

not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray.”<sup>2</sup>

The answer to Professor Hull, of course, is that God did not create through evolution. Rather, as the Bible teaches, God created plants, animals and people fully formed and perfect (Gen. 1:31). The suffering and death we see all round us came into the world later, because of Adam’s sin, and is a salutary lesson for all of us as to sin’s terrible nature. But praise God that, one day, he will restore the world to its original beautiful form, reflecting his own beautiful nature, and where “the wolf will live with the lamb and the leopard will lie down with the goat ... [and] the lion will eat straw like the ox” (Is. 11).<sup>3</sup>

### The doctrine of creation matters

The biblical doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* lies at the heart of the Christian faith and we should be careful not to diminish its biblical basis. It affirms that God is sovereign and that He can be trusted to do all that He has promised. There are no other gods who compete with Him and He alone merits our worship. The universe belongs to Him, and He will do with it whatever He pleases. By beholding his creation, we are enabled to glimpse something of his greatness and beauty. By recalling that He brought everything into being simply by his word, we begin to realise something of his awesome power. And we are reminded that, as well as being the only creator, He is the only Saviour.<sup>4</sup>

### References

1. Barr, J., letter to David C.C. Watson, 23 April 1984. Cited by Sarfati, J., *Refuting compromise*, Master Books, Green Forest, AR, p. 137, 2004.
2. Cited by Grudem, W., *Systematic Theology*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 302, 1994.
3. Gurney, P., The carnivorous nature and suffering of animals, *J. Creation* 18(3):70–75, 2004; creation.com/carniv.
4. It is significant the Hebrew word ‘bara’ (‘create’) is used in the context of both creation and salvation. See, for example, Is. 43:1ff and Ps. 51:10.

## New study shows the importance of Genesis creation for early apologist’s Christology

A review of  
*Irenaeus and Genesis: A study of Competition in Early Christian Hermeneutics*  
by Thomas Holsinger-Friesen  
Journal of Theological Interpretation, Supplement 1,  
Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake,  
IN, 2009

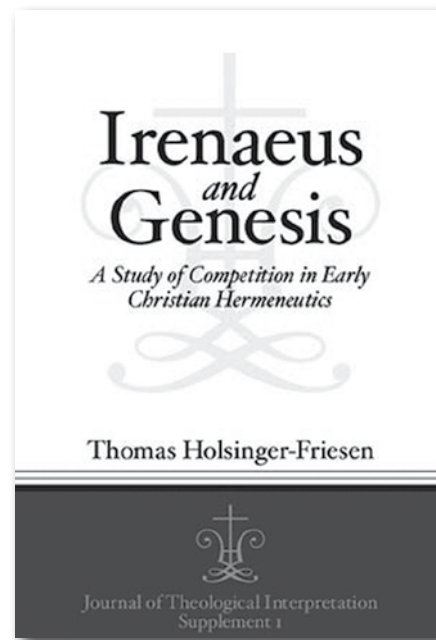
Lita Cosner

In *Irenaeus and Genesis*, Thomas Holsinger-Friesen examines the significance of Genesis 1:26 and 2:7 for early Church Father Irenaeus (d. c. AD 200). In particular, Irenaeus’ interpretation of Paul and his arguments against the Valentinian heresy, a type of Gnosticism. This study examines both Irenaeus’ and the Gnostic sect’s use of Genesis in their respective theological systems, and shows how the interpretation of Genesis became a key battleground where Irenaeus fought against the Gnostic ideas threatening orthodox Christianity.

### “Recapitulation” in Irenaeus and modern scholarship

Irenaeus was an important early Christian apologist, and Bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul. He was a disciple of Polycarp, who in turn was a disciple of John the Evangelist himself. He was best known for his defence of Christianity and demolition of the Gnostic heresy of Valentinus, *Adversus Haereses* or *Against Heresies* (c. 180).

A recurring idea in Irenaeus’ exegesis is that of “recapitulation”—that Jesus, through His incarnation



and life, ‘relived’ Adam, but in such a way that He performed perfectly where Adam failed. Holsinger-Friesen notes that for Irenaeus, “in order to understand the ultimate and crowning significance of Jesus Christ for humanity, one must start with the beginning” (p. 2). Naturally, this presupposes a historical first man Adam who was the ancestor of the human race.

His use of the idea of recapitulation is especially noteworthy in his writings against the Valentinian Gnostics, who were also very protologically oriented. In these texts, Genesis 1:26 and 2:7 are of central significance. Irenaeus seems to agree with his opponents that protology is key when it comes to understanding the person and work of Christ; the debate is how the protological texts are to be interpreted.

“A coherent, satisfying interpretation of the Jesus Christ of

apostolic texts, Irenaeus will insist, depends upon the interpretation and theological usage of the *Genesis* texts” (p. 4).

This made an orthodox interpretation of Genesis the keystone of Irenaeus’ case against the Valentinians.

Adolf von Harnack and subsequent scholars accused Irenaeus of imposing recapitulation as an alien paradigm on Scripture which represented a Hellenistic mutilation of the text. But Holsinger-Friesen argues that

“recapitulation ought to be seen as a subordinate expression of Irenaeus’ broader hermeneutical endeavor, that is illustrating how texts may be appropriately read and *used* as Christian Scripture” (p. 26).

### Irenaeus versus the Valentinians

The Valentinian Gnostics were a heretical group, founded in the second century AD by Valentinius (as well as Basilides), who sought to understand Christ through their view of His origin. They saw Gnostic doctrines encoded in John’s Gospel, available for “those who have eyes to see”, and believed their doctrine about Christ’s origin (christogony) was simply based out of a “true” reading of Paul’s writings. Their name comes from their assertion that they possessed an elite secret knowledge (gnosis). They co-opted Christian terms to use in their own soteriology, and had distinctly anti-Christian views on creation, anthropology, and Christology (detailed below).

While the Valentinian Gnostics used recapitulation to understand humanity in terms of Christ’s origin, Irenaeus sought to understand Christ in terms of humanity’s origin. In His life, Irenaeus argues, Christ relived every stage of human life and sanctified it to God, undoing the effects of Adam’s disobedience.

“Yet important as is this discussion of recapitulation, it is entirely predicated on Christ’s prior recapitulation of the *formation* or physicality of humanity” (p. 39).

Genesis 1:26 and 2:7 are the lynchpins for Irenaeus’ understanding of this recapitulatory work. While Genesis 3 has a place in Irenaeus’ explanation of the significance of Christ’s redemptive work, “when Irenaeus looks to the beginning, he deems Christ’s unique role in creation as having primary significance. The divine Word who first formed humanity has re-formed it after taking this formation upon himself” (p. 27). So the texts which detail God’s creation of humanity and humanity’s defining features are more promising for defining what it was that Christ recapitulated. Irenaeus used his interpretation of these verses in Genesis in his reading of Paul and the evangelists.

### Gnostic protology

While the Valentinian Gnostics, and the Ophites who preceded them, genuinely ascribed authority to Genesis as a divine revelation, they believed that it was only a partial, and partially flawed, revelation. The Ophites believed that “Moses’ story is merely a partial and superficial appropriation of a deeper, more complex story”, yet their interpretation of the Genesis creation account informed their understanding of the created order, humans, Christ, and salvation (p. 58). They believed that humans were only pawns in a conflict between divine beings, and that an evil god, the Demiurge, gave Moses the creation narrative in Genesis, which they believed to be only a partial and distorted account of what really happened, a piece of propaganda to spin the Demiurge in a good light. In the Ophites’ “fuller” creation account, the Demiurge was a bungling idiot who could not control his own offspring, and inadvertently transferred his image to mankind, and only afterwards made it seem like that’s what he meant to do. The Fall is rendered into a *positive* event wherein humanity discovered its own divine spark.

The Valentinians, unlike the Ophites, wanted to be seen as a genuine Christian sect, so they had to moderate the teachings which they borrowed from the Ophites. So while the Ophite Demiurge is malicious, his Valentinian



Courtesy of www.wikipedia.org

Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons, was one of the foremost opponents of Valentinian Gnosticism.

counterpart is only ignorant and limited. They also give Jesus (*Soter* or saviour) a bigger role in the pre-creation conflict involving Sophia and Achamoth. *Soter* was the link between humanity and divinity. “In contrast with the Ophites, the Valentinians used Genesis 1–3 to ascribe ultimate significance and pre-eminence to the person and work of Christ” (p. 101). So the debate between Irenaeus and the Valentinians was not about *whether* Christ and His work was significant, but about the *nature* of Christ and His work.

### Genesis 1:26 and the divine economy

The Valentinian interpretation of the Genesis narratives provided the basis for Christ’s soteriological function, and Irenaeus seems to agree with them that Genesis provides crucial information without which we cannot properly understand Christ’s saving work. But while the Valentinians looked to what they believed happened before Genesis, Irenaeus started with Genesis itself, and proclaimed that anthropogony, not theogony, must be the starting point in the discussion of God’s or Christ’s activity.

While the Valentinians believed that the highest god, Bythus, was very remote from the physical creation, Irenaeus powerfully asserts that the true God *directly* created the physical world:

“It was not angels, therefore, who made us, nor who formed us, neither had angels power to make an image of God, nor anyone else, except the true God, nor any power remotely distant from the Father of all things” (*Adv. Haer.* IV 20.1).

Genesis 1:26 is crucial for Irenaeus’ argument—God *directly* formed man; there was no degree of separation between God and His creation. Irenaeus thus uses the verse to say something more crucial about God than about humanity.

Irenaeus also attacks the Gnostic doctrine of the divided Christ, where *Soter* descended on Jesus during His ministry, but left Him on the cross, so the truly divine part of Christ never suffered and died. But Irenaeus argued that if Christ were to truly reconcile humanity to God, He had to do so *as a truly human being*. He had to live a full human life, through all the stages of life:

“... he would need to experience and re-claim through his sanctifying obedience every temporal location in human development from infancy to old age” (p. 125).

The concept of recapitulation also has an element of Jesus’ *discontinuity* with Adam and his continuity with God as Creator.

“Thus Christ is said to *reform* humanity, and this re-formation corresponds to God’s original formation of Adam’s physical body” (p. 126).

### Human arche and telos

Both Irenaeus and the Valentinians drew on their interpretation for Genesis to develop their views of anthropology, including human destiny. Valentinian anthropology equated the material aspect of humanity with imperfection, so redemption involves realizing that one is a carrier of the divine spark, and finally being freed from

the imperfect material existence. A Christian reading of the Genesis texts “permitted Irenaeus to speak of human destiny using similar language as had his Gnostic opponents” (p. 140). Genesis 1:26 provided him with a ground for arguing that mankind was *comprehensively* created in God’s image, that is, that both the physical and spiritual aspects of humanity reflect the image of God. If this is the case, redemption involves the restoration of the physical, as well as the spiritual.

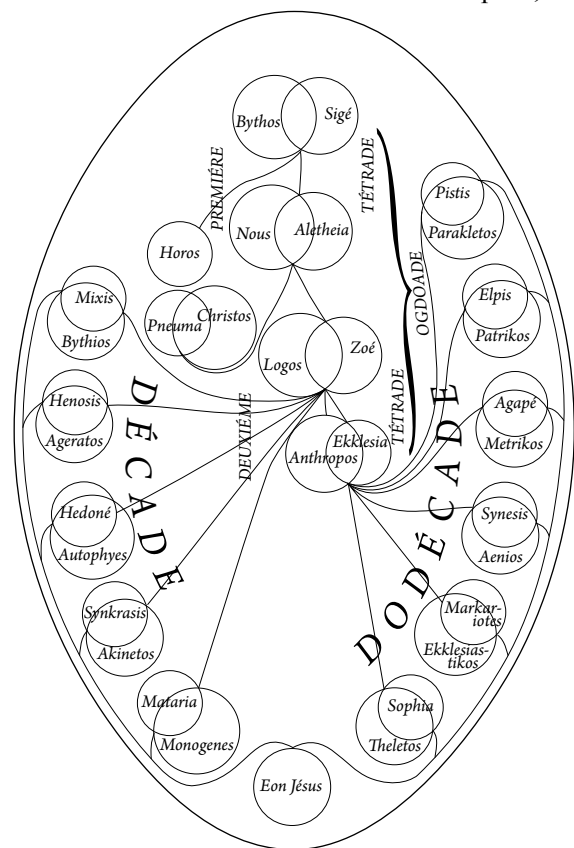
For Irenaeus, the question of the origin, purpose, and destiny of the physical human body was central. He argued that the Valentinians, in interpreting 1 Corinthians 15:50 “spiritually” to exclude all possibility of a bodily resurrection, were “tugging on the one loose

thread that if pulled, unravels the whole garment of Christian doctrine” (p. 181). He believed that his interpretation of Genesis and of Christ’s advent as a recapitulation of Adam’s creation is key to rightly interpreting 1 Corinthians 15:50. If Christ is described as being flesh and blood, then the salvation of flesh and blood must be possible, even if not completely manifested. Irenaeus argued that if the Valentinians were to be seen as Christians, they had to deal with the physicality of Christ’s incarnation.

### Theological interpretations of Genesis 2:7

While Irenaeus and his opponents differed significantly on anthropology, Irenaeus saw the *theological* differences between the two groups as far more significant. The anthropological errors were a *symptom* of the Valentinian misconceptions about the nature of God. “Only when at first God is properly understood as a trinity—and God’s activities framed accordingly—will humankind then be properly understood. Valentinian anthropology was deemed deficient not because Genesis 2.7 was ignored, but because it was not interpreted by means of a christological hermeneutic” (p. 156). Irenaeus argued that Genesis 2.7 tells us several important things about God:

“First, Genesis 2.7 establishes the Father as being the origin, destiny, and all-powerful guarantor of the *homo vivens*. Second, Genesis 2.7 informs an apostolic redefinition of humanity wherein the physical body is not opposed to but embraced by the divine Spirit. The Spirit’s ongoing work endows the embodied human creature with the capacity to bear fruit and, eventually, to receive God—the one who is truly living. Finally, in *Haer.* V. 13–16, Irenaeus employs Genesis 2.7 to provide a third viewpoint from which to describe the divine economy of human vivification, that of the Son” (p. 174).



Valentinian Gnosticism entailed belief in god-like beings called Aeons who were emanations from the Pleroma. The lowest of these Aeons, Sophia, was said to have created the material world through her passion.

Author: Jacques Matter, courtesy of www.wikipedia.org

## Hermeneutical Significance of Irenaeus

Irenaeus' use of recapitulation was a significant contribution to Christian biblical hermeneutics. First, it shows that "when approaching the biblical canon from the theological assumption that it expresses a coherent, cohesive message, one need not choose between ... Christology *or* narrative chronology" (p. 222). Second, it provides a way of addressing "the boundaries of the biblical narrative itself, and for navigating interaction between it and other external 'narratives'" (p. 223). Finally, he contributed a doctrine of humanity from a protological starting point shared with his opponents, and his typological reading of Genesis 1–2 resulted in a non-Platonic Christian anthropology which rivaled the Valentinian system. As such, it is incredibly instructive for how biblical texts can be used in a distinctively *Christian way*.

## Conclusion

*Irenaeus and Genesis* is a technical work intended for other specialists in a fairly narrow field, and this shows in the language, which is so technical in places that even someone familiar with the terms may have trouble following the argument at times. But the reader will become acclimated to the style later in the book.

This is a very interesting book, despite its technicality, for anyone interested in how protological texts inform doctrine. It is not about how we should interpret Genesis, *per se*, but a look at how a heretical sect misappropriated Genesis and used it for its own purposes, and how Irenaeus in turn 'took back' Genesis and used a truly Christian and biblical understanding of creation to overturn Valentinian protology. I came away from this immensely valuable book with a renewed appreciation for the importance of Genesis as the foundation for Christology and soteriology.

# Making sense of how an atheist is made

A review of  
*The Making of an Atheist:  
How Immorality Leads  
to Unbelief*  
by James S. Spiegel  
Moody Publishers,  
Chicago, IL, 2010

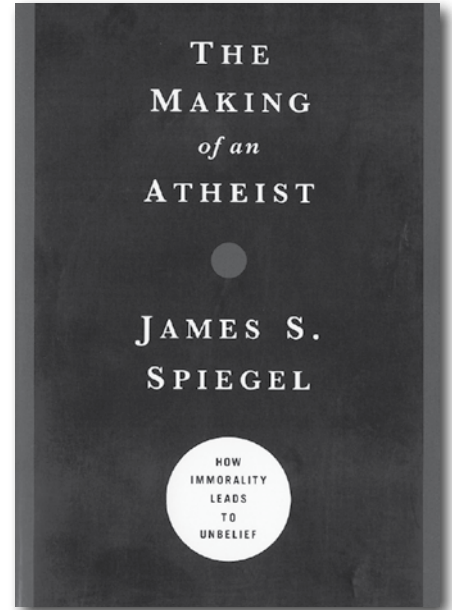
Brian Thomas

In this brief but insightful book, author James Spiegel cogently clarifies, especially for Christians, the real cogs that turn in the engines of atheist's hearts, including the New Atheists. One key distinction of the New Atheists is that not only do they say that it is probable that there is no God, but that belief in God is wrong and should be proactively stamped out. Not only is Spiegel's analysis backed up with history, Scripture, and logic, but his suggested mindsets and tactics for Christians to use in ministry among atheists are equally insightful and practical. This book has something for young and old, and would be a valuable addition to most any Christian's library.

The entire book follows a progressive flow that compels the reader forward. Spiegel's first two chapters point out obvious and fatal flaws with the atheistic worldview. In fact there are more, and more well-laid-out, arguments in just these forty large-font pages than there were in the entire book *God and the New Atheism* by John Haught, which was reviewed in the December 2008 issue of *Journal of Creation*.<sup>1</sup>

## Succinctly refuting atheism

For example, Spiegel notes that the problem of evil, often considered the bedrock of atheism, "could never



count as grounds for atheism" (p. 26). This objection is usually framed as a question like, "How could a theistic God allow evil, since by definition he doesn't like it and is able to stop it?" Spiegel states that "one cannot—whether by appeals to evil or anything else—eliminate the need to explain the existence of the universe. Nor does the problem of evil eradicate the abundant physical and biological evidence for design" (p. 27). He admits that while it is challenging, the problem of evil really has nothing much to do with explaining how this world got here.

Not only this, but New Atheists like Richard Dawkins who have used the problem of evil to argue against God's existence actually "have no grounds to call anything evil" (p. 27). The New Atheists are 'positivists', which means they believe that all real or true knowledge must come from a science experiment. Spiegel correctly points out that this faith claim is self-refuting, since, "the notion that all beliefs must be scientifically verifiable is, well, not scientifically verifiable" (p. 29).