

THE BISHOP, BEELZEBUB, AND THE BLESSINGS OF  
MATERIALITY: HOW IRENAEUS' ACCOUNT  
OF THE DEVIL RESHAPES THE CHRISTIAN  
NARRATIVE IN A PRO-TERRESTRIAL  
DIRECTION

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If our hymnody and funeral sermons are any indication, contemporary Christian suspicions abound regarding the goodness of the material world. And if not suspicions about its goodness, then at least about its *enduring* goodness. As the old gospel hymn states, this world is not our home; we're just passing through. Heaven, it would seem, occupies pride of place in the popular imagination as the final resting place for the people of God. This heaven-bound narrative is the result of latent Platonic and Stoic influence upon patristic Christianity.<sup>2</sup> In the Platonic tradition, the heavenly world of the true "forms" is the dwelling place of all things good. Death is release from the prison of the body, so that the soul can leave the material world and rise to the more perfect world of the forms.<sup>3</sup> And in the Stoic account, the way to avoid becoming overly preoccupied with the material world is to recognize that fine dishes are nothing more than the "corpses of dead animals," that wine is merely "grape juice," and that sex is nothing more than the "friction of a piece of gut." When material things seem "most

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<sup>2</sup> The anti-material posture of Platonic and Stoic thought and its unhealthy influence on Christianity is assumed as a theological premise for this paper, rather than defended as a conclusion. Yet I realize that at least some Christian theologians (such as we find in Radical Orthodoxy) would push back against my statement that Plato is to blame for the anti-material, anti-body posture of much Christian theology. And of course my claim depends upon what counts as true "Platonic" thought. At the end of the day, my concern is not with who is to blame (be it Plato, the Neo-Platonists, the Stoics, etc.), but rather with the problem at hand—namely, that too much Christian theology has adopted a sub-Biblical account of the material world and the body. For a helpful analysis of this question and Plato's role in it, see James K.A. Smith, "Will the Real Plato Please Stand Up? Participation versus Incarnation," in James K.A. Smith and James H. Olthuis, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy in the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005), 61-72. I might also add that my critique here of Plato and the Stoics is not meant as a dismissal of the entirety of their thought. I find a great deal in both traditions that is admirable and wise.

<sup>3</sup> This basic account is woven throughout Plato's writings and can be seen most clearly in his famous analogy of the cave. See Plato, *Republic*, 12. For Plato on the benefits of death and the evils of the body, see such passages as *Phaedo*, 63-65, 79a-81d; *Timaeus*, 81e; *Apology*, 40c-42.

worthy of our approval,” we must “lay them naked and see how cheap they are.”<sup>4</sup> Don’t make much of the material world, Stoic logic goes, because it is not worth making much of. It is all just “water, dust, bones, stench!”<sup>5</sup>

The anti-material, anti-body posture implicit within these accounts (and expressed by other Greek philosophers in their own variegated ways), runs counter to the Biblical witness regarding the goodness of the material world and stands in strong contrast with the Bible’s vision of bodily resurrection and the renewal of the material cosmos.

Try as we may, Christian theology has never been able to wholly shake it. Many early Fathers such as Origen, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine, each in their own way, show a commitment to the basic Platonic and Stoic prioritization of the “spiritual” over the material.<sup>6</sup> This Platonic and Stoic narrative has steadily pulled Christian eschatology up and out of the material world into the world of the forms, gods, and spirits. The problem with the Platonic narrative, of course, is that it is wrong. Heaven is not the final resting place for the people of God. God has created us from the earth, as earth people. It is no affirmation of our humanity or credit to God’s creative power that we treat the material world (from which we are made) as a throwaway husk. As John’s eschatological vision in Revelation 21- 22 makes clear, the destiny of the Christian—both temporal and eternal—is tied up with this world. What God has made is good, indeed *very* good. It was virginal in Adam; it will be consummated in Christ.

<sup>4</sup> Thus the advice from the Stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius in his *Meditations*, 6.13. The same basic disinterested approach can be seen in other Stoic-influenced Roman statesman-philosophers such as Cicero and Seneca. For Cicero’s comments about death as a blessing, see his *Tusculum Disputations*, 1. And Seneca’s counsel to a mother who was grieving the loss of a son is typical of Stoic and Platonic thought: “There is no need, therefore, for you to hurry to the tomb of your son; what lies there is his basest part and a part that in life was the source of much trouble —bones and ashes are no more parts of him than were his clothes and the other protections of the body. He is complete—leaving nothing of himself behind, he has fled away and wholly departed from earth; for a little while he tarried above us while he was being purified and was ridding himself of all the blemishes and stain that still clung to him from his mortal existence, then soared aloft and sped away to join the souls of the blessed. A saintly band gave him welcome.” *De Consolatione ad Marciam*, 25. Seneca’s perspective is uncomfortably similar to what one hears at Christian funerals and what one reads in Augustine’s response to the death of his mother in *Confessions*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 9.36.

<sup>6</sup> Tertullian, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria are especially noteworthy. For Origen’s comments on the vanity of the material body, see *De Princ.* 1.7. For Tertullian’s comments about the dangers of female beauty see *On the Apparel of Women*, 1.2-2.2; here Tertullian memorably asserts that makeup and the braiding of hair are dark arts taught to the daughters of men by the fallen angels of Genesis 6. Thus feminine beauty should not be emphasized, but “obliterated and concealed by negligence.” For a thorough analysis of Clement of Alexandria see John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Behr shows how Clement largely accepts the Platonic and Stoic premise that the unseen world of the heavens is ontologically superior to the material world and how this in turn leads to an overdrawn asceticism. Behr likewise shows how Irenaeus rejects this basic anti-materialist premise and avoids Clement’s unduly ascetic approach to the Christian faith.

Here we are not just quibbling about eschatological geography. What is at stake is the very nature of Christian hope. As a pastor I have seen the positive way in which a robust knowledge of our terrestrial future serves as a vital resource for anchoring Christian hope. This hope is in turn the basis of Christian obedience; we persevere in obedience to the teachings and person of Christ precisely because we believe that God's promises are true and his reward is sure. No Stoic ethic, this. As the author of Hebrews makes plain, even Jesus' will to obey was based on his confidence in the eschatological "joy that was set before him" (Heb. 12:2). Visions of disembodied spirits dwelling in an angelic celestial city do little to inspire Christian hope and perseverance. Thankfully, our Lord has more terrestrial things in store for us.

For the purposes of this paper, I take it as axiomatic that the eternal home of God's people is (at least in part)<sup>7</sup> the earth that now spins through our space and time. Much good work has been done to recapture the Bible's pro-terrestrial posture and its eschatological vision of cosmic hope. As N. T. Wright and others have shown, God's ultimate plan for the material world is not its annihilation, but its redemption.<sup>8</sup> So I do not here attempt to make a case that has already been made ably elsewhere. Instead I wish to resource this pro-terrestrial narrative by marshaling the assistance of an unlikely ally—the Devil. And not just any old Devil, but the Devil of the early Christian tradition as articulated by the great church father and bishop, Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–200).<sup>9</sup> As we will see,

<sup>7</sup> I say "at least in part" because the New Testament also makes plain that Christians are raised up with Christ and seated with him in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:3–10)—a position that we occupy for eternity. In the eschaton, we do not trade earth for heaven, but rather, in Christ, take on heaven as an extension of our home.

<sup>8</sup> This has been a particular emphasis of recent evangelical Biblical theology. See, for example, N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008); Greg Beale and Mitchel Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2014); J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> The main lines of Irenaeus' account of the Devil can be found in earlier Christian writers. See Ignatius, *Ad Rom.* 5, *Ad Tral.* 4.2; Papias, *Frag.* 11, 24; Justin, *2 Apol.*, 5; Tatian, *Ad Graec.* 7; Athenagoras, *Plea*, 10, 24, 25; and Theophilus, *Ad Autol.*, 2.28–29. No single one of these authors mirrors exactly Irenaeus' account of the Devil; yet the similarities point toward a common narrative. At no point do the Christian writers contemporary with or earlier than Irenaeus contradict the basic structure of Irenaeus' account of the Devil. What's more, Irenaeus tends to speak of the Devil in passing, without justifying or defending his position. The overall effect of this suggests that Irenaeus takes his position on the Devil to be common knowledge within the early Christian community. In support of my claim that there is an "early" Christian account of the Devil, as distinct from the later Christian tradition, see Jeffery Burton Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Cornell University Press, 1987), 80–106. Russell correctly notes that Theophilus, Athenagoras, and Tatian all worked within the same basic tradition, a tradition that Irenaeus continued and expanded. For Russell, the break with this early tradition begins with Origen. See also Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 333–42. Forsyth likewise views Origen as a transition figure who moves Christian reflection away from Irenaeus' account toward what will later emerge as the standard account codified by Augustine.

Irenaeus' account of the Devil offers us a minority report in the Christian tradition that runs in a somewhat divergent direction from the accounts of the Devil that emerged after the third century and that now hold sway in contemporary Christian theology. By retrieving Irenaeus' account of the Devil, I hope to resource and bolster accounts of the biblical narrative that seek to take seriously the eschatological goodness and permanence of the material world.

## I. IRENAEUS AND THE DEVIL IN IRENAEUS' SCHOLARSHIP

Irenaeus is unique among the Fathers. He is rightly called the church's first theologian and is certainly the church's earliest extant Biblical theologian. His Christology, anthropology, and early trinitarian articulation offer us perhaps the best look into a developing and maturing second-century Christianity. In many respects his work established the framework for later Christian reflection. As Gustaf Aulén correctly observes, Irenaeus "did more to fix the lines on which Christian thought was to move for centuries after his day" than did any of the other fathers.<sup>10</sup> Indeed his thought remains fertile soil for contemporary theological reflection and scholarship. As a consequence, scholarly studies abound regarding Irenaeus' views on apostolic succession, recapitulation, anthropology, Christology, Mariology, canonicity, the rule of faith, atonement, and divinization (to name a few).<sup>11</sup> Most saliently for the theme of our symposium on the doctrine of creation, Irenaeus is well-known for his strongly pro-cosmological stance.<sup>12</sup> His disputation with the Gnostic heresy compelled him to articulate a clear and aggressive

<sup>10</sup> Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 17.

<sup>11</sup> Major treatments of Irenaeus include (but are not limited to): Matthew Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption* (Boston: Brill, 2008) and *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009); John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement and Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Gustaf Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation: A Study in the Biblical Theology of Irenaeus* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2004), originally published as *Manniskan och Inkarnationen enligt Irenaeus* (Lund: C.W. K. Gleerup, 1947); Antonio Orbe, *Anthropologia de San Ireneo* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Christianos, 1969), *Parabolas Evangelicas en San Ireneo*, Vols. 1 and 2 (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Christianos, 1972), and *Espiritualidad de San Ireneo* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1989); Jacques Fantino, *L'homme image de Dieu chez saint Irénée de Lyon* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1986); Ysabel de Andia, *Homo Vivens: Incorruptibilité et divinization de l'homme selon Irénée de Lyon* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1986); Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, originally published by SPCK, 1931; John Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Irenaeus* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2006), originally published by the Epworth Press, 1948; Denis Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010); Paul Foster and Sara Parvis, eds., *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012); Ian M. MacKenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching: A Theological Commentary and Translation* (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2002); and Eric Osborne, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> See especially Matthew Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation and Of God and Man*; also John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology*.

affirmation of the goodness and eventual redemption of the material world—an affirmation that stands unparalleled in the early Christian tradition.<sup>13</sup>

But what is of equal relevance for the present occasion, and what has not been explored at length, is Irenaeus' account of the Devil and the way this account resources his (and potentially our) high terrestrial cosmology. To be sure, one can find many treatments of Irenaeus that touch upon his view of the Devil.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, there are a number of scholarly treatments of the Devil that touch upon Irenaeus.<sup>15</sup> But in both instances Irenaeus' account of the Devil features only as a peripheral topic in a larger argument—most typically in discussions centered on atonement and theodicy. Such neglect lacks imagination. As William James once famously quipped, “The world is all the richer for having a Devil in it, so long as we keep our foot upon his neck.”<sup>16</sup> And rich indeed is Irenaeus' world, not least because of his Devil.

Into this open space I offer an executive summary of Irenaeus' account of the Devil and the way this account shapes and informs his high terrestrial cosmology and eschatology.<sup>17</sup> Like any story, the shape of Irenaeus' narrative is significantly influenced by the identity and aims of the narrative's chief antagonist. And it is at just this point that Irenaeus' account of the Devil has unique power to reshape our overly Platonized Christian story in a more Biblical and pro-terrestrial direction. In what follows I offer a brief summary of Irenaeus' account of the Devil—the Devil's identity as angelic steward of the material world, his envy of humanity's lordship, his assault upon humanity, his fall, and his eventual defeat—all with a view to showing how this narrative pushes Irenaeus' reading of the Biblical plotline in a decidedly pro-terrestrial direction. By way of a foil, we begin with a brief retelling of the Devil narrative that now reigns in the contemporary imagination.

<sup>13</sup> Colin Gunton goes even further, stating that Irenaeus' defense of the goodness of the material creation is “without equal in the history of theology.” Gunton, *The Triune Creator* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 62.

<sup>14</sup> Typically the Devil tends to show up in Irenaeus' scholarship as it relates to the broader themes of atonement. Gustaf Aulén's classic work, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, 16-35 is a standard here. Likewise, see Gustaf Wingren's, *Manniskan och Inkarnationen enlight Irenaeus*, chap. 11. Wingren shows how the *Christus Victor* framework undergirds the whole of Irenaeus' narrative. See also the brief (but helpful) comments in Denis Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 104-07. Yet in each case no systematic treatment of the Devil is offered.

<sup>15</sup> The seminal scholarly work on the history of the Devil is provided by Jeffrey Burton. His four-volume work explores the identity of the Devil from ancient times until modernity. Burton's work touches on Irenaeus in the second volume, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987), 80-106. Burton's primary lens through which he assesses the Devil is that of theodicy.

<sup>16</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, 1902), 50.

<sup>17</sup> Such is a central burden of my doctoral research, which I hope to complete in 2017.

## II. THE FOIL: JOHN MILTON'S DEVIL

Beginning with Origen<sup>18</sup> and then achieving a relatively fixed status by the time of Gregory the Great in the sixth century, Christian teaching on the Devil took the form now known to us and popularized by John Milton in *Paradise Lost*. In this now familiar "Miltonic"<sup>19</sup> narrative, the fall of the Devil and his angels occurs in heaven prior to the creation of humanity.<sup>20</sup> Satan's besetting sin is pride. Though one of the great archangels, he is not content with his limited status in relation to the Son, and so leads a rebellion against God in an attempt to usurp the Son's dominion in heaven. The coup fails, and the Devil and his angels (one third) are cast out of heaven. Still determined to strike against God, the Devil attempts to avenge this defeat by attacking humanity—God's prized possession. The garden temptation and the fall of humanity ensue.

A number of features from this narrative are notable. First, the fall of the Devil and the angels occurs before the creation of humanity. As such the informed reader of the Biblical narrative has already been handed a backstory that necessarily shapes the reading of Genesis 1-3, which in turn influences the way one reads the rest of the canonical narrative. Second, the primary and initial conflict of the Miltonic narrative is between God and the Devil; indeed, the initial conflict of the narrative occurs before humanity has even entered the story. Humanity becomes involved in the plot's conflict only as an innocent bystander, a civilian casualty of the already existing warfare between heaven and hell. Third (and most significantly), the spoil of war in the Miltonic account is a celestial one; Satan's pride has driven him to attempt to usurp the Son's heavenly throne. In this account the earth is simply the battleground where two extra-terrestrial forces wage war. The story concludes in a celestial tone. The Devil is defeated in his war against God by the divine Son of God, faithful humanity ascends to heaven to replace the angels who have fallen, and humanity lives happily ever after in God's eternal home.

As we will see, this Miltonic narrative of the Devil mirrors the same basic plot sequence and climax that we find in Platonism's non-

<sup>18</sup> The account of Satan's fall takes a new turn with Origen. Origen's neo-Platonic framework—particularly his notion of the pre-existence of the soul—is influential at this point. Material creation and the body are the result of the Fall, and thus the Fall must take place prior to creation. On this account, Origen must look beyond the canon for Satan's fall rather than taking the Genesis account at face value, as does Irenaeus. More on this below.

<sup>19</sup> It is, of course, anachronistic to refer to the whole of this tradition as "Miltonic." But given that Milton's *Paradise Lost* has done more to shape the contemporary English imagination on the Devil than has any other work, and given that our primary concern is pastoral and theological (rather than strictly historical), I here use Milton as the spokesman for a tradition that he, more than any other, has expressed in its most mature form. As we will see, the same is the case for Irenaeus, who himself does not invent the early Christian account of the Devil, but nonetheless is its most mature spokesman.

<sup>20</sup> See Augustine's extended discussion on the timing of the Devil's fall in his *De Gen. litt.*, 11.1-26. Augustine is uncertain about when the angels fell. But he is certain they didn't maintain their original righteousness for any significant length of time, falling soon after they were created. In any case, for Augustine, Satan has already fallen prior to his temptation of Adam and Eve.

terrestrial narrative. In the Miltonic account of the Devil, the redemption of humanity and the earth are not necessary features in the resolution of the larger soteriological narrative. Irenaeus' account, however, runs in a different direction.

### III. IRENAEUS' DEVIL: PRE-FALL IDENTITY

Irenaeus' comments regarding the Devil are scattered liberally throughout his two extant works.<sup>21</sup> For Irenaeus, the Devil is "Satan,"<sup>22</sup> "the serpent,"<sup>23</sup> the "rebel,"<sup>24</sup> the "adversary,"<sup>25</sup> the "deceiver,"<sup>26</sup> "the author and originator of sin,"<sup>27</sup> the "neighbor of death,"<sup>28</sup> the "accuser,"<sup>29</sup> the "dragon,"<sup>30</sup> the "enemy of humanity"<sup>31</sup> and "the apostate."<sup>32</sup>

But the Devil was not always so diabolical. Irenaeus, like other early Christian writers, posits a "fall" in which the Devil apostatizes and becomes the enemy of God, of the good angels, and of humanity. Irenaeus does not offer us an exhaustive portrait of the Devil's pre-fall identity (in keeping with his general anti-speculative reading of Scripture). Yet given the paucity of Scriptural information available on the topic, Irenaeus has

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<sup>21</sup> Irenaeus' two extant works are *Adversus Haereses* (his major work against the Gnostics) and *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (a short summary of the Biblical storyline). Both works were originally written in Greek, but now remain complete only in Latin and Armenian translations respectively (with extended and smaller fragments of the Greek found in other writers). For the Latin text of *Adversus Haereses*, see the relevant volumes in A. Rousseau, ed., *Sources Chrétiennes*. For the Armenian text of *Demonstration*, see the 1919 edition of *Patrologia Orientalis*, Vol. 12, ed. K. Ter-Mekertschian and S. G. Wilson. The English translation of *Adversus Haereses* used in this essay follows ANF, Vol. 1. The English translation for *Demonstration* is based on Armitage Robinson's 1920 translation from the Armenian. I have modified these English translations at various points, based on my reading of the Latin, as well as updating the translations for smoother English reading. The translation of *Dem.*, 12 and 14 used in this chapter follows the work of Matthew Steenberg in his essay "Children in Paradise: Adam and Eve as 'Infant' in Irenaeus of Lyons," in *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Spring 2004, 1-22. Steenberg bases his translation first on A. Rousseau's retrograde Latin edition of *Dem.*, which can be found in *Sources Chrétiennes*, Vol. 406, and secondly on the Armenian text of 1919. Any departures from Steenberg's English translation are identified in the notes. Bracketed Armenian transliterations are drawn from Smith, *Proof*. Bracketed Latin terms are from SC, Vol. 406. Bracketed Greek terms are from Steenberg's translation, representing his best guess as to Irenaeus' original term.

<sup>22</sup> *Dem.*, 11, 16; *Adv. Haer.*, 5.21.2.

<sup>23</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, 5.21.1, 3.23.1. Irenaeus clearly identifies the Devil with the serpent in Genesis 3. Satan indwells the snake, and for this act God thereafter punitively associates the Devil with the snake (*Dem.*, 16, *Adv. Haer.*, preface to book 4).

<sup>24</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, 3.8.2.

<sup>25</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, 5.21.2, 4.24.1

<sup>26</sup> *Dem.*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> *Dem.*, 16.

<sup>28</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, 5.22.2

<sup>29</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, 3.17.3.

<sup>30</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, 2.31.3.

<sup>31</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, 4.24.1.

<sup>32</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, 5.24.4; *Dem.*, 11.

more to say about the Devil's pre-fall identity than we might otherwise expect. Two aspects of Irenaeus' thought are notable. First, for Irenaeus, the Devil began as the angelic "steward" of our planet, ordained to govern the affairs of the world on behalf of humanity until such time as humanity "came of age" and could govern the world on its own. And second, it was as an angelic steward that the Devil and his angels were destined to be subject to humanity. I address each aspect below.

#### A. THE DEVIL BEGAN AS AN ANGELIC STEWARD OF THE MATERIAL WORLD

Fundamental to Irenaeus' perspective on the Devil is the idea that the Devil began as an archangel, a "creature of God, like the other angels,"<sup>33</sup> who was divinely appointed as steward of the earth. For Irenaeus, innumerable angelic hosts occupy the seven heavens; each is assigned to various tasks by the Creator.<sup>34</sup> The lowest heaven (the seventh) is our firmament. It is in this lowest heaven that the archangel-soon-to-be-the-Devil and his angels reside. Irenaeus writes,

In the domain [i.e., the world] were also, with their tasks, the servants [i.e., the angels] of that God who fashioned all, and this domain [i.e., the world] was in the keeping of the steward, who was set over all his fellow servants. Now the servants were angels, but the steward the archangel.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, 4.41.1; see also 5.19.1, 5.21.1, 3, 5.24.3, 4; *Dem.* 11. The idea that the Devil began as an angel is not original with Irenaeus. See Justin, *Dial.*, 79; Tatian, *Ad Graec.*, 7; Athenagoras, *Plea*, 24; and Theophilus, *Ad. Auto.*, 2.28. Russell notes that this view was fixed in the Christian tradition from Theophilus onward (c. 170). See Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Satan*, 78. Russell's comment implies there were alternative early Christian perspectives on the Devil's origin. However, I am not aware of any ancient Christian writer (here I exclude Gnostic writings) before or after Irenaeus who offers an alternative understanding of the Devil's original ontology.

<sup>34</sup> See *Dem.*, 9.

<sup>35</sup> *Dem.*, 11. This same idea of the Devil's stewardship is again mentioned briefly in *Adv. Haer.*, 5.24.4: "Just as if any one, being an apostate, and seizing in a hostile manner another man's territory, should harass the inhabitants of it, in order that he might claim for himself the glory of a king among those ignorant of his apostasy and robbery; so likewise also the Devil, being one among those angels placed over the spirit of the air [*sic autem et Diabolus, cum sit unus ex angelis his qui super spiritum aeris praepositi sunt*], as the Apostle Paul has declared in his Epistle to the Ephesians." The *spiritum aeris* here is a reference to the lowest level of heaven and identifies Satan and the angels as those who dwell in the firmament and (presumably) from this position in the cosmos exercise their stewardship over the material world. While Justin and Papias speak of angelic stewardship generally, Athenagoras is the only other extant early Christian writer who assigns this role to the Devil specifically. See *Plea*, 24: "...so also do we apprehend the existence of other powers, which exercise dominion about matter, and by means of it, and one in particular, which is hostile...to the good that is in God, I say, the spirit which is about matter, who was created by God, just as the other angels were created by Him, and entrusted with the control of matter and the forms of matter...."



As the narrative of *Demonstration* unfolds, this angelic “steward” is the one who tempts Eve and so becomes the Devil.<sup>36</sup> Thus in Irenaeus, the Devil stands apart from the other angels and archangels insofar as he was once the chief steward of the material world and leader of those angels assigned to care for the earth.<sup>37</sup>

Our understanding of Irenaeus’ position here is informed by other early Christian writers, who explicitly taught some form of angelic stewardship over the material world. So Papias: “Some of them—obviously meaning those angels that once were holy—he assigned to rule over the orderly arrangements of the earth, and commissioned them to rule well.”<sup>38</sup> Likewise Justin: “God, when he had made the whole world...committed the care of humanity and of all things under heaven to angels whom he appointed over them.”<sup>39</sup> And Athenagoras, *Plea*, 24: “For this is the office of the angels: to exercise providence for God over the things created and ordered by him, so that God may have the universal and general providence of the whole, while the particular parts are provided for by the angels appointed over them...”<sup>40</sup> Taken together, it is likely that Irenaeus has something similar in mind when he speaks of the angels as serving God by “keeping” the domain of the earth.<sup>41</sup> Exactly what this care consisted of is not certain. In pre-first-century Jewish thought the angels were said to have dominion over nations and peoples,<sup>42</sup> but Irenaeus seems to be suggesting something different, since for him angelic stewardship is in place from the very beginning of creation (and thus prior to nations and peoples). Was it ordering the powers of the natural world—the winds, the snows, the rivers, the oceans, etc.? Or perhaps watch-care of the animals?<sup>43</sup> Irenaeus does not tell us.

In some of the Gnostic schemes that Irenaeus was combating, the Devil’s association with the material world was a black mark on the Devil’s

<sup>36</sup> See *Dem.*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Along these lines, Joseph Smith observes that for Irenaeus, the “steward” (i.e., the Devil) and the “servants” under him (i.e., the angels) appear to be uniquely “subcelestial.” See Joseph Smith, trans., *St. Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1952), 150.

<sup>38</sup> Papias, *Frag.*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> Justin, *Second Apology*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> See also *Plea*, 10, 25.

<sup>41</sup> However, see MacKenzie who argues for less similarity here between Irenaeus and Justin and Papias. For Mackenzie, Irenaeus is hesitant to assign the angels a stewardship role over the material world, since such a role would play into Gnostic cosmologies. “Irenaeus does not approach anything as definite as angelic dominion. Dominion could imply territory, and territory ownership, and ownership that the holder had created that domain. Irenaeus deliberately removed himself from such a train of thought; it was too near the tenants of the gnostic system.” *Irenaeus’s Demonstration*, 113. I appreciate MacKenzie’s theological point, but given Irenaeus’ comments, it seems he is content to work within the “angelic stewardship” framework, even at the risk of it being deployed against him by his Gnostic opponents.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Daniel 10:13, 20, 21 which makes reference to “the prince of Persia” and “the prince of Greece” and to “Michael, your prince” (i.e., Daniel’s). Justin’s singular comment in *Sec. Apol.*, 5 might point in this direction as well.

<sup>43</sup> Something along this line seems to be suggested in *Hermes*, 1.4.2.

*curriculum vitae* insofar as spirits associated with the material world were viewed as less enlightened than those above. In the Valentinian system, the material world represented the wrong side of town and owed its origins to fear, grief, death, passions, and ignorance; it was certainly not a place for a respectable spirit to dwell.<sup>44</sup> Thus in the Valentinian system, both the demiurge (i.e., the creator god) and the Devil are mutually slandered in their association with the material world.

But for Irenaeus, the material world is inherently good and serves as a visible witness to God's inherent goodness and wisdom. Thus it would be inappropriate to read the Devil's primordial association with the material world as a slur against the Devil. Rather, the Devil's association with the material world serves in Irenaeus to underscore the Devil's uniqueness and highlights the egregious nature of his rebellion. We can't go so far as to say that Irenaeus viewed the Devil as the highest of all the archangels; yet the fact that the Devil was assigned to care for humanity and humanity's world is an indication about the high honor the Devil held at the time of creation. His original assignment, at any rate, was most illustrious.<sup>45</sup>

#### B. THE DEVIL WAS DESTINED TO BE SUBJECT TO HUMANITY

Irenaeus next introduces us to what is perhaps the most central aspect of the Devil's pre-fall identity: the temporary nature of the Devil's stewardship and his eventual subjection under humanity. According to Irenaeus, the Devil's stewardship of the material world was always intended to be for a limited duration. "Therefore, having made the man lord [κυριος] of the earth and of everything that is in it, [God] secretly appointed him as lord over those [angels] who were servants [δούλοι] in it."<sup>46</sup>

Here we must pause to comment briefly on Irenaeus' concept of human infancy. For Irenaeus, Adam was created as "lord of the earth and all things in it," but was nonetheless created as an "infant."<sup>47</sup> It was

<sup>44</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, 1.5.4.

<sup>45</sup> MacKenzie rightly cautions against reading a strong hierarchical structure into Irenaeus' cosmology. With respect to Irenaeus' broader cosmological framework, MacKenzie writes, "There is no cosmological speculation...neither is there any rumination in questions of angelic hierarchy." MacKenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration*, 97.

<sup>46</sup> *Dem.*, 12.

<sup>47</sup> Irenaeus, with the exception of Theophilus (and possibly Clement) is the only extant early Christian writer to speak about the infancy of humanity at the time of creation. For this idea in Theophilus, see his *Ad. Autol.*, 2.25, where he writes, "But Adam, being yet an infant in age, was on this account as yet unable to receive knowledge worthily. For now, also, when a child is born it is not at once able to eat bread, but is nourished first with milk, and then, with the increment of years, it advances to solid food. Thus, too, would it have been with Adam; for not as one who grudged him, as some suppose, did God command him not to eat of knowledge. But he wished also to make proof of him, whether he was submissive to his commandment. And at the same time he wished man, infant as he was, to remain for some time longer simple and sincere." See also Clement, *Ad Heath.*, 11 where Clement refers to Adam as α παιδίον του Θεου prior to his fall and then remarks that through the Fall he became a grown man, ο παισ ανδριζόμενος απειθεια. The reference is suggestive, but only passing, and therefore difficult to associate with Irenaeus' concept

necessary that he “grow, and so come to perfection”<sup>48</sup> before he would be able to properly exercise this lordship. The idea that the first human pair was created as infants occurs five times in Irenaeus—two times in *Demonstration* and three times in *Adversus Haereses*.<sup>49</sup> For Irenaeus, the infancy of the first human pair explains their need for a steward to govern on their behalf.<sup>50</sup> Irenaeus writes:

Therefore, having made the man lord [κυριος] of the earth and of everything that is in it, [God] secretly appointed him as lord over those [angels] who were servants [δουλοι] in it. They [the angels], however, were in their full development, while the lord, that is the man, was very little, for he was an infant, and it was necessary for him to reach full development [*karelut'ıwn*] by growing.<sup>51</sup>... But the man was a little one, and his discretion still underdeveloped, wherefore also he was easily misled by the deceiver.<sup>52</sup>

Thus humanity, though created as the heir of the world, was nonetheless not yet in “full development.” The steward and his angels were to govern the world until humanity came of age.

Irenaeus also comments here that though Adam’s lordship over the world was public knowledge, Adam’s lordship over the angels was “secret”

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of human infancy. See also Clement’s comment in *Stromata*, 3.17, likewise passing and suggestive. Behr sees a clear connection between Irenaeus, Theophilus, and Clement on this point. See his *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 135, 143-44. The idea is absent in early Jewish and Gnostic writings. See Matthew Steenberg, “Children in Paradise: Adam and Even as ‘Infant’; in Irenaeus of Lyons,” 20-21.

<sup>48</sup> *Dem.*, 12.

<sup>49</sup> *Dem.*, 12, 14; *Adv. Haer.*, 3.22.4, 23.5, 4.38.1-2.

<sup>50</sup> In his commentary on *Demonstration* Ian MacKenzie rightly notes the link between human infancy and Irenaeus’ larger maturation theme: “This idea of the potential of growth of Adam from infancy to the fullness of human stature in the Word, and therefore in perfect community of union with God, whereby Adam will be made like unto God points to an integral and characteristic of Irenaeus’ theology; namely that humanity is given the opportunity to grow and advance in the knowledge of God.” See MacKenzie, *Irenaeus’ Demonstration*, 116.

<sup>51</sup> Smith remarks, “The [Armenian] word so rendered is *karelut'ıwn*, which would mean ‘possibility.’” See his *Proof*, 150.

<sup>52</sup> *Dem.*, 12. Irenaeus refers to the “steward” and his “fellow-servants.” As such, I take Irenaeus to mean that Adam’s lordship over the “servants” includes lordship over the “steward.” Irenaeus’ account of the temptation stands in stark contrast with Tertullian on this point. For Tertullian, humanity was created in power and glory, as mature bearers of the image of God. The Devil resorts to subterfuge precisely because of humanity’s greater power. Tertullian writes, “No doubt it was an angel who was the seducer; but then the victim of that seduction was free, and master of himself; and as being the image and likeness of God, was stronger than any angel; and as being, too, the *afflatus* of the divine being, was nobler than that material spirit of which angels were made.” Tertullian, *Cont. Marcion*, 2.8. And again in 2.9, “Undoubtedly, when you demand for it [the soul] an equality with God, that is, a freedom from fault, I contend that it is infirm. But when the comparison is challenged with an angel, I am compelled to maintain that the head over all things is the stronger of the two, to whom the angels are ministers, who is destined to be the judge of angels, if he shall stand fast in the law of God—an obedience which he refused at first.”

(*zanxlabar*).<sup>53</sup> Smith helpfully remarks, “The ‘secrecy’ is probably to be explained by the fact that man, though lord by right, and destined to rule in fact, was not yet capable of doing so...so that his lordship was not yet made known to his subjects.”<sup>54</sup> This reading makes good sense, given that Irenaeus immediately follows his comment about the secrecy of Adam’s lordship with comments about Adam’s infancy and the maturity of the angels. Thus I take Irenaeus to mean that the steward and his angels knew that the man had been made lord of the world, but did not know that this lordship extended even to them.

Even without direct knowledge of Adam’s future lordship over the angels, the steward and his angels knew themselves to be caring for the world on behalf of humanity. Thus Irenaeus introduces the Devil into the creation narrative as not only a servant of God, but more pointedly, as a servant of humanity. The Devil, much like the steward of a child-king, is granted only temporary leadership of the earth until such time as the heir can assume the full responsibility of his throne.

The stewardship of the Devil and the infancy of humanity thus serves in Irenaeus as the alternate backstory that sets the stage for the first major action in Irenaeus’ narrative—the Devil’s envy of humanity and the garden temptation.

#### IV. THE DEVIL’S ENVY OF HUMANITY

We now arrive at the crux of Irenaeus’ account of the Devil. Irenaeus tells us that the Devil’s fall was due to his envy of Adam and Eve and that the Devil’s first sin was not a celestial rebellion against God in heaven, but a terrestrial rebellion against humanity on earth. The idea of the Devil’s envy of humanity occurs five times in Irenaeus.<sup>55</sup> The most significant occurrence is in the early chapters of *Demonstration*. We begin with *Dem.*, 11 to establish the context. Irenaeus writes:

But man he formed with his own hands, 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,<sup>56</sup> 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. And there were in this place also with (their) tasks the servants

<sup>53</sup> The Armenian term is used only here in *Demonstration*. It is variously translated elsewhere as “in secret,” “furtively,” “stealthily.”

<sup>54</sup> Smith, *Proof*, 150, note 69.

<sup>55</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, 3.23.3-5, 4. preface, 4.40.3, 5.24.4; *Dem.*, 16.

<sup>56</sup> Robinson notes that the Armenian text here is equivalent to the Latin *plasma* or *plasmatio*.

of that God who formed all things; and the steward, who was set over all his fellow servants, received this place. Now the servants were angels, and the steward was the archangel.<sup>57</sup>

Notable here is the way that Irenaeus highlights the creation of humanity. Human beings are made by God's own hands, a combination of the best of the earth and God's own divine power. Moreover, the sovereignty structure between humanity and the angels is clearly established; humanity, not the steward, is destined to rule over this "great created world."

Irenaeus then goes on in chapters 13-15 to briefly discuss the creation of the animals and of Eve, as well as the prohibition regarding the tree of knowledge. Having set the stage with the principal actors, Irenaeus thus introduces the reader in chapter 16 to the first scene of the drama—the Devil's envy of humanity and the garden temptation.

This commandment the man kept not, but was disobedient to God, being led astray by the angel who, becoming jealous of the man and looking on him with envy<sup>58</sup> because of the great gifts of God which he had given to man, both ruined himself and made the man a sinner, persuading him to disobey the commandment of God.<sup>59</sup> So the angel, becoming by his falsehood the author and originator of sin, himself was struck down, having offended against God, and man he caused to be cast out from Paradise. And, because through the guidance of his disposition he apostatized and departed from God, he was called Satan, according to the Hebrew word; that is, Apostate:<sup>60</sup> but he is also called Slanderer. Now God cursed the serpent which carried and conveyed the Slanderer; and this malediction came on the beast himself and on the angel hidden and concealed in him, even on Satan; and man he put away from his presence, removing him and making him to dwell on the way to Paradise at that time; because Paradise receives not the sinful.<sup>61</sup>

The steward is not content to be the steward. He is envious and jealous of "the great gifts of God which he had given to man." Irenaeus does not specify here (or elsewhere) the exact nature of "the great gifts" that invoke the Devil's envy. But given the overall context this must

<sup>57</sup> *Dem.*, 11.

<sup>58</sup> "Looking on him with envy" is from the Armenian *c'arakneal* and is perhaps more literally "evil-eyeing." Smith suggests *βασκαίνων* (envying, grudging) as the underlying Greek for this term. See Joseph Smith's commentary in his translation, *St. Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* (New York: Paulist Press, 1952), 153. For more on the "evil eye" and envy in the Christian tradition, see George R.A. Aquaro, *Death by Envy: The Evil Eye and Envy in the Christian Tradition* (Lincoln, Neb.: iUniverse, Inc., 2004).

<sup>59</sup> Note the close parallel with *Adv. Haer.*, 4.11.3., where the Pharisees are the "envious wicked stewards" who resist Christ as he rides into Jerusalem to assume his kingdom—a kingdom that they were to rule until his coming.

<sup>60</sup> Cf., *Adv. Haer.*, 5.21.2. So too Justin (from whom Irenaeus likely got this etymologically incorrect idea), *Dial.*, 103.

<sup>61</sup> *Dem.*, 16.

certainly include humanity's lordship over the earth. (Indeed, this is the only divine gift given to humanity mentioned thus far in *Demonstration*) Irenaeus may also have in mind humanity's creation in the *imago Dei*, which he has already mentioned in *Dem.*, 11. This too would be connected to humanity's lordship over the world, for it is precisely because humanity bears the image of God (by which Irenaeus means the image of the embodied human Son)<sup>62</sup> that humanity is the rightful lord of the world.

The Devil enters Paradise in the form of a serpent and assaults Adam and Eve while they are yet in their infancy. The Devil is successful as it relates to overthrowing humanity; he causes humanity to be cast out of Paradise. But ultimately the plan fails. The steward is found out by God.<sup>63</sup> In this act of rebellion the steward has overstepped his boundaries and has become an apostate. He too is cast out of Paradise. Insofar as he used a serpent to disguise himself, the steward is cursed with a perpetual association with the serpent.<sup>64</sup>

Ultimately then for Irenaeus the Devil's rebellion is as much a rebellion against humanity's lordship over the material world as it is against God's. Unlike the Miltonic narrative, Irenaeus' Devil does not assault humanity as a means of rebelling against God. Rather in Irenaeus the Devil wrongly supposes that his treachery toward humanity will go unobserved by God (he futilely uses the serpent as a cloak).<sup>65</sup> Irenaeus' Devil has no aspirations to take on God; his target is humanity, and the throne he seeks is earth's. This way of framing the Devil's initial relationship to humanity emphasizes the enmity between humanity and the Devil as the chief conflict of Irenaeus' soteriological plotline. To be sure, Satan is an enemy of God; but as concerns the narrative Irenaeus will tell, he is principally an enemy of humanity, for humanity is the rightful heir of the world—the chief object of the Devil's desire.

#### V. THE DEVIL'S ENVY AND IRENAEUS' PRO-TERRESTRIAL COSMOLOGY

The theological implications of this narrative are far-reaching, particularly when set against later Milton-like accounts. Per Milton, the primary conflict in the Christian narrative is between God and Satan; the restoration of the earth and repossession of its throne by humanity is largely inconsequential to the resolution of the Miltonic Devil narrative. The Miltonic account of the Devil fits well with, and indeed enables, Platonizing accounts of the Biblical narrative.

As we have already noted, many of the Church Fathers tended to downplay the significance of humanity and the material creation. For Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, the material creation itself is a result of the

<sup>62</sup> See *Adv. Haer.*, 5.16.2. See also Minns, *Irenaeus*, 74.

<sup>63</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, Book 4, preface, 4.

<sup>64</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, Book 4, preface, 4. Irenaeus will go on to assign the fall of the world and the birth of sin most fully to the Devil, for the Devil was in his full development, while Adam and Eve were mere children. As such, Irenaeus interprets the divine cursing of Gen. 3 to be directed chiefly at the Devil; Adam and Eve are only cursed indirectly via the curse of the ground and childbearing. See *Adv. Haer.*, 3.23.5

<sup>65</sup> See *Adv. Haer.*, 5.26.2. See also *Adv. Haer.*, Book 4, preface, .

Fall (or in Gregory's case, a punishment for an anticipated fall),<sup>66</sup> and thus not central to God's redemptive purposes, at least not central in any kind of telic sense. Salvation is about leaving behind the material world and shedding the material body. What is more, in such accounts the destiny of redeemed humanity is to become like the angels, freed from the confines and limitations of the material world and destined to dwell with God in the heavens.<sup>67</sup> While Platonizing Fathers such as Origen, Gregory, and others are careful to leave a place for the body and creation, the overall effect of their synthesis tends to be dismissive of materiality in ways not faithful to the broad concerns of the canon. A Milton-like account of the Devil enables and reinforces this basic Platonic narrative, in that it tends to sideline the embodiedness of humanity and the materiality of creation as central features of the soteriological story and does not require the reenthronement of humanity over the earth as a necessary conclusion.

But Irenaeus' account of the Devil pushes the Christian narrative away from Platonizing and Stoic tendencies and toward a more properly anthropocentric, terrestrial climax. In Irenaeus' view, the Devil's fall occurs *within* Scripture as detailed in Genesis 3.<sup>68</sup> Most significantly, the world is the prize that humanity initially possesses and that the Devil desires. The Devil wishes to be worshipped as God, not by supplanting God in heaven, but by supplanting Adam on earth. In short, the Devil seeks Adam's throne on earth, not the Son's throne in heaven. What's more, in Irenaeus' account, Satan is a successful usurper of Adam's throne rather than a failed usurper of Christ's. Thus the primary conflict in Irenaeus' narrative is between the Devil and humanity, and the lordship of the material earth is the chief spoil of war.

Humanity's loss of the world's throne via the Devil's subterfuge thus sets the stage for the outworking of the soteriological and eschatological narrative that Irenaeus will tell. Not content with Satan's rebellious actions and a reversal of earth's lordship, God enters the war between the Devil and humanity on the side of humanity and through Christ, the Second Adam, reclaims the world's throne on behalf of humanity. Thus

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<sup>66</sup> John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 56; and William Moore and Henry Austin's introductory comments on Gregory's theology in *NPNF* Second Series, 5, 10.

<sup>67</sup> For examples of "angelic soteriology" in early Christian writings, see *Shep. of Hermes*, 3.9.25, 27; Tertullian, *Cont. Marc.*, 3.9; *Ad Mart.*, 3; *De Resurrectione Carnis*, 36, 42; *De Anima*, 56. Tertullian's idea that we become like angels at the resurrection is not a denial of the resurrection of the body. He affirms the resurrection of the flesh throughout his writings and is more careful elsewhere to insist that we do not actually become angels. See *De Resurrectione Carnis*, 62. But his repeated emphasis that the highpoint of salvation is to become like the angels pushes his soteriology in a celestial rather than terrestrial direction. See also Clement, *Instructor*, 2.10; *Stromata*, 6.13, 7.10, 12, 14; Origen, *Cont. Celsus*, 4.29; *Comment. in John*, 2.16; *Comment. in Matt.*, 12.30; Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, 11.15, 12.16, 22, 22.1; Aquinas, *Summa*, 1.62.5, and 1.93.3, where Aquinas states that angels, insofar as they are endowed with a higher intellect than humans, are in some ways more in the image of God than humanity; and Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 1.16-18.

<sup>68</sup> Origen is the first to interpret Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 as references to Satanic pride vis à vis God, and even then only tentatively. See *De Princ.*, 1.5, 8.3. See also Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition*, 125-32.

the reclamation of Adam's throne vis à vis the Devil and the restoration of the material world becomes central to Irenaeus' Biblical narrative in a way not seen in the Miltonic account.<sup>69</sup> With Irenaeus, the soteriological narrative *necessarily* climaxes with the defeat of the Devil and the terrestrial reenthronement of humanity; Platonic escape from the material world, or Stoic indifference, is thereby rendered—from the very outset—an inadequate consummation to the Christian narrative.

And in a remarkably Biblical way, Irenaeus' pro-material account of the Devil both affirms the goodness of the material world against pagan Greek philosophy, while at the same time it undercuts the temptation to make an idol of the good world that God has made (the opposite error on the other side of the pagan coin). In some ways Irenaeus' strong affirmation of the material world may seem a counterintuitive way to combat the idolization of it. We might expect that the surer way forward is to chastise the creation, following the route of Platonism and the Stoics. Irenaeus is not naïve about the dangers of idolatry. But he would have us break free from idolatry not by dismissing God's good creation, but rather by giving thanks for it.

...all [things] have been created for the benefit of that human nature which is saved [*pro eo qui salvatur homine factur sunt*].... And therefore the creation is devoted to humanity [*Et propter hoc condition insumitur homini*]; for humanity was not made for its sake, but creation for the sake of humanity. Those nations, however, who did not of themselves raise up their eyes unto heaven, nor returned thanks to their Maker [*neque gratias egerunt factori suo*], nor wished to behold the light of truth, but who were like blind mice concealed in the depths of ignorance, the word justly reckons as waste water from a sink, and as the turning-weight of a balance—in fact, as nothing.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> A fundamental question that must remain unaddressed in this paper is the extent to which Irenaeus' account of the Devil maps on to the Biblical story line. That Irenaeus' account of the Devil forestalls unwarranted Platonic/Stoic tendencies in Christian theology and eschatology does not mean that Irenaeus' account is true. The question bears more investigation than I can supply here, but I offer briefly five reasons for embracing the early Christian account over the later account. 1) The early account of the Devil is early, 2) the early account is reasonably unified in the first two centuries, 3) the early account of the Devil fits better than the later account with the overall arc of the canonical plotline, which ends in a restoration of the material world and the reenthronement of humanity upon the world's throne, 4) the early account postulates that a creature under the authority of Adam was responsible for Adam's downfall; this follows the same basic contours of the Genesis account, which likewise suggests that a creature under Adam's authority was instrumental in humanity's downfall, and 5) the early account is less speculative than the later account, insofar as it places the fall of the Devil within the canonical plotline and does not rely upon a speculative pre-canonical celestial fall. In the end, both the early and later accounts of the Devil are speculative to varying degrees; the Bible does not offer us a complete picture of the Devil's pre-fall identity, motivations, and post-fall activity. But Irenaeus' account is less speculative than the later account and thus to be preferred.

<sup>70</sup> *Adv. Haer.*, 5.29.1.



Creation has been made by a good God for the sake of his people. It has been “devoted” to humanity and is thus to be enjoyed by humanity. The problem, Irenaeus tells us, is not that we like these good gifts too much, but that we have forgotten to “return thanks to our Maker.” Irenaeus here is following the logic of Paul in Romans 1:18-25, where Paul tells us that the things that are made reveal God’s “eternal power and divine nature.” For Paul (and Irenaeus), creation has an iconic function—it is a gift from God that points beyond itself to the Giver. And as with any “icon,” creation derives its value and meaning from that to which it points, namely, God. But humanity, rather than viewing creation as an icon—a springboard—that led to a knowledge of God instead severed the connection between the icon and the Creator. We fixated on the gift and lost sight of the Giver. But how did this breakdown occur? The answer is found in verse 21, which serves as the fulcrum of Paul’s logic in this passage: “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him.” The problem is not that we failed to recognize the iconic nature of creation, but rather that we failed to give thanks for the icons. This lack of gratitude sets in motion the rest of the story of sin that Paul’s gospel will address in the whole of Romans.

To give genuine thanks for the creation is to acknowledge that there is One above and beyond us who has given it. To give thanks for the world and our bodies necessarily compels us to acknowledge that the Lord *is*, and that he is *good*, and that he *gives*. It reminds us that we ourselves are not the good God, but that we stand in a posture of humility and need—recipients of grace. Thankfulness rightly orders our self-understanding with respect to the creation of which we are a part and with the God who made it and gave it to us. This is why a refusal to give thanks to God for the good world he has given and a refusal to acknowledge the iconic nature of creation go hand in hand. To thankfully acknowledge creation as a good *gift* is to acknowledge that there is necessarily a good *Giver*. At its core thankfulness establishes the relationship between the gift and the giver. It is impossible to give genuine thanks to God for the good things of the world and idolize these things at the same time.

The basic contours of Irenaeus’ Devil narrative do not encourage us to view the material world as a throwaway husk, a ladder to be climbed and then kicked away once we’ve reached the angelic top. Irenaeus’ pro-material account of the Devil reminds us, right at the beginning of the Christian soteriological narrative, that creation is a good gift, given to us by a good Creator. It encourages us to view the materiality of creation as a great blessing that God has given to humanity, and our world as the crown jewel of all the worlds that God has made. Irenaeus’ Devil narrative tells us that our home is a prize so rare that one of the high archangels of heaven has waged war to possess it. It reminds us that Christ has come not only to save our souls, but to save our home. Indeed, to save *his* home, insofar as he too is now forever the embodied Second Adam.