

# SALVATION OF THE FLESH:

## CONTRADICTORY STARTING POINTS

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MARY ANN DONOVAN, SC

November 17, 1993

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Salvation of the Flesh:

Contradictory Starting Points

To believe that Christ has died, Christ is risen; to believe that we will rise in these bodies; to believe that the resurrection concerns human flesh: these are hard sayings, as difficult for late twentieth-century academics as they were for late second-century thinkers. Resurrection preoccupied second-century Christian writers. What had been a stumbling-block when Paul preached on the Areopagus continued to trip people in Antioch and Alexandria, in Rome and Carthage. There in Carthage Tertullian remarked: "The resurrection of the dead is the Christian's trust. By it we are believers. To the belief of this, truth compels us -- that truth which God reveals, but the crowd derides, which supposes that nothing will survive after death." (De Res. c. 1) Further east, the writer of The Acts of Paul and Thecla summarized the apostle Paul's teaching as "the word of

God on resurrection and continence." (Acts, c.5) Faith in resurrection apparently had something to do with Christian lifestyle.<sup>1</sup>

Resurrection faith certainly affected how Christians faced death, for we know that martyrs drew comfort from the hope of resurrection. In fact, the persecutors knew this too. After Blandina and her companions were executed horribly in Lyons in 170, their bones were burnt and the ashes thrown in the river precisely to defeat the possibility of bodily resurrection. (EH V, 1, 62) The persecutors rightly saw the significance of resurrection hope for Christians.

Who constituted the church at Lyons which gave birth to this group of martyrs? The group had a strong base among merchants and traders, and it included slave

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<sup>1</sup>W.C. Van Unnik, who marshals the texts for us, comments: In [the Treatise on the Resurrection], which is typical of the faith of the average Christian at the end of the second century, it becomes apparent what deep an impact this belief had on the Christian life: the resurrection was not only a prospect for the future, promising eternal blessedness for the faithful, but also required a certain mode of life now, because St. Paul is said to have taught: 'Ye had no resurrection otherwise, except ye continue chaste and defile not the body, but keep it pure,' p. 154, "The Newly Discovered Gnostic 'Epistle to Rheginos' on the Resurrection: 1 and 2." Journal of Ecclesiastical History 15 (1964).

members.<sup>2</sup> Yet among them there seem also to have been members of a more scholarly bent, people who offered alternate interpretations of the Christian scriptures in the effort to deal in an intellectually satisfactory way with the implications of resurrection faith.<sup>3</sup> Their approach incorporated alternative myths with the Christian story. After all, educated people of the day had always had the option to incorporate diverse mythologies into their view of reality; it was not expected that people would choose *for religion's sake* among competing mythologies,

Part of what Peter Brown, in a lecture at the University of California at Berkeley, called the "problem of Christianization" has to do, in the second century, with whether Christianity in fact would attempt to compel

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<sup>2</sup>Amable Audin, "Sur la géographie du Lyon-Romain: la population, les voies et les quartiers d'après les documents épigraphiques," Revue de géographie de Lyon 27 (1952), 133-39.

<sup>3</sup>Valentinian exegesis of Paul and John, according to Pagels, offers an understanding of election theology as an alternative to the stress on freedom and self-determination then dominant in most Christian communities Elaine Pagels, The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973); she summarizes this argument pp.120-122, including Plotinus's criticism of the Valentinians for "neglect of any mention of virtue."

such a choice. An instance of the problem is the disagreement between Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, and others on the nature of the salvation of the flesh. The others include Valentinians who deny the reality of Christ's flesh and an unnamed group, who, he writes: "reject the entire divine economy, deny the salvation of the flesh, and spurn its regeneration, saying that it is incapable of incorruptibility." (AH V, 2, 2) <sup>4</sup> Faced with a group which denigrates the flesh, Irenaeus insists on its value, and asserts that resurrection is a final step in a process of salvation which includes the flesh. Thus his insistence on "salvation of the flesh."

Tonight I will examine two questions, each from two viewpoints. Question one: in what sense should one understand resurrection of the flesh, first according to Irenaeus, and then according to one Valentinian document.

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<sup>4</sup>The close coincidence between the position of the anonymous writer of The Treatise on the Resurrection and the fourth group identified in AH V, 2, 2, studied by Orbe, "Adversarios anónimos de la Salus carnis: Iren., adv. haer. V, 2, 2s," Gregorianum 60 (1979) 9-52, makes intriguing the possibility that this Epistle represents the anonymous group Irenaeus had in mind when he was writing AH V. Space has precluded my exploring the idea here.

Question two: what difference does one's understanding of resurrection make in one's way of life, first for Valentinians, and then for followers of Irenaeus. Ultimately, of course, both questions require response from Christian believers.

### Part 1: Two Interpretations of Resurrection of the Flesh

Whether flesh and blood can enter the kingdom of heaven depends in part on what one means by "flesh and blood," and so, ultimately, on how one understands the human being. Most of the pertinent Irenaeian writing on the resurrection of the flesh is found in the first sections of the last book of Adversus haereses, his great work against the Gnostics.<sup>5</sup> Irenaeus opens with arguments from liturgy and from theology. First, liturgical practice. As Irenaeus sees it, in the Eucharist human flesh and blood receives the flesh and blood of Christ; this being so, the flesh that can

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<sup>5</sup>Where page references occur these are to the Sources chrétiennes edition, giving first the reference in Adversus haereses (as AH V, 1, 2) and then the pertinent SC volume and pages (as SC 153, 22-24.)

receive Christ can receive eternal life. (AH V, 2, 3; see also AH IV, 18, 5-6) His argument is rooted in his understanding of the incarnation: that is, since the Word has become flesh, since that flesh has become Eucharist, human flesh, receiving Eucharist, receives the Divine life, mediated through Christ's flesh.

"But," someone might respond, "human flesh is too weak to sustain such life!" In that case Irenaeus offers his argument from theology: it is God who vivifies the flesh; resurrection is the work of the power of God. He thinks that, in knowing their own weakness, humans come to know God's strength. Knowledge of both our weakness and God's strength is necessary, in Irenaeus' opinion, if human beings are to know God and so to grow in love. (AH V, 3-5)

Two strong poles on which Irenaeus thought turns are thus liturgical experience and theological conviction. The texture of his argument, though, is interpretation of Scripture. Let us see how he approaches the human person in this context.

Guided by his reading of scripture <sup>6</sup>, Irenaeus

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<sup>6</sup>Operative texts in this section (AH V, 6, 1) include Genesis 1:26; 1 Thess 5:23, Rom 8:29 ("For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the



describes the complete human being as "that mixture and union of the soul which has received the Spirit of the Father and which has been mingled with the flesh formed in the image of God."<sup>7</sup> What is this "spirit" of the Father received in the soul? Analysis of other Pauline passages (Eph 1:13; 2 Cor 5:4; Rom 8) convinces Irenaeus that the Spirit dwelling with human beings is the Spirit of the Father, the pledge of salvation which renders humans *spiritual* in the present time. In an interesting move, to which I will return, he confirms his analysis by his experience of Christians who have received the Spirit, whom he describes as "having the prophetic charisms."<sup>8</sup>

A typical Irenaeus formula on the human person reads: "there are three ... from which the perfect human

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image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers;" and 1 Cor 2:6, "we speak wisdom among the perfect," which he cites, to indicate that the "perfect" are those who receive the Spirit of God.

<sup>7</sup>Greek is not extant. The Latin reads: perfectus autem homo commixtio et adunitio est animae assumptis spiritum patris et admixtae ei carni quae est plasmata secundum imaginem dei. AH V, 6, 1; SC 153, 72.

<sup>8</sup> The Greek passage is extant: καὶ ὁὕτως καὶ πολλῶν ἀκοιτομεν ἀδελφῶν ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ προφητικὰ χαρίσματα ἔχον-  
των καὶ παιδοδαπαις λαλοῦντων διὰ τοῦ Πνεύματος γλώσσαις  
καὶ τὰ κρύφια τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἰς φανερόν ἀγόντων ἐπὶ τῷ  
συνφέροντι καὶ τὰ μυστήρια τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκδιηγουμένων  
AH V, 6, 1; SC 153, 75.



being is formed, flesh, soul and spirit. One saves and forms, who is the Spirit; one is saved and formed, which is the flesh; another is between these two which is the soul." (AH V, 9, 1, SC 153, pp.106-8) When the soul follows the Spirit it is raised up; when it follows the flesh, it falls. The power by which soul goes one way or the other is freedom. Irenaeus identifies freedom as a "similitude" to God which enables the human being to move into the fullness of the image and likeness to God in which she was created. (AH IV, 37-39)

Does Irenaeus really think, contrary to 1 Cor 15:50, that flesh and blood *will* inherit the kingdom of God? He sees the problem set by this text as the relation between Spirit and flesh, and approaches his commentary on the Corinthians text through Matt 26:41: "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."<sup>9</sup> Taking the ideas from the Matthew text into his development, Irenaeus comments that without the spirit, the flesh is weak, but when the spirit is added to the flesh, the infirmity of the flesh is absorbed by the fortitude of the spirit, in

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<sup>9</sup> It is of course true that we today see the connection between the texts as one of purely verbal similarity. That is, there is similarity of vocabulary but not of context or content.

such a way that the flesh is no longer carnal but spiritual, because of the communion in the spirit. Again, Irenaeus offers an example drawn from his life experience: the way martyrs face death, not in the weakness of the flesh but in the strength of the Spirit. From his analysis Irenaeus concludes that in the proper relation between Spirit and flesh, the Spirit absorbs the weakness of the flesh and possesses the flesh in itself as an inheritance. So he writes: "from the two is made a living human being, living because of participation in the Spirit, human on account of the substance of the flesh." (AH V, 9, 2, SC 112)

Irenaeus notes that those who follow the flesh, terrestrial or earthly humans, are dead, deprived of life, incapable of entering the kingdom.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, where there is the Spirit of the Father, there is the living human.<sup>11</sup> This being the case, Irenaeus

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<sup>10</sup> Commenting on 1 Cor 15:48: "As was the earthly one, so also are the earthly, and as is the heavenly one, so also are the heavenly."

<sup>11</sup> Commenting on 1 Cor. 15:49: "Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one," with Rom 6:4c: "We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life."

remarks, the Apostle urges that human beings conserve the Spirit of God by faith and a chaste life, lest without participation in the Spirit they not be admitted to the kingdom. So, Irenaeus concludes: "It is as if the Apostle warns us, saying: "Don't deceive yourselves, because unless the Word of God dwells in you and the Spirit of the Father lives in you, you lead a futile life, for while you exist in flesh and blood you will not possess the kingdom of God." (AH V, 9, 4; SC 153, 120-2)

In these passages Irenaeus uses a fairly literal exegesis, in which he connects texts by linking or echoing words, building a tissue of interpretation governed by the presuppositions he brings to his work. It is the presuppositions which are critical. They derive from his understanding of the Rule of Faith (also called the Rule of Truth.) This Rule is understood as a kind of "narrative creed"<sup>12</sup> telling the theological

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<sup>12</sup>Irenaeus is the first to use the term which also has a prominent place in his Proof (e.g., #3). The earliest credal patterns differed in complexity, from the early confessions including "Jesus is Lord," (Rom 10:9), "the gospel" outlined by Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:3-9) and the more theological affirmation in the opening verses of Romans. (Rom 1:3-4) By the mid-second century one finds related patterns in Justin's

story of Christ the Word, in ways that seem to be related to liturgical experience, although I cannot explore that connection here. To interpret Scripture, Irenaeus thinks, is to read Scripture within the community of faith. A sound reading, then, is a reading consistent with the faith received in Baptism.

The Rule of Faith governs right exegesis, and the Scriptures (the object of exegesis) explain the Rule of Faith. It is a circular argument. However, in actual practice, the relationship Irenaeus understands between

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description of baptism. (Apol. 1, 61) However, credal development should not be conceived of as moving in a straight line from simple to complex. As Kelly comments, The second-century conviction that the "rule of faith" believed and taught in the Catholic Church had been inherited from the Apostles contains more than a germ of truth. Not only was the content of that rule, in all essentials, foreshadowed by the "pattern of teaching" accepted in the apostolic Church, but its characteristic lineaments and outline found their prototypes in the confessions and credal summaries contained in the New Testament documents. J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Creeds 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 1972), p.29.

On Irenaeus' use of "canon of truth", see Norbert Brox, Offenbarung, Gnosis und gnostischer Mythos bei Irenäus von Lyon (Salzburg und München: Pustet, 1966), pp.105-113.

the two is less circular than dialogical.<sup>13</sup> The two are less mirror images of one another, than conversation partners, each of which amplifies and corrects the other. In the passages here examined on the human person, the insights here at work from the Rule of Faith are the incarnation of Christ and the creation of the human being in its totality, including flesh, directly by God, and not by some intermediate deity as is the case in Valentinian mythology. I turn now to the teaching found in a Valentinian gnostic document.

The Treatise on the Resurrection<sup>14</sup> is one of the writings found in the Egyptian desert at Nag Hammadi in 1945. The treatise is quite short (a little more than eight leaves, which cover three pages in Robinson's current English edition of the Nag Hammadi Library). It is cast in the form of a letter to a disciple named

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<sup>13</sup>See, for example, Rowan A. Greer's discussion, "The Christian Bible and Its Interpretation," in James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer, Early Biblical Interpretation (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), pp.110-113.

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm L. Peel, intro. and trans., The Treatise on the Resurrection, in James M. Robinson, ed. The Nag Hammadi Library rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1988), pp.52-57. See also his earlier trans. with intro. analysis, and exposition, The Epistle to Rheginos: A Valentinian Letter on the Resurrection (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969).

Rheginos from an anonymous Valentinian teacher. Most probably its date is late second-century. It is important to realize that, while Irenaeus mentions that he has read Valentinian literature, (AH I, pref., 2) there is no evidence that he actually read this particular text. Nonetheless, because it betrays concerns about survival and the meaning of Christian teaching on the resurrection which were common to the period, and because it does so in recognizably "Valentinian" fashion, the Treatise on the Resurrection is a valuable piece to read in conjunction with what Irenaeus himself wrote on the salvation of the flesh.

We begin with this Valentinian teacher's understanding of the human person.<sup>15</sup> He speaks of the Elect, who are identified with the "All," and pre-exist this cosmos. (46.35 - 47.8) Creation brings into existence the cosmos which is the realm of corruption and death. The world has a negative character. It is the sphere of the flesh. (47.5-6) Old age and corruption are the fate of all in it. (47.17-26) In addition, the world

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<sup>15</sup> The pertinent sections are T.R. # 46.35 through 49.37. Throughout I am especially indebted to Peel's notes and commentary in his 1969 work, together with those of Jacques Ménard, Le traité sur la résurrection (Quebec: Laval, 1983.)

has an illusory quality, (48,13-16, 27-28) being marked by change. (48.22-28) It lies in darkness and needs redemption by Light. (49.2-4)

From birth, then, a human being begins to exist in the flesh. Body encompasses the visible, outward members and the flesh. (47.35-39) Flesh is not only inferior, but also does not have life in itself (47.9-10) In one passage (49.9-16) Rheginos is warned against living 'in conformity to the flesh'; the implication is that life kata sarka is unredeemed life (as Rom 8:4-5, 12-13). Life in the body leads inevitably - as we all come to know only too well! - to old age and corruption (47.11-13, 17-19.) However, one's living, invisible members will rise. These "invisible members," mind and spirit, will be redeemed and survive after death. (45.39-46.2) The writer understands death as the cessation of earthly life. In an especially lovely passage he compares the Savior to the sun, the Elect to its rays, and their death to sunset. It reads:

Now if we are manifest in this world wearing  
[the Savior], we are that one's beams, and we  
are embraced by him until our setting, that is  
to say, our death in this life. 45.28-35



The experience of "sunset," death, involves disengagement from the corruptible body. ( 47.17-22)

And resurrection? The primary distinction governing the writer's approach to resurrection is the distinction between realized and unrealized eschatology. On the one hand an Elect is already risen. So we read lines like " ... already you have the resurrection" (49.15-16) and " ... why not consider yourself as risen?" (49.22-23) In what sense are the Elect already "at rest?" Peel tells us:

Such 'rest' seems to denote both a cessation of anxiety about death and the afterlife and a present anticipation of the fully-resurrected state. It is a gift conferred by the Savior.<sup>16</sup>

Pleasant though it might be to view death as already past, in plain though perhaps unpalatable fact, death lies ahead. The writer recognizes that biological death will precede full sharing in the resurrection. That resurrection which is to come (and so is not yet realized) will involve ascension from this earthly sphere. Continuing the passage quoted earlier, in which

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<sup>16</sup>Peel 1969, p. 143.

the Elect are compared to the beams of the sun, the teacher writes:

We are drawn to heaven by him, like the beams by the sun, not being restrained by anything. This is the spiritual resurrection which swallows up the psychic in the same way as the fleshly. 45.32-46.2

Having passed through the sunset of death, the Elect are freed from the restraints of this world. In a spiritual resurrection the Savior draws them to heaven, "like the beams by the sun."

But in what sort of body will this resurrection happen? The author finds an important clue to the nature of the risen body in the post-mortem appearance of Moses and Elijah, as described in the Gospel account of the transfiguration. The two were recognizable as who they were in earthly life.(48.3-11) The presence of identifiable personal characteristics rules out any notion of the resurrection as the ascension of pure spirit into the divine sphere.

The "flesh" covering the invisible members of the Elect in the resurrection will be a new flesh, a

"spiritual flesh."<sup>17</sup> There is but one true resurrection body, the spiritual one.<sup>18</sup> In the case of this central argument, the anonymous author does a superb job of reading Paul, even by present-day standards.

As we turn to study of the scriptural exegesis in this document, it is helpful to remember that the text is a very limited sample of its author's work. The extreme brevity of the text, combined with the limited direct references to scripture, means we should be very careful drawing conclusions from such study. This being said, there are three points we might usefully notice.

First, the sensitivity with which the Pauline material is handled. Rheginos's teacher grasps Paul's teaching on the resurrection body better than, for example, Pseudo-Justin, who speaks of it as a kind of resuscitated corpse, in which deformities will be made

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<sup>17</sup> We read: "This is the spiritual resurrection which swallows up the psychic in the same way as the fleshly." 45.39-46.2

<sup>18</sup> In fact, as Peel has noted (1969, p.149) TR gives a more faithful interpretation of the Pauline view of the resurrection body than many of the orthodox fathers of the church. See below, re Pseudo-Justin.

whole.<sup>19</sup> In addition, one of the two direct citations in the text is from Paul.

Then, indeed, as the Apostle said, "We suffered with him, and we arose with him, and we went to heaven with him." 45.24-28

This quotation combines two passages, part of Rom 8:17<sup>20</sup> and a paraphrase of Eph. 2:6.<sup>21</sup> Such combination is quite typical of a period when exact direct citation is less valued than catching what one takes to be "the mind" of the figure cited. In this case, the writer uses the authority of Paul to support his contention that the Savior's destruction of death has consequences for the believer. The contention is correct, and makes clear that the author of the Treatise recognizes that Christian teaching has implications for one's way of life.

A second point to notice about the scriptural exegesis in this document is the introduction of a slightly "off-beat" interpretation of the transfiguration account. This interpretation, the only other direct

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<sup>19</sup> Pseudo-Justin, On Resurrection, c.4.

<sup>20</sup> "If only we suffer with (Christ) so that we may also be glorified with him."

<sup>21</sup> God "raised us up with Christ, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus."

citation in the text, has already been mentioned. It is a partial citation, in which the order of appearance of Elijah and Moses corresponds to Mark's account. The author omits mention of Jesus or the disciples; the conversation among Jesus, Elijah, and Moses; the situation of the event; its significance in Jesus' life according to the Synoptic writers. Finally, there is no mention of the transfiguration itself. It is this combination of factors which makes for what I have called a slightly "off-beat" interpretation.<sup>22</sup> It seems to me that the displacement of Jesus in the interpretation may suggest that the fundamental presupposition guiding the interpretation lay somewhere else than in the Rule of Faith, a Rule which with all its variations always stresses the centrality of the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>22</sup> I agree with Peel, who concludes his assessment thus:

the point of crucial significance in the passage as used in our Letter is that Elijah and Moses, who have presumably died centuries ago, have appeared on earth in a resurrected state. Jesus, on the other hand, is understood to have undergone a temporary transformation while still alive! Thus, he is not mentioned as a proof for the resurrection, while Elijah and Moses are. Peel, 1969, p.20.

A third and final point to notice about scriptural exegesis in this document concerns the quality of the exegesis. Both instances of direct citation offer sober readings of the text. The first is a recognizable and soundly Christian reading; the second may give an unexpected "take" on the transfiguration scene, but that "take" excludes fantasy and absurdity. Absent from the Treatise on the Resurrection is any extreme allegorizing. Such interpretation as there is appears to be closer to the more sober literal approach we saw Irenaeus use earlier. Present, too, is the kind of echoing<sup>23</sup> or use of linking words which we also found in Irenaeus.

These three points suggest that what is different when one compares the Treatise on the Resurrection with Irenaeus is not so much the exegetical method as the *presupposition underlying the use of the method*. For the one who wrote to Rheginos, the mythological framework within which his exegesis moves is in tension between the Valentinian myth and the accounts in the Scriptures revered by the Christian church. The Christian mythology seems most dominant in the interpretation of

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<sup>23</sup>For example, "to stand within the Word of Truth" (43.32-24) evokes 1 Cor 15:1. See Peel 1969, 21.

the resurrection body, but ultimately the gnostic cosmogony carries the day. As we saw in the account of the author's view of the human person, it is not possible for him to assign positive value to the earthly body or to the sphere of cosmic creation.

For Irenaeus, the framework within which his exegesis moves is the Rule of Truth. In that account, creation, incarnation, and resurrection are linked in one economy of salvation. All that comes from the One God is capable of salvation and precious even in this earthly sphere, including human flesh.

The two accounts are most distant from one another when they speak of the present cosmos, which Irenaeus values highly and the teacher of Rheginos does not. The two are closest when they speak of the transformed, spiritual body of the risen ones. It seems clear that the agreement rests in mutual dependence on Paul on this point, together with use of similar exegetical methods. Ultimately their differences stem from different and contradictory, starting points. The Treatise on the Resurrection rests on a different mythological base than does Irenaeus. The question remains: does the difference between these two starting points for the analysis of the



resurrection body have any practical consequences for Christian living?

### Part 2: Implications for Christian Spirituality

If Rheginos receives his teacher's letter and takes it seriously, how might he be expected to act? First he will act as a person of faith. The believer is one who has been "elected to salvation and redemption, ... predestined ... not to fall into the foolishness of those who are without knowledge." (46.25-29) One is expected first to believe: that is, to accept the reality of Christ's resurrection, (45.14-46.4) and to trust in the surety of one's own spiritual resurrection. (46.8-13) A belief which has trust as a key dimension is fundamental to immortality (46.20-21). Such belief belongs only to the few who are Elect -- and clearly the writer expects that his disciple is among them.

As well as belief, Rheginos is expected to possess a certain kind of knowledge. His teacher is convinced that knowledge is closely related to believing. He

writes: "For we have known the Son of Man, and we have believed that he rose from among the dead." (46.14-17) The knowledge in question is of the Son of Man, though not of the Father. In addition, knowledge is a gift, but not a gift connected with ecstatic experience in this document. Nonetheless, it is through knowledge that one does receive rest, both now and in the future. Those who know the Savior are immortal, but must experience death before ascending to heaven.

Is there anything other than faith and knowledge expected of Rheginos? Near the end of the letter the teacher introduces an exhortation. He begins:

Therefore, do not think in part, O Rheginos,  
nor live in conformity with this flesh  
for the sake of  
unanimity, but flee  
from the divisions and the  
fetters, and already you have  
the resurrection. 49.9-16.

In a disciple-teacher dialogue, one in which there is an entire series of passages in which the disciple's misunderstandings are being corrected (44.3-6; 44.39-45.13; 46.30-47.3; 47.29-30), it is not surprising to

encounter the encouragement to avoid the "divisions" and "fetters" of false teaching, and to live not halfheartedly "according to the flesh", but wholeheartedly ("do not think in part") according to the spirit. Then, says the master, "already you have the resurrection." (49.15-16) Here we find that Rheginos is to regard false teaching as an evil to be overcome; if he flees such teaching he will be in the already present resurrection.

Then Rheginos is given direction about the resurrection which is "not yet." The teacher remarks the disciple's "lack of exercise" and need "to practice in a number of ways." If he does so, "he shall be released from this Element that he may not fall into error but shall himself receive again what at first was." (49.33-36) The encouragement is towards preparation for death,<sup>24</sup> after which will come resurrection.

So what way of life is expected of this disciple? It is a path marked by faith, trust, the search for and adherence to right teaching, and discipline toward preparation for death: on the whole, a somewhat austere

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<sup>24</sup>Peel, 1969, pp.98-99, gives the parallels from the Phaedo, Philo, 2 Clem., the Odes of Sol., and Basilides (AH I, 24, 4).

and quasi-philosophical life. Finally, even allowing that this is a brief, limited sample of the author's work, there are some surprising omissions. Particularly noticeable in a document dealing with the final state of the human being are the absence of any references to God as Father, Creator, or Judge; to judgment; and to the practice of charity, justice, or prayer in preparation for death.

By contrast Irenaeus concludes his discussion of the nature of the resurrection or spiritual body by reflection on the works of the Spirit. (AH V, 10-14) He uses one text of Paul to exegete another, so allowing the texts of Romans 8 and Galatians 5 to complete his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15. He learns from Romans that one who lives in the Spirit does not do the works of the flesh. And what are these? He turns to Galatians: "the works of the flesh ... are adultery, fornication, impurity, ... enmity, contention, ... heresy, envy, drunkenness ... and other such things ...". Such will not inherit the kingdom. And what will? "Charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, fidelity, sweetness, continence, chastity ... " Irenaeus comments: "those who produce the fruit of the

Spirit will be saved in every way because of the communion of the Spirit, and those who remain in the works of the flesh will be truly carnal. Such will not receive the Spirit and so will not inherit the kingdom of God." As humans choose in their carnal bodies made in God's image to follow the Spirit, the Spirit works in them. Ultimately, he says, "the fruit of the work of the Spirit is the salvation of the flesh." (AH V, 12, 4)

All is to be nourished by the Eucharist (AH V, 13,4) and supported by the faith of the Church, the community in which one finds the visible presence of that same Spirit.

(AH III, 24, 1 and IV, 26) The essential connections here are those between the human body made in the image of God's incarnate Word, the human body of Christ, and the Christian body which is the Church. He describes the Church as the place of the Spirit, the place where Christians led by the Spirit come through Christ to the Father, where they will enter into the fullness of life, alive to the glory of God.

The link between the Spirit of God and the salvation of the flesh could not be tighter. Nor should we be surprised to find it so. Irenaeus spent his youth in Smyrna, a coastal town in Phrygia (on a modern map, it

would be Izmir on the Asia Minor coast of Turkey.) Late in his life he wrote to the Bishop of Rome to defend the right of that area to their own customs in observance of the Pasch.<sup>25</sup> In the interim, Montanist prophecy marked the experience of the Phrygian church. Is it entirely unrelated that in Irenaeus' own church in Lyons, a martyrs' church, he records the continued experience "by many of our members" of the charismatic gifts of exorcism, prophecy, visions, healings, and even the raising of the dead? (AH II, 32, 4 and V, 6, 1) In the Christian communities best known to Irenaeus, it was not unusual for a Spirit dominated way of life to take a charismatic turn.

Study of these two approaches to the salvation of the flesh, approaches beginning from contradictory starting points, suggests different versions of the appropriate lifestyle of the Christian. His teacher exhorts Rheginos to adopt a philosophic lifestyle, one not unlike that of a respectable -- and properly sedate -- second-century philosopher. Followers of Irenaeus may adopt what can probably be called a more enthusiastic and prophetic -- and much less "proper" -- way of life. There

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<sup>25</sup>H.E. V, 24, 9-18.

is no evidence to suggest that Irenaeus himself possessed the more striking charismatic gifts. He was a writer-bishop; beyond that we can only speculate about his way of life.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, let me emphasize where I find the similarities and differences between these two second century interpretations of salvation of the flesh. Both writers support their positions by appeal to Christian scriptures. Both use similar methods to interpret the scriptures. Both find that "spiritual flesh" will enter heaven. The Valentinian document assigns no positive value to earthly flesh. Irenaeus finds God's image in earthly flesh. Why? The writers differ in the presuppositions which support their interpretations. They accept different supporting mythologies. Like any normal second-century writer, the author of the Treatise on the Resurrection expects Christians to hold together in their worldview two quite different mythologies, the more properly Valentinian one and the more properly Christian one. The author of Adversus haereses introduces something quite new: he expects



Christians to permit but one worldview to shape their imaginations, and so their lives, the Christian worldview. Part of the process and the problem of Christianization is thus the struggle for the Christian imagination, a struggle typified in the clash between Irenaeus and the Valentinians over the salvation of the flesh. In a nutshell, this study suggests that what really matters is whose story one believes!

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