

A note from the early church to balance Ignatius' determination to be martyred:

“Now one named Quintus, a Phrygian, who was but lately come from Phrygia, when he saw the wild beasts, became afraid. This was the man who forced himself and some others to come forward voluntarily [for trial]. Him the proconsul, after many entreaties, persuaded to swear and to offer sacrifice. Wherefore, brethren, we do not commend those who give themselves up [to suffering], seeing the Gospel does not teach so to do.” From, “The Martyrdom of Polycarp”

Irenaeus of Lyon



A mural in Lyon of well-known Lyonnais people, with a detail showing Irenaeus.

Irenaeus was from modern Türkiye but we know him from his time as Bishop of Lugdunum, which is Lyon today. Lugdunum was the largest city in Roman Gaul.

Irenaeus knew Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, perhaps as his teacher. Polycarp had been in turn a disciple of the Apostle John in Ephesus. Polycarp had sent Pothinus to found the church in Lyon at some point mid century. Years later, Irenaeus also arrived in Lugdunum to help as a minister.

Rome enjoyed political stability and reached the peak of its influence throughout the 100s under these rulers: Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius. Persecution of Christians was localized and occasional.

We have an account of Polycarp's martyrdom after he refused to denounce Jesus:

“Eighty-six years I have served him, and he never did me any wrong,” said Polycarp. “How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”

In 177, during the rule of Marcus Aurelius, a severe persecution broke out in Lyon. 48 Christians were executed. The longest account we have describes the torture and execution of the courageous young slave girl, Blandina. Pothinus, the Bishop of Lugdunum/Lyon, was also executed.



The ruins of the the Amphitheater of the three Gauls, with a monument to the martyred Christians.

Irenaeus became bishop of Lyon after Pothinus' death.

Irenaeus' two surviving works warn against and correct the errors of various erstwhile Christian teachers who denied the incarnation in one way or another, rejecting Jesus' simultaneously human and divine birth and his physical resurrection. Irenaeus presents a variety of groups, with various competing claims:

- God the Son only appeared to be human.
- Jesus was adopted and temporarily filled with the Spirit at his baptism.
- Jesus died (bodily) and but the (spiritual) Christ ascended to heaven.

These groups were convinced that the world was so fallen and corrupt that it was impossible that God might become part of it. For the same reasons, salvation meant being rid of our bodies and this world.

They claimed that what mattered was the knowledge of God that Jesus gave them.

Irenaeus also warned the church about Montanism, a charismatic renewal movement whose leaders began to act as if they alone had been granted special divine power and authority.

Recapitulation and God's Handiwork

(5) If He was not born, neither did He die. And if He did not die, neither did He rise from the dead. And if He did not rise from the dead, He did not conquer death and abolish its reign. And if He did not conquer death, how are we to ascend to the light, we who from the beginning have been subject to death? Those who rob man of redemption do not believe that God will raise man from the dead.

D39

(6) He appeared as man in the fulness of time, and, being God's Word, He summed up in Himself all things in heaven and on earth. He united man with God and brought about communion between God and man.

D 30f

(7) 'A child is born to us, and a son is given to us, and the government is upon His shoulder' (Is. 9:6) ... The words 'the government is upon His shoulder' figuratively signify the Cross, to which His arms were nailed. The Cross was and is ignominy for Him—and for us, for His sake. And yet it is the Cross which He calls His government, the sign of His kingship.

D 56

3.21.10. For as by one man's disobedience sin entered, and death obtained [a place] through sin; so also by the obedience of one man, righteousness having been introduced, shall cause life to fructify in those persons who in times past were dead. And as the protoplast himself, Adam, had his substance from untilled and as yet virgin soil ("for God had not yet sent rain, and man had not tilled the ground"), and was formed by the hand of God, that is, by the Word of God, for "all things were made by Him," and the Lord took dust from the earth and formed man; so did He who is the Word, recapitulating Adam in Himself, rightly receive a birth, enabling Him to gather up Adam [into Himself], from Mary, who was as yet a virgin. If, then, the first Adam had a man for his father, and was born of human seed, it were reasonable to say that the second Adam was begotten of Joseph. But if the former was taken from the dust, and God was his Maker, it was incumbent that the latter also, making a recapitulation in Himself, should be formed as man by God, to have an analogy with the former as respects His origin. Why, then, did not God again take dust, but wrought so that the formation should be made of Mary? It was that there might not be another formation called into being, nor any

other which should [require to] be saved, but that the very same formation should be summed up [in Christ as had existed in Adam], the analogy having been preserved.

3.22.1 Those, therefore, who allege that He took nothing from the Virgin do greatly err, [since,] in order that they may cast away the inheritance of the flesh, they also reject the analogy [between Him and Adam]. For if the one [who sprang] from the earth had indeed formation and substance from both the hand and workmanship of God, but the other not from the hand and workmanship of God, then He who was made after the image and likeness of the former did not, in that case, preserve the analogy of man, and He must seem an inconsistent piece of work, not having wherewith He may show His wisdom. But this is to say, that He also appeared putatively as man when He was not man, and that He was made man while taking nothing from man. For if He did not receive the substance of flesh from a human being, He neither was made man nor the Son of man; and if He was not made what we were, He did no great thing in what He suffered and endured. But every one will allow that we are [composed of] a body taken from the earth, and a soul receiving spirit from God. This, therefore, the Word of God was made, recapitulating in Himself His own handiwork; and on this account does He confess Himself the Son of man, and blesses “the meek, because they shall inherit the earth.” The Apostle Paul, moreover, in the Epistle to the Galatians, declares plainly, “God sent His Son, made of a woman.” And again, in that to the Romans, he says, “Concerning His Son, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was predestinated as the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

5.14.3. If, then, any one allege that in this respect the flesh of the Lord was different from ours, because it indeed did not commit sin, neither was deceit found in His soul, while we, on the other hand, are sinners, he says what is the fact. But if he pretends that the Lord possessed another substance of flesh, the sayings respecting reconciliation will not agree with that man. For that thing is reconciled which had formerly been in enmity. Now, if the Lord had taken flesh from another substance, He would not, by so doing, have reconciled that one to God which had become inimical through transgression. But now, by means of communion with Himself, the Lord has reconciled man to God the Father, in

reconciling us to Himself by the body of His own flesh, and redeeming us by His own blood, as the apostle says to the Ephesians, “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the remission of sins;” and again to the same he says, “Ye who formerly were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ;” and again, “Abolishing in His flesh the enmities, [even] the law of commandments [contained] in ordinances.” And in every Epistle the apostle plainly testifies, that through the flesh of our Lord, and through His blood, we have been saved.

Recapitulation and the Renewal of the Image, Which is Christ

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

Recapitulation and obedience

5.16.3. And not by the aforesaid things alone has the Lord manifested Himself, but [He has done this] also by means of His passion. For doing away with [the effects of] that disobedience of man which had taken place at the beginning by the occasion of a tree, “He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;” rectifying that disobedience which had occurred by reason of a tree, through that obedience which was [wrought out] upon the tree [of the cross]. Now He would not have come to do away, by means of that same [image], the disobedience which had been incurred towards our Maker if He proclaimed another Father. But inasmuch as it was by these things that we disobeyed God, and did not give credit to His word, so was it also by these same that He brought in obedience and consent as respects His Word; by which things He clearly shows forth God Himself, whom indeed we had offended in the first Adam, when he did not perform His commandment. In the second Adam, however, we are reconciled, being made obedient even unto death. For we were debtors to none other but to Him whose commandment we had transgressed at the beginning.

We Are Body, Soul and Spirit According to the Incarnation

5.6.1. Now God shall be glorified in His handiwork, fitting it so as to be conformable to, and modelled after, His own Son. For by the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit, man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the likeness of God. Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a part of the man, but certainly not the man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God...

For that flesh which has been moulded is not a perfect man in itself, but the body of a man, and part of a man. Neither is the soul itself, considered apart by itself, the man; but it is the soul of a man, and part of a man. Neither is the spirit a man, for it is called the spirit, and not a man; but the commingling and union of all these constitutes the perfect man. And for this cause does the apostle, explaining himself, make it clear that the saved man is a complete man as well as a spiritual man; saying thus in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, “Now the God of peace sanctify you perfect (perfectos); and may your spirit, and soul, and body be preserved whole without complaint to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Now what was his object in praying that these three—that is, soul, body, and spirit—might be preserved to the coming of the Lord, unless he was aware of the [future] reintegration and union of the three, and [that they should be heirs of] one and the same salvation? For this cause also he declares that those are “the perfect” who present unto the Lord the three [component parts] without offence. Those, then, are the perfect who have had the Spirit of God remaining in them, and have preserved their souls and bodies blameless, holding fast the faith of God, that is, that faith which is [directed] towards God, and maintaining righteous dealings with respect to their neighbours.

Jesus Rose Bodily from the Dead

5.31.1. Since, again, some who are reckoned among the orthodox go beyond the pre-arranged plan for the exaltation of the just, and are ignorant of the methods by which they are disciplined beforehand for incorruption, they thus entertain heretical opinions. For the heretics, despising the handiwork of God, and not admitting the salvation of their flesh, while they also treat the promise of God contemptuously, and pass beyond God altogether in the sentiments they form, affirm that immediately upon their death they shall pass above the heavens and

the Demiurge, and go to the Mother (Achamoth) or to that Father whom they have feigned. Those persons, therefore, who disallow a resurrection affecting the whole man (universam reprobant resurrectionem), and as far as in them lies remove it from the midst [of the Christian scheme], how can they be wondered at, if again they know nothing as to the plan of the resurrection? For they do not choose to understand, that if these things are as they say, the Lord Himself, in whom they profess to believe, did not rise again upon the third day; but immediately upon His expiring on the cross, undoubtedly departed on high, leaving His body to the earth. But the case was, that for three days He dwelt in the place where the dead were, as the prophet says concerning Him: "And the Lord remembered His dead saints who slept formerly in the land of sepulture; and He descended to them, to rescue and save them."

The Resurrection of the Body

5.2.3 And just as a cutting from the vine planted in the ground fructifies in its season, or as a corn of wheat falling into the earth and becoming decomposed, rises with manifold increase by the Spirit of God, who contains all things, and then, through the wisdom of God, serves for the use of men, and having received the Word of God, becomes the Eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ; so also our bodies, being nourished by it, and deposited in the earth, and suffering decomposition there, shall rise at their appointed time, the Word of God granting them resurrection to the glory of God, even the Father, who freely gives to this mortal immortality, and to this corruptible incorruption, because the strength of God is made perfect in weakness, in order that we may never become puffed up, as if we had life from ourselves, and exalted against God, our minds becoming ungrateful; but learning by experience that we possess eternal duration from the excelling power of this Being, not from our own nature, we may neither undervalue that glory which surrounds God as He is, nor be ignorant of our own nature, but that we may know what God can effect, and what benefits man receives, and thus never wander from the true comprehension of things as they are, that is, both with regard to God and with regard to man.

Incarnation and Revelation and the Father's invisibility

4.20.6–7. 'No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known' (John 1:18). From the beginning, the Son is the revealer of the Father, since from the beginning He is with the Father. At the fitting time, and for our profit, He has shown the human race, in a rational and harmonious way, the prophetic visions, the diversity of graces, His own ministrations, and the glorification of the Father. For where there is rationality, there is harmony, and where there is harmony, there is a fitting time, and where there is a fitting time, there is profit. That is why the Word became the dispenser of His Father's grace for the profit of men. It was for them that He accomplished such great dispositions, showing God to men, presenting man to God. He safeguarded the invisibility of the Father, lest man become the despiser of God, and so that he might always have something towards which he could advance. At the same time He made God visible to men through many dispensations, lest man, wholly bereft of God, should cease to exist. For the glory of God is the living man, and the life of man is the vision of God.

Incarnation and Revelation in the whole of time

4.6.7. 'No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him' (Matt. 11:27). The word 'reveal' does not have just a future meaning, as if the Word only began to manifest the Father when He was born of Mary; it has a general meaning and applies to the whole of time. From the beginning the Son has been present to His handiwork, and reveals the Father to all, to whom He wills, and when He wills, and as the Father wills. And so in all and through all there is one God the Father and one Word—Son and one Spirit and one salvation for all who believe in Him.

Incarnation and Revelation in scripture

4.10.1. The Son of God has been sown everywhere throughout the Scriptures [of Moses]. Sometimes He speaks with Abraham, sometimes with Noah, giving him the measurements of the ark; He looks for Adam, brings judgement on the Sodomites. There are times when He is actually seen, guiding Jacob on his way, speaking with Moses from the bush.

Music 2.20.3

Created things, in their great number and diversity, fit beautifully and harmoniously into the creation as a whole. And yet, when viewed individually, they appear discordant and opposed to each other, just as the sound of the lute makes a single harmonious melody out of many and opposite notes by means of the intervals between them. The lover of truth must not be deceived, therefore, by the interval between the different notes, nor imagine that this note was the work of one artist and author, and that note due to another, nor think that one person fitted the treble, another the bass, and yet another the tenor strings. He must not forget that one and the same Artist was responsible for the wisdom, justice, goodness, and munificence of the whole work. And those who listen to the melody ought to praise and glorify the Artist, and admire the tension of some notes, appreciate the relaxation in others, enjoy the moderation of those between the two extremes. Recalling that some things are symbols, they will consider what it is that each thing points to and what causes it. But they will never alter the rule, nor stray from the Artist, nor abandon faith in the one God who made all things, nor blaspheme our Creator.

Forgiveness 5.17.1–3

The [true] Creator is God. In His love He is Father, in His power He is Lord, in His Wisdom He is our maker and fashioner. By transgressing His commandment, we have become His enemies. And so in these last times the Lord has restored us to His friendship by His Incarnation. He became ‘the mediator of God and men’ (cf 1 Tim. 2:5), propitiating for us the Father against whom we had sinned, consoling Him for our disobedience by His obedience [on the Cross], granting us the grace of conversion and submission to our Creator. He therefore taught us to say in prayer: ‘Forgive us our debts’ (cf Matt. 6:12), since He is indeed our Father, and we are His debtors, having transgressed His commandment ... Rightly, then, says the Word to man: ‘Your sins are forgiven’ (cf Matt. 9:2). The very One against whom we had sinned in the beginning grants remission of sins in the end ... How can sins truly be forgiven unless the One against whom we sinned is the very One who has granted forgiveness ‘through the tender mercy of our God’ (cf Luke 1:78), the mercy in which ‘He has visited us’ through His Son?

In forgiving sins, the Lord not only healed man, He also showed clearly who He was. If no one can forgive sins but God alone, and if the Lord did forgive them and

did heal men, it is plain that He was Himself the Word of God made the Son of Man. Because He was both God and man, He received the power to forgive sins from the Father, so that, since as man He suffered with us, so as God He might take pity on us, and forgive us the debts we owe to God our Creator.

Love 4.12.2

St Paul says that ... without love for God, there is no value in knowledge, nor in the understanding of mysteries, nor in faith, nor in prophecy. They are all hollow and vain without love. He says that it is love which makes man perfect, and that he who loves God is perfect in this world and in the world to come. We shall never cease to love God, but the more we behold Him, the more we shall love Him.