

EARLY CHRISTIAN MILLENNIALISM AND THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

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ABSTRACT

Further examination of the evidence, especially from Irenaeus in Adversus haereses, supports recognition of chiliasm in the patristic period and undermines the reconstruction by Charles Hill, who has argued for an amillennialism among orthodox (non-Gnostic) Christians that he maintains has been ignored by scholars. It also undermines Hill's theory that early premillennialism was adopted for pragmatic reasons from late Judaism, rather than growing from Scripture or dominical teaching.

IN HIS BOOK *REGNUM CAELORUM*, CHARLES HILL takes issue with the longstanding scholarly consensus that chiliasm dominated the church in its earliest history.¹ In contrast, Hill argues for an extensive *orthodox non-chiliasm* which, he believes, has been overlooked or ignored by traditional accounts of that early period. By “orthodox non-chiliasm,” Hill intends to exclude Gnostic amillennial views that denied many orthodox doctrines, such as the resurrection of the dead.

The problem, of course, is that with the exception of the well-known chiliasts, such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, much of the extant second-century literature is silent on millenni-

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¹ Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Future Hope in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992); second edition published as *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity [RC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). References in this article will be to the second edition unless stated otherwise.

alism. However, Hill claims to have found a key that unlocks the silence and reveals a previously hidden non-Gnostic amillennialism. He then goes on to argue that actually chiliasm, or premillennialism, was a theological innovation upon this early amillennialism—an innovation based not on Christian sources, but on a pragmatic borrowing from late Judaism.

Hill claims to have discovered his key in the classic work of Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus haereses* (*AH*), where in book 5, chapters 31–36, the bishop of Lyons sets forth his eschatology. Hill claims to have discovered right at the beginning of this section a necessary logical connection between Irenaeus’s (1) belief in an earthly millennium intervening between the resurrection of the righteous and the eternal state, and (2) his belief in a subterranean intermediate state of the Christian dead before the resurrection.² The millennium, Hill believes, is for Irenaeus (and by extension for early Christian chiliasm in general) a necessary stage or step in the ascent of a soul from Hades to heaven. If, contrariwise, a soul were somehow to ascend directly to heaven at death, the millennial stage would not be needed. According to Hill, an affirmation of a heavenly intermediate state for the Christian dead should logically exclude belief in an earthly millennium. Since they would already

² The importance of Irenaeus for this argument is noted by Hill when he says, “Irenaeus is the only one who explains the connection between the two doctrines, but we may believe that his explanation was noted and accepted by Tertullian, Victorinus, and Lactantius” (*RC*, 44). Hill emphasizes *the logical and necessary connection* between a subterranean conception of the intermediate state and chiliasm in several places. He writes, “Irenaeus thus exposes *a logical and systematic connection* [emphasis mine] between belief in a heavenly intermediate state and refusal of the notion of a future, temporary kingdom of Christ on earth. It is *a logical connection* [emphasis mine] because, if souls are ushered into heaven, into the very presence of God and Christ, immediately after death and not detained in refreshing subearthly vaults, a future earthly kingdom would seem at best an anticlimactic appendage to salvation history, at worst a serious and unconscionable retrogression. The millennium is then entirely redundant. *It is a ‘systematic’ connection* [emphasis mine] because it would appear by inference that the heavenly intermediate state, in the system of his orthodox dissenters, is the opposing counterpart of the earthly millennium in the system of Irenaeus. As introducing the redeemed into direct fellowship with their Savior and their God this heavenly postmortem existence *takes the place of the millennium* [emphasis Hill]” (*RC*, 19–20). Later, Hill refers to the relationship between the two doctrines as a “bond” (which he says Methodius “severed”), a “link—indeed an alliance” (*RC*, 43). On page 246 of his work, he qualifies this somewhat saying that “the connection may not have been an absolute logical necessity,” yet “it did exist, and it had a rationale.” A few lines later, Hill says the millennium supplied “the *necessary* [emphasis mine] further training” between the subterranean intermediate state and entrance into God’s presence. Again, he states, “Observing this close association between the doctrines leads to the conclusion that in Christian chiliast circles they played complementary roles in an essentially homogeneous eschatological outlook” (*RC*, 245).

be in heaven at death, no millennial step is needed to transfer them there for eternity.³

Leaving aside for the moment Irenaeus's belief that the Christian dead exist in Hades prior to the resurrection (and therefore prior to the millennium)—a view that will seem peculiar to evangelicals of all millennial persuasions—Hill's key evidence would simply be speculation, if hard evidence of the alleged non-Gnostic, non-chiliasm eschatology were lacking. However, Hill identifies such evidence precisely in the same passage where Irenaeus sets forth the supposed logical connection. Hill claims that in *AH* 5:31–32 Irenaeus explicitly identifies a group of “orthodox non-chiliasmists” who did believe that Christian souls went immediately to heaven at death. From this point, Hill goes on to argue that it was because of this belief that the orthodox non-chiliasmists did not affirm a future millennium. Since they were ignorant of the subterranean destiny of Christian souls at death, they were therefore ignorant of the future earthly millennial kingdom as a necessary stage or step in the soul's advance to heaven.

Even if Hill's interpretation of *AH* 5:31–32 were correct, the evidence offered does not, in itself, substantiate the claim of a widespread non-Gnostic, non-chiliasm against which early Christian chiliasm was an innovation. Hill does cite references from Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and later writers as evidence of the existence of non-chiliasmist views. How widespread this early amillennialism was in the second century, however, cannot be determined from these sources. Furthermore, none of the evidence offered by Hill provides the kind of logical link that he claims to find in *AH* 5:31–32. In *Dialogue with Trypho* 80, Justin Martyr speaks of some “who belong to the true and pious faith and are true Christians” but “think otherwise” regarding the millennial glory of Jerusalem than do Justin and those likeminded with him.⁴ However, Justin nowhere teaches that Christian souls descend to Hades at death. Conversely, according to a transcript of his trial, he believed that he himself would ascend to heaven at his martyrdom. We do not find in Justin any key logically linking chiliasm and an intermediate state of the Christian dead in Hades, as Hill claims to find in Irenaeus.

The premillennialist Tertullian affirms in *De anima* 55 his belief that all souls go to Hades at death until the day of resurrec-

³ *RC*, 20.

⁴ The translations used in this article are those found in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (*ANF*), with modification.

tion.⁵ However, he identifies “Abraham’s Bosom” as the place in Hades to which the souls of the faithful go. Although this location is not exactly heaven, it is close enough, in Tertullian’s opinion, to afford “some foresight of [its] glory.”⁶ Furthermore, Tertullian does see an exception whereby some Christian souls do in fact go to heaven directly at death. Citing Revelation 6:9, he notes that the souls of martyrs go directly to heaven, and there they await the resurrection to come. Of course, if this is so, then it is not essential for this premillennialist to affirm the millennium as a *necessary* step to reach heaven. Hill acknowledges that Tertullian sometimes teaches an immediate transference into the Lord’s presence of some Christians at death. To account for this tension, Hill hypothesizes an earlier pre-chilastic stage of Tertullian’s thought. However, this is a circular argument. The important point is that nowhere in Tertullian do we find a millennium-based argument for a subterranean descent at death.⁷ Even if Tertullian had come to his chilastic views later in life, there is no reason to think that he linked millennialism *per se* to a specific view of the intermediate state of the dead.⁸ To state it differently, Tertullian provides no clear evidence for Hill’s key.

ADVERSUS HAERESES 5.31–36

Before looking at the precise lines in *AH* 5:31 on which Hill bases his key, we should examine the overall presentation of Irenaeus’s eschatology in *AH* 5:31–36, giving particular attention to how he supports his doctrinal views. One needs to note that, beginning in *AH* 5.31 and running through *AH* 5.36, a primary point for Irenaeus is *the necessity of bodily resurrection from the dead* for the en-

⁵ See the discussion of Tertullian in Hill, *RC* 24–28.

⁶ Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 4.34. Tertullian relates “Abraham’s Bosom” to the idea of ascending steps to heaven, which he finds in Scripture. He also compares it to the Greek idea of the Elysian fields.

⁷ Only in *Adversus Marcionem* 33.24 are the two themes found together. Tertullian briefly presents his premillennial expectation, but postpones his explication of “Abraham’s Bosom” as the place of premillennial repose for the dead until *AM* 4.34.

⁸ William Tabbernee actually argues a reverse development in Tertullian’s thought, where Paradise, the destiny of the believing dead, becomes more associated with heaven in Tertullian’s later writings. William Tabbernee, “The World to Come: Tertullian’s Christian Eschatology,” in *Tertullian and Paul*, Pauline and Patristic Scholars in Debate, vol. 1, ed. Todd D. Still and David E. Wilhite (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 267–68.

joyment of everlasting life. In *AH* 5:31, Irenaeus argues that ascension into the eternal blessedness of heaven only comes through resurrection. The alternative debated by Irenaeus is (1) ascension of a soul without a body at death, *versus* (2) ascension of a holistic body-soul unity at resurrection. These are presented as two opposing views. Most importantly, in both cases, *ascension is viewed as entry into everlasting blessedness. It is not perceived to be an intermediate experience.*

Irenaeus does argue in *AH* 5.31 for the intermediate state of Christian souls in Hades. He bases this view on the typology of Christ's personal progression from death through Hades to resurrection. This pattern of Christ is presented to the reader by means of commentary on a string of texts that include Matthew 11:40, Ephesians 4:9, Psalm 86:13, and John 20:17. The textual construction begins with the descent of Christ's soul to Sheol, and ends with the ascension of the resurrected One to heaven. "It was thus [that] He ascended to the Father." The pattern is then applied to Christians by means of the principle enunciated in Luke 6:40 that "no disciple is above the master, but everyone that is perfect should be as his master." The conclusion is then given:

As our Master, therefore, did not at once depart, taking flight [to heaven], but awaited the time of His resurrection prescribed by the Father, which had been also shown forth through Jonas, and rising again after three days was taken up [into heaven]; so ought we also to await the time of our resurrection prescribed by God and foretold by the prophets, and so, rising, be taken up, as many as the Lord shall account worthy of this [privilege].

Two things should be noted here. First, the argument that Christians descend into Hades at death is not a systematic argument—it is not an argument made from the logical necessity of a premillennial eschatological system, but a textual-grammatical and typological argument from Scripture. Secondly, a millennium is not necessary to this argument. In the Christ typology, ascension to the Father follows upon the resurrection. There is no millennial interval between Christ's resurrection and ascension. Consequently, the pattern of the servant following the master does not entail a millennium *per se*. The Irenaeian argument of the pattern of Master and Servant could allow for an intermediate state in Hades, followed by resurrection into an amillennial consummation!

Irenaeus's view of an intermediate state of the Christian dead in Hades is not one shared by many premillennialists today. Our difference on this point concerns the interpretation of the totality of biblical teaching on the intermediate state. Like Irenaeus, premillennialists today seek to base their eschatological views on Scrip-

ture. In light of that, it is puzzling how Hill can postulate a logical necessity inherent in premillennialism without considering the fact that it has existed for many centuries in the church without this supposedly necessary doctrinal component, one that is largely absent from today's iterations of premillennialism.

Irenaeus's extended argument for the coming millennium begins in *AH* 5.32. While it is certainly true that Irenaeus speaks here of ascending stages from a subterranean repose in Hades to resurrection and then through the millennium to the eternal state, and while he criticizes those who are ignorant of this progression, his rationale for the millennium is not based on a logical necessity in the progressive stages. In accordance with the general framework of Irenaeus's theology, his doctrine of the intermediate state in *AH* 5.31 is, rather, an intensely textual, hermeneutical argument. This extended *biblical* (rather than systematic and logical) argument is set in contrast to "opinions . . . derived from heretical discourses" (*AH* 5:32:1). In Scripture one finds the promise of God regarding an earthly inheritance, and that promise must be fulfilled, because it is God who promised it. The link between resurrection and renewal of the creation that Irenaeus finds in Romans 8 is the key to tying the patriarchal promise of an earthly inheritance to bodily resurrection. Irenaeus cites texts concerning the Abrahamic promise from Genesis to Galatians, and he concludes, "Now God made promise of the earth to Abraham and his seed; yet neither Abraham nor his seed, that is, those justified by faith, do now receive inheritance in it; but they shall receive it at the resurrection of the just. For God is true and faithful; and on this account he said, 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.'"

In 5.33–34, Irenaeus cites texts that emphasize the exceeding fruitfulness and prosperity of the promised inheritance, while continuing a textual and thematic linkage to resurrection. There are a number of lexical as well as thematic intertextual links in this chain of texts. In 5.35, Irenaeus argues that the fulfillment of the inheritance fits an order, an event sequence that further reinforces its earthly nature. The millennial kingdom is justified hermeneutically by an exposition of the biblical theme of inheritance, both as to its nature and in its linkage to resurrection from the dead.

The subterranean nature of the intermediate state presented in *AH* 5:31 plays no role in Irenaeus's argument for a future millennium, which begins in *AH* 5:32. Irenaeus does not argue that a millennium is necessary because of the subterranean location of the Christian dead, nor *vice versa* that a subterranean descent of the dead is necessary because of the expectation of a millennium. The arguments he presents for a millennial kingdom would be just

as valid if a soul spent its intermediate state in heavenly repose, as pictured in Revelation 6:9 (as already noted in Tertullian, who otherwise agreed with Irenaeus on the intermediate state). The issue for Irenaeus is not so much location (which has its own rationale in the pattern of Christ) as it is the mode of the experience of final blessedness. Final blessedness is not the experience of a “naked soul,” but of a whole anthropological entity, of body and soul by means of resurrection. This is why Irenaeus’s apparent exception on location for martyrs (or children) should be seen neither as a contradiction nor as an indication of later eschatological development—any more than it is in Tertullian. Even if the martyrs come to their resurrection out of the heavenly scene pictured in Revelation 6:9, full enjoyment of the eschatological consummation requires holistic resurrection. Furthermore, the promises of an earthly inheritance still need to be fulfilled for them, because the Word of God is true. In his view, martyrs still need to be rewarded in the place where they suffered, for the laws of recompense and reward remain in force. Finally, there is no retrogression in these stages because the earthly order shares in the same advance in glory that is given to humans in the resurrection. Heavenly glory extends to renew the creation.

THE “SO-CALLED ORTHODOX” OF *AH* 5.31

Let us now look more closely at the alleged identification of an *orthodox non-chilias*t group in *AH* 5:31–32, which is crucial to Hill’s supposed Irenaeian key. For the purpose of analysis, the text of *AH* 5:31, lines 1–17, is reproduced below, along with the translation found in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* edition, slightly revised with the lines rearranged for convenient comparison.

AH 5:31.1.1–17 from *Sources chrétiennes* [SC] 153:388–89:⁹

Quoniam autem quidam ex his qui putantur
recte credidisse supergrediuntur ordinem promotionis
justorum et modos meditationis ad incorruptelam
4 ignorant, haereticos sensus in se habentes—haeretici
enim despicientes plasmationem Dei et non suscipientes
salutem carnis suae, contemnentes autem et repro-
missionem Dei et totum supergredientes Deum sensu,
8 simul atque mortui fuerint dicunt se supergredi caelos
et Demiurgum et ire ad matrem vel ad eum qui ad ipsas

⁹ The critical text for Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* 5 is found in *Sources chrétiennes* 152–53, ed. A. Rousseau, L. Doutreleau, and C. Mercier (Paris: Cerf, 1969).

afflingitur patrem—, qui ergo universam reprobant
 resurrectionem et quantum in ipsis est auferunt eam
 12 de medio, quid mirum est si nec ordinem resurrectionis
 sciunt, nolentes intellegere quoniam, si haec ita essent,
 quemadmodum dicunt, ipse utique Dominus, in quem
 dicunt se credere, non in tertia die fecisset resurrec-
 16 tionem, sed super crucem exspirans confestim utique
 abiisset sursum, relinquens corpus terrae?

AH 5:31.1 from ANF 1:560 (with slight revision):

Since, again, some who are reckoned / among the orthodox go beyond
 the plan for the exaltation / of the just, and concerning the methods
 by which they are disciplined for incorruption / they are ignorant,
 they thus entertain heretical opinions. For the heretics / despising of the
 handiwork of God, and not admitting / the salvation of their flesh,
 while they also treat contemptuously / the promise of God and pass
 beyond God altogether in the sentiments they form, / affirm that im-
 mediately upon their death they shall pass above the heavens / and
 the Demiurge, and go to the Mother or to that Father / whom they
 have feigned. Those persons, therefore, who disallow / a resurrection
 affecting the whole man and as far as in them lies, remove it / from
 their midst, how can they be wondered at, if as to the plan of the res-
 urrection / they know nothing? For they do not choose to understand,
 that if these things are / as they say, the Lord himself, in whom they
 profess to believe, did not rise again on the third day; / but immedi-
 ately upon His expiring on the cross undoubtedly / departed on high,
 leaving His body to the earth.

In lines 1–2, Irenaeus speaks of “some who are reckoned among the orthodox [*quidam ex his qui putantur recte credidisse*].” The fundamental problem which Irenaeus charges against this group is that “they have heretical opinions [*haereticos sensus in se habentes*]” (line 4). From the end of line 4 to the middle of line 10, between the dashes in the SC text, heretics are specifically described who appear to be (as many including Hill have noted) Valentinians. These Valentinian heretics “pass beyond” God altogether in their thoughts and say that at their deaths they will “pass beyond” both the heavens and the Demiurge to their imagined supercelestial Mother or Father (the ANF translator inserts parenthetically the name of the Valentinian aeon Achamoth). The problem with these (Valentinian) heretics, Irenaeus notes, is that they “despise the handiwork of God [*plasmationem Dei*], do not admit the salvation of their flesh [*salutem carnis suae*], and treat contemptuously the promises of God.”

As noted, the critical text of *Sources chrétiennes* sets Irenaeus’s comments on the heretics within dashes, located in lines 4 and 10.

In line 10, the text *qui ergo universam reprobant resurrectionem* refers back to those of line 1 “who are reckoned among the orthodox.” This accords with the study of Antonio Orbe, who treated the groups of line 1 and line 10 as identical, and linked them with an anonymous group addressed in *AH* 5.2.2 “who despise the entire dispensation of God [*universam dispositionem Dei*], disallow the salvation of the flesh [*carnis salutem*], and treat with contempt its regeneration, maintaining that it is not capable of incorruption.”¹⁰

Read this way, the problem with this so-called orthodox group is their rejection of the holistic resurrection (*universam reprobant resurrectionem*). Consequently, it is no wonder that “they know nothing of the plan, the order, of the resurrection.” They have been infected with a *heretical* contempt for *the salvation of the flesh*, a lack of appreciation for *the handiwork of God*, which is tied to a disregard for *the promises of God in Scripture*.

Hill, however, objects to the identification of the group in *AH* 5.31, line 10, with the reputed orthodox in line 1–4. He claims that line 10 continues the description of Valentinian heretics begun at the end of line 4. In line 14 Irenaeus refers to what *they*—the group in question—*say* (*dicunt*). Hill sees here a verbal link to line 8, where the verb “say” (*dicunt*) is used in reference to the heretics. Only the heretics have “spoken” prior to line 14, so “as they say” in line 14 must be to these same heretics.¹¹ In Hill’s view, Irenaeus’s complaints from lines 10 and following are not about “those reckoned among the orthodox,” but about Valentinian heretics. It is the Valentinian heretics, not “those reckoned among the orthodox,” who have a problem with the resurrection, and consequently are unable to understand the progress of eschatological events. By isolating the supposed orthodox of lines 1–4 from Irenaeus’s criticism in line 10 and following, Hill is able to portray them as actually orthodox, immune from the criticism regarding the resurrection.

However, this is not likely, for Irenaeus’s point in line 14 and following is that the group in line 10 does not seem to understand that their view logically means that “the Lord himself, in whom they profess to believe, did not rise again upon the third day, but immediately upon His expiring on the cross, undoubtedly departed on high, leaving His body to the earth.” Yet the *Valentinians* did

¹⁰ Antonio Orbe, “Adversarios anónimos de la *Salus carnis*,” *Gregorianum* 60 (1979): 9–53.

¹¹ Hill, *RC*, 11.

not believe that *their Lord* either expired on the cross or rose on the third day. There was no conflict between the Valentinians' belief in what they expected of their souls at death and what they alleged to have been experienced by their Lord who did not die—a non-material ascension. Someone who believed that the Lord really died on the cross and really rose bodily on the third day would be expressing an orthodox belief. The point of Irenaeus in lines 1–4 is that there were people who were presumed to be orthodox but who were actually entertaining heretical opinions, not people who were presumed to be heretics but who were actually entertaining orthodox opinions. People who have an orthodox confession regarding Jesus Christ but whose views on eschatological anthropology were influenced by heretics exactly match the description of the group in lines 1–4. In the rest of this section, Irenaeus demonstrates the contradiction between these people's Christological and eschatological views. In so doing, Irenaeus connects this section to theological themes—Christological, soteriological, and anthropological—that unify *Adversus haereses*.

However, Hill argues that the opinions identified by Irenaeus in lines 10 and following are typically Valentinian and suggests seeing both groups as Valentinian heretics. Such opinions mentioned by Irenaeus include: (1) rejection of holistic resurrection, (2) interpretation of Ephesians 4:9 in which “the lower parts of the earth” refer to the present world and not Hades, (3) usage of the term “inner-man,” which Hill says “is practically a Valentinian technical term” (although it is precisely the term used in Ephesians 3:16), and (4) the term “super-celestial place” (*supercaelestem locum*).¹² However, once again, holding opinions in common with the heretics is exactly what Irenaeus charged against this group of so-called orthodox in 31.1, lines 1–4—“they have heretical opinions!” It should not be at all surprising if Irenaeus should proceed to point out views held in common with heretics. It is possible that some of the language (such as “super-celestial place”) may be used rhetorically. But it should be noted that Irenaeus uses this same language to criticize the group in 32.1, which Hill acknowledges to be the same group as that of 31.1, lines 1–4—the so-called orthodox. Again in 33.1, Irenaeus disagrees with this same so-called orthodox group and asserts that the kingdom enjoyment of the fruit of the vine will not take place in a “super-celestial place.” Likewise,

¹² Hill, *RC*, 11–12.

in 35.2, reviewing a group of kingdom passages, he insists that “all these things . . . cannot be understood in reference to super-celestial matters.” Furthermore, after citing Paul’s reference in Galatians 4 to the Jerusalem which is above, Irenaeus notes, “He does not say this with any thought of an erratic Aeon, or of any power which departed from the Pleroma, or of Prunicus.” References to clear Valentinian ideas whether as a rhetorical device or because of real ideological influence does not change the fact that Irenaeus’s addressees are undoubtedly the so-called, but obviously confused, “orthodox.”

The dispute between Hill and Orbe on the comparison of so-called orthodox groups in *AH* 5:31–32 and Justin’s *Dialogue* 80.3–5 is beyond the scope of this article. It is sufficient to note the weakness of Hill’s attempt to link the group in 31, lines 10–58 (the conclusion of *AH* 31) with the heretics of 31, lines 4–10.

In contrast to Hill, and in support of the claim that the group in 31, lines 10–58, is the same group as the so-called orthodox of lines 1–4, one should observe the verbal and conceptual repetition of *ordinem* (plan) in the two sections of the text: the so-called orthodox of lines 1–4 “going beyond the prearranged plan for the exaltation of the just” (*ordinem promotionis iustorum*) and the group of line 10 and following being ignorant of the *ordinem resurrectionis*. Likewise, the group referred to in 32.1 (whom Hill admits are the so-called orthodox of 31.1–4), are alleged to be ignorant of the *mysterium resurrectionis*, which the subsequent argument says takes place in steps according to an order and arrangement (*ad ordinationem et dispositionem . . . et per hujus/modi gradus proficere*).

Finally, although much more could be said, Hill does not give sufficient weight to Orbe’s observation that the eucharistic/theological criticism of an anonymous group in *AH* 5.2.2 reappears in the argument against the so-called orthodox in 5.33. It must be emphasized that the anonymous group in 5.2.2 is charged with rejecting *the salvation of the flesh*, and Irenaeus’s eucharistic/theological criticism is aimed directly at this problem. Not only does that particular eucharistic argument reappear in *AH* 5.33, but also a number of other terms and arguments defending *the salvation of the flesh* in the sections following 5.2 reappear in the arguments of 5:32–36. Hill’s assertion that the so-called orthodox in 5.31.1 are not criticized by Irenaeus “for denying the salvation of the flesh, but merely for being ignorant . . . of the mystery of the resurrection of the just, and of the kingdom which is the commencement of incorruption” is short-sighted, missing entirely the substance of the argument against the so-called orthodox in the

following lines. The salvation of the flesh (*salus carnis*) is the theme and primary concern throughout *AH* 5. It is conceptually and theologically linked to the dispensation(s) of God which appear in 5.2.2, and again in 5.32.1 (compare 5.2.2: *universam dispositionem Dei . . . et carnes salutem* with 5.32.1: *dispositiones Dei et mysterium iustorum resurrectionis*). The rejection of the holistic resurrection (*universam reprobant resurrectionem*) in 5.31.1, line 10, is an issue because these so-called orthodox “have heretical opinions . . . despising the handiwork of God and not admitting the salvation of their flesh” (*salutem carnis*).

Hill is correct when he says that one’s conclusion about the precise identities of the groups in 5.31 “will profoundly affect our appraisal of non-chiliasts at the time of Irenaeus.” Yet Hill’s postulation of a group of non-chiliasts who in Irenaeus’s opinion are orthodox on the resurrection of the dead but who deny the descent of the Christian soul to Hades at death *and are therefore necessarily and logically non-chiliasts* fails to do justice to Irenaeus’s argument. In *AH* 5.31–32, Irenaeus complains about a group of so-called orthodox, who under temptation from Gnostic heresies and through their own ignorance of Scripture fail to grasp or are hostile to the salvation of the flesh. This in turn entails large-scale, systematic theological and doxological confusion.

CONCLUSION

Charles Hill has performed a valuable service for patristic studies by calling attention to the question of the systematic coherence of early Christian eschatological views. In addition, he has stimulated discussion on the identity of so-called orthodox groups identified by Justin and Irenaeus. However, his proposed key to revealing a previously hidden, widespread non-chiliasm is unreliable. He has failed to demonstrate a logical, necessary connection between chiliasm and a subterranean descent of Christian souls at death. It is unquestionable that some chiliasts held the two doctrines. However, it is not the case that the two were so conceptually linked that the appearance of one doctrine necessarily implies the other. Nor was it the case that the denial of one necessarily implies the denial of the other.

On the contrary, that which most concerned the early chiliasts in their disputes with some who appeared to be orthodox but nevertheless held heretical opinions appears to be precisely that which Hill wishes to take for granted—a full appreciation for the resurrection of the dead, which is essential to a holistic biblical eschatology. As Irenaeus expressed, his so-called orthodox opponents

seemed to disregard the salvation of the flesh in their construal of Christian hope. The expectation of ascension to heaven at death strongly resembled Gnostic teaching. Their so-called orthodox view of the afterlife made bodily resurrection superfluous at best, even if they did not reject it altogether. Early chiliasts saw a logical connection between the materiality of resurrection hope and that of the promised kingdom. The challenge for non-chiliasm would be how to dematerialize the latter without doing likewise to the former. In Origenism, this problem would become acute. Whether it was ever satisfactorily resolved in the amillennial tradition is beyond the scope of this study.