



*Second-century prayers offer us insights into how the early church reflected and practised liturgy, gave instructions on ecclesiology, the spiritual life, and on the person of Christ. This issue addresses one such example.*

## Clement's Hymns to Christ on Spiritual Nourishment

*Christ Jesus, heavenly milk pressed from the sweet breasts of the bride, gracious gifts of your wisdom. The tiny infants with tender mouths suckled at the nipple of the logos and filled with the dewy Spirit (lines 43-53)*

Although Clement of Alexandria cites both Christian and non-Christian prayers in his writings, the best known occur at the end of his work on Christian instruction entitled *ho paidagōgos* (hereafter *Ped*) in a sort of double ending (3.12.101) to the three-part book (*Strom* 6.1.3). Distinctive in form and content, they summarize its major themes and commend certain responses to the reader. This reflection treats three questions about the second prayer, the "Hymn to Christ the Saviour" (according to some manuscripts) and the one which precedes it: (1) whether the hymn belonged originally to the book or was added later, (2) structure and possible function of the prayer (literary-didactic or liturgical), and (3) how the passage reflects particular views of Clement on Christ, the church, and prayer.

Whether the hymn originally belongs with the work arises from three related phenomena. First, its most important manuscript, the tenth century Arethas Codex lacks the hymn. Second, no other contemporary text has been found which ends with a poetic or hymnal composition. Third, the passage is neither cited by later writers, repeated in other liturgical contexts.

In answer to these points: (1) some direct copies of the Arethas Codex do include the hymn. (2) Close linguistic parallels exist between the prayer and the introduction to the hymn. (3) Its contents

reflect the major theme and images of the book, thus serving as a summary. Thus it is likely that this composition stood at the end of Clement's work.

But if the hymn belonged to *Ped*, how did it function? Was it primarily a literary or didactic poem, or could the author have intended its use in the local Alexandrian liturgy? There is little data elsewhere in Clement over how worship services were conducted (see Cosgrove, "Clement of Alexandria and Early Christian Music" *J ECS* 14:3 [2006]: 255-82).

The above arguments mentioned apply to the case for a literary or didactic use. The passage aptly sums up the roles of Christ and Christians that characterize *Ped.*, Hymns and other poetic compositions, not found at the end of documents, frequently occurred within both early Christian and non-Christian literature, without necessarily reflecting intended performance.

Yet circumstantial factors suggest the opposite view. Paul exhorted Christians at Colossae to use "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" in corporate worship (Col 3:16, cf. 1 Co 14:26). Pliny the Younger learned that Christians in Asia Minor habitually sang a "hymn to Christ as to a God" (*Letters* 10.96-97). By the third century a vespers hymn, "*Phōs hilaron*" circulated widely in the east. In his *Symposium*, Methodius (d. 311) describes group antiphonal singing which may reflect typical rather than historical events (*Symposium, Arete*, 2).

The structure of the hymn further suggests that it may have been antiphonally read or sung. It begins by invoking Christ under various images (lines 1-10). The "assembled" chorus responds once (lines 11-28), and again (lines 29-42, 43-53). Finally, shift to the first person plural, invites participation of a larger group up to the end of the hymn (lines 54-66). Yet, possible antiphonal parallels are difficult to prove, and the thematic movement of the prayer shows as much early Christian linguistic influence as that from contemporary Hellenistic models.

Whether intended for actual performance or not, the hymn reflects Clement's distinctive attitude toward

Christ as living tutor for Christians in his time. The images of shepherd, ship's rudder (or pilot) and nurturer are not new to the reader but are exploited in the argumentation of the book. Corresponding images of flock, ship and especially children (objects of instruction and nurture) are amply developed.

More striking in the content of the hymn are ambiguous references to Christ and God the Father, suggesting exaltation. First, in both prayer and hymn, Christ or the Logos is the main object of the communication. The prayer begins: "Be merciful to your children, Tutor, Father, guide for Israel, son and father, two in one, Lord" (*Ped* 3.12.101.1). Second, the exalted Christ/Logos is requested to intervene in the life of the community and is praised. Trinitarian language even occurs: "Day and night to the last day, let us keep praising with praises of thanksgiving to the only Father and Son, Son and Father, Tutor-Son and Teacher, together with the Holy Spirit" (3.12.101.2).

Use of nurturing imagery (see citation introducing this article) is also relatively rare in early Christian circles, except in the East, in particular in the *Odes of Solomon* (e.g., 19:1-5). Clement develops it as an essential part of his description of the work of Christ in the lives of Christians throughout *Ped*, partly influenced by his reading of 1 Peter 2:2, e.g.: "If we have been regenerated for Christ, the one who regenerated us feeds us with his own milk, the Logos. Every progenitor furnishes, in effect immediately and naturally nourishment to the one who came into being. Thus, as with spiritual regeneration, spiritual nourishment also exists for the spiritual man" (1.6.49.3). Resemblances between Clement and the *Odes* suggest an area for further study of how ecclesiological and Christological concepts developed in the Christian East.

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## Reviews & Annotations

**Matthew C. Steenberg,  
Irenaeus on Creation.  
Supplements to Vigiliae  
Christianae. Vol. 91 (Leiden:  
Brill, 2008). 244p.**

This is a comprehensive study on Irenaeus' cosmology. The monograph examines and enlists the scattered and varied cosmological and anthropological statements in the Irenaeus corpus with the intent to argue for the centrality of the human person to the bishop's theology. Expanding upon his Oxford dissertation, which was a more focused study on Gn 1-11, Steenberg now attempts 'to understand fully this unique interrelation of protology and eschatology, anthropology and Christology' (9).

To this end, Steenberg sets out in the opening chapter to discover Irenaeus' method, a proper hermeneutical lens through which Irenaeus engages in deeper reflection on creation. Doctrinal formulation, particularly of the motivation and cause of creation, received an impetus, Steenberg argues, when early Gnostics began to propagate claims contrary to the biblical narrative. This was especially true because despite its absence in all Jewish cosmological models, the Valentinian system stresses ignorance as its centerpiece in their proclamation of the demiurge as creator. Perhaps indebted to Theophilus and Philo, it suffices for Irenaeus that both creation and the ensuing economy are propelled simply by virtue of the creator's goodness. Along with this self-communicating goodness of God as the motivation for creation, God's cosmic power in creation *ex nihilo*, and chiliastic eschatology serve, Steenberg argues, as the other two of 'the three interpretive foundations' upon which to understand Irenaeus' approach to creation. Regrettably, however, except for the last of these three, Steenberg does not adduce convincing evidence how the other two points are also 'grounded squarely in the testimony of the incarnation' (60). Indeed, the chiliastic kingdom, through the Recapitulator of creation, fulfils, restores, and renews what God initially began. But it is not equally clear how the incarnate life of the Son 'clarifies' the Father's motivation in creation *ex nihilo*.

Irenaeus' understanding of the cosmogony is taken up in the next chapter in which creation is a triune act, Steenberg explains, not merely as the unified work of, but also according to the distinct roles of the three persons. Creation as the work of the Father's two hands parallels Irenaeus' standard delineation (*Epid.* 5) of the Father as creator, the Word as the means of, and the Spirit as the adorer of creation, that which bespeaks 'a distinctive dependency of the latter two persons upon the first' (80). The trinitarian implications in the creation narrative, especially Gn 1.1-4, 26-7, and 28 all reinforce the idea of God's goodness as self-

expressive motivation and cause. Moreover, the charge to 'increase and multiply' (1:28) is significant as a movement toward the perfection of the eschaton. But again, the author does not clearly substantiate that these are conceived through the 'incarnational focus on the redemptive Christ working in the Spirit' (83).

The third chapter is the most thorough and the strongest part of the book. His arguments are based on the well-known Irenaeus' Christological reflection in *Epid.* 32: 'this earth, while it was still virgin, God "took mud from the earth and fashioned man" . . . thus the Lord, recapitulating this man, received the same arrangement of embodiment as this one, being born from the Virgin by the will and wisdom of God, that he might also demonstrate the likeness of embodiment to Adam, and might become the man, written in the beginning, "according to the image and likeness of God."' Thus, Gn 2:7, Steenberg claims, is the one verse which 'discloses to Irenaeus the incarnational nature of God's creative endeavour' more than any other in the OT (112). Accordingly, Steenberg comes up with four categories of incarnational reading which he believes are Irenaeus' Christocentric approaches toward the texts on the creation of humanity: (1) The triune God without any mediating power (e.g., angels) fashioned humankind; (2) the reality of Christ's birth refutes all Docetic theories and conveys solidarity with all humankind beginning with Adam; (3) against all anti-materialistic and dualistic views, the same Word that took up the dust of Gn 2:7 formed the mud of Jn 9:6, teaching that the material aspect of our nature as earthly is accompanied with the material limitations of corruptibility, mortality, and temporality, but still positive and transformable through Christ; and (4) the 'breath' given to Adam by God is the animating soul that eventually helps us to participate in the life of the Holy Spirit. Steenberg concludes that a human person bears the 'image' of God in material and immaterial terms: One is fashioned by God's hands after the physical form of the incarnate Son from his own material work; also, the life visible in this person is God's own life, the animating principle. In general, Irenaeus ascribes the divine image to the image of the Word, and the divine likeness to our formation as a result of participating in the life of God through the Holy Spirit, although the full likeness is achievable only in the eschaton. In this vein, Steenberg argues that the notion of image and likeness in Irenaeus 'summarises the whole thrust of the divine economy of salvation' (138).

In chapters four and five, Steenberg continues to trace how the creation narrative is read Christologically, now in regards to Gn 3 - 11 (the prohibition on the tree of life, humanity's subsequent deception and transgression, the life after Eden, and finally the revelation of sin and redemption found in Christ). He locates recapitulative work of God for the human creature in *AH* 5.36.3 to draw out the connection of the curse against the serpent (Gn 3:15) to the incarnate Christ who

will eventually dominate the serpent. Christ is the link that binds together the beginnings and the ends and unites the whole of the economy. Following an earlier study by Wingren, (*Man and the Incarnation*) however, Steenberg's take on Irenaeus' reading of the creation narrative tends to weaken the culpability of Adam and Eve, and more importantly, the effect of the Fall, when he says, '[Irenaeus'] understanding of human nature after the expulsion from Eden remains largely unchanged from this initial state . . . . It is primarily humanity's relationship to the cosmos, God and other human persons that is altered, and this through the transgression proper and the circumstances under which Eve and then Adam were to violate the divine command' (169). Although known for his functional language to delineate his theology, Irenaeus also says that the human composite who 'does not receive through faith the engrafting of the Spirit, remains in his old condition, and being mere flesh and blood, he cannot inherit the kingdom of God' (*AH* 5.10.2). While it is true that in the Genesis narrative Irenaeus has in mind the incarnate Christ as the epitome of the perfected human being in contradistinction to the immature and inexperienced Adam, it would be a case of confusion moving from metaphor to history, and certainly an overstatement if one were to dismiss the change in the condition of Adam incurred by sin, as if Adam and all his race can mature and have 'participation in incorruptibility' (*Epid.* 31) apart from our 'regeneration unto God' (*Epid.* 3).

The virtue of this book in using creation as a horizon for understanding the human condition connects many details of Irenaeus' polemic response to his contemporary situation. Not many studies cover the range of Irenaeus' dependence on Justin and even less on Theophilus on this topic of creation. Steenberg also brings forth that, according to Irenaeus, the creation narrative thrust toward the chiliastic eschaton is intricately interwoven into the fabric of his reflection on the divine economy. The major weakness as perceived by this reviewer, however, is that this attempt at synthesis of Irenaeus' corpus overextends and even capitulates over to the concept of the 'immanent incarnation', conceived as the mature and perfected humanity, thus making little room for the 'transcendent incarnation', the 'inbreaking' of the redemptive cross and resurrection of Christ applied to the rest of humanity.

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