

‘TO BEHOLD ITS OWN DELIGHT’: THE BEATIFIC VISION IN IRENAEUS OF LYONS

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ABSTRACT. The aim of this essay is to give a high-level overview of Irenaeus’s beatific vision, and to suggest that for him, the beatific vision has a temporal dimension (now and future) and a dimension of degree (lesser now, greater in the future). His beatific vision is witnessed as it intersects with at least four main ideas in his writing—the Trinity, anthropology, resurrection, and his eschatology. Irenaeus famously held that ‘the glory of God is living man, and the life of man is the vision of God’ (*AH* 4.20.7), which speaks to the reality of seeing God in the present, but he could also look forward in anticipation to beholding the face of God in the resurrected body in the new creation. What made the latter possible is the gradual beholding of God in the present that makes one prepared to see God’s glory in the future. Additionally, the *visio Dei* is Trinitarian. We behold God in Christ, since God the Father is invisible, and it is the Holy Spirit who prepares us incrementally to see God.

KEYWORDS: Irenaeus, beatific vision, seeing God

In *Adv. Haer.* 4.20.5, Irenaeus raised the problem of how one can see God, for when Moses asked to see the face of God (Exodus 33:18) he was told, ‘You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live’ (Exodus 33:20). This brief exchange on Mount Sinai seems to run against the grain of the Christian hope that one day believers will behold the face of God, a doctrine that has come to be called the beatific vision. After all, Jesus told his disciples, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God’ (Matthew 5:8). Likewise, Paul, though not in Irenaeus’s purvey in this section, looked forward with great expectancy to ‘what no eye has seen, nor ear heard’ (1 Corinthians 2:9), and even more to the point, he held out the hope that he would behold the glory of the Lord ‘with unveiled face’ (2 Corinthians 3:18). How can both these truths, the impossibility of seeing God on the one hand, and the hope of a face-to-face encounter on the other, be held together? Furthermore, is the hope of seeing God a future-only expectation?

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Is there any sense in which we see God now? [Scripture quotations taken from the ESV.]

Irenaeus addressed this very issue in *Adv. Haer.* 4.20.5, questioning how we can know God since he is invisible (*invisibilis*) and incomprehensible (*incapabilis*). Somehow, Irenaeus purported, God will do the impossible (Luke 18:27), which means that ‘we will see in that day that God will talk to man, and he will live’ (Deuteronomy 5:24). This concept of seeing God (the beatific vision), which overlaps significantly with his idea of participation and vision of God, was ‘Irenaeus’s favourite imagery’ (Behr 2000: 108). As Eric Osborn notes, ‘Participation defines Irenaeus’ account of the life which will grow to all eternity’ (Osborn 2001: 230). What begins in the present, namely, that God ‘gives life to those who see him’ (*AH* 4.20.5), continues into the future until believers ‘rise again to behold God in this creation which is renovated’ (*AH* 5.32.1). The aim of this essay is to give a high-level overview of Irenaeus’s beatific vision, and to suggest that, for him, the beatific vision has a temporal dimension (now and future) and a dimension of degree (lesser now, greater in the future). In other words, the beatific vision in this temporal life is the necessary preparation for beholding God in the future. [All critical texts come from *Sources Chrétiennes*; English translations are mine, if unnoted, or come from *ANF* or Grant 1997 as noted.]

In her important article on the beatific vision in Irenaeus, though she does not frame it that way, Mary Ann Donovan picks up on this theme in Irenaeus, focusing particularly on *Adv. Haer.* 4.20. She presents the threefold beatific vision that Irenaeus put forth in *Adv. Haer.* 4.20.5 that God has been seen ‘*prophetically* [*propheticè*] through the Spirit, and seen, too *adoptively* [*adoptivè*] through the Son, and He shall also be seen *paternally* [*paternaliter*] in the kingdom of heaven’ (*AH* 4.20.5, emphases added). God was seen prophetically in the past, he is seen in the present through the advent of the Son, and he will one day be seen paternally. Although Donovan recognizes more than most the temporal aspect of seeing God, her focus nonetheless is mostly on seeing God in the present. Thus, while this threefold pattern is important in Irenaeus’s thought, for the purpose of this essay, I will focus on the beatific vision in the present and the beatific vision in the future, and how this doctrine is connected to other key themes in his thought.

A significant challenge of studying the beatific vision in Irenaeus is that it rarely seems to be his direct concern, which means that we only glimpse it in relation to other doctrines he espoused. His beatific vision is particularly pieced together through his discussion of Trinitarianism, anthropology, the resurrection, and, of course, eschatology, and all of these against the backdrop of his primary concern, that of assailing Gnosticism. We might even think of these four doctrines like bricks and the concept of seeing God like the mortar which binds them together. These four points of intersection

form the structure of this paper under the broader concept of the time dimension. Eric Osborn has recognized that participation in God intersects with other doctrines in Irenaeus, what he refers to as ‘four untidy problems’ problems in Irenaeus (image and likeness, sin and fall, breath and spirit, flesh and spirit) which he believes ‘show that human life depends on participation in God’ in Irenaeus (Osborn 2001: 230). Osborn makes a worthy case for participation in light of these ‘untidy problems’, and this article is meant only to complement and not to disagree with his work. Thus, in addition to demonstrating the time dimension, it is also important to see how Irenaeus developed his concept of seeing God in relation to these doctrines, as these doctrines show why the beatific vision must include a dimension of degree.

‘The Life of Man is the Vision of God’: Beatific Vision in the Present

The goal of life, both now and to come, is to see God. In a sentence that Hans Boersma identifies as ‘perhaps the most well-known expression of Irenaeus’s entire corpus’ (Boersma 2006: 291), Irenaeus wrote, ‘For the glory of God is living man, and the life of man is the vision of God’ (*Gloria enim Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei* [*AH* 4.20.7]). This sentence not only identifies the goal of life, but it also converses both ways to God and man—God’s glory is his handiwork of humanity, and humanity’s life is bound up in seeing God. As if in anticipation of John Calvin, Irenaeus firmly believed that knowledge of God and self are fundamental starting places for theology. He frequently alternated between his reflection on God and man, with each serving to inform the other. He made inroads into divine and human composition with his ‘Two Hands’ expression of the Trinity and his trichotomy and image/likeness distinction of man. More than this, he often tried to show the union of God and man as man participates in God and God participates in man. In an early mention of *theosis*, he remarked that ‘the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ... became what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself’ (*AH* 5 pref., *ANF*), and this comes through seeing God. Vision of God is the essence of life, beginning now and extending forever, which depends on a right view of God and self.

Doctrine of God

Since Irenaeus held that the purpose of existence is to see God (Anatolios 2001: 467), then understanding God and what it is to see God is foundational to his argument. To begin with, participation in God is necessarily a Triune activity. Irenaeus argued, ‘the Spirit truly prepar[es] man in the Son of God, and the Son lead[s] him to the Father, while the Father, too, confers [upon him] incorruption for eternal life, which comes to everyone from the

fact of his seeing God' (*AH* 4.20.5, *ANF*). On this point Steenberg writes, 'Irenaeus' only absolute is that the human creation was born of the trinity of Father, Son and Spirit, brought to life in this trinity, and ultimately shall be perfected in the same' (Steenberg 2008: 138). Each member of the Trinity participates in man's redemption (*AH* 4.20.6) so that, in turn, man can participate in God. But this leads to the problem noted at the outset of this essay—how can man see God who is invisible and incomprehensible? Several things should be noted.

First, to reiterate, Irenaeus is abundantly clear that God is invisible (*AH* 4.6.5, 4.20.5). God does not, and cannot, surrender this essential attribute of himself even in the eternal state. This means that the Father will never be seen with the physical eye. Second, God desires to be seen physically, which flies in the face of the Gnostic concept that the physical is disgraceful. This leads to the third and most important point—God has chosen to make himself visible in the person of the Son. Dennis Minns makes these points well and raises others that are fleshed out in greater detail below:

There is no power of vision within the creature that can, of its own accord, develop to a stage at which it can see God. God will be seen only because he chooses to make himself visible, and this is something God will do gradually, keeping pace with the creature's process of development towards God. Since the power of seeing in question here is not a mystic, inward vision, but ordinary human eyesight, if God is to be visible at all it will be as an object available to human eyesight. In fact, God has chosen to become visible to us as a human being, Jesus Christ (Minns 2010: 51).

Jesus Christ is God's solution to the entire dilemma of the beatific vision. Jesus 'showed God to man and man to God, preserving the invisibility of the Father' (*AH* 4.20.7; Grant 1997: 153). The invisible God became visible in Christ so that mankind could behold God's glory in the present and in the eschaton, meaning that mankind will only see God the Father in the face of the Son. To cite Minns again, 'Irenaeus says that while the Son is what is visible of the Father, the Father is what is invisible of the Son' (Minns 2010: 52; *AH* 4.6.6; cf. 3.11.5).

Another point worth making is that it is the prerogative of the invisible God to make himself seen. Irenaeus noted the sovereign pleasure of God's own self-revelation: 'For man does not see God by his own powers; but when [God] pleases he is seen by men, by whom he will, and when he wills, and as he wills' (*AH* 4.20.5, *ANF*; cf. *AH* 4.6.4). Man does not lay hold of divinity—divinity lays hold of man. Or to say it another way, 'the divine nature is something that can only be received' (Vogel 2007: 450).

If one passage pulls together Irenaeus’s thoughts on the relationship of the divine nature being beheld in the present, it may be this section in 4.20.5:

But [His] splendor vivifies them; those, therefore, who see God, do receive life. And for this reason, He, [although] beyond comprehension, and boundless and invisible, rendered Himself visible, and comprehensible, and within the capacity of those who believe, that He might vivify those who receive and behold Him through faith. For as His greatness is past finding out, so also His goodness is beyond expression; by which having been seen, He bestows life upon those who see Him. It is not possible to live apart from life, and the means of life is found in fellowship with God; but fellowship with God is to know God, and to enjoy His goodness (*AH* 4.20.5, *ANF*).

God is pictured here as life itself and those with faith are made alive to enjoy his fellowship and goodness. This process begins in the present as believers are made able to see God because of the person of the Son, as they have been prepared by the Spirit. Beholding God involves incremental participation that begins with faith and steadily grows into deeper fellowship with God, which, for Irenaeus, brushed up against his anthropology.

Anthropology

What does Irenaeus’s dictum, ‘For the glory of God is living man, and the life of man is the vision of God’ (*AH* 4.20.7), mean for his doctrine of humanity? How can a person take in a vision of God in this temporal life? Two main ideas surface in his thought that relate his doctrine of man to the beatific vision—first, God gradually prepares individuals, and humanity as a whole, to see him, and second, the beatific vision effects human constitution.

Beholding the glory of God is too great for people to take in all at once. God slowly prepares mankind for glory, patiently massaging eternity into the lives of the faithful through a vision of God. Irenaeus maintained that we must be made ‘capable of beholding [God]’ (*sed quomodo illum nos videre poteramus* [*AH* 4.38.1]), because ‘we could never have endured the greatness of [his] glory’ (*nos magnitudinem gloriae ipsius protare non poteramus* [*AH* 4.38.1]). Glimpsing God fully now would overwhelm the soul, and so he treats mankind as infants that must grow up into maturity, which will allow them to take in more of God at each stage of development. This is true not only for individuals, but also for humanity as a whole.

For this reason, Irenaeus believed that Adam and Eve were prepubescent in the Garden of Eden. He reasoned, ‘But the man was a young child, not yet having a perfect deliberation (βουλή), and because of this he was easily deceived by the seducer’ (*AP* 12, Behr 1997: 47; cf. *AH* 3.22.4, 3.23.5, 4.38.1–2, and *AP* 14). Adam and Eve fell into sin in part because of their

immaturity, which made them more susceptible to the Devil. According to Steenberg, Genesis 1–3 is more about imperfection growing and maturing to the fullness of life, for Irenaeus, than it is about the fall leading to redemption (Steenberg 2008: 143). Since the fall, God has been patiently revealing himself for our maturity—at first in the Garden, next in the prophets, then in the person of Christ, and finally in Christ in the glorified state.

He also taught that Christ's life recapitulated humanity's growth in maturity. In one of the stranger arguments in Irenaeus, he held that Christ had to live a full life, experiencing each stage of humanity so that he might 'sanctify every age' (*AH* 2.20.4), whether infants, children, youth, or old men, and it was only after living as an old man that he came to death itself. Though it may seem bizarre to those who read Irenaeus today, it makes perfect sense in his scheme of recapitulation. Jesus, the model of participation with God and the very face of God himself, makes it so that individuals at every age can experience God. So not only do individuals need the slow inculcation of glory, but humanity itself needs this exposure to God over long periods of time.

In articulating the need for people to take God in slowly, Irenaeus turned to sacramental language to explain one way in which God brings about participation (see Andia 1986: 237–255).

[Christ] 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 (*AH* 4.38.1, *ANF*).

In his book *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry*, Boersma defines sacramentalism as a 'carefully woven unity of nature and the supernatural, according to which created objects are sacraments that participate in the mystery of the heavenly reality of Jesus Christ' (Boersma 2011: 8), which captures well the connection Irenaeus made. Just as infants suckle on milk, so too believers eat and drink of Christ, the bread and milk of life, and in so doing, begin to take in immortality by participating in him. The entire human race is moving from a place of immaturity to maturity, from milk to the solid 'bread of immortality—the Spirit of the Father' (*AH* 4.38.1; see Steenberg 2008: 143). Growing to maturity also has an element of taking on immortality. His thoughts spiraled upward on this as he reasoned that beholding God produces immortality and immortality brings us closer to God (*AH* 4.38.3).

Irenaeus's beatific vision is a gradual process that begins in the infancy of faith, is nurtured through the sacraments, and continues with immortality,

never reaching a point of completion. Whereas the Gnostics are hasty in their scheme of salvation (Vogel 2007: 448), Christians must allow God's course of slow inundation into the divine, like dipping one's toes in warm water to acclimate before fully immersing. Vogel highlights this idea of patience as a key theme in Irenaeus: 'The patient expectation characteristic of waiting is the training that prepares human beings to receive divine life' (Vogel 2007: 447). Thus, the beatific vision is both something that is experienced now but continues to grow in degree from infancy to maturity.

The beatific vision also shaped Irenaeus's view of human constitution, both as it relates to his trichotomy position and to his idea of the image and likeness, two concepts which he helped pioneer in Christian thought. Because of the fall, which Irenaeus called humanity's apostasy, mankind has lost the likeness, which refers to immortality and communion with God, but has retained the image of God, which he believed was more of our physical characteristics, including the flesh. While this captures his thought in broad strokes, Steenberg acknowledges that Irenaeus can be inconsistent at times in clearly delineating 'image' from 'likeness', but believes that the overall thrust of Irenaeus's distinction is that 'image' refers to the 'ontological formation of the human person' and 'likeness' refers to 'the actualisation of human nature in an individual's lived life' (Steenberg 2008: 138).

The theme of God's Trinitarian glory and mankind's constitution merge in Irenaeus thought. Steenberg places his finger on this fundamental connection, saying, 'Such references to the image and likeness are grounded in specific soteriological convictions, and behind these lies the fundamental notion of participation in the triune reality of Father, Son and Spirit' (Steenberg 2008: 136). The likeness of God, lost in fallen humanity, begins to be restored as believers participate in God's Triune being. This is made clearer in Irenaeus's interpretation of Genesis 1:26 alongside Romans 8:29. On this point Stephen Presley observes, 'he interprets the notion of being conformed to the likeness as the activity of the Spirit transforming the faithful into the glorified and perfected image of the resurrected Christ' (Presley 2015: 186). According to Steenberg, 'The *full* likeness, however, shall come only in the participation in trinitarian glory which is the promise of the eschaton. And so a proper reading of 'image and likeness' summarises the whole thrust of the divine economy of salvation' (Steenberg 2008: 138). Salvation itself is the redemption of 'likeness' and this comes through participation.

Irenaeus also famously argued that the human constitution is a trichotomy—flesh, soul, and spirit, which is how he understood Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 (AH 5.6.1). Irenaeus was a trichotomist only insofar as believers are concerned, because only believers have the Spirit, while unbelievers have an animal nature and are left carnal since they are bereft of the Spirit (AH

5.6.1; cf. *AH* 5.8.3–4). The soul gives all men the breath of life, but it is the Spirit that truly vivifies ([*Spiritus vivificans*] *AH* 5.12.1–2; see Briggman 2012: 166–173; *pace* Behr 2000: 105–108).

Accounting for what was already said about Jesus, namely that to see God is to see Christ, we see in Irenaeus's theology of the Holy Spirit the role of God's other so-called 'hand' in the beatific vision. The Spirit's role is to indwell and vivify believers in the present in order to prepare them for future glory. He is the 'earnest' (*pignus*; ἀπράβων), or the down payment, that Paul spoke of in Ephesians 1:13 (*AH* 5.8.1), securing the promise that one day those in Christ will receive the fullness of God. The purpose of the Spirit, then, is to 'prepar[e] us for incorruption, being little by little accustomed to receive and bear God' (*AH* 5.8.1). For Irenaeus, then, all three parts of our being are essential—the flesh, which constitutes our image of God, the soul, which animates life, and the Spirit, who vivifies us in our participation with God for the preparation of glory.

The tripartite individual is gradually made to see God in the person of Christ by the Holy Spirit. In the following quotation, Irenaeus brings together the themes discussed already and ties them in nicely with the future fulfillment of the beatific vision. Here he shows how the gap is bridged between the temporal and the eternal, and this pericope also contains the dimension of degree as he employs the lesser to greater argument that if the Spirit prepares us now for the glory of God, how much greater will it be when we see God face-to-face:

If, therefore, at the present time, having the earnest, we do cry, 'Abba, Father', what shall it be when, on rising again members shall burst out into a continuous hymn of triumph, glorifying Him who raised them from the dead, and gave the gift of eternal life? For if the earnest, gathering man into itself, does even now cause him to cry, 'Abba, Father', what shall be given to men by God? It will render us like unto Him, and accomplish the will of the Father; for it shall make man after the image and likeness of God (*AH* 5.8.1, *ANF*).

'To Behold God in this Creation': The Beatific Vision to Come

The tension in Irenaeus between the present and future iterations of the beatific vision might be explained using the more modern theological category of already/not yet. Believers already see God in this temporal life through the Spirit, but believers do not yet see God as they will when they physically encounter him face-to-face. Christopher Smith, seeing this interplay between the present and the future, rightly argues, 'Preparation for glory is an organic process, not the product of following a regiment for a fixed length of time; it requires, moreover, continuity between the present creation and the eternal state' (Smith 1994: 320).

Because of Irenaeus's 'beautiful formulation' (Donovan: 1988: 283) of beholding God in the present, this dimension receives the most attention from scholars. However, Irenaeus always kept an eye on the horizon of time and was filled with hope that one day his faith would be sight and he would behold God in the flesh. This hope begins with the resurrection and carries on into the final state.

Resurrection

In Book 5 Irenaeus sets out to correct Gnostic views of resurrection. If one thing united the disparate Gnostic movement it was that Gnostics disdained any notion of resurrection because resurrection meant that the flesh is something worth rehabilitating. Gnostics wanted freedom from the flesh and an incorporeal heaven, but Irenaeus was adamant that the resurrection is vital to God's plan, as creation itself is recapitulated in a final act of redemption. Gnostics were fond of using 1 Corinthians 15:50 to clinch their argument about the weakness of the flesh—'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' (AH 5.9.1; see Pagels 1974).

They used this verse, Irenaeus said, 'in support of their folly, with an attempt to annoy us, and to point out that the handiwork of God is not saved' (AH 5.9.1, ANF). The 'handiwork' of God, that is, the psychosomatic union of body, soul, and Spirit, should not be so flippantly disregarded since God will one day raise up and restore the entire person.

As we have seen, much of Irenaeus's beatific vision resides in his anthropology, which stands in sharp contrast with the anthropology of the Gnostics. On the face of it, Irenaeus is happy to concede that 'flesh in itself, and blood, cannot possess the kingdom of God' (AH 5.9.3), but when the flesh is vivified by the 'Spirit of God', the person can inherit God's kingdom. To be technical, he says, the 'flesh does not inherit, but is inherited' (*non possidet sed possidetur caro*; AH 5.9.4).

Traditionally, living persons take the inheritance of the deceased, but in this scenario, believers are the inheritance. The flesh will rot in the earth, but it is the Spirit of God in man that lives (AH 5.7.1), and these things 'are inherited by the Spirit when they are translated into the kingdom of heaven' (AH 5.9.4). Those who do not receive and live by the Spirit, are the flesh and blood of whom Paul says, 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven' (AH 5.10.1; 5.8–9). These are the ones who do not 'receive through faith the engrafting of the Spirit' but who 'remain in [their] old condition, and being [mere] flesh and blood, cannot inherit the kingdom of God' (AH 5.10.2).

Along these lines, Irenaeus uncovered a deep irony in Gnostic thought—the Gnostics thought that the flesh is dead and that they just need to live spiritually, not realizing that they are dead because they do not have the

Spirit. If Gnostics want to be alive in the present, then they need the Spirit of God, which they do not have.

At the time of the resurrection the body sown into the ground in corruption will rise incorruptible (*AH* 5.7.1; citing 1 Corinthians 15:42), not by its own power (citing Romans 8:11), but through the Spirit's instrumentality (*'per Spiritum'*; *AH* 5.7.2). Irenaeus claimed that 'the final result of the work of the Spirit is the salvation of the flesh' and that the Spirit renews us and 'sets forth the recapitulation of the same man, who was at the beginning made after the likeness of God' (*AH* 5.12.4).

The Spirit, who began as the earnest, completes his work by raising the dead, so that the believer can worship God in the flesh. The Spirit works to recraft man into the likeness of God, raising him up in the flesh to 'say hymns' to God, who 'perfected us for this very thing' (*AH* 5.13.3).

In *AH* 5.3–5.5, Irenaeus orients his entire discussion of the resurrection along the lines of 2 Corinthians 12:9 and Genesis 2:7 (Presley 2015: 181), arguing that God is able to resurrect the flesh easier than when he created man *ex nihilo*, for now he has matter with which to work. The contrast for Irenaeus is not so much that the resurrected life is somehow different than this temporal life by nature, but rather that resurrected life is better in terms of degree. Presley notes this distinction well:

Consequently, [*AH* 5.3–5.5] entertains the contrast between the temporal life in the body and the eternal life given by the Spirit. Here Irenaeus distinguishes between two 'modalities of life' that are separated by degree not nature. This distinction between the present life and the resurrected life is not a distinction in nature, but a distinction in degree, from a 'weaker' or 'temporal' life to a 'stronger' or 'eternal' life [Presley 2015: 183; cf. Behr 2000: 95–96].

Resurrected life is stronger not only because it is eternal, but more importantly, because the believer has an unobstructed vision of God. Temporal life is by nature true life, and as we have seen, God can be seen in the present, but not with the same magnitude that one will see God in resurrected life to come.

These arguments on the resurrection allowed him to build up to the crescendo of the beatific vision. After recognizing with Paul the incompleteness of our knowledge now (1 Corinthians 13:9, 12) and sympathizing with Peter that for now we believe but do not see (1 Peter 1:8), Irenaeus wrote, 'For our face shall see the face of the Lord, and shall rejoice with joy unspeakable—that is to say, when it shall behold its own Delight' (*AH* 5.7.2; *ANF*). This sentence is the driving hope for Irenaeus that he will see the Lord in the flesh, whom he calls his 'Delight' (*gaudium*).

It is this face-to-face encounter with Christ, prepared for us by the Spirit and realized in the resurrection (*AH* 5.8.1), that fueled his piety and his polemic.

Eschatology

Adversus Haereses closes with Irenaeus's chiliastic eschatology. Until recently, many scholars thought this ending was a 'dull thud' (Smith 1994: 313), instead of seeing it as a critical piece of his argument. Smith critiques those who see Irenaeus's foray into eschatology as a mistake or an 'inevitable consequence of his insisting too strongly on the idea of recapitulation' (Smith 1994: 314) with a better way to read Irenaeus which sees his eschatological discussion as a perfect ending of Irenaeus's doctrine of recapitulation. Plenty of solid work has been done on Irenaeus's chiliasm. Our task in this section is to see how Irenaeus explained the beatific vision in the millennial period and the eternal state, as these are important periods of existence during which a person can see and experience God.

The purpose of the millennial reign is not so much rewards for the faithful, but rather a preparation for the glory that will be revealed in the final state, as we have seen time and again in this thought. In a revealing line, Irenaeus remarked that in the commencement of the earthly kingdom 'those who shall be worthy are accustomed gradually to partake of the divine nature (*capere Deum*)... and to reign in it, when they rise again to behold God in this creation which is renovated' (*AH* 5.32.1; cf. Smith 1994: 318). Even as believers reign during the thousand years alongside Christ, the primary goal remains the preparation for glory that is still yet to come.

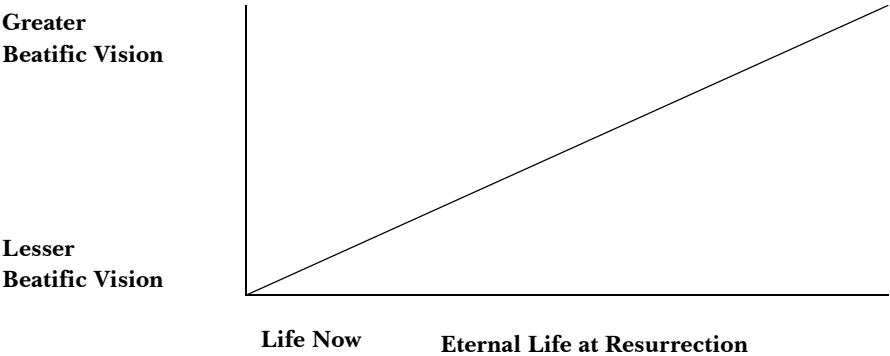
To say that the millennial reign is not primarily about rewards is not, however, to suggest that rewards play no role at all. For Irenaeus, though, rewards have more to do with seeing God than they do any sort of tangible thing. He wrote, 'And to as many as continue in their love towards God, does He grant communion with Him. But communion with God is life and light, and the enjoyment of all the benefits which He has in store' (*AH* 5.27.2, *ANF*). Communion with God is life itself and it is from this life that believers are able to enjoy the benefits that God has planned.

While Irenaeus had plenty to say about the millennial reign, this period remains only the prelude to what will come in the final state when God establishes the new heavens and new earth and the faithful 'behold God in this creation' (*AH* 5.32.1). Irenaeus finished his work with the new creation because it is the capstone of recapitulation as creation itself is recreated. As Smith notes, 'Creation will be repristinated; this is the axiom of recapitulation. But this, according to Scripture, must await the time when the children of God enter into their 'glorious liberty', their anticipation of God-likeness' (Smith 1994: 327). Throughout time God has carefully recapitulat-

ed every detail of salvation history from Adam to Christ, Eve to Mary, and the tree of knowledge to the tree of the cross. The temporal state of Adam in the Garden was good, and Adam knew of God’s presence, but he was immature and unable to appreciate fully the vision of God. In the new creation, humanity will gaze upon God unfettered by corruption and sin, and in so doing transform into God’s likeness. Irenaeus’s use of recapitulation in his eschatology is ‘an insistence on the essential harmony of the true soteriological task, that of bringing humanity from its Edenic state of infancy to the true maturity of God-likeness’ (Smith 1994: 329). The final state ties up all the loose ends of thought, culminating in our *visio Dei*.

Conclusion

In his book *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Anthony Briggman provides a chart for understanding the believer’s life with the Holy Spirit, beginning with minimal grace/power in this temporal life, but trending upward toward complete power/grace with eternal life experienced now and then eternal life at the resurrection (Briggman 2012: 172). We could use a very similar chart to summarize what I argue in this paper. Believers experience the beatific vision in the present but will continue to experience the beatific vision to greater degrees in the intermediate state and then even more so at the resurrection and new creation. It might look something like this:



For Irenaeus, the chart would continue *ad infinitum*, as beholding God has no end in his view. Heaven is a continual experience of seeing the face of God in Christ, which always comes with deeper fellowship with God. Irenaeus may well have agreed with C. S. Lewis that the essence of heaven is ‘further in and higher up’ into the person and mysteries of God (Lewis 2000: 176), as the believer ‘behold[s] its own Delight’ (AH 5.7.2).

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