

# Participation in the Divine Logos According to Irenaeus' *Adversus haereses*

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**Abstract:** - In the early Christian era, the apologist Irenaeus of Lyon contemplated the meaning of participation in the divine Logos by humans and all created beings. In his main work *Adversus haereses*, he offers an orthodox view of the Logos, Jesus Christ, as the Word and Wisdom of God the Father. He explains that the Logos is present in human beings and is also united with all creatures. Through the divine Logos, people are renewed, animated and become partakers of immortality. Furthermore, Irenaeus teaches that participation in the Logos is linked with the presence of the Holy Spirit. The universe exists through the divine Logos, who is inseminated in everything. Thus, the divine Logos plays a major role in the process of sanctification, and of unification and communion with God.

## Introduction

As the most significant theologian of the second century, Irenaeus of Lyon<sup>1</sup> became famous for his main work, *Unmasking and Refutation of the Gnosis Falsely So-Called*.<sup>2</sup> His second important study was *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Irenaeus was born around 140 in Smyrna, Asia Minor, and died in 202 in Lugdunum. In his youth he was a pupil of Polycarp of Smyrna, and later—during the reign of Marcus Aurelius - he became a presbyter and bishop in Lyon. He studied in Palestinian Caesarea, as well as in Rome under Pope Anicet. In Lyon, he took action against the Gnostics. See also B. Altaner, A. Stuiber, *Patrologia*, Warszawa, 1990, 186; J. M. Szymusiak, M. Starowieyski, *Słownik wczesnochrześcijańskiego piśmiennictwa [Glossary of early Christian Literature]*, Poznań 1971, 206–207.

<sup>2</sup> In this article I am using the critical edition: A. Rousseau, L. Doubleau, SCh, Paris 1979, namely vol. 1, SCh 263 and 264; vol. 2, SCh 293 and 294; vol. 3, SCh 210 and 211; vol. 4, SCh 100; vol. 5, SCh 152 and 153. I use the English edition, namely, the translation: Philip Schaff, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, Omaha 2019. The first two books of Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* were translated by A. Roberts. The groundwork for the translation of the third and fourth books was furnished by W. H. Rambaut. A. Roberts and W. Rambaut, trans., in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, Buffalo, 1885. The original works are mostly lost, but survived in the Latin version from the early 3rd century. Hereafter the acronym AH is used, referring to the work in the original language.

<sup>3</sup> The critical edition: A. Rousseau, *Demonstratio apostolicae praedicationis*, SCh 406, Paris 1995, and the English edition: A. Robinson, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, London 1920. Hereafter the acronym DAP is used, referring to the work in the original language. This work is linked by content to the

Which he wrote after *Adversus haereses*. This eminent Christian writer greatly appreciated philosophy, but he put the living tradition of the Church before philosophical considerations. He was the first to respond to the threat of gnosis in the official teaching of the Church.

The five books of *Adversus haereses* do not constitute a unified work. As individual parts, they were created gradually in the form of lecture supplements. Irenaeus based these writings on his knowledge of gnostic ism, which he acquired by analyzing the gnostic writings, as well as the texts of earlier writers, such as Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Hermas and Justin Martyr.<sup>4</sup> He found the source and norm of faith in apostolic teaching and in the continuous succession of bishops.

He thus collected and deepened the Christology that had been formulated by previous apologists. At the same time he explained the Trinitarian rule of faith (*regula fidei*) and argued that God had his Logos and his Spirit, which Irenaeus identified with divine Wisdom. He also drew upon biblical theology and teaching about the divine Logos in the New Testament. In the second century of Christianity, his

second part of *Adversus haereses* (Books III-IV).

<sup>4</sup> See B. Altaner, A. Stuiber, *Patrologia [Patrology]*, Warszawa 1990, 187–188.

vision of God was the fullest and the most Trinitarian.<sup>5</sup>

**Participation in the Divine Logos**

In *Adversus haereses*, Irenaeus of Lyon explains that Word and Wisdom (*Verbum ET Sapientia*) can be understood as the “two hands” of God the Father.<sup>6</sup> At the time of the creation of the world and the formation of humankind, all the angels who also had their origin in the Logos were at his service.<sup>7</sup> Spiritual beings thus help us recognize the greatness of God, but even with their support it is not possible to fully understand the mystery of the divine Logos, who includes everything and abides with people at all times (*pervenit usque ad nos et nobiscum est*).<sup>8</sup> According to Irenaeus, the Creator of the world (*Demiurgo*) directly revives mortal bodies (*vivificante mortalia corpora*) and, by his own will effects the resurrection of all.<sup>9</sup> This view is presented in the following:

For His *offspring* and His similitude do minister to Him in every respect; that is, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Word and Wisdom; whom all the angels serve, and to whom they are subject.<sup>10</sup>

Irenaeus emphasizes that the Logos is always present with humankind, united and connected to all creatures (*unit us ET consparsus humano generi adest*).<sup>11</sup> He reveals himself in the fullness of time,

<sup>5</sup> See J. N. D. Kelly, *Początki doktryny chrześcijańskiej [Early Christian Doctrines]*, Warszawa 1998, 86–89.

<sup>6</sup> See AH IV 20.4; 33.7. See also 1 Cor. 8: 6; 1 Tim. 2: 4. According to Irenaeus' theology, God the Creator through Word and Wisdom has done everything and assigned the world to humankind. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, is the Word who has become man, and the Spirit of God is the one who explains the plans of the Father and Son (◆□☩ ◆☩☩☩ □✠Ⓞ&□■□○✠☩☩☩ □☩◆□ □☩☩ ◆☩ ☩☩☩☩ ◆✠☩□◆☩ ◆&☩☩☩□☩☩ ☩◆□◆☩☩).

<sup>7</sup> See AH II 2.4; IV20.1.

<sup>8</sup> See AH IV19.3.

<sup>9</sup> See AH II 3.1-2; V 4.1-2.

<sup>10</sup> AH IV 7.4 (SCh 100, 464): “*Ministratenimei ad omnia sua progenies et figuratiosa, hoc est Filius et Spirit, Verbum et Sapientia, quibus serviunt et subjecti sunt omnes angeli.*” See also AH III 18.3.

<sup>11</sup> See AH III 16.6: “*Unus igitur Deus Pater et unus Christus Iesus Dominus noster, veniens per universam dispositionem, et omnia in semetipsum recapitulans.*” According to Irenaeus' theology, God is one, and one with the Lord Jesus Christ, who has fulfilled the plan of salvation and reunion of everything in

previously planned by the Father, as the Savior of those who are saved (*Salvator eorum qui salvantur*) and as the Lord of those who are subjected to him (*sub dominio Domini*). He is also the Lord of all that is created and at the same time, the “Only-begotten of the Father” (*Unigenitus Patris*), the foretold Christ and the “Incarnate Word of God” (*Verbum Dei incarnatum*).<sup>12</sup> The divine Logos attracts all beings to himself and presents himself to the people as the Head of the Church (*caput Ecclesiae*).<sup>13</sup> Thanks to the Logos, the entire human race, scattered into different languages and nations, can be united again (*in semetipso recapitulatus est*).<sup>14</sup>

Irenaeus of Lyon claims that it is not possible to fully understand the essence of the Father, but people can approach him in love and through the divine Logos (*per Verbum eius*). In this way we enter more deeply into the mystery of participation in God, who has established, created, beautified, and integrated everything (*per semetipsum*).<sup>15</sup> It is thanks to the Son who instructs us that God the Father is one, and who includes everything and gives existence to everything (*qui continet omnia ET omnibus esse praestat*).<sup>16</sup> In the Logos we know that God performs the act of creation from nothing, using only his will and power.<sup>17</sup> The Father reveals his Son in order to make himself known to all, and to give believers immortality and eternal rest (*in aeternum refrigerium*).<sup>18</sup> Irenaeus then explains in detail the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word:

The Father therefore has revealed Himself to all, by making His Word visible to all; and, conversely, the

himself.

<sup>12</sup> See AH III 16.7.

<sup>13</sup> See E. Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, Cambridge 2001, 121-123. Here Osborn analyzes the writings of Irenaeus, and in one subsection he collects all the passages that testify to Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church.

<sup>14</sup> See AH III 22.3. See also 1 Cor. 15:45.

<sup>15</sup> See AH IV 20.1. See also Gen. 2: 7; Mt. 1.21; Lk. 1: 31; 2: 21.

<sup>16</sup> See AH 20.6. See also Jn. 1: 18.

<sup>17</sup> See AH II 10.2.

<sup>18</sup> See AH IV 6.5.







Himself that communion which should be held with it, and seeking out its salvation.<sup>42</sup>

Irenaeus explains that God's Word is powerful in everything from the very beginning of the creation,<sup>43</sup> and the human - by receiving a breath of life - participates in the divine Logos as a being endowed with reason. For the Word of the Father and the Spirit of God are united in a mysterious manner with the substance of creation (*adunitus antiquae substantiae plasmationis*). They make the human being alive and perfect (*viventem etperfectum hominem*) and capable of understanding the Father (*capientem perfectum Patrem*).<sup>44</sup> This shows that the human being is always in the hands of Providence and is constantly united with God (*adunitio ET communio Dei ET hominis*). Since the Incarnation of the Son of God, human beings are even more closely united with the eternal Logos (*percommunione*). Irenaeus then asks the following rhetorical question about unity with God: In what way could we be partakers of the adoption of sons, unless we had received from Him through the Son that fellowship which refers to Himself, unless His Word, having been made flesh, had entered into communion with us?<sup>45</sup>

Irenaeus explains that since the divine Logos entered into relationship with people, God has been reuniting them and destroying sin and death and giving them new life.<sup>46</sup> They return to this original state, which existed when the first man was formed by the "hand of God," which is the Word of God (*plasmatus manu Dei, id est Verbo Dei*).<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> AH V 14.2 (SCh 152, 186): "Nunc autem quod fuit qui perierat, homo, hoc salutare factum est Verbum, per semetipsum eam quae esset ad eum, communionem et exquisitionem salutis eius efficiens."

<sup>43</sup> See AH V 1.1.

<sup>44</sup> See AH V 1.2-3. In *Adversus haereses*, Irenaeus indicates that the Logos is the Spirit of God (□■ℳ◆□○☉ ☉ℳ□◆□) who reveals himself through the Incarnation (*per suam incarnationem*).

<sup>45</sup> AH III 18.7 (SCh 210, 366): "Qua enim ratione filiorum adoptionis eius participes esse possemus, nisi per Filium eam quae est ad ipsum recepissemus ab eo communonem, nisi uerbum eius communicasset nobis caro factum?"

<sup>46</sup> See AH III 18.7: "Deus hominis antiquam plasmationem in se recapitulans, ut occideret quidem peccatum, evacuet autem mortem, et vivificaret hominem."

<sup>47</sup> See AH III 21.10. See also Gen. 2: 7; Jn. 1.3.

Therefore, the Word, taking his origin from the Blessed Mary (*Verbum existens ex virgine Maria*), unifies each human being with himself (◆□☉■ ☉☉■☉&ℳ×☉☉☉□◆☉○ℳ ■□■ ℳ×☉☉ ☉◆☉◆□☉■). According to Irenaeus, the prophets pointed to this unique unification of the Word of God with his creatures (◆☉☉■ ℳ☉☉■◆×■ ◆□◆□ ■□☉ ☉□◆ ◆□◆□ ☉ℳ□◆□ □□□☉☉ ◆ □☉ □●☉☉○☉) when they wrote that the Son of God was to become the Son of man (□×☉ ◆□☉■ ℳ☉& ◆☉☉☉☉ □☉☉ ☉ℳ☉■□◆ ☉☉○☉☉■□◆☉☉● &☉☉◆☉◆◆□■◆ℳ☉).<sup>48</sup> Thus Jesus Christ first recapitulates within himself (*in se recapitulans*) the flesh taken from Mary and then saves his creatures, who died with Adam in the beginning.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, in *Adversus haereses*, Irenaeus writes that since the Old Covenant, people are prepared to follow God (*sequi Deum*), to carry his Spirit (*portare eius Spiritum*) and to participate in the divine Logos (*communione habere*).<sup>50</sup> For God constantly leads people, and spiritually unites himself with those who need it (*suampraebens communionem*). Although he remains invisible, he prepares humankind for the "symphony of salvation" (*ad consonantiam salutis*). Through his Spirit and divine Word he has given every creature an appropriate law (*congruentem ET aptam legem conscrivens*). The immeasurable Father does everything according to the measure and order (☉☉☉□☉◆☉ ○ℳ☉◆□◆ &☉☉☉ ◆☉☉☉ℳ☉) of the Son, who alone is able to comprehend him.<sup>51</sup>

### The Communion with the Divine Logos

Irenaeus of Lyon describes participation in the divine Logos in the context of the misconceptions of heretics who do not accept that the Word really became flesh (*Verbum Dei caro factum est*) and came into this world as our Savior. He explains that

<sup>48</sup> See AH IV 33.11. See also Ex. 13: 2; Jn 1: 14.

<sup>49</sup> See AH III 22.2; V 14.1.

<sup>50</sup> See AH IV 14.2.

<sup>51</sup> See AH IV 4.2: "Et bene, qui dixit ipsum immensum Patrem in Filio mensuratum: mensura eim Patris, Filius, quoniam et capiteum."









- II, ed. A. Rousseau, L. Doutreleau, SCh 293-294, Paris 1982.
4. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, Adversus haereses, Book III, ed. A. Rousseau, L. Doutreleau, SCh 210-211, Paris 1974.
  5. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, Adversus haereses, Book IV, ed. A. Rousseau, L. Doutreleau, SCh 100, Paris 1965.
  6. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, Adversus haereses, Book V, ed. A. Rousseau, L. Doutreleau, SCh 152-153, Paris 1969.
  7. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, Demonstratio apostolicae praedicationis, ed. A. Rousseau, SCh 406, Paris 1995.
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  15. Robinson, A., Proof of the Apostolic Preaching, London 1920.
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