

Article

The Agencies of God's Word and Spirit: Modern Science as a "Sacred Reminder"

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Abstract: In this essay, I argue that modern science can function as a source of "sacred reminders" for aspects of Christian theology, like the doctrine of the Trinity, that are not normally engaged with in the empirical world. This approach is an alternative to the usual ways of relating scientific and theological endeavors in terms of conflict, separation, or consonance. I demonstrate this by beginning with the thoughts of two representative physicists (John Archibald Wheeler and Steven Hawking), particularly focusing on a fundamental distinction they make about the underlying ideal of the physical sciences. Noting a striking similarity of this distinction with some of the biblical imagery of God's Word and Spirit, I review biblical texts along these lines to show partial continuity with the groundbreaking ideas of our physicists, and to show how they can be generalized to include (a) levels of organization beyond those of physics; (b) intensive, localized agencies of Word and Spirit as well as the more extensive agencies suggested their ideas; and (c) the commissioning agency of God the Father. A review of the theology of Irenaeus shows that these distinctions in biblical imagery were developed in the early Church and played an important role in early Trinitarian theology.

Keywords: goals of scientific endeavor; John Archibald Wheeler; Stephen Hawking; laws of nature; Donald Walhout; God's Word and Spirit; economic Trinity; levels of organization; image and likeness of God; divine revelation; theophanies; Incarnation; sanctification; Irenaeus of Lyons



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1. Introduction

Biblical texts are rich with imagery surrounding the divine Word and Spirit,¹ their relations to God, and their agencies in the created order.² They exhibit a variety of images that defy neat systematization. Any attempt to do justice to this variety must approach the subject from a particular viewpoint or question, theological or otherwise. My purpose in this essay will be to review those verbal images in a way that resonates with the understanding of the natural order, as proposed by two well-known modern physicists. In theological terms, these hints of an immaterial presence and agency in the physical world may be seen as a fresh way of framing the classical idea of the *vestigia Trinitatis*—the worldly vestiges or imprints of the triune God.³ In this way, the thoughts of physicists about their own endeavors can serve as a "sacred reminder" to Christians for aspects of biblical theology that are not normally engaged with the empirical world. So, my main objective here will be to include the thinking of physicists in our conversations about theology. The result will contribute to our understanding of the distinctive ways in which members of the divine Triad function in the created order.

Over fifty years ago, Donald Walhout published a seminal article on "Other Religions as Sacred Reminders", in which he showed that the beliefs and practices of other religions can remind us of features that are currently forgotten or neglected in accounts of our own religious tradition.⁴ This relationship is, therefore, a "self-reflective" one between religions rather than a theological assessment of other religions from the perspective of one's own (p. 201). For example, learning about the idea of *ahimsa*, the mandate to avoid causing harm to other beings in the indigenous religions of India, can remind us, particularly in

Euro-American societies, of the reverence for life found in the biblical wisdom literature and the teachings of Jesus (which Walhout refers to as a “subdominant theme” in present-day Christianity, pp. 204–5). For other cases, Walhout states, “when in another religion, we come across a more specific utterance, a more definite stance, on a subject than we are accustomed to find in our own thought, we are reminded of unfinished business and the need for more reflection” (which Walhout refers to as a “unclarified butter”, pp. 205–6).

I suggest that the same relationship may hold true for Christian theology and the beliefs and practices of other disciplines like modern physics that are usually regarded as being completely secular.⁵ Thinking about scientific endeavors can not only remind us of theological issues that need clarification, but it can also provide us with a fresh way of addressing them. In this case, the attribute of “sacredness” is based on the beliefs underpinning modern scientific endeavors⁶ that were inspired by the historic Judeo-Christian creationist tradition, rather than overtly religious content.⁷

The work of modern physicists is certainly not the only vantage point from which to think about theology.⁸ Most people find writings about physics challenging in the abstract austerity of its concepts and their distance from everyday life as we experience it. However, physics is one of the truly creative endeavors of our time, and its main ideas lie just beneath the surface of the technologies that we rely on day by day. Moreover, physics gives us an in-depth view of the natural world that our God has created. Even though no one-to-one correlation is feasible between the ideas of modern physicists and those of the Bible, approaching theology from this angle enables us to use the categories of scientific endeavor in our understanding of biblical theology, and vice versa.⁹

2. Guiding Insights from Two Modern Physicists

In thinking about the vestiges—or vestigial agencies¹⁰—of the triune God (the holy Trinity)¹¹ in our world, I have been inspired by ideas that come from two of the theoretical physicists of the previous generation: John Archibald Wheeler (1911–2008) and Stephen William Hawking (1942–2018). Both made intriguing statements about the ultimate goal of their work that point to a shared understanding in the community of physicists. These ideas will serve as a recurring reference point in our discussion of biblical and early Christian theology.

One of the main desiderata that motivate physicists is the formulation of a “final theory” that would unify all fundamental physical phenomena in a small set of mathematical laws (equations) and principles, or even in one single law. Whether that goal is attainable in the long run or not, it is the ideal that motivates physicists to find ways of unifying all the forces of nature and those forces with all the fundamental particles in a way that accounts for phenomena like neutrino oscillations, black holes, dark matter, and dark energy. In the words of physicist–cosmologist Stephen Hawking, finding that final theory would mean that “we would know the mind of God”, at least as far as the physical level of creation is concerned.¹²

Although Hawking was an avowed “unbeliever” in conventional Christian terms, he was articulating a biblical insight better than many theologians do. In biblical terms, the “mind of God” that governs the organization and the evolution of the physical cosmos is usually called the Word (or Wisdom) of God,¹³ which is designated the second member¹⁴ of the divine Triad, the “Son of God”, in Christian theology.¹⁵ The creative Mind or Word of God is first manifested in the laws and principles that determine the form of the natural world and inform its evolution.¹⁶ So, if we want to find vestiges of the triune God in the world governed by physics, we can do no better than to begin with the very laws of nature that Christians sometimes fear will exclude God (i.e., a “God-of-the-gaps”) from the world around us. These laws manifest at the sensible, empirical level, but they are not in themselves empirical, spacetime entities like the phenomena they govern—they are not encoded in a software program hidden in the interior of fundamental particles or in the vastness of cosmic fields of force.

Consider the Pauli “exclusion principle”, for example. It governs all the fermions (subatomic particles having spins in odd-numbered multiples of one half), and it explains why ordinary matter does not instantaneously collapse. Yet the exclusion principle does not exert a force on the particles that it governs, and it is not inscribed anywhere in space or time. Mathematical laws like these constitute the agency that governs the form of the empirical realm and informs its emergence and evolution.¹⁷

This association of physical laws with the divine Mind, Intelligence, or Word is not a new idea. It has often been noted by biblical writers, philosophers, and theologians before.¹⁸ By itself, moreover, it is clearly incomplete from the standpoint of Christian theology. The vestigial agency here relates only to God as the Creative Mind or Creator Word. From the trinitarian perspective of traditional Christianity, it misses the complementary work of the Holy Spirit. There is more to God than a cosmic Intellect—more to be said about creation than God pronouncing a master equation.

I find another example of this idea in the words of a leading theoretical physicist of the postwar period, John Archibald Wheeler. When he was asked about finding a final theory to explain the existence and evolution of the material world, Wheeler began by saying: “There must be at the bottom of it all an utterly simple, if not an equation, an idea”.¹⁹

This much agrees with what, with Hawking’s help, we have associated theologically with the vestigial agency of the divine Word. What caught my attention was what Wheeler went on to say: “There is nothing deader than an equation. . . . Yet the universe flies. It has a life in it that no equation has”.²⁰ Mathematical laws and equations are one part of what brings our world into being; whatever it is that actualizes the laws, gives them a life of their own, is another.²¹

By using the word “life”, Wheeler suggested a meaningful connection to “giver of life”, which is one of the main attributes of the Holy Spirit in trinitarian theology (Greek *zōopoión* in the third article of the Niceno–Constantinopolitan Creed). We normally associate that quality with organic life, or even with our own individual lives. But it can also apply, as Wheeler suggested for the foundational, physical level, to whatever it is that makes the mathematical formalism, or foundational “idea” of the universe, get up and “fly”.

Stephen Hawking was also aware that something like this was assumed in scientific cosmology, and he raised questions that provide us with two further verbal images that suggest the vestigial agency of the Spirit. Like Wheeler, he argued that even if the mathematical equations may be complete, a rational explanation in natural philosophy requires a way of making the equations operative so that they actually do something:

“Even if there is only one possible unified theory, it is just a set of rules and equations. What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe? . . . Why does the universe go to all the bother of existing?”²²

Our two physicists have highlighted the need for an actualizing agency, a “life”, “breath”, or “fire”, without which the mathematical laws would be sterile.²³ We might add that such actualizing “fire” would be aimless without some kind of laws to channel it. The former is required to make things happen, but the latter is needed to provide creative direction to the “fire”.²⁴

The task of the physicist is to formulate and test equations, not to pursue the more metaphysical questions of actuality and existence. But the short, pithy statements of Wheeler and Hawking provide some clues of theological value. The terms they offer were intended to be metaphorical (as is much of theological language). They do not refer to physical forces or physical energy, but to the immaterial laws governing the physics of force and energy and an immaterial agency that actualizes them.²⁵ My point is that they can serve as “sacred reminders” of biblical imagery regarding the roles of God’s Word and Spirit and make that imagery more relevant to the empirical world in which we live.

For those already familiar with biblical imagery, the words “life”, “breath”, and “fire” suggest the agency of the Spirit of God,²⁶ an agency that complements the formative, governing agency of the divine Word.²⁷ At the very beginning of the biblical narrative, when God began to create heaven and earth,²⁸ the wind or spirit of God (Hebrew, *ruach*

elohim) was already sweeping over the primordial items of creation (Gen. 1:2c), and it was accompanied by ten creational decrees,²⁹ with which God formed and informed the primordial elements³⁰ (unformed earth, darkness, waters) to produce the ordered, fruitful cosmos.³¹ In a Christian reading of Genesis One, the Spirit and the Word of God worked together to accomplish the will of God.³² For readers of the New Testament, something very similar occurred at the baptism of Jesus, when the hovering/anointing of the Spirit was accompanied by the declaration of God, “This is my Son”, thus initiating a renewal of creation (Mark 1:10–12; cf. Luke 4:14, 18–19; Acts 10:38). Jesus’ commissioning words to his disciples were similarly accompanied by his Spirit-granting breath (John 20:21–22; cf. Luke 24:46–49). In passages such as these, we have a recurring combination of an enabling, actualizing spirit³³ and defining word.³⁴

As we shall see in the following sections of this essay, this dialectic of the governing word and actualizing breath/spirit can be traced through the various stages of the scriptural narrative: creation, (universal) providence, revelation, and personal transformation (renewal and sanctification), thereby organizing the imagery of biblical texts in accordance with the ideas suggested by our two physicists. This approach will coordinate the many ways in which God’s Word and Spirit play active roles in our world at a range of levels, both physical and spiritual.

3. Generalizing the Agencies of God’s Word and Spirit

Based on this analysis of the cosmos at the physical level, we may first discern the vestigial agencies of the divine Word and Spirit using the dialectic of lawfulness and actuality suggested by our physicists. In other words, there is in the natural world a synergy and coordination between the agencies of the second and third members of the divine Triad, which is termed the “economic Trinity”.³⁵ These vestigial agencies of Word and Spirit are extensive (distributive) and everlasting—they permeate every aspect of our world, including humanity, and persist, wherever applicable, throughout time.³⁶

This natural-science-based interpretation of *vestigia Trinitatis* can be generalized, however, to include biblical descriptions of the Word and Spirit in relation to select human beings. In contrast to the extensive, cosmic agencies of Word and Spirit, these agencies are intensive, locative, personalized, and episodic.³⁷ They manifest themselves as divine encounters with receptive humans at specific times and places. Such divine–human encounters occur both in revelations (“special revelation”) and in transformations (renewal and sanctification); two areas of theology that are even more frequently the focus of attention in Scripture than the extensive laws of nature are.³⁸

In extending our investigation to the intensive agencies of Word and Spirit, I am expanding the analysis along a second dimension. In addition to the distinction between Word and Spirit (an intra-trinitarian dyad), we have the differentiation between their agencies in creation and universal providence, on the one hand, and their roles in revelation and the transformation of humanity (an extensive–intensive dyad), on the other.

The first of these intensive roles is that of divine revelation. Here, the Word manifests itself in finite, generally anthropic (humanlike), forms³⁹ and in discrete events like spoken words and/or a theophany.⁴⁰ According to the Gospel of John, for example, the divine Word had manifested itself to the patriarchs and prophets in both spoken words and visualizable, anthropic forms long before assuming the concrete form of human flesh (John 5:37–40; 12:41; cf. Isa. 6:1–13 on Isaiah’s vision of the Lord⁴¹). The agency of the Spirit is described as elevating the minds and imaginations⁴² of receptive human beings to behold these forms (John 14:26; 15:26).⁴³ In some biblical texts, the Spirit is also credited with actualizing the theophanic forms of the Word.⁴⁴ Throughout the New Testament, the Spirit was operative in enabling the visions and auditions of apostles and prophets.⁴⁵ Here, again, there is a synergy between the vestigial agencies of the second and third members of the divine Triad—only here they are more direct and personal than in the extensive manifestations discussed earlier.⁴⁶ The coordination of an anthropic form with prophetic visualization,

like that of cosmic formation with actualization, reflects the synergy of the Word and Spirit within the created order.

A second intensive role of the Word and Spirit to consider is that of human transformation. According to the Gospel of John, those who believe the words of the incarnate Son/Word of God have eternal life (John 5:24; 6:63b, 68b; 15:3; 17:6–8). According to the Apostle Paul, the Son of God is the divine template in accordance with which believers are transformed in accordance with the original divine image (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10).⁴⁷ But there is an important twist here. This process of image formation (or renewal) in humanity was only made possible by the Cross and Resurrection. In order for humanity to be restored in the image of God, the incarnate form of God had first to be broken and disfigured (John 19:30–37; Phil. 2:6–8; 1 Cor. 11:24 κ^c C³ D^{b,c}) and then restored by God's Spirit (Rom. 1:4; 8:11).

This transformation into the image of the risen Christ is actualized by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4, 7–11; 2 Tim. 1:6–7; cf. Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Tim. 4:14). Like the synergy of anthropic form and prophetic inspiration, this coordination of a formative image and actualizing gift reflects the synergy of the Word and Spirit.

These are the vestigial agencies of the second and third members of the divine Triad, both extensive and intensive. An analogy to the different parts of a musical composition may be helpful here. The extensive agencies of Word and Spirit (creation/providence) are continuous through time like the *cantus firmus* ("fixed song") in medieval polyphony or like the base guitar in rock music. The intensive agencies (revelation and transformation) improvise on that foundation in contrapuntal voices and more melodic figures.

4. The Agency of God the Father in the New Testament

Thus far, our procedure of beginning with the outlook of modern physics has provided us only with vestigial agencies for the Word and Spirit, not of the triune God. The reason is that our representative physicists provided us with two guidelines in thinking about the material cosmos explored by natural scientists, and, by extension, about the spiritual realm accessed by the prophets. This leads us to wonder whether the very first member of the divine Triad, God the Father, has a distinctive agency in the created order, and, if so, in what way. Here, biblical theology may further supplement the insights suggested by our two physicists.

In fact, the agency of God the Father within the created order is not clearly defined in the New Testament in either an extensive or intensive sense. With respect to extensive phenomena, we have the teachings of Jesus, according to which the Father makes the sun to rise, the rain to fall, the earth to bring forth bread, and the birds to be fed (Matt. 5:45; 6:11, 26, 30; cf. Ps. 104:2b–30), all without specifying any means or manner of operation. Paul adds that God arranged the diverse organs of the human body (1 Cor. 12:18, 24b). Texts like these provide us with stated facts or results without any information about their implementation. The first member of the divine Triad appears to be present and active somewhere in the background, decreeing and commissioning such events (cf. Col. 4:2–6), as in the imagery of Word and Spirit in Old Testament texts like Isaiah 55:11 ("my word that goes out from my mouth") and Psalm 104:30 ("you send forth your spirit").

There are some New Testament texts that indicate agency for God the Father in the intensive work of revelation. We occasionally hear the Father's voice (Mark 1:11; 9:7 and parallels; John 1:33; 12:28), but we only find vague indications of an anthropic form of the Father like that of the divine Word. While being tried before the high priest, for example, Jesus prophesied the coming of the Son of man "seated at the right hand of Power", referring obliquely to his heavenly Father (Mark 14:62 and parallels; cf. Acts 7:55–56).⁴⁸ The focus here was on the celestial status of the Son of man, not on God himself (partly reflecting Ps. 110:1).

The heavenly vision of "one seated on the throne" in the Revelation to John (the Book of Revelation) comes closest to a visual description of God the Father.⁴⁹ He looked "like jasper and carnelian", and he held a sealed scroll in his right hand (Rev. 4:2–3a; 5:1).

Without any description of the face or form of the Father, however, our gaze is immediately diverted to the Lion–Lamb who is “worthy to open the scroll and . . . look into it” (Rev. 5:2–10). The contrast between the stationary position of God (“seated on the throne”)⁵⁰ and the detailed activity of the Lion–Lamb (“has conquered”, “standing”, “went and took the scroll”, “worthy to take the scroll and open its seven seals”, “ransomed saints for God”, “made them to be a kingdom”, Rev. 5:5–10) emphasizes the idea that the Lion–Lamb executes the will of the one seated on the throne.⁵¹

As a rule, therefore, God’s Son, or the divine Word is the means through which God’s revelations were assumed to take place,⁵² and so was God’s Spirit. This observation holds up even in cases that may appear to state the contrary. In Gospel accounts of Jesus’ baptism, the Father designates Jesus as his beloved Son, but only after either Jesus or John the Baptist sees the Spirit descending upon him (Mark 1:1 and parallels; cf. Isa. 42:1). In the Gospel of John, God tells John the Baptist how he will recognize the pre-existent Lamb of God, and the Spirit is the means that God uses to direct John’s attention to Jesus, the Son of God (John. 1:30–33). In the early source used by Matthew and Luke (Q for the German *Quelle*), the Father is said to reveal hidden truths to his children, but the text goes on to say that they can only know the Father through the Son (Matt. 11:25–27; Luke 10:21–22). A partial exception may be Matthew’s account of Peter professing Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus credited this revelation to the “Father in heaven” (Matt. 16:16–17). Yet, the sense of distance from earth that this celestial location suggests may reflect the fact that Jesus had previously attributed his disciples’ ability to confess and defend their faith to the Spirit of their Father (Matt. 10:20; cf. Mark 13:11).⁵³

The only agency impinging on the empirical realm that is frequently attributed directly to God the Father is the Resurrection. At least twenty passages in the New Testament state that God raised Jesus from the dead.⁵⁴ The raising of the beloved Son apparently elicited the immediate agency of the Father in a way that no other space–time situation called for. This striking exception to the general rule may be connected literally with the fact that seven of these passages associate the Resurrection with the postmortem agency of Jesus.⁵⁵ In theological terms, Jesus could not be said to restore himself to life without calling into question the reality of his death on the Cross⁵⁶ So, the long-term mission that God had mandated for his Son could not be completed without Jesus’ being restored to life by the direct action of the Father.⁵⁷

This relative ineffability of God the Father is made explicit in the Gospel of John, where we are informed that no one had ever before seen God himself (John 1:18; cf. 1 John 4:12). “You have never heard his voice or seen his form” (John 5:37b; cf. 6:46a): John’s Jesus says these words to his fellow Jews, who certainly knew of the anthropic divine appearances to their patriarchs and prophets (which John assigns to the pre-incarnate Word; John 8:56–58; 12:37–41). As elsewhere in the New Testament, God the Father operates somewhere in the background as far as the affairs on earth are concerned. John’s emphasis on the ineffability of the Father was not meant to deny the possibility of knowing God, however. The distancing of the Father here is compensated by the fact that he is now known and seen through his Son, the incarnate Word (John 1:18b; 5:38b; 6:46b; 14:7, 9b; cf. Matt. 11:27c), or at least is seen by those who are enlightened through the Spirit (John 16:13–15; cf. Rom. 8:13–16; Gal. 4:6).

In terms of Old Testament imagery, the role of the Father in New Testament texts is modeled on that of the presiding figure of the divine council. This council was a deliberative assembly in heaven that oversaw and managed affairs on earth.⁵⁸ In 1 Kings 22, for example, the prophet Micaiah reported a vision of “the Lord [YHWH/Adonai] sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing beside him to the right and to the left of him” (1 Kgs 22:19 = 2 Chron. 18:18). The Lord asked for a volunteer from his attendant angels (here called “spirits”) who would entice Ahab, the King of Israel. When one of the angels came forward, the Lord commissioned it, promised it success, and sent it out (1 Kgs 22:20–22 = 2 Chron. 18:19–21).⁵⁹ This is clearly an intensive (locative, temporal) action of God.⁶⁰

Another example is the throne–room vision of the prophet Isaiah. Here, also, the Lord (*YHWH/Adonai*) was seen by the prophet on a majestic throne (“high and lofty”) with angels (seraphim) in attendance (Isa. 6:1–2). The Lord called for a messenger to deliver a message to his people, and when Isaiah volunteered, he was sent out with detailed instructions (Isa. 6:9–13).

Both of these Old Testament narratives set events on earth in the context of a larger cosmic order (a celestial courtroom in 1 Kings 22 and a cosmic temple in Isaiah 6⁶¹). Like the revelatory events described earlier, they are locative and temporal, but they occur in the spiritual realm (“host of heaven”, “high and lofty”) which transcends our empirical realm, and to which inspired seers like the prophets were granted access.

The heavenly court is clearly the context of the throne–room vision of Revelation 4–5 that was discussed above. This passage gives us only a minimal description of the one seated on the heavenly throne with twenty-four elders in attendance (Rev. 4:2–4). John was invited to ascend by the trumpet-like voice of the risen Lord, the “Word of God”, whom he had already seen in anthropic, theophanic form (Rev. 4:1b; cf. 1:10; 19:13). His visionary capabilities were then elevated “in the Spirit” (*en pneumati*)⁶² so that he could behold the celestial throne and see that God was seated there (Rev. 4:2). This formative/informative agency of the Word and actualizing/transformational agency of the Spirit are the intensive kind experienced by the prophets and apocalypticists rather than the extensive ones that apply to the whole of creation. Here, the role of God the Father, like that of the conciliar Lord seen by Micaiah and Isaiah, is limited to commissioning someone to execute his plan. In fact, the Enthroned One is even more passive here than in our Old Testament texts. He does not ask for volunteers or give any verbal instructions. He merely holds a sealed scroll and leaves it to an attendant angel to look for someone worthy of opening the seals and thereby controlling future history. The crucified Lion–Lamb then steps forward to receive the scroll and open it (Rev.5:1–6:1). The role of the Enthroned One is again one of deliberating and decreeing.⁶³

In fact, the New Testament is replete with texts that refer to Christ, the Son of God, being commissioned by God the Father to administer justice and open the way to salvation⁶⁴ and also to his obeying the Father’s instructions.⁶⁵ There are also texts that speak of the Holy Spirit being sent by the Father to carry out his will.⁶⁶ Although the Father is somewhere in the background as far as the empirical realm is concerned, he is the central figure in the celestial, spiritual realm, the one who ordains the agencies of his Word and Spirit within that realm. This triadic arrangement is compactly stated by Paul in Galatians 4 in relation to the incarnation of the Son and the outpouring of Spirit:

“But when the fullness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal. 4:4–6)

In short, the vestigial agencies of the members of the divine Triad are: (1) commissioning/sending for the Father in heaven; (2) forming/informing for the Word; and (3) actualizing/elevating for the Spirit. Commissioning takes place in the celestial realm, while formation and actualization occur in concert with each other either in the empirical realm or at the interface between the two realms.⁶⁷

Thus far, I have surveyed biblical descriptions of God, God’s Word, and God’s Spirit rather selectively, being guided by the two fundamental ideas, two “sacred reminders”, from modern physics: that the physical realm is governed by formative laws and principles, which are associated in Scripture with the agency of the Word, and that those laws are actualized by some kind of immaterial “life” or “fire” that is biblically associated with the agency of the Spirit. Although the functioning of laws and whatever actualizes them is a necessary assumption for scientific endeavor, neither of them is empirical in itself. Although they govern the entire realm of the finite form and discrete events, neither is located anywhere in space or placed in the temporal sequence of events. They operate

at the interface of the divine and human worlds and make the existence of space and time possible.

For further understanding of these vestigial agencies of God's Word and Spirit and the way in which they were nuanced in the early Church, I turn to Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons. In the following discussion, it will be useful for comparison to keep in mind the main points already noted in biblical texts:

- Within the world of finite forms and discrete events, both empirical and spiritual, the members of the divine Triad are described in terms of their vestigial agencies.
- The vestigial agency of God's Word is expressed:
 - Extensively (universally, continuously) in the laws and principles that govern the form of the created order and inform its evolution. We were reminded of this point by one of the ideas of our two physicists, John Archibald Wheeler and Stephen Hawking, but we have generalized it to include the agency of the Word at each of the empirical and spiritual levels of the created order.
 - Intensively (episodically) in informative revelations, theophanic forms, assumption of a human form in Jesus, the disfiguration of the incarnate form on the Cross, and the image or template according to which humans are transformed. This point was one aspect of our second generalization of the ideas of physicists Wheeler and Hawking.
- The vestigial agency of God's Spirit is expressed:
 - Extensively in the actualization of the possibilities implicit in the laws that govern the created order, not only at the level of physics, but at each of its various levels, thereby effecting the evolutionary transformation of creatures from one level of organization and functioning to another.
 - Intensively (episodically) in actualizing informative revelations, opening the spiritual realm to prophets and apostles, the conception/animation and anointing of Jesus, revivifying the incarnate form of the Word, and actualizing the transformation of believers into the image of the risen Christ. This was the complementary aspect of our second generalization of the ideas of physicists Wheeler and Hawking.
- There is synergy and coordination between the vestigial agencies of Word and Spirit, both extensive and intensive.
- The extensive, continual agencies of Word and Spirit in the created order provide the infrastructure for their more intensive, episodic agencies in revelation and transformation. An analogy to the coordinated parts of a musical composition was helpful here.
- On the empirical plane, manifestations of the vestigial agencies of the triune God are generally accorded to God's Word and Spirit. The agency of God the Father occurs in the celestial background and is most often seen by prophets in the commissioning and sending of his Word and Spirit (also in the resurrection of Jesus). This point was our third generalization of the scientific ideas of Wheeler and Hawking.

5. Irenaeus in His Second-Century Context

Irenaeus's writings date from the last two decades of the second century, roughly a century after the composition of the New Testament documents. He is of particular interest for this essay, in that he was the first comprehensive (though not systematic) theologian of the Church. He drew on biblical traditions, both written and oral, and he provided us with new language concerning the vestigial agencies of the Word and Spirit and the synergy between them. The biblical material summarized above is nicely illustrated in one of his best-known metaphors: the Word and Spirit as "two hands" through which God functions in the created order. In what follows, I shall detail the way Irenaeus differentiated and coordinated the work of these two hands of God along lines similar to our physicists' differentiation of the laws of physics and the immaterial agency that actualizes them. His

various comments give greater clarity to the scattered references in Scripture and further illustrates the notion of scientists' ideas as sacred reminders.

In discussing Irenaeus of Lyons, there are several things to keep in mind. He was one of the last theologians (Hippolytus being another) who ministered in the Latin West, yet he still wrote, and he no doubt knew the apostolic writings, in Greek.

Irenaeus was conversant with the writings of some earlier theologians (e.g., Justin Martyr⁶⁸). He was also keenly aware of oral traditions and interpretations that he had received as the very words of the Apostles, especially the Apostle John, via Polycarp and the Elders of the Church.⁶⁹

Ante-Nicene theologians like Irenaeus thought largely in terms of verbal associations and correlations. They often developed those associations in ways so diverse that modern readers might see disparities or even verbal contradictions, some of which will be noted below.⁷⁰ As various heresies were identified and combatted over the centuries, conciliar theologians would regularize some of the language they used, particularly with regard to the triune God, and give us the standards of faith that have guided the Church ever since. However, there is still value in revisiting earlier (ante-Nicene) theologians like Irenaeus in order to discern the rationale underlying the language of those creeds.

Irenaeus was keenly aware of adaptations that needed to be made in communicating the gospel to gentile audiences, particularly to those in southern France, who were relatively recent converts from pagan polytheism.

Irenaeus was commissioned to investigate various dissident groups that he disparagingly labeled “pretended gnostics”—what we would call “know-it-all”.⁷¹ As he explained at length in his treatise, *Against Heresies* (*Adversus Haereses*, dating from the 170s–180s CE),⁷² there were three main problems that occurred in one gnostic theology or another:⁷³

1. A hierarchy of as many as thirty divine and semi-divine entities (the *plērōma* or pantheon), each having a different grade of stability and knowledge, thereby mediating between the ultimate, immutable reality and the ephemeral, material world;
2. Denigration of the material world, in general, and the human body, in particular;
3. A Christology in which the deity of Jesus required that he not experience the messianic aspects of human life like natural birth and death.

Finally, Irenaeus sometimes appealed to selected traditions he claimed to have received as a way of combatting these ideas. His writing was expository and polemical, not organized systemically according to the topics of later theology.

In countering the gnostic idea of a *plērōma* of hypostases, Irenaeus stressed the biblical belief that there is a single divine being, “one God”, especially in his use of credal statements (AH I.10.1; III.4.1; IV.20.2; 33.7). The divine being is integral and therefore not subject to an emanation or gradation of hypostases, as some gnostics had portrayed it (AH II.13.3; 17.7; 28.4, 5).⁷⁴ On the positive side, Irenaeus portrayed the triune God—God the Father, God’s Word (also titled Son and Lord⁷⁵), and God’s Spirit (also titled Wisdom⁷⁶)—as a single entity of which the second and third members were the agents through which God operated in the world of finite form. To make this idea more accessible, he used a simple metaphor: the Word and Spirit function like two hands with which God operates in the world of finite form.⁷⁷ What did this striking image mean?

Irenaeus’s view of God the Father was not anthropomorphic. He did not view God the Father as having a bodily form with literal hands and feet. To do so would have subjected the Christian God to the ridicule of gnostics who portrayed the Old Testament deity as a demiurgic remnant of the divine *plērōma* (e.g., AH I.11.1). In keeping with the apostle Paul and the Evangelist John, therefore, Irenaeus referred the finite manifestations of the Deity in Scripture to the agency of God’s Son/Word: “for the Father is the invisible of the Son [*invisibile Filii*], but the Son is the visible [form] of the Father [*visibile Patris*]” (AH IV.6.6; cf. Col. 1:15–17; John 1:14).⁷⁸ Here, Irenaeus used the image of hands as a metaphor to describe the agencies of God’s Word and Spirit in visualizable terms,⁷⁹ terms that his gentile audience would more readily understand.⁸⁰

6. Irenaeus on the Extensive Agencies of God’s Word and Spirit

To illustrate this approach and see how it exemplifies the formation–actualization dyad suggested by our physicists, let us begin with the agencies of God’s Word and Spirit in the extensive work of creation. Later, we shall look at the more intensive agencies of the Word and Spirit in original sanctification, revelation, the Incarnation, and human transformation. Our findings will then be summed up in a table at the conclusion of the following section.

First, we consider the agency of God’s Word and Spirit in creation—that of the cosmos and that of the human species, which Irenaeus usually treated together because humanity was the climactic step in the two accounts of creation in Genesis One and Two. This set of ideas is well described in *Against Heresies*, Book IV:

“. . . we do always learn that there is so great a God, and that it is he who by himself has established and made and adorned and contains all things [*per semetipsum constituit et fecit et adornavit et continet omnia*] and among all things both ourselves and this our world. . . . And this is he of whom the Scripture says, *And God formed man [plasmavit Deus hominem], taking clay of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life [flatum vitae; cf. Gen. 2:7⁸¹]* For God did not stand in need of these [angels] in order to accomplish what he himself had determined within himself [*apud se*] . . . as if he did not possess his own hands [*suas manus*]. For with him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and Spirit, by whom and in whom . . . he made all things, and to whom also he speaks, saying, *Let us make man after our image and likeness* [Gen. 1:26a] . . .”. (*AH* IV.20.1; *SC* 100:624–6; *ANF* 1:487–8 adapted)

This typically dense statement includes the Word/Son and Wisdom/Spirit within the identity of God (“within himself”, “his own hands”). It begins by saying that God accomplished the work of creation (“established and made and adorned and contains all things”⁸²) all by himself. He did not need angels to accomplish this task.⁸³ Instead, he used “his own hands”, that is, his Word and Spirit in “making all things”,⁸⁴ and it was to them, rather than to angels, that he addressed the words, *Let us make man after our image and likeness* (Gen. 1:26a).⁸⁵

Irenaeus has carefully established the unity of God here, while at the same time allowing for a conversation to take place within the Godhead itself.⁸⁶ The process of creation was initiated by God (identified as “God the Father”⁸⁷), but it was carried out through the agency of his Word and Spirit, the two acting in conjunction with each other.⁸⁸ The role of God the Father is assumed to be in the celestial background. The agency of the Godhead on the empirical plane (here the creation of humanity), is accorded to God’s Word and Spirit as if they were two hands that reach the earth.

The cited passage dealt with the extensive agencies of God’s Word and Spirit, those that pertain to all created things (including all human beings⁸⁹). But it did not differentiate the agencies of the Word and Spirit in any way. For further explanation, we may begin with the section of *Against Heresies* that immediately follows the one quoted above (*AH* IV.20.2). Here, again, Irenaeus stressed the unity of God and the universal scope of God’s creation. The task of governing [*principatus*] and judging all things is then delegated by God the Father to the Lord (Jesus) and his Word, and the role of the Spirit is further defined. In the midst of his intricately woven discourse, Irenaeus then described God as the one “who made all things by the Word [John 1:3]⁹⁰ and adorned them by Wisdom [*qui omnia fecit Verbo et Sapientia adornavit*]” (*AH* IV.20.2; *SC* 100:630; *ANF* 1:488a). In the previous section (IV.20.1), Irenaeus had assigned the role of making and adorning all things to God (“who has established and made and adorned and contains all things”), operating through both Word and Spirit. In this second text, however, he brings out the dialectic of the Word and Spirit by assigning the role of making all things to the Word and the role of adorning them to Wisdom/Spirit. This passing mention suggests that Irenaeus associated the Spirit of God with the completion or perfection of the creative work that God accomplished through his Word.⁹¹ It also provides some support for my thesis about scientific endeavor as a sacred

reminder of this dialectic. It is not clear, however, whether the relation of adorning to making is proportional to that of actualization to law-giving that we discussed earlier.

Some help regarding the Spirit's adorning work comes from Irenaeus's discussion of horticulture, which was of particular interest for its relevance to the production of bread and wine for the Eucharist. Cuttings from a grapevine, he noted, once planted in the earth, will spontaneously grow and bear fruit (thereby adorning the vine) and kernels of wheat, once planted in the ground, will germinate to produce grain (cf. Gen. 1:11–12; Pss. 104:13–15; 147:8, 14; 1 Cor. 15:37–38). Irenaeus attributed these life-giving, transformative wonders of the natural world to the work of the Spirit who "contains all things" (*continet omnia*, AH V.2.3). As we saw above, Irenaeus spoke of God "containing all things" (*continet omnia*, IV.20.1). Elsewhere, he attributes this containing work to the Lord Jesus (AH V.18.3, *continent . . . omnia*). But for Irenaeus, the growth of fruit from detached cuttings and the growth of seemingly inert seeds perfectly illustrated the transformative, lifegiving agency of God's Spirit throughout the vegetable kingdom. In the view of Irenaeus's contention that God had established the laws that govern all things through the agency of his Word (*Dem.* 10) however, we must conclude that the Spirit's contribution was not to displace the biological laws of growth (as for a God-of-the-gaps) but rather to actualize them at various levels of organization.⁹²

Irenaeus further distinguished the transformative, lifegiving work of the Spirit from the formative agency of the Word in other places where he discussed the creation of humanity in Genesis One and Two. In the case of Genesis 2:7a, he accorded the formation of the human body to the Word ("God formed man from the dust of the ground"), and he assigned the divine breath that animated it to the Spirit ("and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life"). One of his clearest statements occurs in his later treatise, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (c. 200 CE).⁹³

"But man he [God] fashioned with his own hands, taking of the purest and finest of earth, mingling his own power [breath]⁹⁴ with the earth in a measured manner [cf. Gen. 2:7ab]. He gave man's frame the outline of his own form [i.e., that of the anthropic Word; cf. Phil. 2:6], so that its visible appearance should be godlike [lit. 'deiform']—for it was as a [material] image of God that man was fashioned and set on earth [Gen. 1:27]. And in order that he might come to life, *he breathed into his face the breath of life [and man became a living being, Gen. 2:7bc]*. So, man became like God in inspiration [by the Spirit] as well as in frame [modeled after the form of God's Word]". (*Dem.* 11⁹⁵)

Here, again, we see the Word and Spirit described as the two "hands" with which God created all things, including all human beings. Following the account in Genesis 2, Irenaeus described the creation of humanity here in two ways:⁹⁶ (1) formation of the upright human body,⁹⁷ for which God's Word served as the template (Gen. 2:7b; cf. Gen. 1:27);⁹⁸ and (2) animation or ensoulment⁹⁹ of that deiform body by the "breath of life" (Gen. 2:7b),¹⁰⁰ which he has assigned to God's Spirit.¹⁰¹

These associations help to clarify the intra-trinitarian dimension of the vestigial agencies of Word and Spirit that we described earlier in terms of scriptural imagery, thereby providing further support for my thesis about science as a sacred reminder. The dialectic of Word and Spirit is proportional to the dialectic of cosmos-governing laws and actualizing the breath/fire that guided our investigation from the outset.¹⁰² For Irenaeus, in this case, the archetype impressed upon the human body is the intensive agency of the Word, as the anthropic image or form of the Deity,¹⁰³ rather than its extensive manifestation in laws that govern the biological world (e.g., the growth of grapes and wheat). However, Irenaeus extended the formative effect of this intensive agency to all human beings (note above). So, it is both intensive and extensive; intensive in its archetype and extensive in its effects. In that case, it provides a segue to the discussion of the intensive agencies of the Word and Spirit in the following section of this essay.

The reader will notice that Irenaeus's description of Word and Spirit as God's hands, with which we began, is incommensurate with his subsequent description of the distinct

agencies of the Word and Spirit: formation, image, prototype, on one hand and actualization, breath, animation, on the other. These latter phrases, of course, were dictated by the twofold process, bodily form, and life-giving breath in the foundational text, Genesis 2:7. However, both ways of interrelating the members of the divine Triad served Irenaeus's purpose of countering gnostic denigration of the human body and its Creator. Irenaeus's two-hands metaphor adapted biblical language to ensure the unity of the Godhead together with its agency in the "hands-on" work of creation, while his use of phrases from Genesis 2:7 asserted the godlike form and divine animation of the human body—all this while using everyday language that was comprehensible to his gentile parishioners. The completion of God's work in creating human beings requires the agencies of both formation (from earthly matter) and transformation (animation/ensoulment). Moreover, there is synergy between these two agencies just as there is every day human tasks that require the coordinated use of two hands, each in its own way, for their successful completion.

7. Irenaeus on the Intensive Agencies of God's Word and Spirit

We have seen that the words of Genesis 2:7 were taken by Irenaeus to describe God's deploying of the agencies of his Word and Spirit in the creation of humanity. The task was carried out by the Word in the formation of the human body from elemental material and by the Spirit in animating this finite portion of matter, thereby actualizing its operation at the biological level ("became a living being"). In addition to these operations concerning human anatomy and physiology in Genesis 2:7, Irenaeus saw two distinct agencies of the Word and Spirit in the paired phrases of Genesis 1:26 "in our image, according to our likeness". His most detailed explanation of this text occurs in *Against Heresies*, of Book V, chapter 6:

"Now God shall be glorified in his handiwork [*in suo plasmate*, the human body¹⁰⁴], conforming it and modeling it after his Son [*conforme illud et consequens suo puero adaptans*]. 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 [originally] made in the likeness of God [*secundum similitudinem Dei*, Gen. 1:26a]. . . . for the perfect [spiritual¹⁰⁵] man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul [*adunitio animae*], receiving the Spirit of the Father [*assumentis Spiritum Patris*], and the admixture of that fleshly being which was molded after the Image of God [*plasmata secundum imaginem Dei*, Gen. 1:26a; cf. 2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15] . . .". (*AH* V.6.1; *SC* 153:72; *ANF* 1:531b adapted)

Much of the wording here is familiar to us from Irenaeus's treatment of Genesis 2:7—specifically the molding of Adam's body (God's "handiwork"), with God's Son/Word serving as the prototypical image (assuming a visualizable, anthropic form of the Word¹⁰⁶); the Word and Spirit serving as the two "hands" that God used in the operation; and Adam becoming an embodied soul or ensouled body ("the commingling and the union of the soul").¹⁰⁷

But there are two further ideas in this passage, one regarding the creation of humanity, and the other about its redemption.¹⁰⁸ With regard to the work of creation, the first humans were not only molded after the image of God, but they were also perfected (temporarily) by "receiving the Spirit" in their souls and so becoming God's "likeness" (*similitudo*) as well as reflecting God's image.¹⁰⁹ In other words, Irenaeus assigned a dual role to the Spirit of God in creating humanity, animating (ensouling) the human form—an extensive agency based on Genesis 2:7b that was discussed in the previous section—and elevating that embodied soul to the divine "likeness"—an intensive agency based on Genesis 1:26.¹¹⁰

Ancient anthropology differentiated several levels of human existence: physical, biological, rational, and spiritual (angel-like), the latter level being the "likeness of God" as Irenaeus understood it.¹¹¹ At the biological level, the Word's modeling and the Spirit's actualizing are extensive in the sense that they apply to all human beings to the present day. In the case of spirituality, however, the actualization turned out to be intensive. It applied to the original pair of humans, and it would subsequently apply to those who would be

restored to the divine likeness, but it would not be extended to the entire human species, due to the original sin in the Garden of Eden.¹¹²

Irenaeus's stress on the original perfection of humanity, including the human body (and all of creation), was clearly designed to counter the gnostic denigration of the created world, but it was also the basis for his main point, that the salvation of humans would include their bodies as well as "that which is purely spirit" (*solum spiritus*, AH V.6.1). Therefore, gnostics who denied the goodness of the human body not only blasphemed the Creator of all things, but they even "disallowed the salvation of the Creator's workmanship [*plasmatis Dei*], which the flesh truly is, on behalf of which . . . the Son of God accomplished the whole dispensation [*omnem dispositionem fecisse*]" (AH IV.pref.4; SC 100:390; ANF 1:463a).

The second idea to notice in the previously cited passage (AH V.6.1) is that the agency of the Word will also operate in the future restoration of the divine likeness to humanity, "conforming it and modeling it after his Son". This step would require the Word assuming a human form and likeness (cf. Phil. 2:6–7), his deformation on the cross, and his resurrection, all of which would involve the agency of God's Spirit.

Before proceeding to Irenaeus's treatment of the Incarnation, however, we should pause to note the ways in which he described the role of God the Father in creation and the roles of the Word and Spirit in prophetic revelations.

Because God the Father always operates through the agency of his two "hands", he appears to function in the celestial background for Irenaeus as was the case in the New Testament. He is the one who plans and commands all things, including the creation of the first human as described in Genesis 1:26:

" . . . man, a created and organized being, is rendered 'after the image and likeness' of the uncreated God [Gen. 1:26a]—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 it". (AH IV.38.3; SC 294–96; ANF 1:521–22)

Here, Irenaeus correlated the paired phrases of Genesis 1:26 ("image and likeness") with the agencies of God's Son and Spirit, yielding a description of the roles of all three members of the divine Triad in an ordered sequence. For the Son and Spirit, it is only a summary statement, with emphasis on the forming agency of the Son ("make man in the image of God") and the increasing, perfecting work of the Spirit (in the likeness of God). Irenaeus made it clear, however, that the initiator of these actions, the mind behind the "hands", as it were, was God the Father.

The intensive agency of God's Word and Spirit also occurred in revelations to the Old Testament prophets. In *Against Heresies* IV.36.8, Irenaeus described them rather succinctly (while discussing another topic): "He who chose the patriarchs and those [people of Israel; cf. Deut. 7:6; 14:2] is the same Word of God who visited them by [means of] the prophetic Spirit . . ." (SC 100:916; ANF 1:518b). Here, we find the agencies of the Word and Spirit coordinated in prophetic revelations: the one visiting the prophets and revealing himself to them (in an anthropic form and prophetic words), and the other actualizing those revelations and heightening the prophets' faculties to see him and to hear his words.

In *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, Section 5, Irenaeus described the reciprocity of these two agencies in more detail and applied it to prophecies of the Incarnation.

"Thus, the Spirit demonstrates [or 'manifests'] the Word, and, because of this, the prophets announced the Son of God, while the Word articulates¹¹³ the Spirit, and therefore it is he [the Word made flesh] himself who interprets [or 'gives their message to'] the prophets and brings humans to the Father". (SVSP trans., 43 adapted, with note d; cf. ACW 16:51)

Here, again, the role of the Spirit was one of inspiring the words of the Old Testament prophets, in this case words announcing the advent of the Son of God. As in the Gospel of Luke, however, some of the prophets' words about the crucifixion and resurrection were not understood before the Word became flesh and interpreted their message to his followers

[Luke 24:25–27, 44–49, which credits the Spirit, sent by the Son, for the power to bear witness]. Even if the wording here could have been clearer,¹¹⁴ it shows Irenaeus’s concern to coordinate the agencies of Word and Spirit along the lines we have discussed, revealing the future Incarnation to the prophets, on the one hand, and making those prophecies about the incarnate Word manifest to chosen humans, like the Apostles.

Proceeding to Irenaeus’s treatment of the agencies of Word and Spirit in the Incarnation itself, we may turn to two passages in book V of *Against Heresies*. I begin with section V.18.3, which is the shorter of the two passages and focuses our attention on the extensive and intensive agencies of the Word:¹¹⁵

“For the Creator of the world [*mundi factor*] is truly the Word of God. And this is our Lord, who in the last times was made man [*homo factus est*], existing in this world [that he created; cf. John 1:10, 14a], and who in an invisible manner [*secundum invisibilitatem*] contains all things created [*continent quae facta omnia*; cf. Col. 1:16a] and universally pervades [*in universa conditione influxus*], since the Word of God governs and arranges all things [*gubernans et disposens omnia*].¹¹⁶ And therefore, he came to his own [John 1:11a] in an invisible manner [*invisibiliter*¹¹⁷], and was made flesh [*caro factum est*, John 1:14a], and was ‘hung upon the tree’ [Acts 5:30; 10:39b; Gal. 3:13b], so that he might sum up all things in himself [*universa in semetipsum recapituletur*, Eph. 1:10]”. (AH V.18.3; SC 153:244; ANF 1:546–7 adapted)

The first point of this passage is the extensive agency of the Word as maker and governor of the cosmos. Here, Irenaeus followed the traditional idea that the Godhead pervades (*influxus*, literally “flows into”) all things,¹¹⁸ while it also contains all things and therefore cannot be contained (1 Kgs. 8:27; Wis. 1:7).¹¹⁹

Irenaeus then built on these ideas to explain (and defend) the divine Word’s being made human flesh (John 1:14a). The Word who made all things (*mundi factor*) and contains all things (*continent quae facta omnia*), including the form of the human body, is also “our Lord” who was “made man” (*homo factus est*) and “made flesh” (*caro factum est*). By this quadruple use of the Latin verb *facio*, “to do or make”, Irenaeus showed that the agency of the Word/Lord has to do with forming and imaging, not only extensively in the creation of the cosmos and of human beings in general, but also intensively in the *in vivo* formation of the man Jesus, who is the perfect embodiment of the Word of God.¹²⁰ In other words, the incarnation of the Word involved its self-formation as a flesh-and-blood human being speaking audible human words (rather than a theophanic form as in the Old Testament narratives).¹²¹

Irenaeus also describes the Cross of Jesus along these lines. The Word made flesh was “hung upon the tree that he might sum up all things in himself”. In Irenaeus’s well-known typology of recapitulation, the obedience of Christ on the “tree” of the Cross (to the point of death) atoned for the disobedience of Adam regarding the Tree of Knowledge (for which death was the prescribed penalty). However, Irenaeus seems to have a role of the Word in mind here that is more active (“sum up”) and more extensive (“all things”) than just the sin of the first humans.¹²² Could the Cross also be a “summing up” of the Word’s extensive agency in the entire cosmos?

The answer, I believe, comes from Irenaeus’s later treatment of the Cross in Section 34 of *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*:

“And because he is himself the Word of God Almighty, who in the invisible [preincarnate] form pervades us universally in the whole world [cf. Wis. 7:24] and encompasses both its *length* and *breadth* and *height* and *depth* [cf. Eph. 3:18]—for by God’s Word everything is disposed and administered—[so] the Son of God was also crucified in these [four dimensions] imprinted on the universe in the form of a cross. For, in becoming visible, he had necessarily to bring to light his cross-sharing with the universe, in order to show openly through his visible form [on the Cross] that [cosmic] activity of his: that it is he who illumines the *height* (that is, what is in heaven), and holds the *deep*, and stretches forth and extends the

length from east to west, navigating also the northern parts and the *breadth* of the south, and calling in all the dispersed [people] from all sides to the knowledge of the Father". (*Dem.* 34; ACW 16:69–70 with 172n.172 and italics added; cf. SVSP, trans., 62)

Instead of using the Word's formation of the cosmos as a way of explaining the form of the Cross, as he did in the case of the Incarnation as previously discussed, Irenaeus retroactively portrayed the four-dimensional design of the Cross as "imprinted on the universe" in its "length and breadth and height and depth". Based on the pattern of the Cross, the Word illuminates the heavens and holds back the deep (cf. Pss. 74:16; 104:2; Pr. Man. 2–3).

In discussing Irenaeus's theology of the Incarnation thus far, we have focused on the agency of the divine Word, largely based on the Gospel of John, chapter one. We still need to see how he coordinated the agency of the Word with that of the Holy Spirit in effecting the Incarnation. Irenaeus's most extensive discussion of the role of the Spirit occurs in *Against Heresies*, book V, and is based on the Gospel of Luke, chapter one. I divide the relevant passage into three parts: the first of which relates the Spirit to the need for holiness; the second part establishes a parallel to the formative–animating dyad of Genesis 2:7; and the third returns to the idea of the Word and Spirit as the hands of God in the image-likeness dyad of Genesis 1:26:

"... the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, and the power of the Most High overshadowed her [Luke 1:35a]. Therefore, what was generated is holy [*quod generatum est sanctum est*] and the Son of the Most High God, the Father of all [Luke 1:35b], who effected the incarnation of this being [the Son] and showed forth a new [kind of] generation [*novam ostendit generationem*]" (*AH* V.1.3; SC 153:24–26; ANF 1:527b adapted)

In this first part of this passage, Irenaeus focused on the agency of the Spirit. Evidently, noticing the AB–AB parallelism in Luke 1:35—"Holy Spirit ... power of the Most High",¹²³ followed by "holy thing ... Son of the Most High"—he explained that the incarnate Son of God was holy (*sanctus est*) by virtue of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying Mary. In actualizing the conception of Jesus, the Spirit thereby effected "a new generation", that is, one untainted by natural intercourse (cf. John 1:13; Justin, *Dial.* 54.2). In other words, the agency of the Spirit elevated the process of reproduction above the normal physiological level, thereby making human gestation, with all its frailties, a fit vehicle for the incarnation of the divine Word and thereby countering the common gnostic assertion that the holiness of Jesus required that he not be tainted by gross matter as in natural birth. Irenaeus also saw a parallel between the Spirit's agency in the conception of Jesus and the agency of the Spirit in the original animation of humanity, as the sequel to the passage above explains:

"... as at the beginning of our formation [*ab initio plasmationis nostrae*] in Adam [Gen. 2:7a], that breath of life from God [*a Deo adspiratio vitae*], having been united to what had been fashioned [*unita plasmati*], animated [or 'endowed with soul,' *animavit*] the man and manifested him as being endowed with reason [*rationabile ostendit*]; so also, in the last times, the Word of the Father and the Spirit of God, being united with the ancient substance of Adam's formation [*adunitus antiquae substantiae plasmationis Adae*; cf. Gen. 2:7], rendered man living and perfected [*viventem et perfectum effecit hominem*], receptive of the perfect Father [*capientem perfectum Patrem*] ...". (*AH* V.1.3; SC 153:26; ANF 1:527b adapted)

This part of the passage begins by revisiting the creation story of Genesis 2:7. The first human was fashioned from earth (according to the image/form of the Word) and united with the "breath of life" (by the animating agency of the Spirit). In addition, we hear that humanity was endowed by the Spirit with reason,¹²⁴ evidently, in coordination with the "Word of the Father", and this synergy would also bring about the Incarnation "in the last times". As the conclusion of this passage indicates, the function of human "reason" was to enable humans to respond to the teachings of the incarnate Word (the Greek term *logos*

means both “word” and “reason”¹²⁵ and, once perfected, to receive the perfect Father (cf. Matt. 5:48).

In short, Irenaeus completely reframed the creation story here to match the Incarnation and the sanctification of humanity. As humans had been deprived of their original, spiritual perfection (the divine “likeness” of Gen. 1:26), the Word had to be directly united to human nature (the “ancient substance of Adam’s formation”), in conjunction with the Spirit’s new work (the “new generation”) in order to restore its God-given life and bestow the primordial perfection that made it “receptive of the perfect Father”.¹²⁶ As in the first part of the longer passage, the Word provided the ideal form for the humanity of Jesus, but the Spirit’s agency was required to actualize it.

In the third part of this passage, Irenaeus returned to his favorite metaphor, that of Word and Spirit as the two “hands” that God used in the creation of humanity, and he extended it (along the extensive–intensive dimension) to that of the perfection of humanity in the Incarnation:

“For never at any time did Adam escape the hands of God [the Word and Spirit] to whom the Father said, *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness* [Gen. 1:26a]. And for this reason, in the last times, his hands perfected a living man [*vivum perfecerunt hominem*, i.e., Jesus] ‘not by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, but by the good pleasure of the Father’ [John 1:13], in order that Adam [the human species] might be made [once again] after the image and likeness of God”. (AH V.1.3; SC 153:26–28; ANF 1:527b adapted)

Like the first human created in the image and likeness of God, Jesus was perfected (in the image and likeness of God) by the two hands of God. He was conceived (by the Spirit), formed (by the Word¹²⁷), and born (of the Virgin Mary) in accordance with the will of God (the Father), rather than not the will of man (cf. John 1:13),¹²⁸ thereby renewing both “image and likeness of God” in humanity (Gen. 1:26a). The Word made flesh was the perfect human (as well as divine) image of God and, by virtue of his union with God the Father, he serves as a model for the restoration of humanity in the image and likeness of God as in the original creation.¹²⁹

So, the Incarnation was made possible by the same synergy of the Word and Spirit that occasioned the original creation of humanity, and it re-established the likeness to God that humanity had previously lost (cf. AH V.6.1 discussed above). The passage above has added, therefore, a further step along the extensive–intensive dimension: the sanctification of humanity by the restoration of the divine likeness. For clarification on this point, we may turn to a text in *Against Heresies* Book III, in which Irenaeus explained this step in relation to the Church and its spiritual gifts:

“For this gift of God [*Dei munus*, i.e., the Spirit¹³⁰], has been entrusted to the Church, as breath [*aspiratio*] was to the first created man [Gen. 2:7], so that all members receiving it may be vivified [*vivificentur*]. And [the means of] communion with Christ [*communicatio Christi*] has been distributed in it, that is, the Holy Spirit, [which is] the earnest of incorruption [*arrha incorruptelae*; cf. 2 Cor. 5:5; Eph.1:14], the confirmation of our faith [*confirmatio fidei*],¹³¹ and the ladder of ascent to God [*scala ascensionis ad Deum*]. ‘For in the Church,’ it is said, ‘God has set apostles, prophets, teachers’ [1 Cor. 12:28], and all the other means through means through which the Spirit works . . .”. (AH III.24.1; SC 211:472; ANF 1:458b adapted)

Once again, Irenaeus built on his earlier treatment of the creation of humanity. The work of the Spirit in creation was the bestowal of breath on the first human being (Gen. 2:7b) and its perfection in the divine likeness (Gen. 1:26a). In the new dispensation, the Church is granted the gift of the Spirit in order to vivify all its members¹³² and to distribute to them the means of communion with Christ—the latter presumably referring to the transformative work of the Spirit in the Eucharist. The Spirit has advanced its members toward incorruption, confirmation of their faith (in the Lord Jesus Christ), and ascent

into the very presence of God.¹³³ Among the gifts of the Spirit to the Church are apostles, prophets, teachers, and miracle workers (1 Cor. 12:28; cf. 12:4–11).¹³⁴ In short, the agencies of the incarnate Word and the gifted Spirit ensure the sanctification of believers along the lines of the creation of humanity (both image and likeness; form and breath) and the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus (the perfect embodied image and likeness of God).

8. Summarizing and Assessing Irenaeus’s Theology of Word and Spirit

We have discussed Irenaeus’s views of creation, revelation, the Incarnation, and the transformation of fallen humans. The specific agencies that Irenaeus attributed to God’s Word and Spirit in these areas are summarized in Table 1. Irenaeus on the agencies of Word and Spirit. The first five entries (rows) are about extensive (distributive) agencies and the last four are about intensive agencies (personalized and episodic):

Table 1. Irenaeus on the agencies of Word and Spirit.

Level/Stage of the Created Order	Word’s Agency	Spirit’s Agency
Empirical cosmos in general	Made all things (undifferentiated) Gave laws and set bounds Contains all things, yet embedded in all in an invisible manner Governs and arranges all things Imprints the form of a cross in the dimensions of the universe Illuminates the heavens and holds back the depths	Made all things (undifferentiated) Adorned all things Contains all things
Vegetation	Same as for the empirical cosmos.	Fructifies and multiplies vegetation
Creation and animation of human beings (Gen. 1:26a; 2:7a)	Prototypical image for formation of the human body (godlike in form) Carries out the Father’s plan and commandments	Animates what was formed Produces a living soul (godlike in breath)
Humanity endowed with reason		Endows humanity with reason (in coordination with the Word)
Humanity formed in the divine Image and elevated to the divine likeness (Gen. 1:26a)	Prototypical image for the human body (godlike in form as above)	Perfected the first human (Adam) in the divine likeness (godlike in spirit)
Revelation	Coming to prophets in words and theophanic forms	Inspiring chosen humans to perceive those words and forms
Incarnation (perfect divine Image and likeness)	Was made man/flesh, visible Recapitulated the formation of Adam in Mary United the Spirit of God with humanity Hung upon the Cross that he might sum up all things in himself	Enabled Mary to produce a holy child, “Son of the Most High” Anointed the Word made flesh for service with the seven charismata of Isa. 11:2 LXX Raised the Word made flesh to glorified life
Humanity restored in the divine likeness	Re-established the divine likeness in humanity by becoming a perfect human in the image and likeness of God Raised from the dead as the prototype for restoration of humanity in union with God the Father	Vivifies us from a fallen, sinful life Renews the divine likeness in us Elevates us to union with Christ Confirms us in our faith
The life of the Church, present and future	Invites us to partake of his theanthropic life (esp. in the Eucharist) The ladder of our ascent to God the Father	Distributes the means of communion with Christ (esp. in the Eucharist) Works through apostles, prophets, and teachers The earnest/guarantee of our future resurrection and final union with Christ

This table shows that Irenaeus balanced the complementary agencies of the Word and Spirit along the lines suggested by our physicists for each of seven topics:

The creation and development of the natural world: the Spirit's adorning all things and fructifying vegetation, complementing the Word's forming all things.

The bodily creation of humanity: the Spirit's animation of virgin earth, complementing its bodily formation with the anthropic Word as its prototype.

The elevation of humanity to the spiritual likeness of God, complementing its formation in the divine image.

Divine revelations with the elevation of human minds and imaginations to perceive the forms and hear words of the divine Word.

The Incarnation: conception, anointing, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus.

The restoration in the divine likeness in humanity: spiritual rebirth and union with God with Christ as the prototypical Image.

The Church, its spiritual gifts, the Eucharist, and its future hope.

The general outline of Irenaeus's treatment of the agencies of the Word and Spirit is comprehensive, spanning five major levels of the created order: physical, vegetable, physiological (animated body), mind (reason), and divine likeness (bestowed, lost and, restored). Irenaeus never systematized his ideas in this way. As seen in the passages cited above, they are entangled in such a way that you are never too far from one idea when reading about another. However, differentiating them as distinct topics can help us to describe the overall contours of his theology.

Most importantly, Irenaeus maintained the unity of the Godhead while including the Word and Spirit as integral members of the divine identity, on the one hand, and as potentialities for coordinated agency in the created world, on the other.

Recalling the ideas of our two physicists, however, one can see that Irenaeus's treatment of the extensive agency of the Spirit in the creation of the physical cosmos is not clearly differentiated from that of the Word. Based on our physicists' insights and our brief survey of the imagery of Scripture, I conclude that the Word's formative, ordering, lawful agency in the physical realm needs to be complemented with the actualizing "breath" or "fire" of God's Spirit to bring our world into existence, as stated in several biblical texts (e.g., Gen. 1:2; Ps. 33:6¹³⁵). For Irenaeus, such actualization by the Spirit would not compete with the lawful evolution of the natural world.¹³⁶ So, our two physicists' ideas about scientific endeavors have not only given us an entry into the complex imagery concerning the agencies of God's Word and Spirit found in Scripture and in Irenaeus, but they also remind us of aspects of those agencies that might otherwise escape our notice.

9. Conclusions

The purpose of this essay has been to use the idea of two representative modern physicists (John Archibald Wheeler and Stephen Hawking) concerning the goal of scientific endeavor as a template for rethinking the complex imagery for God's Word and Spirit as described in Scripture and as further developed by Irenaeus of Lyons. The basic idea by which we were guided was a cooperative dialectic between a propensity for lawfulness and form, on the one hand, and the actualization of that propensity in all the many levels of the created order. It follows from our physicists' idea that any description of a Deity capable of creating a lawful world of finite form must include the potential for formation/information and the potential for the actualization/elevation of such a world. In biblical terms, these potentials are manifested in the formative agency of God's Word and the actualizing agency of God's Spirit.

These two divine agencies operate in unison at a variety of empirical levels, and also at spiritual, supramundane ones, like the world seen in prophetic visions. Divine agencies that operate at empirical levels (physical and organic) are generally extensive in that they function in the formation and information of all members of every class of creatures. At

least some human beings also function at a higher, supramundane level that may have formative laws of its own but are also subject to the intensive agencies of God's Word and Spirit, ones like those involved in theophanies and personal transformations that apply to specific individuals at specific times.

Whether or not there is any significant harmony between the current theories of modern physics and those of Scripture, there is an overlap between their underlying dialectics of formation and actualization as far as the natural world is concerned. To offer full justice to biblical imagery for God's Word and Spirit, however, this shared dialectic must be supplemented in several ways. It must allow for levels of the created order beyond the purely physical in order to do justice to the biblical tradition and avoid reductionism. It also must include the intensive, personal agencies of God's Word and Spirit in the context of revelation, Incarnation, and personal transformation. In these contexts, the biblical tradition reveals the agency of God the Father as the source and commissioner of the Word and Spirit. Despite these important supplements, the basic pattern offered by our modern physicists suggests that there is a much deeper relationship between scientific endeavor and historical theology than we normally assume. As theologians, we can benefit by being reminded of aspects of our traditions that have been appropriated by modern scientists and are often neglected by the Church as being too secular.

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Notes

- ¹ The ontological status of the Word and Spirit is not clearly addressed in the Hebrew Bible. Are they hypostatized attributes or angelic beings? In either case, the descriptor, "divine", serves to distinguish them from human words and spirits. Our primary concern here will be with the economic Trinity rather than the "immanent" Godhead that transcends all space and time.
- ² I am using the term "agencies" to describe what traditional theology has called the "operations" (Greek, *energeia*) or "powers" (*dynamis*) of the deity e.g., Philo, *Cherubim* 27; *Special Laws* 1.45–47. On the proper use of this etic term, in discussing Irenaeus's understanding of Word and Spirit, see Lashier (2014, 176, 179, 181), passim. Lashier identifies a "two-agent theology of creation" (ibid. 177, 180), that supports the findings of the analysis of Irenaeus's writings here below.
- ³ In keeping with modern systems theory, I assume a multi-level model of the created order. I use the term "world" to indicate the created order in all its levels, spiritual as well as material. I shall use the terms "cosmos", "realm", and "plane", with various modifiers (physical, spacetime, material, empirical, mundane, spiritual, heavenly, celestial, angelic), as a way of differentiating those levels. I have previously reviewed two helpful ways of constructing such a stratified model in Kaiser (2013, 11–25).
- ⁴ Walhout (1970, 201–8). Walhout was then a professor at Rockford College (now Rockford University) in the state of Illinois. He proposed that other religions can be "sacred reminders" in the sense that they can function as "reminders of the truth or potentiality one affirms in one's own religion" but do not receive so much attention (ibid., 202).
- ⁵ On the role of beliefs in modern scientific endeavors in relation to creational theology, see Kaiser (2007, 130–45).
- ⁶ I make a case for relating theology to the study of scientific endeavor, rather than to current (provisional) scientific theories, in Kaiser (2007, 2–4).
- ⁷ I have discussed this heritage in detail in Kaiser (1997).
- ⁸ One alternative understanding of *vestigia trinitatis* is based on Augustine's psychological analogy to human memory, intellect, and will (summarized in his *On the Trinity* XV.3.5).
- ⁹ To be clear, I do not equate the teachings of Scripture with theories of modern-day scientists. I view the relationship rather as an analogy of proportionality (A is to B as C is to D): the ideas of modern-day scientists can be seen in relation to the modern worldview of what the teachings of Scripture were to their own view of the created order. This analogy will be exemplified in our discussion of the various levels of the created order in Irenaeus's writings.
- ¹⁰ The traditional idea of *vestigia Trinitatis*, literally "footprints" or "traces" of the Trinity, are more accurately termed "vestigial agencies" in the context of present-day English (where vestiges are traces of something that is disappearing or no longer exists). They are operations of the Deity that are most often accorded to God's Word and Spirit in Scripture, but operations carried out in the world of finite forms and discrete events; e.g., Isa. 55:11; Pss. 33:6; 147:15, 18; Wis. 9:1–2; Sir. 42:15; 43:26; 48:3; Heb. 1:3. In traditional Latin theology, the external operations of the Trinity are said to be shared by all three members (*opera ad extra indivisa*

sunt), yet “the distinction and order of the persons are preserved” (*servato discrimine et ordine personarum*). Typically, the mandate of creation is attributed to God the Father; lordship and redemption to the Son; communion and sanctification to the Spirit; see Blocher (1997, 120–22).

- 11 For the purposes of this essay, I generally use the term “triune God” and “Triad” rather than Trinity. The latter term was introduced by Tertullian to combat modalism (*Against Praxeas* 2, 3, passim), in the early third century; cf. Kaiser (2001, 64).
- 12 Hawking (1988, 175) (concluding words). Hawking was perhaps echoing Albert Einstein, who had stated that the laws of nature revealed “a superior mind” half a century earlier; Einstein (1935, 28, 131).
- 13 The association of the laws that govern creation with the Word (or command or covenant) of God is implicit in Pss. 119:89–91 (Hebrew, *devarka*); 148:8 (Hebrew, *osah divaro*) and Jer. 33:25 (*berit*), and it is made explicit in Second Temple texts like Sir. 16:26–28 (Greek, *to hrēma autou*); 39:31 (*lógos*), and 1 Enoch 5:2–3; 18:15; 41:5–7, 69:16–21; 72:35–36 (Ethiopic, *tezāz*); 79:1–2 (*sherāt*); 80:4–7 (*sherāt* and *tezāz*); on the meaning of the Ethiopic terms, see Orlov (2022, 307nn.207, 208). This association of the divine word and law was firmly established in Christian theology by Basil of Caesarea, *Hexameron* IX.2.
- 14 I speak here of “members” of the Trinity in order to not become entangled in the problematic idea of individual “persons”, another term that was introduced by Tertullian in response to modalism (*Against Praxeas*); Kaiser (2001, 75–77).
- 15 The Word’s cosmic agency is analogous to the way the Word is manifest in the Torah (Law) that governs and informs the lives of God’s children. In rabbinic texts, the study of the laws received on Mount Sinai is called *halakhah* (plural *halakhot*), which derives from the verb *halakh*, meaning “to go”. So, *halakhot* are meant to direct human behavior (Exod. 18:20) as much as the laws of nature direct the processes of the physical world as in Ps. 19:1–9 (knowledge, words, course, circuit, law, decrees, precepts, commandment, ordinances of the Lord); Ps. 147:16–20 (his word governing weather, his statutes and ordinances); cf. Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolytus* (hereafter *Autol.*) II.15 (disposition of the stars, laws and commandments of God). An analogy between the Torah and the cosmic agency of the Word is also found in classic rabbinic writings, where Torah/Wisdom is seen as the blueprint for the created order (*Mishnah Avot* 3:14; *Genesis Rabbah* 1:1).
- 16 From the perspective of modern science, information about a system must include, not only its observed form, but the program that governs its formation and evolution. Hence, the agency of the Word is more expansive than the traditional Platonic world of ideas that give permanent form to material things, e.g., Philo of Alexandria’s notion of divine powers or ideas that delimit, order, and define material objects (*Special Laws* 1.46–48) and are themselves embedded in the divine Logos (*Creation* 20).
- 17 According to many physicists, mathematical laws like those of quantum theory govern the origin of our universe as well as its subsequent evolution. If so, they transcend space and time much like cosmic decrees of God in Scripture.
- 18 One could go back as far as Aristotle’s assignment of a “separate intelligence” to each of the cosmic spheres. Each of these intelligences conceived an idea or law of perfect motion that governed its assigned (albeit animate) sphere. So, the separate intelligences functioned something like the laws of motion, principles, and geometries of modern physics, and they all emerged from the one single Unmoved Mover. Another unitary scheme was found in Philo of Alexandria’s *Mind of the universe*, which is the divine Word (Philo, *Creation* 8, 20, 69).
- 19 John Archibald Wheeler was interviewed in Ferris (1985), at 28–29 min of the program.
- 20 John Archibald Wheeler in “The Creation of the Universe” at 1 h, 18–19 min of the program. The “life” that Wheeler attributed to the universe is not the same as energy in the physical sense. It is what actualizes the equations that govern all physical matter and energy.
- 21 William Whewell made a similar distinction from a theistic perspective in his *Bridgewater Treatise* (the first): “Hence we infer that the intelligence by which the law is ordained, [and] the power by which it is put into action, must be present at all times and in all places where the effects of the law occur”, Whewell (1834, 361–62); cf. Kaiser (1997, 366–69). Whewell’s “intelligence” and “power” correspond to the agencies of God’s Word and Spirit as described below.
- 22 Hawking (1988, 174). On Hawking and the actualization of the laws of theoretical physics, cf. Kaiser (2007, 28–29). Kitty Ferguson quoted this passage and took the idea as the title of her book, Ferguson (1995, 84). Michael Heller refers to this issue in philosophical cosmology as the “ontological gap” between nonexistence and existence, in contrast to the “epistemological gap” that grants intelligibility to the universe; Heller, “Chaos, Probability, and the Comprehensibility of the World”, in Heller (1995, 121). Heller states that, from a theological perspective, “the ontological gap and the epistemological one coincide”. The theological rationale for this coincidence, according to our findings here, is the coordination of the agencies of the Spirit (actualized existence) and the Word (intelligibility).
- 23 This actualizing agency is not the same as physical energy, the latter being interchangeable with rest mass and all such mass energy having been generated by the laws of quantum theory and relativity. Here, we are concerned with the actualization of those laws.
- 24 The dialectic of transformative, sometimes chaotic novelty (“spirit”), on one hand, and limiting, harnessing order (“word”), on the other hand, is a common theme in the Old Testament wisdom literature; e.g., Job 38:8–11; Ps. 148:6–8; Prov. 8:29; Pr. Man. 3. In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus is portrayed as the channel for the outpouring of the transformative Spirit of the Church (John 20:22; Acts 2:38). For an ecclesial parallel to this dialectic in the New Testament, see Paul’s treatment of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Cor. 14:2–6, 13–19.

- 25 When speaking of laws that govern the cosmos, physicists generally assume a “nomological realist” view of those laws, rather than the descriptive, non-causal view taken by most of today’s philosophers of science. According to such nomological realists, what we term “laws of nature” are progressive approximations to the phenomena at hand, depending on the current state of experimental technology and degree of computing power.
- 26 The Greek terms *penuma* (spirit) and *pnōē* (breath) are closely related in the LXX (Septuagint) of biblical texts like Job 32:8; 33:4 and Isa. 42:5. For the purposes of this essay, we assume their rough equivalence.
- 27 Divine light is another of the biblical images for the agency that forms and informs the created order, including humanity; cf. Pss. 36:9/10; 43:3; John 1:4, 9; 2 Cor. 4:6. In fact, the Word (Aramaic *Memra*) of the Lord is equated with primordial light in *Targum Neofiti* to Exod. 12:42; [McNamara \(1972, 103\)](#).
- 28 The Masoretic Hebrew text of Gen. 1:1 is best translated as “When God began to create heaven and earth—the earth being unformed and void . . .” (*Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation, (Berlin and Bretler 1999)*). It is described as if we were in a theatre waiting for the play to begin, and when the curtain rises, God is already at work on the primordial elements of earth, darkness, and water. In modern cosmology the primordial elements would be different, and the creative process would include the origin of those elements.
- 29 The exact phrase, “and God said” (*vayyomer elohim*) occurs only nine times in Gen. 1:3–29. However, a total of ten such words (*ma’amarot*) is asserted in *Mishna Avot* 5:1 (early third century) in order to match the number of commandments or words (*devarim*) of the “ten words” in Exod. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4.
- 30 The early rabbinic Sages saw a parallel to the ten creational decrees in God’s delivery of the ten commandments at Mount Sinai. Each commandment (*davar*, word), issuing from the mouth of God, was activated by a blast of spirit/wind (*ruah*, from God’s treasury of winds) so that the people of Israel could hear it distinctly and even see it; *Babylonian Talmud Shabbat* 88b (cf. Exod. 20:18a = 20:15a in Hebrew), as translated in [Wollenberg \(2023, 182–85\)](#).
- 31 In keeping with the usage of modern science, I shall use the simple term “cosmos” to designate the physical, spacetime level of the created order, which includes everything that is perceptible to the senses or with the aid of technologies. Our “cosmos” is comparable to the sensible world (*kosmos aisthētos*) of Platonic philosophy), but not the Platonic “world of ideas” (*ho ek tōn ideōn kosmos*).
- 32 E.g., Theophilus, *Autol.* II.13; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (hereafter *AH*) IV.32.1 (which aligns Gen. 1:3 with John 1:3); cf. [Steenberg \(2008, 70–71 with n.24\)](#).
- 33 Old Testament and Second Temple texts detail the agency of the Spirit empowering the prophets (Num. 11:25–26; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10–11; Mic. 3:8; Isa. 42:1–7; 61:1–3; Hos. 9:7b) and the Messiah (Isa. 11:2; Psalms of Solomon 17:37). In keeping with modern systems theory, I understand this empowering as the actualization of a higher, more complex level of functioning rather than power in the physical or biological sense (as in the empowerment of Samson in Judg. 14:6, 19; 15:14).
- 34 Similar combinations occur in 2 Sam. 23:1–2 (the Spirit anoints David and inspires him to speak God’s words and rule justly); Isa. 11:1–4 (the Spirit inspires Jesse’s descendant to judge and establish a just order); 42:1–4 (the Spirit identifies God’s servant and enables him to establish a just order); Isa. 61:1 = Luke 4:18 (the Spirit inspires words of restoration); Luke 1:35 (the Spirit enables the conception and holy birth of Jesus, followed by his designation as “the Son of God”); John 14:26 (the Spirit inspires the Apostles to “remember” the words of Jesus).
- 35 Our primary concern here is with the “economic” Trinity rather than the “immanent” Trinity. The latter inheres within the divine being that transcends all finite forms and discrete events and for which the contingencies involved in creation and cosmic evolution are not directly applicable. This distinction was already made by early Apologists, who distinguished the *Logos prophorikos* (the spoken Word active in creation) from the *Logos endiathetos* (the eternal Word immanent within the Godhead); cf. the note below on Theophilus of Antioch and [Kaiser \(2007, 43\)](#). To avoid confusion, I refer to the former as the “vestigial agency” of the Word.
- 36 Given the multi-level world model assumed here, humans are embedded in the agencies of the Word and Spirit at the physical, chemical, biochemical, biological, social–psychological, and spiritual (even celestial) levels. Even though biological, social–psychological, and spiritual creatures are not ubiquitous, they constitute classes of beings. So, the agencies of the Word and Spirit are extensive at each level in the sense that they are distributive throughout the corresponding class of beings. In other words, the extensive vestigial agencies of Word and Spirit consistently apply to all members of those classes, but are not omnipresent or ubiquitous at all levels.
- 37 My distinction between “intensive” vestiges (effective at particular times and specific places) and “extensive” ones (affecting all of creation) is adapted from the thermodynamic distinction between intensive variables like temperature and extensive quantities like heat. Biblical texts make a similar distinction regarding the agency of divine Wisdom (Sir. 24:3–12; Bar. 3:24–37) and regarding Christ (Col. 1:15–20; Heb. 1:3–4; cf. Luke 2:9b, 11). In patristic texts, this differentiation was codified in the idea of the threefold presence of the divine Word: eternally present with God the Father, extensively and permanently present in all of creation, and intensively present in the Lord Jesus Christ as well as in biblical theophanies (Origen, *On First Principles* I.2.8; IV.4.3; *Against Celsus* IV.5; VII.17; Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 14.8, 17.5). The latter two modes of presence are the vestigial agencies of the eternal Word, pertaining to the economic Trinity, that concern us here.

- 38 As noted above, present-day scientific endeavor is based on beliefs inherited from the historic creationist tradition, three of which are intelligibility, unity, and relative autonomy of the natural world. These beliefs relate to the extensive agencies of God's Word and Spirit. Since the nineteenth century, the focus of the ecumenical Church's discourse has largely shifted to the Incarnation, Atonement, ecclesiology, and sacraments, all of which relate to the intensive agencies of Word and Spirit.
- 39 The background reference to the revelation of *YHWH/Adonai* in a finite, anthropic (humanlike) form is explicitly stated in biblical texts like Num. 12:8 (*temunah*, apparently contradicting Deut. 4:12, 15–18); Jer. 1:9 (*yoshlah YHWH et-yado*); Ezek. 1:26b (*demut . . . adam*); 1:28b (*demut kavod YHWH*, both contradicting Isa. 40:18); Hos. 12:10/11 (*edameh*); cf. Gen. 32:30–31 LXX (*eidos theou*); Phil. 2:6 (*morphē theou*). An anthropic form modeled on that of *YHWH/Adonai* was also assigned to the divine Word in Wis. 18:15–16; Rev. 19:11–16; cf. Pss. 9:8; 96:13; 98:9; Isa. 11:4; 63:1–3; 64:1–2, 7a; Lam. 1:15; 1 Enoch 9:4). The variety of revelatory forms of the Deity was highlighted in the third/fourth-century midrash, *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishma'el*, Shirata 4; Bahodesh 5: at the Red Sea, the Lord was “a man of war”, young enough to engage in battle (Exod. 15:3–4), but on Mount Sinai, he appeared as “an old man full of mercy”; Lauterbach (1961, 2:31, 231). For an overview of the homology between the anthropic form assumed by the deity and the human (male) body, see Altmann (1963, 213–22, Reprinted 1969, 19–28).
- 40 The Word's assumption of a finite form is a reflexive instance of its intensive formative agency, hence, an autoformation. As with all formations governed by the Word, the Spirit is the agent of actualization; see below on the Irenaeus's treatment of the Incarnation in *AH* V.16.2. I refer to these finite forms of the Deity as “anthropic” rather than “anthropoid”. The latter term is equally valid, but in scientific discourse it refers to a class of primates that includes monkeys and apes as well as humans.
- 41 In most cases, Scripture writers used the Tetragrammaton (*YHWH/Adonai*) rather than God (*Elohim*) as the divine name when describing concrete manifestations and the worldly actions of the Deity; e.g., Exod. 19:11; 33:11; Num. 12:5, 8; Deut. 31:15; 2 Sam. 22:10–18 (=Ps. 8:9–17); 1 Kgs. 19:11; 22:19; Isa. 6:1–5; Ezek. 1:26–28; 43:4–7; Amos 7:7; Zech. 9:14; 14:3–4; Mal. 3:1b. John's correlation of Logos theology with Kyrios traditions was facilitated by the fact that both were associated with the governance of world affairs in first-century sources like Philo, *Cherubim* 27. According to Richard A. Horsley, this association was also assumed the Apostle Paul, for whom the extensive agency of the “one Lord” in 1 Cor. 8:6b (*di' ou ta panta*) was based on the Middle Platonic identification of the Word as the instrument through which God made all things; Horsley (1978, 134).
- 42 Elliot Wolfson describes the intermediate realm of spiritual forms as an “imaginal world” (*mundus imaginalis*) and explains that it “is not the imaginary world of subjective fantasy or psychotic hallucination, but is instead a realm where invisible realities become visible and [where] corporeal entities are spiritualized”; Wolfson (1994, 61–62).
- 43 The Spirit's agency in opening the realm of spiritual forms to Old Testament prophets and sages is indicated in texts like Num. 24:2–4 (Balaam); Job 32:8 (Elihu); Jer. 1:9; Ezek. 1:3b; 2:2; 8:1–4; 37:1, 4; 43:5–6; Joel 2:28–29; 4 Ezra 14:22; Philo, *Planting* 24–26 (Moses); idem, *Life of Moses* 2.291; Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 28:6–7, 10 (Kenaz); 1 Pet. 1:11–12 (the Old Testament prophets); cf. Wis. 7:27; 10:21 on the illuminating agency of divine Wisdom (associated with the Spirit in 7:7b, 22b). Some biblical narratives portray visionary theophanies as occurring in a quasi-material way (e.g., Gen. 15:17; Amos 9:1), but I attribute this fact to the absence of the later apocalyptic distinction between visionary–spiritual and visible–empirical worlds, together with the tendency of dramatic narrative forms to flatten out the multileveled complexity of prophetic phenomena. Esther J. Hamori makes a helpful distinction between “concrete anthropomorphisms” and “envisioned anthropomorphisms” (two of her five categories) in biblical texts; Hamori (2008, ch. 2). Note, however, Hamori includes the concretely crafted theophany in Amos 9:1 (“I saw the Lord standing on/beside the altar”) in the “envisioned anthropomorphism”, rather than the “concrete anthropomorphisms”, category (p. 29).
- 44 The role of God's *ruah/pneuma* (spirit, breath) in actualizing anthropic forms (including those of the Word made flesh) is indicated in texts like Ezek. 1:4–5 (living creatures, cherubim); Rev. 1:10–16 (a Christophany); cf. Matt. 1:18–21 (virginal conception of Jesus); Luke 1:34–35 (virginal conception of the Son of God). Only in rare cases is the Spirit accorded a voice like that of the Lord (Acts 21:11; cf. Ezek. 2:4) or even a finite form like that of angels (possibly Acts 8:26, 29); cf. Martyrdom of Isaiah 9:27–36 on the “angel of the Holy Spirit”; Origen, *On First Principles* IV.3.14 on the two seraphim of Isa. 6:2 representing the Word and Spirit; Aphrahat, *Demonstration* VI.15 on the Holy Spirit standing before God like an attending angel). All four Gospels describe visions of the Spirit descending like a dove upon Jesus at his baptism (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:33; John 1:32), and the two of these versions indicate that the Spirit alighted on him (Matthew) and remained on him (John), recalling the imagery of the dove that Noah released, finding a resting place after the Great Flood (Gen 8:9–12); compare this with Rabbi Ben Zoma's interpretation of Gen. 1:2c in *Genesis Rabbah* 2:4. However, only the Lukan version of the baptismal narrative states that it descended “in bodily form like a dove” (Luke 3:22a), and none of the Gospel accounts say that the Spirit was seen in the form of a dove, or that it was heard to speak the declarative words from heaven (Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22b; John 1:32).
- 45 On visions and auditions of the apostles and prophets, see Matt. 10:20; John 3:3–6; Acts 7:55–56; 1 Cor. 2:9–13; 12:3–11; 14:29–32; Gal. 4:6; Acts 2:17–21; Rev. 1:10–13; 4:2; 21:10; Odes of Solomon 36:1–3. In 1 Cor. 12:6, Paul stated that spiritual gifts were inspired by God (the Father). In the following verses (12:7–11), however, he repeatedly stated that the Spirit was the agency through which God bestowed those gifts. It should be kept in mind that visions and auditions (theophanic forms and words) often occurred together in biblical times; see e.g., 1 Sam. 3:1; 1 Kgs 22:19–22; Isa. 6:1–13; Amos 9:1.
- 46 The idea of synergy between agencies of the Word/Christ and Spirit is indicated in texts like Rom. 1:3–4; 1 Cor. 12:3–5; 1 Tim. 3:16; and (arguably) 2 Cor. 3:16–18 (“The Lord is the Spirit”).

- 47 The word “image” (Hebrew *selem*; Greek *eikon*, Latin *imago*) has various meanings. The two that we encounter in this project are: (1) the visible form of something that would otherwise be formless and invisible, as in the cases of God’s Son, the Lord Jesus, in relation to God the Father (Col. 1:15; cf. 1:3, 10) and Philo’s Word/Son of God in relation to the invisible, ineffable Deity (e.g., Confusion 62–63, 97, 146); and (2) the reflection or reproduction of a pre-existing, prototypical form, an exemplar, as in the case of Adam in relation to God and Seth in relation to Adam (Gen. 1:26–27; 5:3). The latter is in effect an image (sense 2) of an image (sense 1). It is common in rabbinic Judaism and has been termed “corporeal isomorphism” by Idel (2013, 113).
- 48 The reference to God as “Power” in Mark 14:62 (Greek *dymanis* for the Hebrew *gevurah*) is unique in canonical Scripture, but it later occurs in the talmudic and midrashic literature; see Idel (1988, 157–9).
- 49 The Lord Jesus was also envisioned as enthroned in New Testament texts like Matt. 19:28; 25:31 (on the Son of man); and John 12:41; Rev. 1:10–14a (with echoes of the enthroned deity in Isa. 6:1–3; Ezek. 1:26, 28; Dan. 7:9). When the risen Christ is described alongside God the Father, however, the throne is ascribed either to the Father or to both together (Rev. 7:15–17; 22:3).
- 50 The relative amorphousness and repose of God the Father in the New Testament suggests that the formative/informative agency of the Word could not apply to God the Father, of which supposition is consistent with the patristic idea of the “monarchy” of the Father (Athanasius, *To the Antiochenes* 5–6; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 42.15).
- 51 The detailed description of the Lamb, compared with that of the “one seated on the throne”, in Rev. 4 reflects the greater accessibility and mediating role of the former. In the background are similar biblical throne–room scenes in which the enthroned one is less visible and more exalted than more accessible figures like seraphim and cherubim (Isa. 6:1–7; Ezek. 1:22–26; 1 Enoch 14:8–23 [Book of Watchers]; cf. Martyrdom of Isaiah 9:37–10:6; Testament of Levi 3:4–8, 2 Enoch 22:1–4; *Babylonian Talmud Hagigah* 12b–13a). One exception to this generalization is Dan. 7:9–10, where the enthroned “Ancient of Days” is described in some detail. In the Book of Revelation, however, these attributes were accorded to the risen Christ (Rev. 1:13–14).
- 52 The Gospels clearly identify the Son of man with Christ, the Son/Word of God (Mark 14:21, 41; John 3:13, 14; passim), and Revelation equates the Lion–Lamb with Jesus, the crucified and risen one (Rev. 3:1; 5:6, 9; cf. John 1:29, 36).
- 53 Similar ambiguity occurs in the Gospel of John. On one hand, Jesus states that the Father draws believers to Jesus; on the other, no one besides Jesus has seen the Father directly (John. 6:44–46; cf. 1:18; 14:8–9).
- 54 Jesus was raised by God the Father according to Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15, 26a; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30; 17:31b; Rom. 4:24; 6:4b; 10:9b; 1 Cor. 6:14a; 2 Cor. 4:14; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20; Phil. 2:9; Col. 2:12c; 1 Thess. 1:10b; Heb. 11:19; 13:20; 1 Pet. 1:21. Two of these passages also assign the future resurrection to God: 1 Cor. 6:14b; 2 Cor. 4:14 (“with Jesus”). However, the focus is on the relation of God to his unique Son.
- 55 On the postmortem agency of Jesus (and the renewed agency of his disciples), see Acts 3:26b (“he sent him to you first”); 10:40–42 (“and he commanded us to preach”); 13:30–31 (“and he appeared to those who came up with him”); 17:31a (he appointed him to judge the world); Rom. 4:24–25 (“for our justification”); 1 Thess. 1:10c (“he delivers us from the wrath to come”); John 10:16 (“And I have other sheep . . . I must bring them also”).
- 56 The major exception to God’s direct agency in the Resurrection is the Gospel of John, where Jesus repeatedly states that he will raise himself after his crucifixion, John 2:19; 10:17, 18 (in obedience to a command from his Father), and will raise his followers (John 5:21b; 6:39–54). Perhaps this postmortem self-formation or re-formation was the climax of the signs that John’s Gospel intended to trace (John 2:11; 4:54; passim; cf. Matt. 12:39–40). Nonetheless, the patricentric rule that we find in Acts and Paul (see above) might still be reflected in the glorification language of John 13:32; 17:1, 5.
- 57 The fact that Paul consistently attributed the Resurrection to God the Father may also be due to its association in his mind with our justification (Rom. 4:25; 10:9c–10a). If the Lord Jesus had to rely on God for his renewed life, how much more must we rely on God, rather than ourselves, for ours.
- 58 In terms of his external operations, the Lord God of the Old Testament is Chief Executive or First Commissioner, rather than “First Cause” or “Prime Mover”, as God would be portrayed in the Middle Ages under the influence of Aristotelian metaphysics (e.g., *Metaphysics* 1072b). The executive aspect of these external operations is seen, for example, in the Lord God’s issuing decrees or laws for the natural world (Job 28:26 MT; 38:10, 33; Ps. 148:6; Prov. 8:27–30; Jer. 5:22; 31:35–36; cf. 1 Clem. 20:1–11). Unlike commissionings that generally last for a limited time, these cosmic decrees are said to be extensive in that they last for all of time (Ps. 148:6; Prov. 8:29; Jer. 5:22b; 31:35–36; 1 Enoch [Similitudes] 69:20; 1 Clem. 20:3–4). In the terms of the present essay, the execution of these decrees is part of the extensive agency of God’s Word and Spirit.
- 59 Similar commissioning scenes are described in Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6. In other Old Testament texts, God is said to send out his Word (Ps. 147:15, 18; Isa. 55:11; 147:15) or his Holy Spirit (Wis. 9:17; cf. 9:9–10).
- 60 There are a few Old Testament examples of God’s commissioning that extend to all creatures (at any given level). Isaiah 55:10–11 compares the Lord sending out his word (to redeem his people) to his sending rain to earth to bring forth vegetation from the earth. Psalm 104:27–30 blesses the Lord for sending out his spirit/breath to renew the earth and all its inhabitants—an example of agency that is spatially extensive and temporally cyclical. In general, however, such commissionings have to do with intensive divine–human relationships.
- 61 As scholars of Ancient Near Eastern cultures like Tryggve Mettinger have shown, the local temple was viewed as the primary conduit between our world and that of God (e.g., Pss. 11:4; 20:7; Isa. 66:1; Jer. 25:30; Zech. 3:7); cf. Mettinger (1982, 29–32).

- 62 The “spirit” that opened John the Apocalypticist’s mind and imagination evidently came to him from the heaven above (Rev. 4:1–2). In the pseudepigraphal Epistle of Enoch, the patriarch similarly hears a voice and has a spirit poured out on him that enables him to foretell future events (1 Enoch 91:1).
- 63 The same may be said for God’s receiving and answering of human prayers (e.g., Mark 11:22–25), and making various declarations from heaven (e.g., Mark 1:11; 9:8). As Brittany Wilson (2021) has pointed out, the Synoptic Gospels locate God (the Father) in the heavenly realm, but they do not describe God as having an anthropic form (e.g., Mark 6:41; 7:34; 14:62; 16:[19]); Wilson (2023, 144–45, 149); cf. Wilson (2021, 780, 789f., 791)) An exception may be the “face of the Father in heaven” as seen by angels in Matt. 18:10. Early theologians like Clement of Alexandria dealt with this anomaly by identifying this “face” of God with the divine Word; Clement, *Instructor* I.7.57; *Excerpts from Theodotus* 11.1–2; 12:1; cf. Bucur (2014, 70n.18; 2007, 221n). A Valentinian origin of this idea is suggested by Clement’s *Excerpts* and by the occurrence of the same motif in the *Tripartite Tractate* (Nag Hammadi Codex I,5), 65.35–66.18; 110.37–111.4, which also stresses the formlessness and invisibility of God the Father; see James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 3rd edition (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Robinson (1988, 67, 90)).
- 64 Jesus is said to be commissioned by God the Father in Mark 12:6 (a parable); John 3:17, 34; 5:30, 36–37; 8:26–28; 10:36a; 12:45, 49–50; 14:24b; 17:2–4, 8; 20:21; Rom. 8:3; 1 John 4:9–10, 14; cf. Rev. 1:1.
- 65 Christ’s obedience to the Father’s instructions and commands is described in John 9:4; 10:17; 15:10b; Phil. 2:8–9.
- 66 The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father in Rom. 8:27; Luke 11:13; Acts 2:17–18; 5:32; 15:8; John 14:26a; Acts 1 Pet. 1:12; cf. Rev. 5:6.
- 67 In the New Testament, God the Father is identified with “heaven”, particularly in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 3:17; 5:16, 34, 45; 6:1, 9, 10; 7:11, 21; 10:32, 33; 12:40; 16:17; 18:10, 14, 19; 23:21–22). The biblical “heaven” is ontologically “higher” than the empirical world, even higher than the supracelestial waters (Ps. 29:10; Ezek. 1:22–28 using the Hebrew word *qerah*, meaning crystal or frozen water), but it is still part of the created order. It is everlasting, but not the eternal locus of the triune God, “Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible” (Nicene Creed). In other words, the biblical “heaven” is an intermediate realm in which the Deity can manifest itself through various self-projections and agencies, and to which biblical prophets and priests had access (1 Kgs. 22:19; Jer. 23:18–22; Zech. 3:1–7); cf. Kaiser (2007, 38–45). Like the empirical realm, the heavenly one could be described as having several levels or discrete “heavens”, the highest of which was the throne or abode of the Lord God (e.g., 2 Cor. 12:2; Martyrdom of Isaiah 7–9; Irenaeus, *Dem.* 9; *Fathers According to Rabbi Natan* A 37; *Babylonian Talmud Hagigah* 12b–13a). From that perspective, the relationship between the empirical and spiritual levels of creation is a continuum with an interface and some overlap between the two.
- 68 For Irenaeus’s debt to Justin Martyr, see, e.g., *AH* III.2.3 and cf. Justin, *1 Apol.* 12.
- 69 John’s teachings had been passed down orally to Irenaeus by Polycarp and by the Elders, who were disciples of the Apostles; Irenaeus, *AH* III.3.4; V.5.1; 33.3; 36.1, 2, and his *Epistle to Florinus: On Unique Sovereignty* (apud Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* V.20.4–8). On his receiving and preserving the tenets of the faith handed down by his other predecessors, see *AH* I.10.1; III.4.1–2, 3.3; 24.1.
- 70 Matthew Steenberg has carefully noted the lack of tidy conceptual consistency in Irenaeus’s writing; Steenberg (2008, 63, 70, 106), passim. As a result of the variation in Irenaeus’s verbal associations, no scholarly attempt to organize them will do justice to every statement he made. As noted in the Introduction to this essay, the vantage point adopted here is one option based on the ideals that motivate scientific endeavor.
- 71 The recipient to whom Irenaeus addressed his treatise *Against Heresies* had requested him to provide detailed information about the heresies described (I.pref.2; III.pref.1; cf. IV.pref.1; V.pref.1).
- 72 *Against Heresies* was written in Greek in the late 170s and early 180s. The only complete extant version is the Latin translation, *Adversus Haereses*, which is thought to date from the third or fourth century. Comparison with the Greek fragments that survive indicate that this translation was fair. The best critical edition is found in Rousseau et al. (1965).
- 73 There was no such thing as “Gnosticism” as a unified group or single ideology. Of the many different varieties, Irenaeus concentrated on several versions classified as “Valentinian”.
- 74 Irenaeus never spoke of a “Trinity” consisting of distinct hypostases or *personae* (usually translated as “persons” in English); cf., Lashier (2014, 11, 54n.1, 209). Those terms would be adapted for theological discourse early in the following century by Origen and Tertullian, respectively, as a way of combating a very different kind of heresy, that of modalism; cf. Kaiser (2001, 75–77).
- 75 In keeping with the salutations and confessional formulas of the New Testament world, Irenaeus used the divine titles “God” and “Lord” for the Father and Jesus Christ, respectively, whenever the two were mentioned together; cf. Kaiser (2001, 41, 53).
- 76 The association of the Spirit with divine Wisdom was already present in Wis. 1:6; 7:22, 27; 9:17; 1 Cor. 2:13. Theophilus of Antioch had assumed a Spirit–Wisdom identification; e.g., *Autol.* I.7; II.15, 18 (late 170s?). Irenaeus may have learned this association from Theophilus, as argued by Lashier (2014, 166, 179, 182). On the other hand, such sapiential traditions were still shared between Jews and Christians in the second century; so, Irenaeus could just as well have inherited it from the same oral tradition that Theophilus did; cf. Briggman (2012, 126–28).
- 77 Theophilus had also written about God creating the first man, Adam, using his Word and Wisdom (Spirit) as his two hands; *Autol.* II.18 (citing Gen. 1:26; 2:7). He used this metaphor in describing the “spoken Word” (*Logos prophorikos*) that is active in creation, as distinct from the “immanent Word” (*Logos endiathetos*), as it eternally existed like a thought in the mind of the Godhead. Neither

here nor in the parallel text in *Autol.* I.17, however, did Theophilus clearly differentiate the roles of the Word and Spirit the way Irenaeus did (see below).

- 78 The English translation of [Roberts and Donaldson \(1965\)](#) (hereafter ANF), 1:469a. For the Latin text, see SC 100/2:450.
- 79 As a result of his concern to protect God the Father from gnostic ridicule, Irenaeus tended to attribute all such agency in the empirical world to the Word and Spirit. Even in his few citations of some of the New Testament texts that attribute the resurrection of Jesus to God the Father (see the listing above), Irenaeus included the reference to God (the Father) only once (*AH* III.18.2, citing the confessional formula in Rom. 10:9).
- 80 See *AH* III.24.2, where Irenaeus differentiates the finite manifestations and agencies of God, “within the reach of human knowledge”, from his “substance” (*substantia*). The Greek term most often used for these agencies is *oikonomia* (“economy”), which is usually translated in Latin as *dispositio* (“dispensation”, e.g., *AH* IV.pref.4).
- 81 The first two parts of Gen. 2:7 follow the same sequence of words in both Hebrew and Greek: action (formed/breathed); object (man/his nostrils); source (clay of earth/breath of life). The parallelism suggests that the two events are coordinated, even simultaneous, rather than separate stages.
- 82 The idea of the Lord “containing all things” was based on is the divine function of setting boundaries to the different parts of creation and thereby limiting chaos and maintaining a degree of order; e.g., Job. 38:4–12 (“shut the sea with doors”, “prescribed bounds”, knows its place”); Ps. 104:8–9 (“set a boundary”); 148:6–8 (“fixed their bounds”, “fulfilling his command”); Prov. 8:27–29 (“drew a circle”, “assigned its limit”); Wis. 11:20 (“arranged all things by measure and number and weight”); Sir. 16:26–28 (“determined their boundaries”, “never disobey his word”); 43:6–10 (“governing the times”, “stand in their appointed places”); Prayer of Manasseh 3 (“shackled the sea . . . confined the deep”); Mark 4:39 (Jesus restrains wind and waves); Epistle to Diognetus 7:2 (“enclosed the sea”, “the measure of the courses of the day”).
- 83 The idea that God needed no external help because he used the Word and Spirit as his very own hands is also found in one of Irenaeus’s versions of the rule of faith (*AH* I.22.1). The idea may have come from Theophilus, *Autol.* II.18, as argued in detail by [Briggman \(2012, 107–19\)](#). However, it may also have come from a common oral tradition. In contrast, some early Jewish sources held that God was conversing with his angels (e.g., Philo, *Creation* 75; idem, *Confusion* 179; *Genesis Rabbah* 8:4).
- 84 Irenaeus also described the Word and Spirit as the “hands of God” in *AH* IV.pref.4; 7.4 (Armenian text); V.1.3, 5.1, 6.1, 28.4; *Dem.* 11. The image of God using his “hands” to create was common in Judaism. According to Gen. 2:6–7, God formed the first human body from the dust of earth (often assumed to be moistened clay that could be molded). Job 10:8–9 adds that God’s hands had made and fashioned the body of Job (Vulgate, *manus tuae fecerunt me et plasmaverunt me*). Psalm 119:73a (118:73 LXX) states that God’s hands had made and fashioned the psalmist (Vulgate, *manus tuae fecerunt me et formaverunt me*). Later Rabbinic texts explicitly cited this verse to show that God formed Adam with his two hands (e.g., *Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* 1 ad finem). Philo understood Gen. 2:7 to say that, when the first man was fashioned (*diaplasas*), he was made by divine hands (*chersi theiais genomenos*) and instructed by Wisdom herself. According to 2 Esdras (4 Ezra) 8:7b, all of God’s people are the work of his hands.
- 85 As noted above, this exclusion of angels from the work of creating humanity contradicts the major Hellenistic Jewish theologian of the previous century, Philo of Alexandria, who held that the blame for the misdeeds of humans should not be assigned to God himself (*Creation* 75; *Confusion* 179).
- 86 Irenaeus’s idea of a conversation of within the Godhead in Gen. 1:26 also occurs in *AH* IV.pref.4; V.1.3; 15.4; *Dem.* 55; cf. Barnabas 5:5; 6:12; Justin, *Dial.* 62; Theophilus, *Autol.* II.18. Irenaeus’s idea differs from modern-day social models of the Trinity in that it was a simple imperative from the Father, not a reciprocal, social conversation. As noted above, Irenaeus stressed the unity of the Godhead and did not differentiate Word and Spirit as hypostases or persons.
- 87 Irenaeus identified the “God” (Greek *Theos*) of Gen. 1 as the Father in *AH* IV.20.1; V.1.3, 6.1; *Dem.* 97.
- 88 Irenaeus’s stress on the oneness of the Godhead and the coordination of God’s Word and his Spirit may also have been intended to avoid the idea of multiple divine powers in heaven. The latter idea was being challenged as heresy by rabbinic Sages by the third century CE, as highlighted for modern scholarship by [Segal \(1977\)](#), and recently reframed by [Grossberg \(2022, esp. 419–22, 430–31, and bibliography on pp. 432–36\)](#).
- 89 Irenaeus seems to have understood the manner of formation and animation of Adam in Gen. 2:7 as extending to all human beings (cf. Gen. 1:26–27; Wis. 2:23). In *AH* V.1.3, he described “the beginning of our formation [*ab initio plasmationis nostrae*] in Adam [Gen. 2:7a]” (ANF 1:527b, discussed below). In *AH* V.5.1, we are told that Enoch and Elijah were translated to heaven by the very same hands with which they were formed in the beginning (*di’ on cheirōn eplasthēsan tēn archēn*; Greek fragment): “For in Adam the hands of God had become accustomed to set in order, to rule, and to sustain his own workmanship and to bring it and place it where they pleased” (SC 153:62–64; ANF 1:530–31). Irenaeus further argued that “throughout all time, man being molded at the beginning by the hands of God . . . is made after the image and likeness of God” (*AH* V.28.4, ANF 1:557b); cf. [Briggman \(2012, 124–25\)](#) with notes 67, 69 on the creation and vivification of human beings.
- 90 Irenaeus held that God’s Word established the boundaries and laws that govern the cosmos, and assigned a particular function to every single creature, including the angels: e.g., *Dem.* 10: “He [God] has established by the Word the whole world, and the angels too are included in that world. And to the whole world he [the Word] has given laws, that each one keep to its place and not overstep the boundary laid down by God, each accomplishing the work marked out for it”; [Smith \(1952, 51, adapted\)](#); cf. [Behr](#)

(1997, hereafter SVSP trans.), 46. For the background of this idea, see Job 38:5–11; Sir. 16:26; 1 Enoch 2:1–2 (Book of Watchers); 41:5 (Similitudes).

- 91 The meaning of the Wisdom/Spirit's "adorning all things" is partially clarified in *AH* II.30.9, where Irenaeus states that God "founded and made all things (*condens et faciens omnia*), visible and invisible", by his Word and fitted and arranged all things (*omnia aptavit et disposuit*) by his Wisdom" (SC 294:318–20; ANF 1:406a; cf. Dem. 5). Another such passage is *AH* III.24.2, where Irenaeus cites Gen. 2:7 and then describes God as establishing (*confirmans*) all things by his Word and binding them all together (*compingens omnia*) by his Wisdom (ANF 1:459a). Noting the variety of verbs that were used to describe the creative agency of God's Wisdom, Anthony Briggman concluded that Irenaeus's intent was not to define the agency of God's Wisdom so much as to demonstrate the purposefulness and coherence of creation itself ("the wise activity of God"); Briggman (2012, 136–7, 140–42). Jackson Lashier takes *AH* III.24.2 as the basis for his differentiating the agencies of Word and Wisdom and concludes that Wisdom's role was one of completing or perfecting the work of the Word; Lashier (2014, 176, 179).
- 92 Irenaeus's differentiation of the actualizing agency of the Spirit from the governing, formative agency of the Word is missed by Matthew Steenberg when he describes the role of the Son as "formative actualization" and "the means of actualization" of the Father's creative will; Steenberg (2008, 79, 80) (but see his clear distinction of these roles in the creation of humanity, *ibid.*, 106).
- 93 Irenaeus's *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* was written in Greek, but the only extant version is a later, Armenian translation. In any case, Irenaeus also used Gen. 2:7 to differentiate the agencies of Word and Spirit in *AH* III.24.2 (forming/establishing and inbreathing/uniting); V.1.3 (fashioning and animating/endowing with reason).
- 94 Irenaeus's mention of God's two hands (the Word and Spirit), together with his correlation of "purest earth" with the "measured power" that is mingled with earth, indicates that the "power" in this sentence must here represent the divine "breath of life" (cited from Gen. 2:7b) that animated the earthly form.
- 95 *Demonstration* 11, adapted from ACW 16:54; 148n.65; cf. SVSP trans., 46–47. Other early Christian writers located the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27) in the rational human mind; e.g., Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 10. Like Irenaeus, however, others interpreted it quite literally: the human body is isomorphic with the form of God; e.g., *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* XVI.19; XVII.7 (ANF 8:316–17; 319–20). The early rabbinic Sages also viewed the anthropic form of YHWH/Adonai as the prototype for the human (male) body, e.g., *Genesis Rabbah* 8:8, 10; cf. Gottstein (1994, 171–95); Fossum (1996, 1:529–39).
- 96 Anthony Briggman comments that, for Irenaeus, "The activities of the Word and Wisdom in creation are, at least logically, sequential. Both are required for a complete and meaningful created order"; Briggman (2012, 146); cf. Lashier (2014, 203), on Theophilus's understanding of Gen. 2:7.
- 97 Like the biblical account (Gen. 2:7), Irenaeus regarded formation of the human body as unique, unlike that of the animals, due to its upright, heaven-oriented form.
- 98 For Irenaeus, as noted above, all things were formed by the divine Word, including humanity; cf. *AH* III.21.10, citing John 1:3; cf. Briggman (2012, 111).
- 99 The words used here for "life" and "soul" are the same in both Greek (*psychē*) and Latin (*anima*). So, Irenaeus associated the "breath of life" with the first man's "living soul".
- 100 In this respect, Irenaeus's understanding of the formation of the divine image in humanity is comparable to the ancient Near Eastern procedure for manufacturing images of the gods. As described in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian sources, the statue of a god was sculpted—with the aid of the god himself—in his own image. Then it was animated by that god and deified by of washing the mouth of the statue with water; Jacobsen (1987, 120–28). Irenaeus seems to have been aware of this tradition, but he followed the biblical text in substituting terrestrial soil for wood and divine breath for water (which is similar to the Greek myth of the creation of humanity by the Titans, Prometheus and Epimetheus).
- 101 Irenaeus also associated the "breath of life" with God's Spirit by parallel constructions in *AH* III.24.1; V.1.3. As he made clear in passages like *AH* II.25.3, however, the physiological breath that was infused by God's Wisdom/Spirit is not the same as the Spirit itself. It is best described as an agency of God's Spirit.
- 102 Life giving in the physiological sense is not the same as the physicists' idea of breath/fire in the mathematical equations, but there is an analogy of proportionality between the two pairings (A is to B as C is to D), ancient and modern. The animation of human beings plays a role in the context of ancient physiology that is analogous to the actualizing breath/fire assumed in the context of modern mathematical physics.
- 103 Irenaeus discussed the Word's assumption of an anthropic form in Old Testament theophanies in texts like *AH* IV.7.4, 10.1, 20.8; *Dem.* 12, 44, 45. These theophanies literally pre-figured the Incarnation; e.g., *AH* IV.26.1; *Dem.* 12; see Ochagavia (1964, 90–95); Bucur (2018, 256, 273–74).
- 104 The Latin nouns *plasmatio* (workmanship) and *plasma* (image, figure) stem from the Septuagint of Gen. 2:7a, 15a, in which the Greek verb for "form" is *plassō*.
- 105 Irenaeus used the words "perfect" (*perfectus*) and "spiritual" (*spiritalis*) as synonyms in the sequel to this passage (*AH* V.6.1; SC 153:72; ANF 1:531–2). His knowledge of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians is evidenced by his contrasting of this perfect state with that of being carnal (*carnalis*) or animallike (*animalis*) due to lack of the gifts of God's Spirit (1 Cor. 2:6a, 14a; 3:1). Elsewhere,

Irenaeus reserved the attribute of perfection to the uncreated, unbegotten God and those humans for whom the redeeming work of God's Word and Spirit had been effective (AH IV.38.1–3).

106 In AH IV.7.4, for example, the Word/Son of God appeared in humanlike form and spoke to Abraham and Moses (citing Gen. 18:1; Exod. 3:7–8); cf. Bucur (2018, 283)). The traditional idea of the Word/Lord assuming an anthropic form was not functionally at variance with Irenaeus's idea of the Word as one of the hands of God, because the former was rooted in Old Testament theophanies (as well as in the wording of Gen. 1:26–27), while the latter was a metaphor designed to protect the unity of the Godhead. In other words, Irenaeus was anthropomorphic regarding the divine Word, but not for the Godhead as a whole. Theophilus also stressed the formless nature of God the Father and attributed the Old Testament theophanies to God's Word, e.g., in *Autol.* II.22.

107 As Irenaeus stated in AH IV.pref.4, the man who was "formed" (*formatus*) and "molded" (*plasmatus*; cf. Gen. 2:7 LXX) by God's hands was a "mixed organization of soul and flesh" (*temperatio animae et carnis*; SC 100/2:390; ANF 1:463a).

108 The homology between the creation and redemption of humanity in Irenaeus is a major theme of Matthew Steenberg's book: "for Irenaeus the protology speaks from, and in turn to, the Christological testimony of salvation"; Steenberg (2008, 72; cf. 62, 76, 81, 83, 105, *passim*).

109 The Latin translation of AH IV.7.4 depicts the Word/Son and Wisdom/Spirit as God's "offspring and likeness" (*sua progenies et figuratio sua*), respectively (SC 100/2:462; ANF 1:470b), using the word *figuratio*, rather than *similitudo*, for the Spirit as "likeness". The wording is ambiguous here: the Spirit might be the likeness of the Offspring/Son (*figuratio sua*), who is himself the image of the Father. However, the Armenian translation of the same passage describes Word and Spirit as God's "offspring and hands", apparently applying both terms to each of the two. It is difficult to know which of the translations best reflects the original Greek; cf. Briggman (2012, 122–23 with n.61).

110 Irenaeus also assigns the likeness of God to the Spirit in *Dem.* 5; cf. Steenberg (2008, 105–6).

111 Like other early Greek theologians, Irenaeus differentiated the "likeness" of God in Gen. 1:26 from the "image" of God in Gen. 1:26; see, e.g., Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation* 12 (albeit identifying both with the Word); see the summary of the issue in Smith (1952, 126n.70).

112 See *Dem.* 97, according to which the transformation of "those who are far from God" (i.e., gentiles; cf. Eph. 2:17) into the "likeness of God" was made possible by the one who had dominion over all of life; the Son of God made that transformation available to all people (reflecting John 1:4; 3:36; 5:26; 6:47; cf. Gal. 4:19, "Christ is formed in you"). The Son accomplished this by coming down to earth (citing Bar. 3:38) and "uniting the Spirit of God the Father with what God had fashioned", viz., the human nature assumed by the Word/Son of God (ACW 16:107–8; cf. SVSP trans., 100).

113 The Armenian word for "to articulate" can be taken in either of two senses: (1) to link or connect (the primary sense), or (2) to utter clearly (secondary sense). The older translation by J. Armitage Robinson preferred the latter; Robinson (1920, 74). Joseph P. Smith and John Behr both prefer the former, primary sense; ACW 16:141n.37; SVSP trans., 103.n.24.

114 My interpretation follows the SVSP translation (p. 43) here: the Word-made-flesh "interprets the prophets", thereby reciprocating the forward-looking annunciations of the prophets by looking back to their original message (which were, if fact, given to them by the pre-incarnate Word). The alternative translation, stating that the Word "gives their message to the prophets" (ACW 16:51) only credits the Word with the original annunciation ("their message") itself.

115 While not using the language of extensive and intensive (borrowed here from physics as explained above), Irenaeus clearly made the same conceptual distinction in passages like AH IV.20.7: "For, if the manifestation of God which is made by means of *creation* affords life to *all living* in the earth, much more does that *revelation* of the Father which comes through the Word give life to *those who see God*" (SC 100:648; ANF 1:490a, italics added for emphasis).

116 Irenaeus attributed the governing and arrangement of all things to both the Word and Spirit in AH I.22.1, but his focus in that section, as here in AH V.18.3, was clearly on the agency of the Word, as his citation of John 1:3 indicates.

117 The Latin *invisibiliter* is sometimes emended to *visibiliter*, based on the assumption that Irenaeus was thinking of the Word's "coming to his own" in the visible, tangible body of Jesus (as in *Dem.* 34, for example). But Irenaeus was probably thinking of the Word "coming" to the prophets in Old Testament theophanies, which are apparent to the eyes of the mind (as opened by the Spirit), but not to the eyes of flesh; cf. AH V.16.2; Eph. 4:8–10; Rev. 4:1–3; Philo, *Special Laws* I.46; Martyrdom of Isaiah 6:10–15; 10:17–31. On the "non-physical visibility" of Old Testament theophanies in a multi-storied spiritual universe, see Bogdan Bucur (2018, 275–77).

118 See *Dem.* 34: "the Word of God Almighty, who in the invisible form pervades us universally in the whole world and encompasses both its length and breadth and height and depth" (ACW 16:69–70, cited more fully below).

119 This paradox of the Deity containing and pervading was a commonplace in early Jewish and Christian literature: e.g., Philo, *Posterity* 14; *Confusion* 136; *Migration* 192–93; Preaching of Peter, frag. 2a; Hermas, Mandate 1. Irenaeus also stated the paradox in AH I.15.5; II.1.2, 30.9; IV.3.1; 20.2 (where Hermas is quoted as Scripture).

120 Compare AH V.16.2: "When, however, the Word of God became flesh [John 1: 14a], he confirmed both of these [image and likeness, Gen. 1:26], for he showed forth the [human] image truly [*tēn eikona edeixen alēthōs*], since he became himself what was his image [a human being], and he re-established the similitude after a sure manner by assimilating man to the invisible Father through means of the visible Word [assimilating man to himself]" (ANF 1:544ab; Greek text in SC 153:216). In other words, the

Word made flesh was the “image of God” in a double sense: as the divine Image of the invisible God (cf. Col. 1:15), according to which humans are formed (Gen. 1:26–27), and as a human being perfectly formed in that image.

- 121 In Irenaeus’s Christology, the paradoxical combination of the divine Form and the formed human being in one and the same person, Jesus Christ, may be seen as an early version of the Chalcedonian combination of the divine and human natures in one *hypostasis*.
- 122 As Irenaeus stated in *AH* V.23.2, the Lord was “summing up in himself the whole of human existence [*recapitulans universum hominem in se*] from the beginning [of its life] to the end [in death]”; SC 153:290–92; ANF 1:551b. For a summary of the idea of recapitulation in Irenaeus, see Smith, 30.
- 123 The association of the power of God with the Spirit has precedent in Luke 1:17a; 4:14a, 49; 5:17b; 24:49; Acts 1:8; 10:38.
- 124 The association of reason with God-given breath goes back to Philo of Alexandria, e.g., *Creation* 139; *Planting* 18–19.
- 125 Irenaeus stressed the role of the Word made flesh, conceived/animated by the Spirit, as the formative model for rendering humans “living and perfected”. According to *Dem.* 9, the seven charismata of the Spirit (Isa. 11:2 LXX) were the source of the wisdom and counsel of the Word made flesh (ACW 16:53; cf. SVSP trans., 45); cf., Luke 4:14, 18–19; John 16:12–15.
- 126 For a similar statement, see *Dem.* 97, where the Son of God bestowed new life on “what God had fashioned” (Gen. 2:7a) by assuming it and uniting it with the Spirit, thereby restoring the likeness of God in humanity that the Spirit had bestowed in the beginning (Gen. 1:26a).
- 127 Compare *AH* III.21.10, where Irenaeus drew a parallel between the Word’s forming the body of Adam from virgin earth and the formation of the Word as a human body in the womb of the Virgin Mary.
- 128 Like several other early Latin texts, *AH* V.1.3 read John 1:13 as referring to Jesus himself (cf. *AH* III.16.2; 19.2).
- 129 In *AH* IV.38.3, Irenaeus stated that man is “made according to the image and likeness of the uncreated God [*tou agenētou theou*], of the Father who plans and commands, of the Son who assists and accomplishes, and of the Spirit who nourished and completes, but with the man . . . ascending toward the perfect, becoming near to the uncreated One”; Greek fragment from *Sacra Parallella*, attributed to John of Damascus (SC 100/2:294, 296); ET by Lashier (2014, 210 with n.67) (cf. ANF 1:521–2). Lashier assumes that Irenaeus redefined “God” here to include all three members of the divine triad. In the immediate context, however, Irenaeus described God as “unbegotten” (*agenētō hyparchonti*) as well as “uncreated” (*AH* IV.38.1; ANF 1:521a); the terms “God” and “Father” may be understood in apposition to each other. In the previous section of his work, moreover, Irenaeus stated that the Church was fashioned “after the image of his Son” (IV.37.7; ANF 1:521a). I conclude that the “image and likeness” of God in IV.38.3 are attributed to the agencies of God’s Son and Spirit, respectively, here as elsewhere in Irenaeus’s writings.
- 130 The Latin grammar of this part of *AH* III.24.1 is difficult. Dominic Unger understands the “gift” here to be the faith of the Church; Unger (2012, 110). In *AH* III.17.2 (ad finem; SC 211:334; ANF 1:445a), however, Irenaeus had just described the Spirit as the “living water” and “gift from the Father” (*aqua viva . . . quam Dominus acceptians munus a Patre*) that Christ bestowed on all the people on earth (cf. John 3:34; 4:10; 15:26). In the passage from *AH* III.24.1 cited above, moreover, this “gift” is associated with the inbreathing of the first human (Gen. 2:7b; cf. John 20:22), the vivification of members of the Church (cf. John 3:6, 8; 6:63; Rom. 8:1), the “earnest/guarantee of incorruption” (cf. 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14, cited in *AH* V.8.1), and various “means through means through which the Spirit works”, including apostles, prophets, and teachers (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4–11, 28).
- 131 In one of his versions of the rule of faith, Tertullian would refer to the Holy Spirit as *sanctificator fidei* (“sanctifier of the faith”, *Against Praxeas* 2.1 ad finem). This phrase is not found in the New Testament, so I assume that Tertullian received it from his own teachers.
- 132 The vivification of living believers is the deliverance from the “death” of a sinful life (Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13). It might be taken as a reference to the future resurrection, but the very next words describe the “communion with Christ” that has been distributed in the Church, presumably in the celebration of the Eucharist.
- 133 Irenaeus’s “the ladder of ascent to God” is probably the God-man, Jesus himself, as described in John 1:51. Based on *Dem.* 45, it might also be understood as the Cross, “for by it, believers in him ascend to heaven, since his passion is our ascension on high”; cf. Eph. 2:5–6; Col. 3:1–3 (ACW 16:77; SVSP trans., 70; cf. Ignatius, *Eph.* 9:1). However, the one who raises us to union with Christ is the Spirit, as Irenaeus would explain in his discussion of eschatology in *AH* V.36.2: “they ascend by the Spirit to the Son, and by the Son to the Father” (SC 153:458–60; ANF 1:567a)—here, a tradition passed down from the Apostles by their disciples, the Elders of the Church; cf. *AH* IV.20.5; *Dem.* 5, 7.
- 134 In *AH* III.24.1, Irenaeus gave a short list of “apostles, prophets, teachers” and omitted the following reference to workers of miracles, healers, etc., in 1 Cor. 12:28. He had already argued (against the gnostics) that the miracles of exorcism and healing were among the many gifts that the Church had received by invoking the name of Jesus Christ in order to minister to the needs of gentiles (II.32.5); cf. Kaiser (1997, 66–67).
- 135 Irenaeus cited Ps. 33:6 (LXX 32:6) several times (*AH* I.22.1; III.8.3; *Dem.* 5). Following Theophilus (*Autol.* I.7), or else a common tradition, he understood the Psalm verse to assign the creation of the heavens to God’s Word and the creation of their “powers” (*virtutes*, i.e., their angelic hosts; cf. *Dem.* 10) to the Spirit (the divine “breath”). As noted earlier, his focus was clearly on the agency of the Word, as his repeated citation of John 1:3 indicates. For Irenaeus, the main function of the celestial powers in *Dem.* 10 was to glorify God; cf. Briggman (2010, 593–4). While assigning the structure and motion of the heavens to the Word, Irenaeus apparently reserved the inspiration of this higher, angelic function to the Spirit.

- ¹³⁶ As noted above, Irenaeus held that God’s Word established the boundaries and laws that govern the cosmos and assigned a particular function to every single creature (*Dem.* 10).

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