Perfect Life Through Special Nourishment: Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 5

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Translated by
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1. Introduction

In his listing out of the tasks of Christian theology and instruction in *Haer.* 1.10.3, the Gallic bishop Irenaeus ranks the redemption of the flesh as one of the central, universally agreed upon contents of the proclamation of the church. In the fifth book of his large-scale work *Adversus haereses*, he himself also presents a detailed examination of this topic (5.1–14) and embeds it in his conception of the economy of salvation, which makes an arc from God's action at the creation of the world to its complete restitution and salvation at the end of time and seeks to provide a bullwork in the conflict with competing early Christian-gnostic systems. Thus, for Irenaeus, the redemption of human flesh belongs to a more comprehensive argumentation for the value of the created, material world. Consequently, Irenaeus understands his remarks on the role of the Eucharist in the salvation of the flesh in *Haer.* 5.2.3[2] – a central text in what follows – as one of several argumentative building blocks that he uses to contest such teachings, which, in his view, denigrate creation and exclude human σάρξ from the end-time salvation.[3]

At the same time, Irenaeus shares some fundamental convictions and frameworks of thought with his opponents.[4] He is connected to them by the reflection on the flesh of Jesus and human beings within the framework of a worldview in which the σάρξ or

[1] For the German version of this work, see C. Jacobi, *Leiblich vermitteltes Leben. Vorstellungen vom Überwinden des Todes und vom Auferstehen im frühen Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023), 201–39 (https://www.mohrsiebeck.com/buch/leiblich-vermitteltes-leben-9783161599507/).

[2] Alongside this text, it is also necessary to mention *Haer.* 4.18.5, where Irenaeus likewise describes the Eucharist as a ritual in which the flesh of the recipient receives a share in "life" and in a "heavenly element." On this, cf. also Y. de Andia, *Homo Vivens. Incorruptibilité et divinisation de l'homme selon Irénéé de Lyon* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1986), 237–55; A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau, eds., *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les Hérésies*, vol. 5.1: *Introduction, notes justificatives, tables*, SC 152 (Paris: Cerf, 1969), 212–13.

[3] However, one will not do justice to the comprehensive salvation-historical conception of Irenaeus if one reduces it to a mere skirmish and to an anti-heretical counter-conception to gnosis.

[4] On this, cf. M. J. Olson, *Irenaeus, the Valentinian Gnostics, and the Kingdom of God (A.H. Book V). The Debate about 1 Corinthians 15:50* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 7: "Sometimes the bitterest of foes

ὕλη of human beings is a fundamental part of the created, changeable, material, and perishable cosmos. The discussion of anthropological questions in a principles-based cosmological framework is something that he has in common with gnostic thinkers, such as Valentinian theologians, and it is only against this background that he can enter a discussion with them at all.[5]

As a community theologian connected to ecclesiastical piety, Irenaeus – as will become clear in what follows – places his view of the fate of the flesh and of the fleshly resurrection on a firm creation-theological foundation. This means that he consistently ties back his argument to a specific image of God as the creator of the world and of human beings. Against the background of a biblically oriented picture of the human being, who was created and enlivened by God as a unity of body and soul, Irenaeus' central concern lies in demonstrating that the human being, including his body or flesh, participates in imperishable, eternal life and divine being and thus can overcome his destiny of perishing also with respect to his body. He wishes to show that the flesh can receive imperishable life. Here, Irenaeus argues for the *salus carnis* on an epistemological, ethical, and ontological level.[6] In what follows, the concern will be only with the last of these dimensions, i.e., the ontological, substantial salvation of the flesh.

Irenaeus follows the tradition in the conviction that the Eucharist mediates between the present, perishable existence and the future, glorious existence. Perfect life is bestowed upon the human being through it. But he concretizes the traditional notion of the gift of life in the Eucharist in such a way that the eucharistic elements introduce eternal life as a fundamentally new quality to the flesh of the recipient of the Eucharist. Therefore, he ascribes essential significance to it for the preparation for imperishability under earthly conditions. Irenaeus interprets this kind of participation in salvation as the progressive growth of the believer until his perfecting and as continued divine creative activity. On the whole, the theology of Irenaeus is characterized by a specific kind of interpretation and argumentative use of Scripture in a specific hermeneutical

share common perspectives which they do not even question, of which they themselves are not even aware." Cf. also E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975); E. Thomassen, "§ 91. Valentin und der Valentinianismus," in *Philosophie der Antike*, vol. 5/1: *Philosophie der Kaiserzeit und der Spätantike*, ed. C. Riedweg, C. Horn, and D. Wyrwa (Basel: Schwabe, 2018), 867–73, here 873.

[5] At the same time, alongside this kind of argument, Irenaeus is also familiar with a specific salvation-historical interpretation of the human being and his relationship to God. This, however, recedes entirely into the background in *Haer.* 5.2.3, i.e., in the text with which we are concerned in what follows.

[6] Corresponding to his twofold interpretation of the economy of salvation, which has a creation-theological support and a support related to the sin of Adam and Adam's recapitulation in Christ, Irenaeus also presents multiple conceptions of the mediation of salvation. The epistemological and ethical approach can be sketched only briefly here. With the incarnation of Jesus, knowledge of God becomes possible for the human being. The human being can turn to God and be reconciled with him. If he receives the Spirit of God, the human being becomes capable of good works and in this respect becomes the spiritual human being, even though the substance of his flesh does not change (cf. *Haer.* 5.10.2). He is now no longer only "flesh and blood, but pneumatic human being" (5.10.2). By contrast, the one who does not receive the Spirit remains flesh and blood and therefore cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 15.50). Irenaeus interprets the passage in 1 Cor 15.53 in this context not in relation to the substance of the flesh but in relation to the desires of the flesh and as a pointer to the gift of the Spirit that is necessary for the overcoming of these desires.

framework.[7]

Adversus haereses 5.1–14 deals with the relationship between human flesh as formed and enlivened earth and the rest of the world created from earth. *Adversus Haereses* 5.2.3, the section that is of special interest here, is situated in this context.

2. The Text: *Haer.* 5.2.3

> (1) *Quando ergo et mixtus calix et factus panis percipit verbum Dei et fit Eucharistia sanguinis et corporis Christi, ex quibus augetur et consistit carnis nostrae substantia, quomodo carnem negant capacem esse donationis Dei quae est vita aeterna, quae sanguine et corpore Christi nutritur et membrum ejus <est>?*[8]
>
> When, therefore, both the mixed cup and the prepared bread receive the word of God and become Eucharist of the blood and body of Christ, from which the substance of our flesh is increased and is composed, how can they contest that the flesh is capable of receiving the gift of God, which is eternal life? It is nourished through the blood and body of Christ and is a member of him.

The argumentation in *Haer.* 5.2.3 is initially developed in demarcation from people who contest the capacity of the flesh to receive eternal life (cf. *Haer.* 5.1). Against this view, the text presents two beginnings of an answer to the question of how the perishable flesh can attain imperishability. The first answer is given in the first section, which is quoted here. Against the view that is to be refuted, it marshals the transformation event in the celebration of the Eucharist, in which the eucharistic elements of the mixed cup and prepared bread receive the word of God through invocation and thus become the body of Christ. The argument of Irenaeus boils down to a continuous activity of the word of God: for the substance of which the flesh of the human being is composed is incorporated into the Eucharist event. By taking the eucharistic food to himself, the flesh of the human being is nourished and put together as in the case of a normal ingestion of food, so that it "grows." The word of God that has previously gone over to bread and cup now mediates itself via the nourishment further to the flesh of the recipient of the Eucharist. The substance of the flesh is not transformed or transmuted, but it does take on the heavenly qualities of the gifts. It is made capable of receiving the life that God gives. This is the first part of Irenaeus' answer to the objection of his opponents, and it refers to the present preparation of the human being for his imperishable resurrection existence.

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[7] Cf. B. C. Blackwell, "Paul and Irenaeus," in *Paul and the Second Century*, ed. M. F. Bird and J. R. Dodson (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 190–206, here 197: "Since unity in God's work in creation and salvation is the center of Irenaeus' work, he expected God's revelation through the scriptures to speak with one voice. Therefore, methodologically Irenaeus argues that the part should be read in light of the whole."

[8] Here and elsewhere, the Latin text of *Adversus haereses* is quoted from N. Brox, ed. *Irenäus, Adversus haereses I-V*, FChr 8/1-5 (Freiburg: Herder, 1993–2001).

> *(2) Quemadmodum et beatus Apostolus ait in epistola quae est ad Ephesios: Quoniam membra sumus corporis ejus, de carne ejus et de ossibus ejus, non de spiritali aliquo et invisibili homine dicens haec – spiritus enim neque ossa neque carnes habet – sed de ea dispositione quae est secundum verum hominem, quae ex carnibus et nervis et ossibus consistit, quae de calice qui est sanguis ejus nutritur, et de pane quod est corpus ejus augetur.*
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> As the blessed Apostle says in the letter to the Ephesians, "We are members of his body, from his flesh and from his bones." He does not say this about some sort of pneumatic and invisible human being – for a spirit has neither bones nor flesh – but about the disposition of the true (real) human being, which is composed of flesh and nerves and bones, which is also nourished from the cup, which is his blood, and built up from the bread, which is his body.

The line of argumentation is interrupted in the second part through an insertion that aims to clarify what kind of substance is exactly in view here. Irenaeus must apparently reckon with reinterpretations of the terms σάρξ (*caro*) and σῶμα (*corpus*) among his opponents. To guard against this, he offers a sort of scriptural proof for the substance of the flesh. To this end, he combines a quotation from Eph 5.30 that has been expanded though allusions to Gen 2.23[9] – which was already present in the tradition available to Irenaeus – and an allusion to Luke 24.39.[10] The combination of these scriptural passages aims, first, to demonstrate that the flesh of the incarnate Jesus is identical with human flesh, i.e., that the body of Jesus is not composed of a *different* substance. Irenaeus reinforces thereby his preceding interpretation of the Eucharist, for only because our bodies are "members" of the body of the incarnate Word of God can our flesh be nourished and built up by the eucharistic elements.[11] Second, with the further specification of the flesh via "nerves and bones" this section confirms that the concern here is not with an invisible, pneumatic body but rather with the body created from earth. The insertion at this point is an anticipation of a more detailed argumentation about the flesh of Jesus in *Haer.* 5.14.1–2, where Irenaeus addresses the possible objection that Jesus' flesh was composed of a different substance than the flesh of human beings. There too, the goal of the argumentation is to make plausible the salvation of human flesh. In *Haer.* 5.14.1–2, however, Irenaeus pursues a different path of justification. His

[9] Eph 5.30: ὅτι μέλη ἐσμὲν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ. Cf. Gen 2.23^{LXX}: καὶ εἶπεν Αδαμ Τοῦτο νῦν ὀστοῦν ἐκ τῶν ὀστέων μου καὶ σὰρξ ἐκ τῆς σαρκός μου· αὕτη κληθήσεται γυνή, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς αὐτῆς ἐλήμφθη αὕτη. (Vulgata: *dixitque Adam hoc nunc os ex ossibus meis et caro de carne mea haec vocabitur virago quoniam de viro sumpta est*).

[10] In *Haer.* 5 Irenaeus also elsewhere draws on scripture extensively to demonstrate that the flesh is not unimportant. In *Haer.* 6.6.1–2, for example, he argues that 1 Cor 3.16–17; 6.15; and John 2.19 refer to the body of the human being as "temple of God" or "members of Christ." Thus, our flesh is not irrelevant and will not be destroyed but resurrected.

[11] Cf. O. Perler, "Logos und Eucharistie nach Justinus I. Apol C. 66," in idem, *Sapientia et Caritas. Gesammelte Aufsätze zum 90. Geburtstag*, ed. D. van Damme and O. Wermelinger, Par. 29 (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1990), 471–91, here 489.

concern there is with the recapitulation of the flesh in the incarnate Logos and not with the continued activity of the creator God on the flesh of the human being. In the third and longest section in 5.2.3 Irenaeus returns once more to this creative activity and to the Eucharist:

> *(3) Et quemadmodum lignum vitis depositum in terram suo fructificat tempore, et granum tritici decidens in terram et dissolutum multiplex surgit per Spiritum Dei qui continet omnia, quae deinde per sapientiam in usum hominis veniunt, et percipientia verbum Dei Eucharistia fiunt, quod est corpus et sanguis Christi, sic et nostra corpora ex ea nutrita et reposita in terram et resoluta in ea resurgent in suo tempore, Verbo Dei resurrectionem eis donante in gloriam Dei Patris: qui huic mortali immortalitatem circumdat et corruptibili incorruptelam gratuito donat, quoniam virtus Dei in infirmitate perficitur, ut non quasi ex nobisipsis habentes vitam inflemur aliquando et extollamur adversus Deum ingratam mentem accipientes, experimento autem discentes quoniam ex illius magnitudine, sed non ex nostra natura, habemus in aeternum perseverantiam, neque ab ea quae est circa Deum gloria sicuti est frustremur aliquando, neque nostram naturam ignoremus, sed ut sciamus et quid Deus potest et quid homo beneficii accipit, et non erremus aliquando a vera comprehensione eorum quae sunt [et] quemadmodum sunt, hoc est Dei et hominis. Et numquid forte, quemadmodum praediximus, propter hoc passus est Deus fieri in nobis resolutionem, ut per omnia eruditi in omnibus simus diligentes, neque Deum neque nosmetipsos ignorantes?*
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> 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. And might it not be the case, perhaps, as I have already observed, that for this purpose God permitted our resolution into the common dust of mortality, that we, being instructed by every mode, may be accurate in all things for the future, being ignorant neither of God nor of ourselves?[12]

Thus, after clarifying what kind of *caro* was being spoken of in the second section, Irenaeus returns in the third section to his actual answer to the question of how our flesh can receive imperishability. In this concluding part, Irenaeus now also discusses the end-time resurrection. For this he expands his perspective far beyond the actual Eucharist celebration, while simultaneously remaining connected to it. His concern is to show that the Spirit of God is not active for the first time in the Eucharist but, first, already *before* it through the ordering creative power of God, which creates fruits from the inanimate wood of the vine put into the earth and from the seed, and, second, also *after* the Eucharist, when this life-giving power has gone over to the bodies of the dead and resurrected them. The Eucharist event is thus placed as a punctiliar event, in which the activity of the Spirit coalesces and the Spirit goes over to the σάρξ of the human being, in the framework of a comprehensive process of creation. In conclusion, Irenaeus draws ethical consequences for human beings from what has been presented and interprets what happens in the sense of a pedagogical intention of God.

The aspects that have been worked out here – namely, (1) the transforming and life-giving activity of the Spirit in the Eucharist, (2) the character of the flesh of Jesus and of human beings, and (3) the activity of the Spirit in nature and on human beings as a continued activity of the creator God, and, finally, (4) the exhortation to human beings to find the proper stance toward this – must now be interpreted further and also viewed in the context of the writing as a whole. Since it is advisable to address the processes in the Eucharist and in created nature in relation to one another, I begin, first, with the second point, the character of the flesh of Jesus and of human beings.

3. The Character of the Flesh of Human Beings and of Jesus' Flesh

3.1 The Significance of the Flesh for Irenaeus' Anthropology

Irenaeus develops his anthropology in opposition to a view of human beings that traces back the various, differently redeemable parts of the human being to different creator deities – a view that he regards as heretical. To the one, whole human being corresponds his complete creation by the one God.[13] Beneath this level, Irenaeus distinguishes between the flesh and soul of the human being, to which the spirit, as an enlivening third, is added. The great significance that Irenaeus assigns to the *flesh* in this trichotomic specification of the human being is instructive. In *Haer.* 5.9.2 he makes a fundamental anthropological statement about the nature of the spiritual human being: "He is alive

[12] Trans. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1896), 528 (modified).

[13] Cf. D. Wanke, *Das Kreuz Christi bei Irenäus von Lyon*, BZNW 99 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 100.

through participation in the Spirit, but human because of the substance of the flesh (*homo autem propter substantiam carnis*)." According to Irenaeus, the flesh substance of a human being is decisive for the nature of the human being, including the saved. A pneumatic human being is not one who gets rid of the flesh but one who *participates* with his flesh in the Spirit (*Haer.* 5.6.1).[14] It is not the *nous* or the like that makes the human being a real human being but rather the fleshly substance, the fleshly formation made by God out of dust.[15] For this he appeals to Gen 2.7 as evidence that the human being is a being who has been created from earth and enlivened entirely by God (cf. *Haer.* 3.2; 14.2). The whole human being comes from the dust of the earth, so that the term "flesh" can be used synecdocally also for the entirety of the human being.

For Irenaeus, the event of the creation of the human being possesses consequences not least for the image of God. The creative power of God reveals itself precisely in the fact that he can form something living out of dust. What was formed originally possessed the image of God.[16] Irenaeus can even say that "we belonged by nature to the omnipotent God" (cf. *natura essemus Dei omnipotentis*, *Haer.* 5.1.1). Not only the invisible soul of the human being but also his visible parts are the image of the invisible God. Here, the body is "the image" of God,[17] the soul "the likeness" of God, as can be seen from Irenaeus' presentation of the apostolic proclamation (*Epid.* 11):

> But He fashioned (πλάσσω) man with His own Hands, taking the purest, the finest <and the most delicate> [elements] of the earth, mixing (συγκράννυμι) with the earth, in due measure, His own power (δύναμις); and because He <sketched upon> the handiwork (πλάσμα) His own form – in order that what would be seen should be godlike (θεοειδής), for man was placed upon the earth fashioned <in> the image (εἰκών) of God.[18]

[14] Cf. also *Haer.* 5.8.1, where Irenaeus explains that we already have the Spirit now as a pledge and for this reason already now become pneumatic human beings who do not live according to the flesh. This shows that for the pneumatic being it is not necessary – and also not possible – to lay aside the flesh.

[15] In *Haer.* 5.7.1–2 Irenaeus endeavors to prove that there is no immortal element in the human being but rather that the talk of the resurrection of the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15.36, 42–43; Rom 8.11) can refer only to the flesh, which dies and goes into the earth.

[16] Cf. *Haer.* 5.6.1 (trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 531): "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."

[17] On the question of the corporality of God, which naturally follows from this, cf. C. Markschies, *Gottes Körper. Jüdische, christliche und pagane Gottesvorstellungen in der Antike* (Munich: Beck, 2016), 261–67 (ET = C. Markschies, *God's Body: Jewish, Christian, and Pagan Images of God*, trans. A. J. Edmonds [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2019], 193–98). In his review of the texts, Markschies concludes that Irenaeus (amidst all unclarity in his statements) does not attribute a material body to God but a body in the "form of immaterial structures of a material corporeality" (Markschies, *God's Body*, 195; cf. Markschies, *Gottes Körper*, 263: "Form von geistigen Strukturen einer materiellen Körperlichkeit").

[18] Trans. J. Behr, ed., *St. Irenaeus of Lyons, On the Apostolic Preaching* (Crestwood: St. Vladamir's Seminary Press, 1997) 46 with Greek words inserted by Behr.

Irenaeus can ground the special dignity of human flesh not only with recourse to the creation of the human being according to Gen 2.7 but also with reference to the end of salvation history, the incarnation of the Word of God. For the incarnation of Jesus is also said to show that the flesh of the human being comes from God and that the body of the human being has been formed by God, according to his image.

> The human being, however, lost the image of God through apostasy, the Fall.[19] This loss is the starting point of the development of the economy of salvation and of the event of recapitulation. In this line of argumentation, Irenaeus traces back the conception of the redeemability of the flesh to its recapitulation through the incarnation of the Word of God. According to Irenaeus, Christ has come in the flesh (cf. John 1.14a) because the flesh of the human being was meant to be saved.[20] The incarnation of the Logos serves the recapitulation of Adam, the formation of God, in Christ, and reconciles human flesh with God again.[21] It makes the human being to be in the image of God again.
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> With the reconciliation of the flesh and the restoration of the image of God lost through the Fall, there is a recognizable change to a different level of justification in which the sin of Adam stands at the center. Perishability and death appear here not as qualities of matter but rather as a consequence of human beings' distance from God, which is overcome by the incarnate Logos. Irenaeus develops here a reciprocal understanding of the incarnation. The Lord becomes like us in order that we may become perfected to him: "by letting God come down to human beings through the Spirit and through his incarnation letting the human being ascend to God" (*Haer.* 5.1.1). It is conspicuous that here the Spirit does not serve to let the human being come to God and it is not the incarnation that brings God to the human being, but vice versa: The gift of the Spirit brings God to the human being, while the incarnation lets the human being ascend to God. This interpretation of gift of the Spirit and the incarnation shows

[19] Cf. *Haer.* 5.1.1 (N. Brox, ed., *Irenäus, Adversus haereses I–V*, trans. N. Brox, FChr 8/1–5 [Freiburg: Herder, 1993–2001], 8/5, 26; trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 527): *Et quoniam iniuste dominabatur nobis apostasia et, cum natura essemus Dei omnipotentis, alienavit nos contra naturam, suos proprios faciens discipulos…* ("And since the apostasy tyrannized over us unjustly, and, though we were by nature the property of the omnipotent God, alienated us contrary to nature, rendering us its own disciples …").

[20] C. Uhrig, *"Und das Wort ist Fleisch geworden." Zur Rezeption von Joh 1,14a und zur Theologie der Fleischwerdung in der griechischen vornizänischen Patristik*, Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie 63 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2004), 124 points out that that the history of Israel and the prophetic promise of Christ are already adduced and interpreted by Irenaeus with a clear emphasis on the incarnation of the Logos.

[21] Cf. here again the central passage of *Haer.* 5.14.1 (Brox, ed., *Irenäus*, 8/5, 114; trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 541): *si enim non haberet caro salvari, nequaquam Verbum Dei caro factum esset […]*; "For if the flesh were not in a position to be saved, the Word of God would in no wise have become flesh."

> the soteriological intertwining of the human being with Christ and what is exemplary in the Christ event.[22]

As becomes clear, Irenaeus can use the term "flesh" for the whole person, thus stressing his creatureliness and thereby also taking up biblical language (cf. Gen 6.17; 9.11; Lev 13.3; Isa 40.5–6; 49.26; and elsewhere; cf. also 1 Pet 1.24). Beyond this, he differentiates the fleshly substance of the human being more finely into veins and arteries (the conduits for blood and pneuma), nerves, bones, eyes, ears, hands, tendons, different innards, and blood, which is the connection of soul and body. All this is formed in this way through God's art and wisdom and therefore also has a share in God's power (*Haer.* 5.3.2). God's creative power shows itself precisely therein (*Haer.* 5.3.2):

> But that He is powerful in all these respects, we ought to perceive from our origin, inasmuch as God, taking dust from the earth, formed man. And surely it is much more difficult and incredible, from non-existent bones, and nerves, and veins, and the rest of man's organization, to bring it about that all this should be, and to make man an animated and rational creature...[23]

For Irenaeus the σάρξ thus occupies a central place in the definition of the human being and is understood by him as a decisively physical, substantial entity. This also affects his understanding of physical death. In *Haer.* 5.1–14, death interests Irenaeus not as a consequence of sin and of human beings' disturbed relationship to God but rather as an essential quality of the earthly substance. This substance-ontological embedding of the question of the salvation of the flesh is, among other things, also recognizable in the fact that Irenaeus speaks of the body and flesh of the human being not only in an ethical dimension pertaining to life conduct and does not only use "flesh," following Paul, as a cipher for a fleshly conduct that takes its orientation from what is earthly or understand flesh merely as an anthropological component that comes alongside the soul and characterizes the human being in his creatureliness. Rather, going beyond this, Irenaeus, in *Haer.* 5.1–14, defines the flesh of the human being as a part of the whole, perishable matter that comes from the earth, upon which the creator God has acted. This is central for his train of thought. Via nourishment, for example, the flesh has a direct connection to gifts of creation, such as the fruit of the vine and wheat. With all the works of God created from the earth, it also shares, however, the characteristic of being something that came to be and something that changes and is perishable. These same characteristics also apply when Irenaeus comes to speak of the humanity of Christ and of his salvific activity.

[22] The event of redemption realizes itself exemplarily in relation to Christ; in his incarnation the assumption and redemption of human flesh as such takes place. The model of an exemplary validity of the Christ event is also present in the Gospel of Philip, when Jesus' baptism is recounted there in such a way that it appears as a paradigm for the ritual of baptism and as prefiguration of Christian baptism.

[23] Trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 529.

3.2 Jesus' Flesh is Like Ours

Also in the presentation of the event of salvation, Irenaeus can introduce the "flesh" both as a direct subject and as an object of the events, and thus in *Haer.* 5.14.2, following a quotation from Col 1.21–22, he can write:

> He says, "Ye have been reconciled in the body of His flesh," because the righteous flesh has reconciled that flesh which was being kept under bondage in sin, and brought it into friendship with God.[24]

Thus, in this text Irenaeus can even designate the saving reconciliation with God of the human being who is far from God as a deed of the flesh itself; the "flesh" appears as the agent of this event. In *Haer.* 5.1.1 he can analogously describe the salvific significance of the death of Jesus as follows:

> Since the Lord thus has redeemed us through His own blood, giving His soul for our souls, and His flesh for our flesh ….[25]

The saving death of Jesus is divided into the individual components of his human existence ("his flesh for our flesh") to emphasize that this death decidedly also includes the physiological components of the human being in redemption.

The presupposition for the event of redemption described in this way is the conviction that the Irenaean definition of *caro* as a substance that originates from the formation made from dust (*Caro enim vere primae plasmationis e limo factae successio*, *Haer.* 5.14.2) applies also to Jesus' flesh. A central statement in the line of argument of book 5 of *Adversus haereses* is then also that Jesus' flesh does not differ from our flesh according to its substance. Irenaeus therefore speaks of the flesh of Jesus not only in the context of the incarnation and the reconciling salvific death but also explicitly in the context of general corporeal, physical contexts. Along with the flesh of Jesus, he mentions his blood, veins, nerves, and bones and then pointedly states in *Haer.* 5.2.2: "which [substance] the Word of God was truly made."[26] Here, John 1.14a stands in the background, though in a clearly concretized reworking. The Word of God has, so to speak, himself become creation, the dust from which ears, eyes, nerves, bones, etc. come. In Christ, the passive matter that receives life thus connects itself to the life-giving Spirit – in this regard the Christian anticipates the glorious existence of the human being.

There is thus only *one* real flesh. If the flesh of Jesus had been of a different substance – a view that is advocated, among others, in the Gospel of Philip (cf. Gos. Phil.

[24] Trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 541.

[25] *Haer.* 5.1.1 (Brox, ed., Irenäus, 8/5, 27; trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 527): *Suo igitur sanguine redimente nos Domino, et dante animam suam pro nostra anima et carnem suam pro nostris carnibus ….*

[26] Cf. *Haer.* 5.2.2 (Brox, ed., *Irenäus*, 8/5, 32; trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 528): *Sanguis enim non est nisi a venis et carnibus et a reliqua quae est secundum hominem substantia, quae vere factum Verbum Dei* ("For blood can only come from veins and flesh, and whatsoever else makes up the substance of man, such as the Word of God was actually made").

72c, NHC II,3, p. 68.31–37) – then, according to Irenaeus, it could not have reconciled human flesh.[27] This line of argument is developed especially in *Haer.* 5.14.2:

> But if the Lord became incarnate for any other order of things, and took flesh of any other substance, He has not then summed up human nature in His own person, nor in that case can He be termed flesh. For flesh has been truly made [to consist in] a transmission of that thing moulded originally from the dust. But if it had been necessary for Him to draw the material [of His body] from another substance, the Father would at the beginning have moulded the material [of flesh] from a different substance [than from what He actually did]. But now the case stands thus, that the Word has saved that which really was [created, viz.,] humanity which had perished, effecting by means of Himself that communion which should be held with it, and seeking out its salvation. But the thing which had perished possessed flesh and blood. For the Lord, taking dust from the earth, moulded man; and it was upon his behalf that all the dispensation of the Lord's advent took place. He had Himself, therefore, flesh and blood, recapitulating in Himself not a certain other, but that original handiwork of the Father, seeking out that thing which had perished.[28]

In contrast to ours, the flesh of Jesus does, however, possess a special *ethical* quality. It is righteous and therefore reconciles the flesh that is held fast in sin with God. The previously cited interpretation of the Colossians quotation in *Haer.* 5.14.3 also clarifies this connection. The fact that the flesh of Jesus is righteous and is not under the rule of sin also manifests itself in the conception and birth of Jesus. According to *Haer.* 5.1.3, Jesus' birth differed from every natural birth, for (according to Luke 1.35), "the Holy Ghost came upon Mary, and the power of the Most High did overshadow her: wherefore also what was generated is a holy thing, and the Son of the Most High God."[29] Thus, God himself brought about the incarnation and "showed forth a new [kind of] generation"[30] (*Haer.* 5.1.3).

Finally, one last aspect of Irenaeus' use of σάρξ is conspicuous. Although, with John 6.51–58, the letters of Ignatius, and Justin's apology, the expression "σάρξ of Jesus" had already become established for the eucharistic bread at the time of the composition of *Adversus haereses*, Irenaeus, as far as I can see, never identifies the bread with the σάρξ (*caro*) of Jesus but always with his σῶμα (*corpus*). This is noteworthy insofar as Irenaeus

[27] Cf. also de Andia, *Homo Vivens*, 248–49: "L'eucharistie repose sur la consubstantialitié charnelle du corps et du sang du Christ avec notre corps et notre sang."

[28] Trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 541.

[29] Trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 527.

[30] Trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 527. Irenaeus speaks in this context of two kinds of begetting, a natural one, from which human beings inherit death and a new begetting through which human beings receive life (*Haer.* 5.1.3). This is reminiscent of the notion of begetting in the Gospel of Philip. There, however, this special begetting or birth of the new body of the redeemer is individually retraced by the believers in the ritual and through this life is obtained; the Christians are themselves begotten anew. By contrast, Irenaeus affirms that it is the same God who formed Adam and the living human being; it is even "the same hand" of God (*Patris manus*).

does not otherwise distinguish between *corpus* and *caro* (sometimes he also uses *plasma*) but rather uses these terms synonymously with reference to human beings. For the eucharistic elements, by contrast, Irenaeus uses – also in *Haer.* 4.18.5 and 5.2.3 – the terms "body and blood of Jesus" (*corpus et sanguis Christi*), which likewise occur in the Synoptic words of institution. However, for describing the humanity of Jesus (e.g., *Haer.* 5.1.2), the expression *caro et sanguis* is a composite phrase that is preferred by Irenaeus, and there is talk of the "flesh of Jesus" in this way also in the context that is of interest to us here. In *Haer.* 5.2.3, in the passage that I specify as the second part and as an insertion, which is concerned in general with the substance of the flesh of Jesus and with the constitution of every human being, there is also talk of the *caro* of Jesus (cf., e.g., also *Haer.* 5.10.2).

4. The Transforming and Life-Giving Activity of the Spirit in Nature, in the Eucharist, and in the Resurrection

4.1 Introduction

The substantiality of the flesh is emphasized not only via the semantic field of physiological components ("nerves and bones"), in which it appears in Irenaeus, but also through the fact that Irenaeus connects it to biological processes such as the ingestion of nourishment. Thus, its growth, buildup, and nourishment through food and drink come into view. At the same time, Irenaeus can use this aspect for his interpretation of the Eucharist, which he initially specifies in a biological, natural-scientific approach as *ingestion of nourishment*. In the Eucharist, the flesh is built up through the gifts of creation and nourished (*Haer.* 5.2.3), for example, through the fruit of the vine and through wheat. In this way the flesh becomes part of a large, divinely established and enlivened connection between the dust of the earth, the fruitfulness of the earth, and their gifts (vine, wheat), which then become the human being's nourishment. In this way, Irenaeus establishes a direct connection between the creation of the human being from earth, his bodily character, and his continuing subsistence through created things. All these processes and conditions have a share in the earth and emerge from it. At the same time, they all need an enlivening principle from outside, which shall be examined more closely in what follows.

4.2 The Concept of Life in Irenaeus

In the quoted text from *Haer.* 5.2.3, "eternal life" is mentioned right at the beginning. It is designated as the "gift of God," which is given in the Eucharist to the communicants.

> How can they contest that the flesh is capable of receiving the gift of God, which is eternal life?

With the view that the reception of the Eucharist meal elements mediates "life" to the recipients of the Eucharist, Irenaeus takes up a traditional understanding of the Eu-

charist, as it is also represented in the Didache and letters of Ignatius.[31] With respect to the σάρξ of Jesus, texts that connect the Eucharist to the term life (John 6.51–58; Did. 9.3; 10.2–3; Ign. *Eph.* 20.2; Ign. *Smyrn.* 7.1) show an interest in its effect, but, in distinction from Irenaeus, do not give special attention to the quality of the σάρξ as substance. In the Didache, the meal elements are placed in a connection to ordinary nourishment and give not only transitory life but eternal life. Both forms of nourishment are, however, gifts of the one creator God, a point that is reminiscent of *Haer.* 5.2.3. Prior to Irenaeus, Ignatius presents a medicinal metaphor for the life-giving effect of the correctly celebrated Eucharist in his letter to the Ephesians (Ign. *Eph.* 20.2), where he gives the Eucharist the designation φάρμακον ἀθανασίας. It is common to these texts that they connect (sometimes in an unspecific way) the gift of eternal life to the eucharistic elements, which as nourishment or "medicine" exercise a corresponding effect, and that the final resurrection is at the same time still expected in the future.

According to Irenaeus, too, "eternal life" is not, for example, a fixed, naturally given quality of the substance or nature of a human being (for example, of a pneumatic person)[32] but rather something that is given to the human being from *outside*, in the Lord's Supper. In this respect, Irenaeus stands in the tradition described above, which views eternal life as a salvific good mediated in the Eucharist. Unlike John 6.51–58, however, in *Haer.* 5.2.3 Irenaeus does not understand the gift of life as a relation between the believer and Christ constituted by faith; he does not understand it spatially as remaining in Christ or in the "salvific sphere" of Christ. Instead, it is more likely that he takes up a conception of nourishment that is also attested in the Didache, according to which the bread and the wine are special, spiritual foods that make possible not temporal but rather eternal life. For him the meal elements have a direct effect upon the flesh of the believer,[33] to the point that this "life" benefits the flesh of the recipient via the meal elements and becomes its special quality. Here too, the focus is again on the *flesh*, which actually comes into view as the component that creates continuity between the present and the future life.

The flesh is conceptualized as a passive entity, which can, however, take on characteristics of the actively operating Spirit, for which Irenaeus uses the image of a burning

[31] On this, see Chapter 2 on Ignatius in Jacobi, *Leiblich vermitteltes Leben*, 35-76. Cf. also D.-A. Koch, "Eucharistievollzug und Eucharistieverständnis in der Didache," in *The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts. Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, vol. 2: *Patristic Traditions, Iconography*, ed. D. Hellholm and D. Sänger, WUNT 376 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 845–81; L. Wehr, "Die Eucharistie in den Briefen des Ignatius von Antiochien," in *The Eucharist. Its Origins and Contexts. Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, vol. 2: *Patristic Traditions, Iconography*, ed. D. Hellholm and D. Sänger, WUNT 376 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 883–900; L. Wehr, *Arznei der Unsterblichkeit. Die Eucharistie bei Ignatius von Antiochien und im Johannesevangelium*, NTA.NF 18 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1987), 351–56.

[32] Cf., however, the interpretation of John 6.53 among the Naassenes (Hippolytus, *Haer.* 5.8.11).

[33] Cf. here also the correspondence between the flesh and blood of Jesus and our flesh and blood, which Justin (*1 Apol. 66*) describes (on this, see the excursus on *1 Apol.* 66 below). Justin also interprets the elements of bread and wine as nourishment, though precisely not as ordinary food but as σάρξ καὶ αἷμα of the incarnate Jesus that, after a transformation, nourish our flesh and blood. In Justin a connection to eternal life is lacking.

torch and a wet sponge.[34] The flesh can in principle receive life.[35] After all, it lives also in the present, i.e., one can already recognize now that it has a share in temporal life. From this Irenaeus infers that it is even more capable of having a share also in the future, eternal life. He understands the flesh as the *one* bearer of both the present and the future life, and insofar as it is enlivened at every time by God, it becomes the connecting link between the two forms of existence. On the one hand, in its materiality and in its connection via nourishment, for example, through bread and wine, the flesh is part of the whole perishable creation. On the other hand, through the reception of the gift of eternal life it participates in the imperishability of God. Irenaeus apparently avoids a potential view of eternal life and imperishable corporeality in the glorified existence in which this appears completely detached from the earthly corporeality that exists in creation. Instead, his concern is to connect the future life as well to the flesh that comes from the creation and to continue to understand it as part of the divine creative activity. Even though the flesh is not itself heir of the kingdom of God, even though it is passive, it nevertheless shows – in its special differentiation in the human body with all its organs and specific functions – the artistry and wisdom of God, as it is recognizable in the whole creation and as it will show itself again also in the heavenly glory.

In the Eucharistic section in *Haer.* 5.2.3, there is also then talk of the *caro*, especially with reference to the *recipient* of the Eucharist. His *caro* is, so to speak, the actual addressee in the event of the Eucharist. Irenaeus describes eternal life as something bound to the eucharistic gifts, whence it is passed on to the recipient of the Eucharist, in order to build up his flesh and change its quality. In this way, the dynamic and relational character of the giving of life in John, the opening of an intensive relationship and mutual immanence through faith in Jesus and his saving death, for which the "chewing of the flesh of Jesus" stands metaphorically, is "materialized" in *Haer.* 5.2.3 and interpreted in the sense of a biological event of receiving nourishment. The giving of life starts with the flesh, works upon the flesh of the recipient of the Eucharist, and changes it. This ultimately enables the fleshly substance to receive imperishability. In this way, Irenaeus establishes a direct, substantial connection between the reception of the Eucharist and the future resurrection of the dead. Above all, however, his interpretation of the Eucharist is oriented in such a way that it becomes an argument for his central thesis regarding the salvation of human flesh.

[34] In this sense, the flesh can also be "inherited" (cf. *Haer.* 5.9.4).

[35] Cf. J. Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*, OECT (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 96 (with reference to *Haer.* 2.34 and 5.3.3): "this passage emphasizes that man lives as long as God wants, or as long as God confers life on his flesh. It is important to note that although it is God who provides life, it is man who lives. Participating in this life provided by God, man does not lose his identity; nor does the gift exist apart from him or superadded to him; but, rather, the gift is 'personalized' by each human being: the gift is life, yet it is the human being who lives this life in their flesh."

4.3 How is Imperishability Mediated to the Flesh? Adversus haereses 5.2.3 in the Framework of Ancient Theories of Nourishment

To ground the end-time resurrection of the flesh vis-à-vis critics, Irenaeus must answer the question of how the immaterial Spirit can affect human flesh. The starting point is the view that flesh/matter and spirit stand over against each other and are distinct spheres. Since Irenaeus affirms the material, substantial fleshliness of the human being also in the resurrection and avoids the notion of a transformed "pneumatic body," he must conceptualize how imperishability can be mediated in a correspondingly material and substantial way.[36] In doing so, Irenaeus endeavors to satisfy contemporary scientific theories about the character and development of human nature. Here, he stands in the tradition of early Christian apologists.[37]

He begins his argument with the eucharistic elements bread and cup or wheat and vine and presupposes here that human – and then also Jesus' – flesh, just like bread and cup, come from the *earth*. Between the human body and the gifts of the earth there operates, as an establishment of the divine order of creation, a circle of nourishment. Presupposing this view, Irenaeus can, finally, draw on ancient theories of nourishment regarding the growth of human flesh for his explanation of the salvation of the flesh

[36] One of the presuppositions comes from the Jewish or early Christian tradition of the word of God as "bread" for human beings. Cf. also the image of "milk" for Jesus' teaching and person/saving work, which is received and interiorized by human beings in faith (cf. John 6; 1 Cor 3) – this metaphoricism actually pictorially depicts faith.

[37] Cf., for example, Athenagoras' tractate on the resurrection (*De Resurrectione*). In this work, Athenagoras, on the one hand, critically engages with views that contest the bodily resurrection and, on the other hand, presents positive arguments for the bodily resurrection. He first presents a picture of the body, in which this is composed of individual parts. The living human being is composed of soul and body together (it also corresponds to this view that bodily continuity of the human being after his resurrection is not linked to material correspondence but to the rejoining together of the body's own parts [ἐκτῶν οἰκείων μερῶν]). In *Res.* 18, Athenagoras then also speaks of the double nature of the human being: taken on its own, the soul is free of desires, whereas the body recognizes neither law nor right. Correspondingly, death is the separation of soul and body and the dissolution of the composite body (*Res.* 16). Athenagoras consequently understands the resurrection of the body not as a re-enlivening of the bodily substance but as the rejoining together of the parts of the body that fell apart in death. For Athenagoras, the first argument for the bodily resurrection consists in the creative power of God. Thus, he describes the event of resurrection (interfused with Platonic conceptions) in analogy to creation. His second argument is natural-scientific in character and aimed against an objection that comes from outside. A body that serves the nourishment and thus the building up of a different body could not rise. Against the background of a theory of digestion in which nourishment builds up the body, the devoured human being is partly assimilated to the animal body (and even more complexly: if the animals, in turn, are eaten by human beings and thus serve the building up of their bodies – to whom, then, do the parts belong in the resurrection?). In *Res.* 3–9, Athenagoras engages critically with this "chain-nourishment-argument." Not only is it possible for God to bring together scattered parts again. The chain-nourishment-argument can also be invalidated from a scientific perspective. Some nourishment is inappropriate and does not serve the building up of the bodily substance. In its case, parts are not digested and assimilated to the body that is to be nourished (*Res.* 5). The nature of the human being (and the natural development of all living beings) would also show that they pass through serious bodily changes – they develop from seeds via adolescence and mature to an old person (*Res.* 17). These observable changes let one infer that the human being can undergo fundamental bodily changes again also after his physical death. On Athenagoras, see, in general, N. Kiel, *Ps-Athenagoras, "De Resurrectione." Datierung und Kontextualisierung der dem Apologeten Athenagoras zugeschriebenen Auferstehungsschrift*, SVigChr 133 (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

and against this background sketch out the specific effect of the Eucharist.

Information about ancient conceptions regarding the way that nourishment works in the human organism can be found, among others, in the writing of Ps.-Hippocrates titled *De alimento* or *Nutriment*, which is to be dated to the beginning of the first century CE.[38] There, we read (*Alim.* 1.2–3):[39]

> (2) αὔξει δὲ καὶ ῥώννυσι καὶ σαρκοῖ καὶ ὁμοιοῖ καὶ ἀνομοιοῖ τὰ ἐν ἑκάστοις κατὰ φύσιν τὴν (3) ἑκάστου καὶ τὴν ἀρχῆς δύναμιν.
>
> (2) It [the nourishment] increases, strengthens, clothes with flesh, makes like, makes unlike, what is in the several parts, according to the nature (3) of each part and its original power.

Thus, the effect of the nourishment consists in the promotion of the growth, strengthening, and building of the flesh, and it does this in the form of assimilation and dissimilation (ὁμοιοῖ καὶ ἀνομοιοῖ, "like and unlike"). On the one hand, this manner of operation is dependent on the organs, upon which the nourishment has an effect. On the other hand, it is dependent upon the kind of nourishment, with there being disagreement in ancient tractates about the exact processes involved. Thus, it appears that the organs have the capacity to assimilate related substances but also the capacity to cut out nourishment. The text quoted from *De alimento* does not clearly indicate what assimilates and what is assimilated, i.e., whether the organs assimilate the nourishment or the nourishment the organs.

The presentation of the ingestion of nourishment is somewhat clearer in Galen, from whom an investigation of the processes related to nourishment titled *De naturalibus facultatibus* is likewise handed down. According to this text, powers of assimilation and dissimilation operate between the nourishment and the respective organ (*De fac. nat.* 3.155.15–156.1):[40]

> ὡς γὰρ κἀκεῖνα δέδεικται ποιοτήτων μεταβολῇ γιγνόμενα, κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον καὶ ἡ ἐν τῇ γαστρὶ πέψις τῶν σιτίων εἰς τὴν οἰκείαν ἐστὶ τῷ τρεφομένῳ ποιότητα μεταβολή.

[38] Thus K. Deichgräber, ed., *Pseudohippokrates Über die Nahrung. Text, Kommentar und Würdigung einer stoisch-herakletisierenden Schrift aus der Zeit um Christi Geburt*, AAWLM.G 1973/3 (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1973), 12.

[39] *Alim.* 1.2–3 (LCL 147, 342 [Jones]); trans. Jones, LCL 147, 343 (Jacobi's insertion). Cf. also the translation of Deichgräber, ed., *Pseudohippokrates*: "Sie [die Nahrung] stärkt und baut auf, bekleidet mit Fleisch und macht ähnlich bzw. Unähnlich das in jedem Einzelnen (Enthaltene), gemäß der Natur jedes Teils und der ursprünglich (vorhandenen) Kraft."

[40] K. G. Kühn, ed., *Claudii Galeni Opera omnia*, vol. 2: *Medicorum graecorum opera quae exstant 2* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964 [1821]); trans. A. J. Brock, LCL 71, 241.

> For, just as it has been shown that these two processes depend upon a change of qualities, similarly also the digestion of food in the stomach involves a transmutation of it into the quality proper to that which is receiving nourishment.

Galen interprets the event of nourishment as leading like to like and unlike to unlike.[41] In his view, nourishment is an assimilation of the thing nourishing to the thing that is nourished, i.e., a transformation of the nourishment into the substance or into the characteristics of the nourished organ. Nourishment can be understood as a dynamic relationship between the organism and the nourishment substance, with powers of attraction, repulsion, and assimilation being active between the nourishment substances and the body. Bread is transformed through the medium of the power into bodily substance, whereas nourishment that cannot be adapted to the respective organ is cut out. In this way, fitting is drawn to fitting and assimilated, whereas the unfitting is rejected. This is possible not only on account of the active powers but also because nourishment substances are similar to the body substances and therefore can assimilate themselves to the organs through transformation. And vice versa, the organs are also akin to the nourishment.[42]

The medical tractates cast light upon the presentation of the effect of eucharistic nourishment upon human beings, which Irenaeus sets forth in Haer. 5.2.3. Potential for the interpretation of the Eucharist is possessed especially by the notion, developed in medical writings, that the flesh can absorb nourishment and receive its powers. Thus, the flesh appears to be fundamentally in a position to assimilate stuff from outside, to adapt it to itself, and thereby to build up its substance.

Irenaeus describes the special way in which the eucharistic food affects the recipient as an adaptation, i.e., as an assimilation of the human flesh to the characteristics of this special food. At the same time, when he uses the modified Ephesians quotation to affirm the sameness of our bodies with the body of Jesus, he emphasizes the physiological principle of the effect of like upon like. Not only wheat and wine, which come from the earth and the vine, are components of the one creation of God and come, like the human being himself, from the earth but also the flesh of Jesus as such is like human flesh and can also only for this reason enter into a relation of impact to the human bodies, in which the gift of life is then transferred. Finally, the powers that, according to Galen, operate between nourishment and bodily substance can be understood in analogy to the power of the word of God in the Eucharist.

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[41] Cf. Deichgräber, ed., *Pseudohippokrates*, 18.

[42] On this, cf. C. Hoffstadt, F. Peschke, A. Schulz-Buchta, and M. Nagenborg, eds., *Der Fremdkörper*, Aspekte der Medizinphilosophie 6 (Bochum: Projektverlag, 2008).

Excursus: Forerunners and Aftereffects of the Irenaean Interpretation of the Eucharist: Justin, *1 Apol.* 66.2 and Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio Catechetica Magna* 37

In his *1 Apology*, Justin could already presuppose not only that the Eucharist is a special food – as Did. 9.3; 10.2–3 and Ignatius, *To the Romans* (cf. Ign, *Rom.* 7.3, where the "bread of God" stands over against perishable food) already attest for early Christianity – but also that the manner of its operation presents a special form of the ordinary process of nourishment.

The text of Justin's *1 Apology* is addressed to Emperor Antonius Pius, his adoptive son Marcus Aurelius, and Lucius Verus (as well as the Roman senate and the whole Roman people, as a presumable gloss adds[43]) and understands itself to be a petitionary writing and appeal for the "unjustly" hated and maligned people from "every tribe" (*1 Apol.* 1). Alongside the fact that the grievance is addressed to the emperor, the elements of the genre include the portrayal of the legal problem (2.1–4), the petition for administrative intervention (3.1–5), and the reproduction of a "judicial document to establish the legal situation."[44] Justin expands this schema to include an extended refutation of the accusation that the Christians are deniers of God, atheists, despisers of morals, and enemies of the state, in which he presents Christianity as a rational and honorable philosophy (13–60) and elucidates the cultic practice of the Christians (61–67). The Christians are said to worship the one, true God with reason and in truth (6). On the one hand, time and again, Justin presents the similarity of the Christian doctrine to the philosophy and mythology of the Greeks and Romans. On the other hand, he postulates a reversed relation of dependency, according to which Plato in particular had read Moses (cf. 59–60).[45] His writing demands that the addressees judge Christians impartially and with reason. The person who proceeds in this way will recognize the truth of Christianity. Justin also points out that the Christians could deny their faith in the trials but do not do so because they expect an end-time judgment and hope for eternal existence with God (8).

The passage that is important for our context appears in *1 Apol.* 66, where Justin comes to speak of the Eucharist. Only interrupted by an excursus on the "aping" of Christian doctrine and practice by the "demons" and on the correct interpretation of Moses and the prophets (62–64), *1 Apol.* 61.61–67 deals with the Christian ritual practice and the order of the worship service. After his elucidation of baptism, which he describes with a quotation from John 3.3 as a bath for rebirth and illumination (*1 Apol.* 61), Justin presents the course of the celebration of the Eucharist, which follows baptism. After baptism, everyone gathers for prayer and for the kiss of peace.[46] After this, bread and a cup with water and wine are handed to the presider; he speaks the thanksgiving over these, and they are then distributed to all by the deacons *(1 Apol.* 65; *1 Apol.* 67 is similar, there as part of the Christian Sunday worship service). In *1 Apol.* 66.1–2, Justin grounds the exclusivity of participation in the Eucharist, to which only those who are baptized are admitted, with a description of the nature of the proffered elements of bread and wine or drink. In doing so, he formulates a parallelism, which places aspects of the Eucharist in relation to the salvation-historical incarnation of Jesus.

> οὐ γάρ ὡς κοινὸν ἄρτον οὐδὲ κοινὸν πόμα ταῦτα λαμβάνομεν, ἀλλ' ὃν τρόπον διὰ λόγου θεοῦ σαρκοποιηθεὶς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ὁ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν καὶ σάρκα καὶ αἷμα ὑπὲρ σωτερίας ἡμῶν ἔσχεν οὕτως καὶ τὴν δι' εὐχῆς λόγου τοῦ παρ' αὐτοῦ εὐχαριστηθεῖσαν τρὸφην ἐξ ἧς αἷμα καὶ

[43] Cf. D. Minns and P. Parvis, eds., *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr. Apologies*, trans. D. Minns and P. Parvis, OECT (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 35.

[44] Cf. D. Wyrwa, "Justin," in *Philosophie der Antike*, vol. 5/1: *Philosophie der Kaiserzeit und der Spätantike*, ed. C. Riedweg, C. Horn, and D. Wyrwa (Basel: Schwabe, 2018), 790–806, here 792.

[45] Cf. also *1 Apol.* 22.

[46] Cf. Tertullian, *Or.* 18.

> σάρκες κατὰ μεταβολὴν τρέφονται ἡμῶν ἐκείνου τοῦ σαρκοποιηθέντος Ἰησοῦ καὶ σάρκα καὶ αἷμα ἐδιδάχθημεν εἶναι.[47]
>
> For we do not receive these things as ordinary bread or ordinary drink.
> But just
> as through God's word
> Jesus Christ was made flesh,
> our Savior,
> and had flesh and blood
> for our salvation
> So we have been taught
> that also the through a word of prayer[48] from him
> with thanksgiving furnished nourishment,
> from which our blood and flesh according to a transformation are nourished,
> is flesh and blood
> of that Jesus who was made flesh.

The parallel structure already shows that Justin introduces two kinds of analogies. One analogy is between the activity of the word in the incarnation of Jesus and the activity of the word of prayer in the Eucharist. The other analogy is between Jesus Christ's assumption of σάρξ and αἷμα in the incarnation (σαρκοποιηθεὶς Ιησοῦς Χριστός … καὶ σάρκα καὶ αἷμα … ἔσχεν) and the fact that according to Christian doctrine the eucharistic nourishment "is" the flesh and blood of Jesus (εὐχαριστηθεῖσαν τροφὴν … ἐκείνου τοῦ σαρκοποιηθέντος Ἰησοῦ καὶ σάρκα καὶ αἷμα ἐδιδάχθημεν εἶναι).

In the second analogy, it is conspicuous that there is not talk of a *transformation* of the meal elements into the flesh and blood of Jesus, and Justin also does not clarify *how* bread and drink become Jesus' flesh and blood.[49] It is true that Othmar Perler assumes that εὐχαριστεῖν is already used here as a *terminus technicus*, which is to be translated with "become Eucharist" and not with "bless with thanksgiving."[50] In that case, there would be talk here, in the clause καὶ τὴν δι' εὐχῆς λόγου τοῦ παρ' αὐτοῦ εὐχαριστηθεῖσαν τρόφην, of the "Eucharist becoming" of the elements bread and drink, and this would be connected with the activity of the word. Against this view, however, nothing suggests that εὐχαριστεῖν already has this meaning here. For Justin it is solely decisive that we are not dealing here with ordinary (κοινός) food and that the entire event has its correspondence in the incarnation of Jesus Christ for our salvation. It is true that one could infer from this correspondence that the activity of the word plays a role, but this is not developed further.[51] Thus, εὐχαριστηθεῖσαν τρόφην is here, initially, to

[47] Justin, *1 Apol.* 66.1–2 (M. Marcovich, ed., *Iustini Martyris Apologiae pro Christianis*, PTS 38 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994]).

[48] The expression δι' εὐχῆς λόγου τοῦ παρ' αὐτοῦ can be interpreted in different ways. If λόγος is dependent on εὐχή, it would need to be translated with "through a prayer of the Word" (i.e., of the Logos, *genitivus subjectivus*) or "through prayer of *a* word" (the words of institution that Christ spoke) or "through a prayer *for* the Word" (Logos, *genitivus objectivus*). If, by contrast, εὐχή is dependent on λόγος, then one must render it with "through a word of prayer" (i.e., through a prayer word, *genitivus explicativus*). On this, cf. Perler, "Logos und Eucharistie nach Justinus I. Apol C. 66," 475.

[49] Cf. also A. Lindemann, "Die eucharistische Mahlfeier bei Justin und Irenäus," in *The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts. Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, vol. 2: *Patristic Traditions, Iconography*, ed. D. Hellholm and D. Sänger, WUNT 376 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 901–34, here 930.

[50] Cf. Perler, "Logos und Eucharistie nach Justinus I. Apol C. 66," 479.

[51] Cf. also J. Schröter, *Das Abendmahl. Frühchristliche Deutungen und Impulse für die Gegenwart*, SBS 210 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2006), 83–84: "As in the Didache, there is thus also in Justin a close connection between the prayers of thanksgiving and the special character of the food of the Eucharist."

be translated simply with "nourishment over which a thanksgiving has been spoken."[52]

Nevertheless, the text does speak of a transformation – namely, with the term μεταβολή in the relative clause, which refers to the nourishment of the blood and flesh of human beings. Under the presupposition that the concern of the sentence construction is above all with the transformation of the food in the Eucharist and is to be translated with "to become Eucharist," J. Betz therefore assumed that for the event of the transformation of the food, Justin, with the relative clause ἐξ ἧς αἷμα καὶ σάρκες κατὰ μεταβολὴν τρέφονται ἡμῶν, invokes a quasi-natural-scientific argument of the general transformation of nourishment and the assimilation of nourishment into bodily substance in order to explain the transformation of the eucharistic food. "From the natural transformation capacity of food, which becomes flesh and blood in the living organism," Justin derives the ability "that also in the Eucharist nourishment can become the flesh and blood of Jesus."[53] Betz therefore translates: "Not like ordinary bread and ordinary drink do we take it. Rather, in the same way as Jesus Christ, our redeemer, who became flesh through the logos of God, had flesh and blood, so, according to our doctrine, the food that has become Eucharist through a prayer for the logos that comes from him (God) is the flesh and blood of that very Jesus who became flesh, as (also otherwise) with us flesh and blood are formed from food on the basis of the transformation of the nourishment."[54]

In my judgment, J. Betz is correct in his view that ancient conceptions of the transformation of nourishment into bodily substance stand in the background of this text, as they are also found, for example, in the quoted passage from Galen. This is supported not least by the fact that Galen likewise uses the term μεταβολή for this process. But is the μεταβολή in the ingestion of nourishment in the relative clause in *1 Apol.* 66.2 ultimately meant to ground a transformation of the eucharistic elements? The attachment of ἐξ ἧς το εὐχαριστηθεῖσαν τρόφην speaks against the translation and interpretation by Betz. The relative pronoun undoubtedly refers to the previously mentioned *eucharistic* nourishment, which nourishes (our?)[55] flesh and blood "according to a/our transformation." Only this nourishment is spoken of here – and not other, ordinary nourishment. To this extent, Betz's translation, which understands the relative clause as a general statement about the physiological transformation of nourishment into flesh and blood, is unconvincing. If, however, this understanding is excluded, why then does Justin speak at all of human αἷμα καὶ σάρκες at this point? After all, in *1 Apol.* 66.2, Jesus' σάρξ and αἷμα is conspicuously set in relation to our αἷμα καὶ σάρκες (and in order to distinguish the flesh and blood of *Jesus* from that of human beings Justin changes, when he speaks of human flesh and blood, the order of the word pair and uses the plural σάρκες).

One possibility is that the "transformation" refers simply to the transformation of the nourishment into bodily substance, as the event in which we are nourished (cf. Ps.-Hippocrates, *De alimento* and Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus*). Thus, Justin could simply emphasize here that the Eucharist also presents an ingestion of nourishment in which the flesh is built up. Against this view, one can, however, invoke (in addition to the fact that this information is actually superfluous and delivers nothing for the special significance of the Eucharist with which Justin is, after all, concerned) the fact that the whole sentence structure is constructed in parallel and that alongside the two aforementioned parallels, i.e., the activity of the W/word and the salvation-historical and eucharistic "incarnation," there is also a possible third parallel that pertains to the salvific effect. In the first part Justin states that the

[52] Thus, C. Markschies, "Abendmahl II.1: Alte Kirche," in *RGG*^{4} 1 (1998), 15–21, here 16 (ET = C. Markschies, "Eucharist/Communion II. Church History 1. Early Church," in *RPP* 4 [2008], 621–25, here 622).

[53] J. Betz, *Die Eucharistie in der Zeit der griechischen Väter*, vol. 1/1: *Die Aktualpräsenz der Person und des Heilswerkes Jesu im Abendmahl nach der vorephesinischen griechischen Patristik* (Freiburg: Herder, 1955), 272.

[54] J. Betz, *Die Eucharistie in der Zeit der griechischen Väter*, 268.

[55] The reference of ἡμῶν is not clear and is interpreted in different ways. Cf. Perler, "Logos und Eucharistie nach Justinus I. Apol C. 66," 482, who assigns ἡμῶν to μεταβολή, and Schröter, *Das Abendmahl*, 84, who, by contrast, relates ἡμῶν to αἷμα καὶ σάρκες.

incarnation took place for our σωτηρία. This statement of salvation could have its counterpart in the comment about the salvific transformation of our flesh and blood that is brought about through the eucharistic nourishment: ἐξ ἧς αἷμα καὶ σάρκες κατὰ μεταβολὴν τρέφονται ἡμῶν.

If this is correct, then Justin does not stop with a description of our nourishment through the eucharistic food as an ordinary process of the transformation of nourishment into bodily substance. Rather, as the incarnation in the first part, he enriches also the eucharistic incarnation with a soteriological significance. Not only the historical but also the eucharistic incarnation is there for our salvation, in that Jesus' flesh and blood, through a transformation, nourish our flesh and blood and prepare them for the resurrection and eternal glorious existence.[56] If one views this text from the perspective of the later interpretation of the Eucharist in Irenaeus, then the result of the μεταβολή can only be the enabling of the human flesh and blood for imperishability. The significance of the Eucharist as spiritual nourishment and as a ritual that mediates perfect life is already attested in the Didache and in the letters of Ignatius. Thus, this would also be nothing unusual in the context of *1 Apology*. However, Justin would be the first transmitted witness to locate the effect of the Eucharist specifically in the σάρξ and αἷμα of the believer and to describe this effect as a physiological process.[57]

It is problematic for such an understanding of the text that Justin, beyond the short relative clause and the parallel constructed sentence structure, does not adduce any further arguments that would support this interpretation. However, the concern in the context is with describing and defending the gatherings of Christians for worship to outsiders and not, by contrast, with the Christian belief in the resurrection of the flesh. This is different in Irenaeus, who engages in detail and against the background of very different fronts with the salvation of the flesh and therefore deals at length with the eucharistic effect on human flesh. Justin, by contrast, professes the resurrection of the flesh in another place, namely, in *Dial.* 80.5, in the context of a dispute with different streams within Christianity: Ἐγὼ δέ, καὶ εἴ τινές εἰσιν ὀρθογνώμονες κατὰ πάντα Χριστιανοί, καὶ *σαρκὸς ἀνάστασιν* γενήσεσθαι ἐπιστάμεθα .... Thus, he does indeed reckon with the fleshly resurrection and defends the resurrection belief there against the view of other Christians who maintain that there is no resurrection of the dead but that souls are directly received into heaven at death.

Beyond this, Justin also adduces other, conventional arguments in support of the bodily resurrection of the dead. For example, in *1 Apol.* 18–19, he appeals to the omnipotence of God and the power of transformation in creation, which already becomes recognizable in the earthly development of the human being from seed to adult man.[58] According to *1 Apol.* 19, the omnipotence of the creator God

[56] A similar interpretation of this text is also advocated by Perler, "Logos und Eucharistie nach Justinus I. Apol C. 66," 473 and Schröter, *Das Abendmahl*, 84.

[57] Cf. also Markschies, "Eucharist/Communion II. Church History 1. Early Church," 622 (GV = Markschies, "Abendmahl II.1: Alte Kirche," 16): "By way of the transformation of this food within the body during the process of digestion … the human being receives both physical and spiritual nourishment."

[58] Cf. *1 Apol.* 18.1–19.8 (trans. Minns and Parvis, eds., Justin, 123, 125, 127, 129): "**18.1.** Consider what happened to each of the kings that have been. They died just like everybody else. Which, if death led to unconsciousness, would have been a godsend to all the unjust. **18.2.** But, since consciousness endures for all those who have existed, and eternal punishment lies in store, take care to be persuaded and to believe that these things are true. **18.3.** For conjurings of the dead – both visions obtained through uncorrupted children, and the summoning of human souls – and those whom magicians call 'dream-senders' or 'attendants' – and the things done by those who know these things – let these persuade you that even after death souls remain in consciousness. **18.4.** And let these too persuade you of the same .... **18.6.** Receive us, at least like these, since we believe in God not less, but rather more, than they do: we who expect even to receive our own bodies again, after they have died and been put in the earth, since we say that nothing is impossible for God. **19.1.** And what would seem more incredible to someone thinking about it than if we were not embodied and someone said that from some small drop of human seed bones and nerves and flesh were able to come to be, depicted as we see them? **19.2.** For, consider the hypothesis now. If, while you neither were such as these, nor were derived from these things, someone said to you with conviction, while showing you human

shows itself in the fact that he can create human beings with all different body parts (bones, tendons, flesh) from the small seed. Likewise, at the end of time God can let "the human bodies that have been dissolved and, like seeds, been placed into the earth rise" and put on imperishability. In *1 Apol.* 18, with the Christians' view that not only the souls live on after death but that God can raise again even the dead bodies that are laid in the earth, he wishes to show that Christians stand not only in the tradition of the philosophers (Empedocles and Pythagoras, Plato, and Socrates) but, beyond this, also distinguish themselves especially by their piety. Here, he criticizes the notion that God is not able to raise the dead and that everything instead returns to where it came from. This Middle Platonic body of thought also includes the notion of the imperishability of the soul, with which Justin critically engages especially in *Dial.* 4–6.

Thus, it becomes evident that at other points in his works Justin must argue both against the view that the soul is immortal and against the view of the powerlessness of God in the face of the fundamental perishability of the human body. For according to Middle Platonic conceptions, which had also fundamentally shaped Justin himself in his pre-Christian period, matter is, to be sure, eternal, but not the human body. In both contexts, the argumentative goal of the urban Roman apologist is to place the power of the creator God over the creaturely conditions of the human being.

The interpretation of the Eucharist that becomes visible in *1 Apol.* 66.2 can be embedded in this larger nexus and understood in the context of all the extant writings of Justin. Justin was concerned to affirm the bodily – indeed fleshly – resurrection of the dead, for reasons relating to the Christian picture of God. The interpretation of the Eucharist in *1 Apol.* 66.2 could already reflect the attempt to explain the transformation of the bodily substance in the resurrection, so to speak, scientifically. It could imply the notion that bread and wine as flesh and blood of Jesus have an effect upon the flesh and blood of human beings in a special way and yet at the same time analogously to ordinary nourishment and prepares them for the imperishable glorious existence.

This type of argumentation is fully developed in the fourth century in Gregory of Nyssa, in his *Oratio catechetica magna*, where the Eucharist is described as an event in which the human being receives the imperishable body of Christ and transforms Christ's whole nature into his own nature.[59] The basic pattern of this conception of the Eucharist is "union with life also brings about participation in life." From the double nature of the human being, who consists of body and soul, one can infer, according to Gregory, that both components must each make a distinct connection to the "author

seed and a painted image, that from such could come to be, before seeing it come to be you would not believe it. Who would dare to contradict this? **19.3.** So in the same way, it is because you have never seen a dead man raised that you remain incredulous. **19.4.** But just as in the beginning you would not have believed that human beings could come from a small drop and yet you see it happening, so now take into account that it is not impossible that human bodies, when they have dissolved and, like seeds, been resolved into earth, do rise in due time, at the command of God, and put on incorruptibility. **19.5.** For what sort of power worthy of God those people are talking about who claim that each thing passes into that from which it came, and that not even God is able to do anything further beyond this, we cannot say. But let us consider this – that they would not have believed that it was possible that such things would ever come to be as they see have come to be, and from such origins, in the case both of themselves and of the whole world. **19.6.** But we have learnt that it is better to believe both these things and also those that are even impossible for human beings by their own nature, than to be incredulous like the others, since we know our teacher Jesus Christ said: 'Things that are impossible for human beings are possible for God,' **19.7.** and: 'Do not fear those who kill you and after this are not able to do anything. Fear rather the one who is able after death to send both soul and body to Gehenna.' **19.8.** And Gehenna is a place where those are going to be punished who live unjustly and do not believe that these things will happen just as God taught through Christ."

[59] Cf. Markschies, "Eucharist/Communion II. Church History 1. Early Church," 623 (GV = Markschies, "Abendmahl II.1: Alte Kirche," 18): "Gregory presents the probably most elaborate ancient attempt to comprehend the mode of this transformation …"

of life."[60] Interestingly, he assigns to the soul and the body respectively different ways of connecting themselves to Christ as the bearer of life. For in contrast to the soul, the body cannot unite with life through *faith*. The connection of the body to life must occur via a material medium that penetrates into the innards. Like Ignatius (Ign. *Eph.* 20.2), Gregory thinks here of an antidote that, according to a typological figure of thought, nullifies the deadly poison ingested by Adam. Thus, not the transgression of the commandment by Adam brought death but the bad paradisical nourishment. Over against this stands a new nourishment, the imperishable body of Christ, which, when it is ingested in the Eucharist, transforms the bodies of the believers to itself. The enlivening dynamis that is necessary for this, which makes bodily substance from nourishment, is received together with the nourishment. In order to fully clarify for his addressees the process that he has in mind in the working of the Eucharist, Gregory very explicitly turns to the physiological processes in the ingestion of nourishment:[61]

> Therefore it is fitting for the argument to digress a little into the physiology of the body, so that, looking to the order [of the argument], our faith might have no doubt about the proposed thought. For who has not known that the nature of our body itself, in itself, does not have life in its own subsistence, but it holds itself together and remains in existence by an influx of power into it, that draws to itself what it lacks by a ceaseless motion, and casts out what is superfluous?"

Nourishment is the power that keeps the body alive at all. It already contains, according to potentiality, the complete body that it will build up:[62]

> Therefore he who looks at these things [bread and drink as ordinary nourishment of the human being] sees the bulk of our body in potential; for in me these become blood and body, the nourishment correspondingly changed into the form of [my] body by [a nutritive] power of alteration.

The body of Jesus, in which God's word dwelt at the same time, also nourished itself from bread and built up his body from this. This process repeats itself, as it were, in the Eucharist, when, there too, the bread is passed, which nourishes the bodies of the believers and lets them, because it is transformed into the body of Christ through blessing, become sharers in imperishability (cf. *Oratio catechatica magna* 37.12).[63]

Irenaeus' writing *Adversus haereses* is an important milestone on the way to an interpretation of the Eucharist that operates extensively with contemporary theories of nourishment, such as we find in Gregory of Nyssa. For the bishop, the corresponding medical insights of his time do not, of course, stand outside of his Christian understanding of

[60] Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio catechatica magna* 37.1 (trans. I. Green, ed., *Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Catechetical Discourse: A Handbook for Catechists* [New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2019], 144): "But since humanity is twofold, being a commixture of both soul and body, it is necessary for those who are being saved to lay hold of him who leads to life through both."

[61] Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio catechetica magna* 37.5 (trans. Green, ed., *Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Catechetical Discourse*, 146).

[62] Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio catechetica magna* 37.7 (trans. Green, ed., *Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Catechetical Discourse*, 147 [the first insertion is from C. Jacobi, the others are from Green]).

[63] See Green, ed., *Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Catechetical Discourse*, 149. Cf. Markschies, "Eucharist/Communion II. Church History 1. Early Church," 623 (GV = Markschies, "Abendmahl II.1: Alte Kirche," 18).

reality but rather are made plausible by him through their integration into a larger conception of the enlivening and preservation of the material world through the wisdom of the creator God.

On this basis, Irenaeus then advances to the decisive point of his argumentation: since the wine and blood that come from the earth receive the word of God (*verbum Dei*) into themselves in the Eucharist and thus – so he explains in *Haer.* 4.18.5 – can receive a heavenly element (*res caelestis*), the strived for unity of matter and spirit realizes itself already in the eucharistic gifts:

> For we offer to Him His own, announcing consistently the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit.[64]

Just as these gifts can consequently receive spiritual quality, so also human flesh, which likewise comes from the earth, can also take on this characteristic in the ingestion of nourishment. According to Irenaeus, the special quality of imperishability is present in the eucharistic bread and wine in the same way as the strengthening, flesh-building powers in ordinary nourishment. From there, it transfers itself to the flesh of the recipient, which adapts itself to this characteristic. How then can someone claim that we cannot receive the gifts of God (cf. *Haer.* 5.2.3)?

Their effect stands on the whole within the salvation-historical and creation-theological framework insofar as God, within the temporal, transient world, prepares the human being for imperishability as the goal of his creation and for this purpose also uses matter and what comes from the earth as an aid. Irenaeus is thus concerned with the connection between the action of God in creation and the end-time perfecting, with the unity of creator God and Father of Jesus Christ, and with the salvation of the created world.[65]

This can also be seen in Irenaeus' treatment of the Jesus tradition. It likewise displays a creation-theological emphasis. In *Haer.* 3.11.5, Irenaeus interprets the transformation of water into wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2.1–11) and the blessing of the bread at the feeding of the 5,000 as indications that the same God who is active in Jesus is also the creator of the earth, since Christ, the Word of God, does not create something out of nothing but rather acts upon the existing, created natural matter.[66] At

[64] Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.18.5 (trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 486; cf. Brox, ed., *Irenäus*, 8/4, 147). On the different contexts of the passages, cf. de Andia, *Homo Vivens*, 238: "Mais le contexte est différent au livre IV et au livre V: dans le premier texte, Irénée insiste sur l'identité du Dieu Créateur et Sauveur pour montrer que l'eucharistie ne peut être l'oblation des prémices de la création que si c'est le même Verbe de Dieu qui a créé le pain et le vin 'coupe de la création,' et les a offerts en s'offrant lui-même au Père. Dans le second texte, il souligne l'identité de la chair du Christ et de notre 'substance' charnelle …, la réalité de l'incarnation du Verbe fait chair prouvant la réalité de notre espérance de la resurrection de la chair."

[65] B. Mutschler, *Irenäus als johanneischer Theologie. Studien zur Schriftauslegung bei Irenäus von Lyon*, STAC 21 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 221–222: "Here Irenaeus sees with John the unfathomable, invisible Father at work in the visible and fathomable Son."

[66] Cf. also Mutschler, *Irenäus*, 221, "Irenaeus places the Johannine feeding of the five thousand alongside the wine miracle. In both Christ, with bread and water, took a starting point from the creation into service, even though he did not need to do so."

the same time, here too, there is an echo of the Lord's Supper, since Irenaeus, with the connection of the wine story and feeding story, comes to speak of the gift of food and drink through Christ (cf. the pair of terms in John 6.55).

5. Resurrection as Process

How then does this affect the conception of the *resurrection of human beings* in Irenaeus? Here, it is, first, conspicuous that Irenaeus, in accordance with his general pattern of thought with its orientation to the whole Bible, does not reckon with a present resurrection. The Spirit received in the Eucharist is, initially, a pledge of the *future* resurrection to imperishability.[67] However, the resurrection – as a gift of life that comes from God and is intended for creation – is understood as the *endpoint* of a more comprehensive process that reaches from the creation of the human being to the completion of salvation history. Thus, in Irenaeus, "resurrection," as high point of the developing, perfect life in the human being, is embedded in a whole series of similar life-giving actions of the creator God, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Already at the first creation, God had formed the earth/dust and enlivened it through his Spirit.
2. In the order that henceforth kept the creation in operation, his Spirit then becomes active when the roots of the vine, which lie in the earth, bring forth fruit and when wheat grows from the seed. The language that Irenaeus uses for these events in *Haer.* 5.2.3 possesses corresponding eschatological overtones (cf. the expressions *depositum in terram, in terram et dissolutum, surgit per Spiritum Dei*). These expressions are, of course, formulated already with a view to the resurrection of human beings, which is spoken of at the end. As examples from nature, vine and wheat are intended to make the resurrection plausible, entirely in the vein of apologetical argumentation. Nevertheless, Irenaeus goes beyond the mere formulation of an analogy here and already interprets the natural growth of the plants themselves as an activity of the Spirit and an enlivening by God. The "manifold rising" (*multiplex surgit*), in turn, makes an arc back to the beginning of creation and God's commission to his creation to be fruitful and multiply.[68]
3. In a certain, indirect way, the life-giving Spirit is also active in the nourishment of the human being through the gifts of creation and in the wisdom of human beings to prepare the gifts of creation into bread (and wine). All this is set in motion by the art and wisdom of God.

[67] Cf. Behr, *Asceticism*, 74.
[68] Cf. Gen 1.22, 28. Cf. de Andia, *Homo Vivens*, 245.

4. The Spirit becomes active once more in the Eucharist, when the prepared bread that comes from the earth (*Haer.* 4.18.5) and the cup become the body and blood of the Lord.[69]

5. These characteristics transfer themselves to the recipients of the gifts when they eat and drink. In the same way as the flesh of the human being grows in the case of the ordinary ingestion of nourishment through the assimilation powers of the organs, in the Eucharist, as well, the special character of the nourishment – namely, the heavenly element that is productive in them, i.e., the word of God – has an effect on the flesh of the human being. The flesh is prepared in this way for imperishability. In the process, the substance of the flesh is not altered. It remains unchanged also for the "pneumatic," i.e., spiritual human being who acts ethically. Nevertheless, the flesh can accept the characteristics of the Spirit and be made conform to the Word of God. In *Haer.* 5.9.3, Irenaeus formulates this in as follows: *ibi … caro a spiritu possessa, oblita quidem sui, qualitatem autem Spiritus assumens, conforma facta Verbo Dei*.[70]

6. Finally, the word of God or the Spirit is active in the end-time resurrection.[71]

Thus, this last, end-time resurrection does not stand by itself as a singular event but rather is the endpoint in a series of different life-giving activities of the Spirit and of a process that strives toward the end-time resurrection. Irenaeus understands the end-time resurrection of the flesh as part of the whole creative activity of God, which is already operative among temporal, earthly conditions. The consistent protagonist of these events is God, whereas matter, the earth, from which the human body, that which nourishes it, and the eucharistic elements come, constitutes the object of his activity.

While Irenaeus reveals a connection to the creation-theological grounding of the resurrection in the apologists Theophilus of Antioch,[72] Athenagoras, and Justin,[73] he simultaneously goes a step beyond them. The end-time resurrection of the flesh is not only prefigured in the processes of nature but directly presupposes them. According to *Haer.* 4.18.5, the gifts of nature, after the invocation of God, receive a heavenly element (*ex duabus rebus constans, terrena et caelesti*), whose characteristic then transfers itself to the bodies of those (*corpora nostra*) who receive the Eucharist. This activity of the Spirit

[69] In the context of this passage, Irenaeus explains that the "heretics" cannot affirm this if they do not regard Christ as the Son of the creator. They devalue the creation by sacrificing to someone other than the creator or by claiming that the creation arose out of a misstep or out of ignorance. Since, however, the eucharistic gifts are said to come from creation, their identification with the body and blood of Christ also demonstrates Christ's closeness to the creation.

[70] Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.9.3 (Brox, ed., *Irenäus*, 8/5, 78; trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 535); "[there is] the flesh possessed by the Spirit, forgetful indeed of what belongs to it, and adopting the quality of the Spirit, being made conformable to the Word of God."

[71] Cf. also the four transformations that de Andia, *Homo Vivens*, 245–247 identifies in *Haer.* 5.2.3: a natural transformation (that occurs in creation), a eucharistic transformation, the transformation of mortal bodies into immortal bodies, and the transformation of water into wine in the miracle at Cana.

[72] Cf. Theophilus, *Autol.* 1.13.

[73] Cf. Justin, *1 Apol.* 19.

already now begins to transform human beings and prepare them for the eschatological resurrection and imperishability. According to Irenaeus, the Eucharist is the bridge that connects God's activity in creation with the final resurrection.

6. The Educative Approach and the Co-working of the Human Being in his Growth unto Imperishability (*Haer.* 4.38.1–3)

In another paradigm – namely, in the context of the human being's capacity for knowledge and his development unto perfect knowledge – Irenaeus can also speak metaphorically of "bread" and "flesh" or of "milk" for the activity of the Spirit and the teaching, person, and saving work of Jesus, which is received by human beings in faith and internalized and through which they grow in their perfection. Here, he builds on early Christian tradition.

> Talk of the word of God as "nourishment" is known in Israelite-Jewish tradition.[74] For example, the manna in Deut 8.3 is correspondingly interpreted: "And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD."[75] On the word of God as "food," cf. also Jer 15.16: "Thy words were found, and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by thy name, O LORD, God of hosts."[76] The idea of a progressive development and growth in knowledge is connected with the metaphor of food in 1 Cor 3.2 and 1 Pet 2.2.[77] Hebrews 5.12–14 designates with "milk" the στοιχεῖα τῆς ἀρχῆς τῶν λογίων τοῦ θεοῦ, the first principles of the oracles of God. The Johannine bread discourse, and especially John 6.35, also builds on the role of wisdom as nourishment or giver of nourishment (cf. Sir 24.21 and Prov. 9.1–6). The Johannine Jesus identifies himself with the bread that comes from heaven. The pretext of the bread discourse is the miracle of the manna, invoked through the quotation from Ps 78.24: "Bread from heaven he gave them to eat." The bread discourse in John 6 quotes from this and is then developed in the form of an interpretation of this quotation (in John 6.45, Isaiah 54.13 is

[74] Cf. K.-G. Sandelin, *Wisdom as Nourisher: A Study of an Old-Testament Theme, Its Development within Early Judaism and its Impact on Early Christianity*, AAAbo.H 64/3 (Åbo: Åbo Akademis Förlag, 1986).

[75] Trans. RSV.

[76] Trans. RSV.

[77] On the reception of 1 Cor 3.2–3 in Irenaeus, cf. R. Noormann, *Irenäus als Paulusinterpret. Zur Rezeption und Wirkung der paulinischen und deuteropaulinischen Briefe im Werk des Irenäus von Lyon*, WUNT 2/66 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 470. On the soteriology of Irenaeus and his reception of Pauline theology, cf. B. C. Blackwell, *Christosis: Pauline Soteriology in Light of Deification in Irenaeus and Cyril of Alexandria*, WUNT 2/314 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2011), 69–70.

cited in addition) in which words from the quotation are paraphrased in a homily like manner.

In Irenaeus the term "bread" occurs metaphorically for the "nourishing" function of the Spirit, which illustrates its growth-promoting, educative activity, which contributes to the perfecting of the human being.[78] The human being's process of growth and the role of the Spirit as "nourishment" for the human being are summarized in *Haer.* 4.38.3.[79]

Here, the educative approach comes to expression in the οἰκονομία of Irenaeus. Human beings cannot initially grasp the Logos as he is in his true glory but only in weakened form. In connection with John, Irenaeus develops from this an interpretation of the incarnation. The incarnation of the heavenly, perfect "bread"[80] is a form of turning to the human beings that corresponds to them and accommodates their capacity for understanding. At the same time, with it, a cognitive and educative process for the human being begins. These two sides of the incarnation – on the one hand, the appearance of the Logos that is adapted to human beings, and, on the other hand, the start of a strengthening and growth-promoting pedagogical effect of this appearance upon human beings – leads Irenaeus to the picture of the gift of "milk for small children."[81] Expressed figuratively, the nourishment with milk prepares one "to eat and to drink"

[78] According to de Andia, *Homo Vivens*, 214, Irenaeus designates the Spirit in its nourishing, life-giving function as "bread": "Cependant, que l'Esprit soit nommé 'eau' ou 'pain,' ce qui est désigné à chaque fois c'est cette fonction nutritive ou fécondante de l'"Esprit de vie' qui 'nourrit et accroît,' tout en unifiant ce qu'il multiplie."

[79] *Haer.* 4.38.3 (trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 521–522). "By this arrangement, therefore, and these harmonies, and a sequence of this nature, man, a created and organized being, is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God, – the Father planning everything well and giving His commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made], but man making progress day by day and ascending toward the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One. For the Uncreated is perfect, that is, God. Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord."

[80] Cf. John 6.51. This interpretation of the incarnation also underlies the bread discourse in John 6, where the bread that comes from heaven is ultimately identified with the flesh of Jesus in 6.51 and is thus made to correspond to the Johannine motif of the καταβάσις.

[81] Cf. *Haer.* 4.38.1 (trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 521): "If, however, any one say, 'What then? Could not God have exhibited man as perfect from the beginning?' let him know that, inasmuch as God is indeed always the same and unbegotten as respects Himself, all things are possible to Him. But created things must be inferior to Him who created them, from the very fact of their later origin; for it was not possible for things recently created to have been uncreated. But inasmuch as they are not uncreated, for this very reason do they come short of the perfect. Because, as these things are of later date, so are they infantile; so are they unaccustomed to, and unexercised in, perfect discipline. For as it certainly is in the power of a mother to give strong food to her infant [but she does not do so], as the child is not yet able to receive more substantial nourishment; so also it was possible for God Himself to have made man perfect from the first but man could not receive this [perfection], being as yet an infant … and therefore it was that He, who was the perfect bread of the Father, offered Himself to us as milk, [because we were] as infants. He did this when He appeared as a man, that we, being nourished, as it were, from the breast of His flesh, and having, by such a course of milk-nourishment, become accustomed to eat and drink the Word of God, may be able also to contain in ourselves the Bread of immortality, which is the Spirit of the Father."

the word of God. The "eating of the word of God" can be a metaphor for the study of Scripture, for listening to God, and for the reception of salvation, as *Haer.* 5.20.2 also shows:

> but to flee to the Church, and be brought up in her bosom, and be nourished with the Lord's Scriptures … therefore says the Spirit of God, "Thou mayest freely eat from every tree of the garden," that is, Eat ye from every Scripture of the Lord; but ye shall not eat with an uplifted mind, nor touch any heretical discord.[82]

However, eucharistic practice can also be heard in the connection to "eating *and drinking*," which the metaphoricism in *Haer.* 4.38.1 establishes. According to this, the "bread of imperishability" can refer to *the word or speech of God* (after all, it is also identified with the Spirit; cf. also *Haer.* 4.38.2), but it can also designate the *eucharistic bread*.

According to Irenaeus, both have the same effect – the human being receives the Spirit into himself and preserves it, so that he himself collaborates in his upbringing and continued creation until his perfect conformity to the image of God and imperishability.[83] As in John 6.51–68, the echoes of the Eucharist are only hinted at and not completely unpacked in *Haer.* 4.38.1–3. "Body and blood of Jesus" are not mentioned; the "flesh" also does not appear in connection to the Eucharist but with the incarnation; and the text never speaks of an action at a meal. Here, it is not the ritual that stands in the foreground but the *effect* of the Eucharist, which is comparable to the growth in faith in Jesus.

7. Summary: The Receptions of John 6.51–58 and 1 Cor 15.35–54 in Irenaeus and in the Discourse Context

In the investigation of the interpretation of the Eucharist in *Haer.* 5.2.3, it has become clear that Irenaeus has developed his conception of the flesh's capacity to be redeemed in proximity to the principle-based thinking of the popular philosophy of his time and to the gnostic teachings combatted by him, though he can neither be regarded as a speculative thinker nor identified as a figure who engages intensively with contemporary philosophy. The particular way in which he develops his ideas about the resurrection is also shaped by his critical engagement with gnostic thinking in the fifth book of *Adversus haereses*.

On multiple occasions, scholars have observed the thematic commonalities between the group of sayings on the resurrection and flesh of Jesus in Gos. Phil. 23b (NHC II,3, p. 56.32–57.8) and the eucharistic section in *Haer.* 5.2.3.[84] The Gospel of

[82] Trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 548.

[83] The substance of the spiritual human being does not change but remains the same. However, by means of an interpretation of the Pauline image of the olive tree, Irenaeus demonstrates in *Haer.* 5.10.2 that the gifting with the Spirit shows itself in the works of the human being – he produces a different fruit.

[84] Cf. Noormann, *Irenäus als Paulusinterpret*, 503–504; J. Schröter, "Eucharistie, Auferstehung und Vermittlung des ewigen Lebens," in *Docetism in the Early Church: The Quest for an Elusive Phenomenon*, ed.

Philip agrees with Irenaeus' remarks in *Haer.* 5.2.3 insofar as they both see realized in the eucharistic event a transformation of the human being, which, taking up John 6.53–54, is brought into connection with the flesh of Jesus and is regarded as indispensable for the fleshly resurrection of human beings.

The anti-heretical work of Irenaeus and the Gospel of Philip attest that the new awareness of the problems associated with the flesh's capacity to be redeemed brought forth a new understanding of the Eucharist, which, independent of the proto-orthodox or "gnostic" basic tendency of the respective writings, stressed the gift of life that was to be received in the Eucharist and its efficacy for the fleshly resurrection. A comparison of the two texts is also interesting with respect to the reception of writings that later came to belong to the New Testament. With John 6.51–58 and Eph 5.30 or 1 Cor 15.35–54, both *Adversus haereses* and the Gospel of Philip make recourse to two witnesses of the normative time of origin, John and Paul. They refer to these texts already against the background of a running discussion and are thus familiar with other interpretations.[85] While Gos. Phil. 23b recognizably reproduces a paraphrase of John 6.53–54 as a saying of Jesus and places it together with 1 Cor 15.50, the recourses to John 6 and 1 Cor 15 in *Haer.* 5.2.3 are somewhat more complex. In the context of the passage (*Haer.* 4.38.1), the talk of the "perfect bread of the Father" and the "bread of imperishability" is initially reminiscent of the Christology of the Johannine bread discourse (cf. John 6.51: ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ζῶν). Above all, the gift of eternal life can then be traced back to John 6.51–58, which Irenaeus, in *Haer.* 5.2.3, locates in the eating of the eucharistic bread and drinking of the mixed cup, which, through invocation, become the blood and body of Jesus. Here, the life-giving "chewing" of the flesh of Jesus in John 6.51, 53–54, 57–58 can be heard. Receptions of texts from the *corpus Paulinum* are also recognizable in *Haer.* 5.2.3. In addition to the direct quotation from Eph 5.30, we find an allusion to 1 Cor 15.53 in *Haer.* 5.2.3: … *qui huic mortali immortalitatem circumdat et corruptibili incorruptelam gratuito donat*.[86] In addition, in *Haer.* 5.2.3 Irenaeus transforms the Pauline analogy between the sowing and fruit bearing of the grain and the bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15.37–38, 42–44) into a direct chain of effects that connects with one another the activity of the Spirit upon the wheat, upon the eucharistic bread, and, finally, in the fleshly resurrection. The whole argument of the last part of *Haer.* 5.2.3 is ultimately influenced by the Pauline image of the sowing and bearing of fruit.

It thus becomes clear that contents and individual passages from 1 Cor 15 and John 6.(26–51b,)51c–58 became important for the discourse on the resurrection that was in-

J. Verheyden, R. Bieringer, J. Schröter, and I. Jäger, WUNT 402 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 89–112, here 108–110; O. Lehtipuu, *Debates over the Resurrection of the Dead: Constructing Early Christian Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 198; cf. also H. Schmid, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus. Anfänge einer Theorie des Sakraments im koptischen Philippusevangelium (NHC II 3; SVigChr 88)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 329, 332–38.

[85] For example, Ign. *Eph.* 20.2 (ἀντίδοτος τοῦ μὴ ἀποθανεῖν) appears to stand in the background of *Haer.* 3.19.1, 10 (*antidotum vitae*).

[86] *Haer.* 5.2.3 (Brox, ed., *Irenäus*, 8/5, 36; trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 528); "who freely gives to this mortal immortality, and to this corruptible incorruption." Cf. 1 Cor 15.53: Δεῖ γὰρ τὸ φθαρτὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσασθαι ἀφθαρσίαν καὶ τὸ θνητὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσασθαι ἀθανασίαν. Cf. also *Haer.* 5.13.3, where, alongside 15.53–54, Phil 3.20–21 and 2 Cor 5.4 are also cited.

tensively carried out in the second century CE.[87] Above all, themes and motifs from 1 Cor 15, such as the images of sowing, transformation, and the "swallowing up" of the mortal by the immortal, as well as the motif of "inheriting the kingdom of God," are broadly attested in texts that deal with the resurrection.[88] Thus, the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of these texts is not restricted to the Pauline slogan σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα βασιλείαν θεοῦ κληρονομῆσαι οὐ δύναται (1 Cor 15.50) – which was especially coopted by the heretics for their teaching according to Irenaeus and which has already received great attention in scholarship[89] – but also goes far beyond this.

With the problem of corporality in the resurrection and the fate of the human σάρξ in 1 Cor 15.35–54, Paul appears already to anticipate the theme of the later controversy. His manner of speaking in 1 Cor 15.35–54 remains, in the first place, pictorial and unsharp, and this promoted its utilization for general ontological speculations about matter and the cosmos as such. And it could even – as far as one can believe Irenaeus here – be connected to christological conclusions about the nature of the body of Jesus and

[87] Ign. *Rom.* 7.3 could reflect knowledge of the Johannine bread of life discourse or John 6.27, 33, 51–56: "I take no pleasure in corruptible food or the pleasures of this life. I want the bread of God, which is the flesh of Christ who is of the seed of David; and for drink I want his blood, which is incorruptible love" (trans. M. W. Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002], 175). Cf. also Ign. *Eph.* 5.2: "Let no one be misled: if anyone is not within the sanctuary, he lacks the bread of God. For if the prayer of one or two has such power, how much more that of the bishop together with the whole church" (trans. Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 141). For further receptions of 1 Cor 15.(50), cf. Tertullian, *Res.* 48; 3 Corinthians; Theophilus, *Aut.* 13 (trans. R. M. Grant, ed., *Theophilus of Antioch, Ad Autolycum* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1970], 17): "If you will, consider the termination of seasons and days and nights and how they die and rise again. And what of the resurrection of seeds and fruits, occurring for the benefit of mankind? One might mention that a grain of wheat or of other seeds when cast into the earth first dies and is destroyed, then is raised and becomes an ear." For the discussion of the fleshly resurrection in general, cf. also Justin, *Dial.* 80; Pol. *Phil.* 7.1–2; Athenagoras, *Res.*; Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 34.11 (trans. G. W. Clarke, ed., *The Octavius of Marcus Minucius Felix* [New York: Newman Press, 1974], 116): "Furthermore, notice how the whole of nature brings us comfort by rehearsing our future resurrection. The sun sinks down and is reborn, the stars slip away and return, flowers fall and come to life again, shrubs decay and then burst into leaf, seeds must rot in order to sprout into new growth. As trees are in winter, so are our bodies in this world; they keep their verdure concealed beneath deceptive barrenness."

[88] Another witness to the reception and processing of 1 Cor 15.35ff. is, for example, the Letter to Rheginus, which independently reworks again the picture that Paul used of the swallowing up of the mortal by the immortal.

[89] Cf. Lehtipuu, *Debates over the Resurrection*; J. R. Strawbridge, *The Pauline Effect: The Use of the Pauline Epistles by Early Christian Writers*, Studies of the Bible and Its Reception 5 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015). The slogan occurs in *Haer.* 5.9.1 (trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 534): "Among the other [truths] proclaimed by the apostle, there is also this one, 'That flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.' This is [the passage] which is adduced by all the heretics in support of their folly, with an attempt to annoy us, and to point out that the handiwork of God is not saved." Cf. also *Haer.* 5.13.2–3 (trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 539–40): "Vain, therefore, and truly miserable, are those who do not choose to see what is so manifest and clear, but shun the light of truth, blinding themselves like the tragic Oedipus … so it is with respect to that [favourite] expression of the heretics: 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God;' while taking two expressions of Paul's, without having perceived the apostle's meaning, or examined critically the force of the terms, but keeping fast hold of the mere expressions by themselves, they die in consequence of their influence (περὶ αὐτάς), overturning as far as in them lies the entire dispensation of God. For thus they will allege that this passage refers to the flesh strictly so called, and not to fleshly works, as I have pointed out, so representing the apostle as contradicting himself."

his incorporeal resurrection, as is reported in *Haer.* 1.30.13.[90] The Pauline argumentation with natural processes could also be a point of contact for attempts to show the natural-scientific evidence for the resurrection. On the other hand, John 6.51–58 became relevant, for a connection the flesh of Jesus and the present reception of eternal life was established for the first time there. On this basis, the *flesh* of Jesus could be described as especially efficacious.

The later receptions of these two texts in Irenaeus and yet also in the Gospel of Philip, indicate that the passages could be read together and sometimes combined with each other or with other passages from the Scriptures as if they mutually supplemented one another. This succeeded through their integration into the described larger frameworks of substance-ontological, principles-based considerations.

Irenaeus and Gos. Phil. 23 also interpret 1 Cor 15 and John 6.51–58 against the background of the question of the fate of matter as such and of the whole created, substantial world. From this perspective, they reach back to the Pauline line of questioning in 1 Cor 15 and let this text, together with parts of John 6.51–58, answer the question of how perishable matter can receive imperishability. It is conspicuous here that Irenaeus and the author of the passage in the Gospel of Philip interpret John 6.51–58 in relation to the more fundamental Pauline question of the fate of the σαρξ and of the bodily resurrection.

They refer to John 6 to discuss how the human, bodily substance can someday gain a share in the heavenly sphere. According to them, "resurrection," i.e., the overcoming of physical death, can only exist if the perishable substance of the human being receives a new *quality* or the human being *himself* receives an imperishable substance and thus becomes capable of entering the heavenly sphere. In 1 Cor 15, Paul, with his solution of an end-time transformation of the bodies from psychic to pneumatic σώματα, had left open questions about their continuity and described the process of transformation only by means of analogies. The incarnation of Jesus and the Eucharist as events in which the heavenly sphere was already connected to the earthly sphere in the present could fill the gap that is felt there. For Irenaeus and the author of Gos. Phil. 23, a transformation of the bodies takes place in the eating of the eucharistic bread and drinking of the mixed cup, when the eucharistic elements, as body and blood of Jesus, exercise their concrete effect upon the corporeality of the believers. Both receptions take up the Johannine realism of the eating as a material-bodily event and take it further in the direction of a substantial effect upon believers.

The Irenaean reception of John is also developed in *Haer.* 5.2.3, where Irenaeus,

[90] *Haer.* 1.30.13 (trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 357): "They affirm that many of his disciples were not aware of the descent of Christ into him; but that, when Christ did descend on Jesus, he then began to work miracles, and heal, and announce the unknown Father, and openly to confess himself the son of the first man … Jesus was crucified. Christ, however, was not forgetful of his Jesus, but sent down a certain energy into him from above, which raised him up again in the body, which they call both animal and spiritual; for he sent the mundane parts back again into the world. When his disciples saw that he had risen, they did not recognize him – no, not even Jesus himself, by whom he rose again from the dead. And they assert that this very great error prevailed among his disciples, that they imagined he had risen in a mundane body, not knowing that 'flesh and blood do not attain to the kingdom of God.'"

like John 6.51–58, connects the gift of life to believers (*donatio Dei*) with the eating of the body of Jesus and also connects the future bodily resurrection to this. However, what stands in the foreground of *Haer.* 5.2.3 is not eating and drinking as symbolic processes for the believing reception of Jesus. Rather, for Irenaeus the concern in the Eucharist is with an event with an effect that can actually be demonstrated biologically. He interprets the way in which the Eucharist works in the framework of nourishment-physiological categories, i.e., in a natural-scientific paradigm, which makes it possible for him to emphasize the physical and bodily aspects of the process.

This is connected to his rejection of readings of the Johannine text that work, for example, with the idea of a different, pneumatic, life-giving flesh-substance of Jesus. Irenaeus wishes to defuse any potential for an interpretation of John 6.51–58 that goes in this direction. Moreover, he hedges in the conception of a pneumatic flesh substance in the resurrection by means of a decidedly creation-theological framework of the Eucharist, for which he makes recourse to Paul. Like 1 Cor 15.35–54 and some apologists who make plausible the resurrection of mortal bodies in general through creation-theological analogies from natural processes of sowing and plant growth and the transformations that take place therein, Irenaeus also traces back the enlivening and the transition from mortal to imperishable corporality not to a self-active resurrection body of Jesus but ultimately to God's creative activity.[91] Going beyond Paul, he therefore emphasizes that the resurrection body of Jesus, from which believers are nourished in the Eucharist, belongs on the side of the created. However, the same Spirit of God was active on the body of Jesus that is then also mediated to human beings via the Eucharist.

Irenaeus' interpretation of 1 Cor 15 is likewise influenced by the fact that he has knowledge of competing interpretations of this text in the principles-based-theoretical discussion about the place of matter and the redemption of the cosmos. Statements that more likely stand alone in Paul are therefore systematized by Irenaeus and integrated into his overall argument, which always also has his "opponents" in view. In the wake of this, it is conspicuous that Irenaeus positions himself in the debate with a decisive subordination of all powers, figures, and forces under his picture of God as creator. The creator God becomes the vanishing point of his remarks. To him he subordinates the role of Jesus and the function of his resurrection body in the saving event and yet also the "weakness of the flesh" of human beings. With respect to the role of Jesus, Irenaeus always ties back the Logos and the Spirit to God's creative activity. The Word of God and the Spirit are the two "hands" with which the creator God is active in the world overall and in various ways.[92] Irenaeus then also places the plant metaphor of 1 Cor 15 under precisely this banner. It is the Spirit of God that acts upon creation in the enlivening of the seeds and in the fruit bearing of the natural gifts that come from the earth. He extends the natural process described by Paul to the Eucharist. The bread

[91] The regaining of the image of God, which is already perfectly embodied by Christ, is connected to this.

[92] Cf. *Haer.* 4, preface (trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 463): "Now man is a mixed organization of soul and flesh, who was formed after the likeness of God, and moulded by His hands, that is, by the Son and Holy Spirit, to whom also He said, 'Let Us make man.'" Cf. also *Haer.* 4.20.1; 5.5.1.

from the earth always becomes the body of Christ in the Eucharist when it experiences the invocation of God (4.18.3) and receives the word of God (5.2.3).

Just as the Logos and the Spirit are modes of God's action, the perishability of matter must also be subordinated to the conception of God, according to Irenaeus. He criticizes his opponents for elevating the perishability of matter to a principle and making their picture of God secondary to it. They place the "weakness of the flesh" at the center of their argumentation. In *Haer.* 5.2.3, by contrast, Irenaeus, building on 2 Cor 12.9, understands the weakness of the flesh as the aspect on which the creative power of God can first fully reveal itself at all. God is not delivered over to the principle of death-bound matter. On the contrary, he has created temporal, transient, and visible things as well as intelligible, invisible, eternal things – both are dependent upon him and God himself is responsible for the becoming and passing away of the world.[93] In this respect, the overall conception of the Irenaean salvation history ultimately also transcends the boundaries of the purely material, principle-based question of whether the flesh substance must pass away or whether it can become imperishable. For Irenaeus understands perishability and finitude as framework conditions of human life that have been intentionally created by God and out of which human beings can develop unto the divine and attain imperishability. Here, aspects of the free will of the human being and his capacity for ethical life conduct also come into play for the salvation of the flesh.[94] In this framework, Irenaeus interprets the celebration of the Eucharist as a possibility – which is given to human beings and also is to be seized by them – for allowing God's creative activity to continue to work on them.[95] The Eucharist is God's intervention in the world under temporal conditions and is interpreted by Irenaeus as continued creation.

The creator God is active not only in the natural order and in the Eucharist; he can also intervene freely in history, as the examples that Irenaeus adduces from Scripture show – the three men in the fire oven who do not burn up, Jonah in the whale, the great

[93] Cf. *Haer.* 1.10.3 (trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 331): "and set forth why it is that one and the same God has made some things temporal and some eternal, some heavenly and others earthly."

[94] Cf. *Haer.* 5.13.3.

[95] Here, the ethical aspect of the salvation-historical conception of Irenaeus comes into play. Unlike the other created things and creatures, the human being was created by God from the beginning with the goal of ultimately participating in the imperishability of God (cf. *Haer.* 4.5.1). For this he was equipped with a free will (cf. *Haer.* 4.31.1–5). He can himself work toward his perfection or, alternatively, also entirely fall victim to perishability, namely, by either subjecting himself to the creative power of God and integrating himself into the action of his creator, i.e., letting God's creative activity continue to work on him, or by withdrawing himself from it. A central statement that discloses the backgrounds of the Irenaean argumentation is directed against the "heretics" in *Haer.* 5.3.2 (trans. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., "Irenaeus Against Heresies," 529): "Those men, therefore, set aside the power of God, and do not consider what the word declares, when they dwell upon the infirmity of the flesh, but do not take into consideration the power of Him who raises it up from the dead." On the whole, the perfecting of the human being and his resurrection are understood as the fulfillment of the actual creative intention of God. The human being can already collaborate with this in the present. To this end he possesses a free will. The perishability of his fleshly substance is not a consequence of sin but configured in this way by God with pedagogical intention. The aspect of development and growth in faith until the perfection of the human being is reflected in the Eucharist, which builds up the flesh, lets it grow, and nourishes it.

age of the patriarchs, and the translation of Enoch and Elijah (*Haer.* 5.5.1–2). According to Irenaeus, the examples demonstrate that temporal life as well can be extended and preserved according to God's wish, with God's will alone being decisive here. Life, according to Irenaeus, is always and in every form, whether temporal or eternal, a gift of this creator God. He maintains that it is solely the activity of the word of God on material things – on a grain of wheat, on bread, and equally on the flesh of believers – that can give life in different qualities. For him, eternal life is not *categorically* different from temporal life. Rather, in temporal life the continued creative action of God on human beings realizes itself unto eternal life, so that there is ultimately only a gradual transition between them. The discontinuity that Paul identifies between the psychic (in later reception "sarkic") and the pneumatic body is flattened out in this creation-theological overall perspective.

Against this background, the answer that the Gospel of Philip gives to the question of the bodily resurrection of believers can also be traced out more sharply. The text from Nag Hammadi excludes an action of the creator God on the flesh of human beings. The Gospel of Philip places over the power of the creator the principle of the perishability of earthly matter and its incapacity for entering the heavenly sphere, in support of which the author quotes 1 Cor 15.50 (Gos. Phil. 23a, NHC II,3, p. 56.32–34). John 6.51–58 then serves, in view of the weakness of human flesh, to uphold the special character and life-giving effect of the flesh of Jesus: "The one who does not eat my flesh and drink my blood does not have life within him."[96]

The apocryphal Gospel relates the words of the Johannine Jesus and of the apostle Paul to one another in a complementary way to ground a fundamental *difference* between Jesus' resurrection flesh and human flesh, which is also thematized in saying 72c (NHC II,3, p. 68.31–37). While 1 Cor 15.50 is meant to underpin the fact that it is precisely human flesh that cannot receive imperishability, the paraphrase from John 6.53–54 secures the different character of the flesh of Jesus. The special substance of the body of Jesus, which originated from a spiritual begetting in the pleroma, accounts for the effect of the Eucharist. In it, believers put on this special flesh of Jesus that is not created and does not come from the earth and thereby generate a reality in the pleroma that remains hidden on earth and is also irrelevant for earthly connections. Only with the postmortem ascent of believers into the pleroma will the flesh of Jesus become their new glorious garment instead of their own flesh, which is discarded at death. The solution to the problem of a fleshly resurrection that devalues human flesh and ascribes a different "heavenly" substance to the flesh of Jesus was known to Irenaeus, so that it is to be surmised that it was attractive not only to the circle of influence of the Gospel of Philip.[97]

The two elaborations of the eucharistic preparation for the resurrection differ in yet another aspect. Irenaeus understands the Logos and the Spirit of God as entities that

[96] Gos. Phil. 23b, NHC II,3, p. 57.4–5; trans. G. Smith, *Valentinian Christianity: Texts and Translations* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 261.

[97] As shown already in chapter 5, it is also handed down as a view of Valentinus in Ps.-Tertullian (*Adversus omnes haereses* 4.5: Valentinus is said to have believed not in the resurrection of this flesh but in the resurrection of another flesh).

in the Eucharist act upon the body of the recipient of the Eucharist and yet ultimately cannot be identified with the meal elements themselves but time and again come forth anew from God. By contrast, it is characteristic for the reception of 1 Cor 15 and John 6 in Gos. Phil. 23b (NHC II,3, p. 57.6) that in an independent reception of John 1.14a, Jesus' flesh is directly equated with the Logos himself and the Spirit is identified with his blood. Thus, the believer receives Logos and Spirit *directly* into himself, and they appear as available entities to which the believer assimilates himself.

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