doctrine of metempsychosis... It does not appear that Origen ever succeeded in resolving the contradiction between an eternal cycle of fall and return, and a universal restoration – with both of which doctrines he was later to be charged.’

<sup>43</sup> Also, Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.preface.4, says, ‘Now man is a mixed organization of soul and flesh, who was formed after the likeness of God, and moulded by His hands, that is, by the Son and Holy Spirit, to whom also He said, ‘Let Us make man.’’

1:1 – 2:3 ('image of God'; 'be like unto God'; 'rule all those things that were upon the earth') with phrases from the Eden story in Genesis 2:4 – 25 ('from the earth'; 'breathed on his face'). Since Irenaeus quotes Genesis 1:26, it is clear he interpreted Genesis 1 as a whole to be the physical world and the physical bodies of human beings.

Origen, however, reads Genesis 1 – 3 in a 'spiritual' or analogical way. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Origen, believing that creation was co-eternal with God,<sup>44</sup> while nevertheless dependent on God, believed that Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 narrated a non-chronological but *logical* account of God's creation of human souls. Then, Genesis 2:4 onwards narrates a chronological but primordial understanding of how souls 'thickened' into bodies. In Origen's view, the Genesis account of the fall, especially the 'coats of skin' in Genesis 3:23, narrated the descent of the soul into the body, since by God's creative providence, the mind-soul pre-existed the body.<sup>45</sup>

Irenaeus believes bodies were part of the *imago dei*, and therefore believes that the 'coats of skin' were simply coverings for the human body made from animal hide to replace the fig leaves.<sup>46</sup> It is apparent that Irenaeus viewed the 'tunics of skin' as 'clothing' of the ordinary sort, with continuity of 'body' between creation and fall and exile, for uncomfortable clothing 'which gnaws and frets the body' at present today is the same bodily experience Adam and Eve felt wearing 'fig leaves,' prior to the 'tunics of skin.' John Behr concurs that Irenaeus interprets Genesis 3:22 in the more straightforward way.<sup>47</sup> It is precisely Irenaeus' opponents, the Valentinians, who argue that these 'skins' were 'the final stage of human formation as the sensible element of the human form.'<sup>48</sup>

Irenaeus and Origen differ notably in their handling of Genesis 1 – 4. Irenaeus seems to believe the relationship between these two literary units of biblical text – Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 and Genesis 2:4 – 4:26 – was that of an interlocking sequence. He is happy to commingle them in his quotations. Origen, however, is more specific about how he reads this material. The Alexandrian puzzles over the fact that 'male and female He made them, and God blessed them saying, 'Increase and multiply and fill the earth and have dominion over it.'"<sup>49</sup> The problem, on Origen's reading of Genesis, is that God had only created Adam, and not Eve, by the point of Genesis 1:26 – 28. Not until God fashioned Eve from Adam's side in Genesis 2:21 did the 'female' appear, as Origen reads the text. So how could God address and bless both 'male and female' human beings before He made the 'female'? Origen reasons that God was either anticipating the creation of the female, or was speaking in such a way as to acknowledge the 'harmony or the appropriate conjunction'<sup>50</sup> where Eve was latent in Adam and would be united with him in marriage after God brought her forth.

My exploration of these two theologians requires me to specify my understanding of how these two Genesis texts ought to be read, and the cultural influences exerting pressure on both ancient readers of Genesis like Origen, and modern readers like ourselves. Some modern interpreters, influenced by the German higher critical school, see Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 and Genesis 2:4 – 25 as two different creation accounts, more or less in disagreement with each

<sup>44</sup> Georges Florovsky, 'St. Athanasius' Concept of Creation' in Volume Four in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1975)

<sup>45</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Dialogue with Heraclides*, translated by Robert J. Daly, edited by Walter J. Burghardt, Thomas Comerford Lawler, and John J. Dillon, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation* No.54 (New York, NY: Paulist Press), p.69 says, 'In creation, therefore, the human being first created was the one in the image (Gen.1:26) in whom is nothing material. For what is made in the image is not made from matter.' Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Genesis*, translated by Ronald E. Heine, edited by Hermigild Dressler, Robert P. Russell, Robert Sider, Thomas P. Halton, Sister M. Josephine Brennan, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press), p.63 says, 'We do not understand, however, this man indeed whom Scripture says was made 'according to the image of God' to be corporeal. For the form of the body does not contain the image of God, nor is the corporeal man said to be 'made,' but 'formed,' as is written in the words which follow... But it is our inner man, invisible, incorporeal, incorruptible, and immortal which is made 'according to the image of God.' For it is in such qualities as these that the image of God is more correctly understood. But if anyone suppose that this man who is made 'according to the image and likeness of God' is made of flesh, he will appear to represent God himself as made of flesh and in human form. It is most clearly impious to think this about God.' Origen's 'Platonist-idealist' or 'spiritual' reading of the pre-fall world in Genesis 1 requires him to explain how human bodies came to be, which he assigns to both the 'earth' in Genesis 2:7 and the 'coats of skin' in Genesis 3:22.

<sup>46</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.23.5 says, 'Inasmuch as, he says, I have by disobedience lost that robe of sanctity which I had from the Spirit, I do now also acknowledge that I am deserving of a covering of this nature, which affords no gratification, but which gnaws and frets the body. And he would no doubt have retained this *clothing* for ever, thus humbling himself, if God, who is merciful, had not clothed them with tunics of skins instead of fig-leaves.' (italics mine)

<sup>47</sup> John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.119 concurs that Irenaeus interprets Genesis 3:22 in the more straightforward way.

<sup>48</sup> Stephen O. Presley, *The Intertextual Reception of Genesis 1 – 3 in Irenaeus of Lyons* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015), p.121.

<sup>49</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Genesis*, p.67

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p.68

other on some key details. The higher critical scholars argued, and continues to argue, that the text of Genesis reflects a political compromise between different ideological camps (J, E, P, and D) in Israel. Those Christians worried by this theory of political compromise sometimes find Origen's interpretation appealing because certain of those problems might be avoided. After all, Origen de-historicizes and de-terrestrializes Genesis 1 and 2.<sup>51</sup> If Genesis 1 refers to neither the material world nor human bodies, and if the phrase 'in the beginning' refers only to 'in the Son' and is stripped of all sense of chronological time, then there is no scientific or logical difficulty with light appearing before the sun (apparently); 'plants' and 'animals' being created before humanity (in Genesis 1) and not afterwards (as in Genesis 2), because they signify something else; and male and female being created simultaneously (as in Genesis 1) and not sequentially (as in Genesis 2). But in my view, Origen's interpretation introduces other very significant, insurmountable problems. One need not find the doctrine of creation ex nihilo in Genesis, as one can derive it from elsewhere (e.g. Romans 4:17; John 1:3; etc.). So that is less of a problem. But having no literary and textual response to the higher critical scholars is worse.

How might these opening chapters of Genesis then be read? In response to the German higher critical scholars, Jewish<sup>52</sup> and then Christian<sup>53</sup> literary scholars pointed out that we lack physical, textual evidence of J, E, P, or D. That singular fact makes the whole source-critical project entirely dependent on perceptions of the final text. In fact, the Samaritan Pentateuch makes this 'Documentary Hypothesis' even more doubtful because the Samaritans are supposedly descendants of the 'Elohists' school in the Northern Kingdom of Israel who rejected the Davidic kingship and the Levitical priesthood in Jerusalem – so why does the Samaritan Pentateuch incorporate material from the supposedly pro-Davidic J and pro-Levitical P schools? Not only that, we also perceive other – in fact, better – explanations for the literary phenomena that gave rise to perceived distinctions of 'sources,' along with masterful and consistent literary patterns within the biblical text, especially along 'compositional seams' where literary units within a book, and books within the canon, were placed together. This shift in scholarly approaches to the biblical text – from its supposed 'sources' to its final composition – is important to recount. The fact is academically and historically significant that Jewish scholars were the first to respond in a scholarly way to the deconstructionist, source-critical theories of German critics of the Hebrew Bible. Since then, Christian scholars have had to acknowledge, recover, and incorporate insights – especially about Hebrew narrative – from Jewish scholars which had long been neglected by the church. That pattern either began with, or was given great impetus by, Origen of Alexandria, whose self-imposed alienation from the terrestrial and embodied meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures can be demonstrated here.

Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 is a theological prologue, and the remainder of the book of Genesis consists of ten genealogies marked off by the Hebrew term 'toledot,' which is translated in English as 'the generations of.' The ten sections are as follows:

1. This is the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created (2:4)
2. This is the book of the generations of Adam (5:1)
3. These are the records of the generations of Noah (6:9)
4. Now these are the records of the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth (10:1)
5. These are the records of the generations of Shem (11:10)
6. Now these are the records of the generations of Terah (11:27)
7. Now these are the records of the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son (25:12)
8. Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son (25:19)
9. Now these are the records of the generations of Esau (that is, Edom) (36:1)
10. These are the records of the generations of Jacob (37:2)

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<sup>51</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *On First Principles* 4.16, writes, 'For who that has understanding will suppose that the first, and second, and third day, and the evening and the morning, existed without a sun, and moon, and stars? And that the first day was, as it were, also without a sky? And who is so foolish as to suppose that God, after the manner of a husbandman, planted a paradise in Eden, towards the east, and placed in it a tree of life, visible and palpable, so that one tasting of the fruit by the bodily teeth obtained life? And again, that one was a partaker of good and evil by masticating what was taken from the tree? And if God is said to walk in the paradise in the evening, and Adam to hide himself under a tree, I do not suppose that anyone doubts that these things figuratively indicate certain mysteries, the history having taken place in appearance, and not literally.'

<sup>52</sup> E.g. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Literature* (Philadelphia, PA: Basic Books, 1981); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985)

<sup>53</sup> E.g. Frank Kermode and Robert Alter, editors, *A Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987 and 1990), Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992); John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992)

New Section: Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Joseph (Ex.1:1)

Moreover, Genesis demonstrates that the genealogies are literary units in themselves, so Genesis narrates stories which intersect and overlap chronologically with each other in various ways; the genealogies do not necessarily narrate history linearly as if one genealogy strictly followed after another. In fact, sometimes, even *within* a single *toledot* unit in Genesis, events are presented in a way that are chronologically ‘out of order.’ The stress instead lies on connectivity and relationship between people, which is the point of genealogical literature like this in the first place. Four examples demonstrate my point:

1. The ‘generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth’ account (Gen.10:1 – 11:9) narrates material in such a way that foregrounds the dispersion of the people over the earth (Gen.10:1 – 32), and only later gives the Tower of Babel story (Gen.11:1 – 9) as an explanation for how that dispersion happened, and why. The material in Genesis 10:1 – 32 gives the larger picture, whereas the material in Genesis 11:1 – 9 provides one instance along the way of that bigger picture, or perhaps an archetypal instance which recurred on more than one historical occasion. This style of literary narration is comparable to the visual artistry of cubist painting. Painters Pablo Picasso and Tycho Brache, for instance, would paint a ‘distorted’ face by ‘unfolding’ the side of a person’s face which would normally be hidden from view. That side of the face would reveal a hidden emotion, indicate on a change of mood, etc. The artistic sophistication we regularly grant to visual artists, we must perceive in literary artists as well, especially the human authors of the Scriptures.
2. The ‘generations of Shem’ account (Gen.11:10 – 26) begins with material about Shem and his immediate descendants, which repeats and develops material in Genesis 10:21 – 30, from the previous genealogy. The later ‘generations of Shem’ account focuses on one family line, expanding in detail and depth on that line, from the more generic account in the earlier account where all of Shem’s sons are listed.
3. The ‘generations of Ishmael’ notes that Ishmael had twelve sons (Gen.25:12 – 18). That generations account ‘interrupts’ the story of Isaac. Isaac’s meeting and marriage to Rebekah is narrated in Genesis 24:62 – 67, near the end of the ‘generations of Terah’ account, which spans Genesis 11:27 – 25:11. As part of the ‘generations of Isaac’ account (Gen.25:19 – 35:29), we learn that Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah (Gen.25:20). But this detail is given to us retrospectively in a new literary unit, the ‘generations of Isaac’ (Gen.25:19 – 35:29), which also informs us about the twin boys Esau and Jacob being born when Isaac was sixty years old (Gen.25:26).
4. Within the ‘generations of Jacob’ unit (Gen.37 – 50), the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen.38) is sandwiched into the story of Joseph (Gen.37; 39ff.). But Judah’s family saga is surely chronologically simultaneous with Joseph’s sojourn in Egypt, which resumes in Genesis 39.

Once Christian scholars began to see the flaws in their biblical scholarship after the German higher critical scholars, in particular, and their centuries of neglect of dialogue with the Jewish synagogue, in general, we can see that the current understanding of Genesis favors Irenaeus of Lyons over Origen of Alexandria. What was revealed was not merely a procedural flaw, but a substantive one: the Christian tendency to prioritize the soul ontologically over the body led to a tendency to diminish the importance of Judaism. To that end, Irenaeus is a helpful reminder to modern Christians both in his biblical scholarship, and also his ethics of the body.

### **Conclusion: The Neglect of Irenaeus’ Theological Anthropology**

In assessing the respective legacies of Irenaeus and Origen, John Behr remarks,

‘Irenaeus’s emphasis on the flesh and his teaching that the body was in the image of God were soon marginalized by the pervasive influence of Origen’s theology, and were never retrieved thereafter.’<sup>54</sup>

Largely, Christians of late antiquity proposed a Neoplatonic Christian synthesis where the soul was to become impassible by governing the body under contemplation of the Word of God. This proposal rested, for example, on a distinction between the ‘bodily passions,’ especially sexual lust, and the intellectual ones like pride and anger. But problems with this synthesis of Christian faith and Neoplatonic hierarchy of soul over body would arise. Arguably, the Neoplatonic Christian conception of the self did not fully answer the questions about the nature and location of ancestral sin, and the role of human desires prior to the faculty of the will and its exercise.

<sup>54</sup> John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.218

By the time of the debate between the orthodox and Apollinaris in the late fourth century, Irenaeus' biblical-Jewish anthropology fully honoring the body and soul equally has been eclipsed in Christian discussions. Origen's Platonic vision centered on the soul is ascendant. The upshot of this shift in conceiving of the body-soul relation is that all authors addressing the topic of the humanity of Jesus – including Athanasius, in his two books against Apollinaris, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and so on – face terminological challenges when they attempt to express the status of Jesus' humanity from conception, and his personal sinlessness in word, deed, thought, etc.

Thus were there immediate theological and pastoral ramifications to adopting the Origenist posture towards the body-soul duality in human beings. Not only that, however: Modern studies of the brain, human development, and trauma thoroughly challenge this Neoplatonic distinction between soul and body. Recovering Irenaeus' insights into Scripture and theological anthropology will surely be fruitful.