

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

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Supplementary Excursus 25.5 Irenaeus of Lyons and the Assumption of the Church

Over the past several decades, approaches to the heavenly “assumption” (*assumptio*) of the church in the early fathers have fallen along a spectrum from maximalist to minimalist positions.¹ Though a small handful claim historical precedence for a pre-tribulation assumption of the whole church in some fathers,² most downplay or reject the notion that any fathers suggested some kind of assumption prior to a coming period of earthly judgment.³ In these discussions, most attention

¹ I have chosen to use Irenaeus’s own language for the “catching up” or “taking up” of the church throughout this paper to avoid confusion when directly quoting primary texts from *Adversus Haereses*.

² E.g., Lee W. Brainard, *Recent Pre-Trib Findings in the Early Church Fathers* (Harvey, ND: Soothkeep: 2023); Larry V. Crutchfield, “Irenaeus,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 181; Ken Johnson, *The End-Times by the Ancient Church Fathers* (Independently Published, 2016); Henry B. Thiessen, “Will the Church Pass Through the Tribulation?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 92.1 (1935): 196.

³ E.g., William Everett Bell, Jr., “A Critical Evaluation of the Pretribulation Rapture Doctrine in Christian Eschatology,” (PhD diss., New York University, 1967), 27–36; Michael L. Brown and Craig S. Keener, *Not Afraid of the Antichrist: Why We Don’t Believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture* (Minneapolis: Chosen, 2019), 57; Allan Carlsson, “A Historical Approach to the Doctrine of the Rapture” (ThM thesis, Wheaton College, 1956); David Currie, *Rapture: The End-Times Error That Leaves the Bible Behind* (Sophia Institute, 2003); Charles August Hauser, Jr., “The Eschatology of the Early Church Fathers” (ThD diss., Grace Theological Seminary, 1961); Bashiri Durham, “A Comparative Look at Darbyan Dispensationalism and the Views Held by the Early Church Concerning the Second Advent” (MA thesis, Regent University, 2008), 28; Donald Fairbairn, “Contemporary Millennial/Tribulational Debates: Whose Side Was the Early Church On?,” in *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to “Left Behind” Eschatology*, ed. Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 105–132; Alan Hultberg, “Introduction,” in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Posttribulation*, ed. Alan Hultberg, Counterpoints, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 14–15; Margaret Mollett, “‘Taken to the Lord’: Did Pseudo-Ephraem Really Teach the Rapture?” *Journal of Early Christian History* 6.1 (2016): 67. Many minimalists include advocates of the pretribulation view themselves. Most supporters of the pre-tribulation rapture position either have not attempted to establish a historical basis for it, or they do so cautiously, pointing out pre-tribulation-adjacent ideas in early church like imminency: c.f., Ed Hindson and Mark Hitchcock, *Can We Still Believe in the Rapture?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2017), 82; Thomas Ice, “A History of the Rapture Teaching,” in *The Popular Handbook on the Rapture*, ed. Tim LaHaye, Thomas Ice, and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2011), 61; Renald Showers, *Maranatha—Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1995); John A. Sproule, *In Defense of Pretribulationism* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1980), 45–46; Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour: A Systematic Study of the Rapture in Bible Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 126; James F. Stitzinger, “The Rapture in Twenty Centuries of Biblical Interpretation,”

focuses on a very small cluster of ambiguous or under-determinative passages especially from *Shepherd of Hermas* and Irenaeus of Lyons.

Elsewhere I have attended extensively to the question of the ambiguous eschatological expectations in *Shepherd*, arguing that while the theme of some kind of salvation or escape from coming wrath and tribulation is possible for the fully repentant and prepared, the double-minded and unrepentant will endure trial and tribulation. However, even in these connections—primarily in Visions 2, 3, and 4—Hermas makes no mention of a catching up of the church from the earth as the means of escaping coming wrath.⁴ And though I have elsewhere briefly addressed the assumption of the church in Irenaeus of Lyons,⁵ the difficult statement in *Adversus Haereses* 5.29.1 requires a much closer examination. On the surface, the evidence for a pre-tribulation assumption in Irenaeus seems to bifurcate, resulting in advocates of both pretribulationism⁶ and posttribulationism⁷ conscripting the unsuspecting bishop of Lyons into their causes.

In this paper I argue that Irenaeus’s view of the eschatological “assumption” or “taking up” of the church in *Haereses* 5.29.1—understood in the context of his own soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology—is best categorized as a “partial pre-tribulation” rapture. In this way, his view seems to have complemented, and perhaps even depended upon, the elusive promises and warnings in the *Shepherd of Hermas* Visions 2, 3, and 4. I arrive at this conclusion by examining *Haereses* 5.29.1 in light of Irenaeus’s discussion of the bodily assumptions of Enoch and Elijah to heaven as types of the future assumption of the “spiritual” members of the church (*Haer.* 5.5.1) and his understanding of “spiritual ones” (4.33.1; 5.6.1; 5.8.1, 2, 4) as a subset of baptized Christians. In this way, I resolve Irenaeus’s apparent contradiction of both an assumption of the church *prior* to the Tribulation and the presence of the church under the Antichrist *during* the Tribulation.⁸ Furthermore, this solution explains Irenaeus’s teaching that the future millennial kingdom will include both resurrected, immortal saints reigning with Christ and mortal survivors of the Tribulation left upon the earth to repopulate the world (5.35.1).

Critics of “rapture theology” in general and the “pre-tribulation rapture view” in particular often approach the question of the assumption of the church in the fathers with deep skepticism, exaggerated claims, or outright ridicule. Perhaps one of the most influential opinions on the matter, George Eldon Ladd, once asserted, “We can find no trace of pretribulationism in the early

TMSJ 13.2 (2002): 153–56; Robert L. Thomas, “The Rapture and the Biblical Teaching of Imminency,” in *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, ed. John F. Hart (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 24; John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation: A Biblical and Historical Study of Posttribulationism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 16–17.

⁴ Michael J. Svigel and Caroline P. Buie, *The Shepherd of Hermas: A New Translation and Commentary*, Apostolic Fathers Commentary Series, ed. Paul A. Hartog and Shawn J. Wilhite (Eugene: Cascade, 2023), 88–89; 120–124; 137–139; Michael J. Svigel, *The Fathers on the Future: A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2024), 236–239; Michael J. Svigel, “Go Deeper Excursus 27: Escape from the Coming Wrath in the Shepherd of Hermas,” available online at www.fathersonthefuture.com.

⁵ Cf. Svigel, *Fathers on the Future*, 227–240.

⁶ Cf. e.g., pretribulationist David K. Hebert, “The Rapture of the Church: A Doctrine of the Early Church or a Recent Development of the Dispensational Movement?” (MA thesis, Oral Robert University, 2006).

⁷ Cf., e.g., posttribulationist Sung Wook Chung, “Historic Premillennialism,” in Sung Wook Chung and David Mathewson, *Models of Premillennialism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 10.

⁸ From this point forward, to avoid confusion, I will use the lowercase “tribulation(s)” to refer to persecutions throughout the church’s history and the uppercase Tribulation in reference to the specific period of future calamities and judgments during the reign of the Antichrist; this is in keeping with Irenaeus’s understanding of a future “final contest” on the earth prior to the millennial kingdom.

church, and no modern pretribulationist has successfully proved that this particular doctrine was held by any of the church fathers or students of the Word before the nineteenth century.”⁹ Ladd’s assertions birthed and nurtured a whole category of eschatology dubbed “historic premillennialism,” which, at least in part, refers to a premillennial eschatology with a post-tribulation rapture, assuming this was *the* historic view of the early church.

William Kimball also takes a similar view, noting, “In spite of the earnest endeavors of pretribulationists to find some shreds of support for a pretrib rapture in the writings of the early church, their labors have been consistently unsuccessful. A careful study of post-apostolic literature points up a glaring absence of anything remotely resembling a pretribulation rapture concept.”¹⁰ Kimball relies on secondary sources for his estimation of the early church and makes no attempt at a careful exegesis of relevant passages in Irenaeus.

Robert Gundry likewise notes, “From the earliest centuries onward, the standard Christian view was that the church would enter the tribulation, confront the Antichrist, and come out not till Jesus’ return following the tribulation. During the earliest centuries every writer who touched in any detail on the second coming represented this view, which nowadays we call posttribulationism.”¹¹ Gundry makes the same assumption about *Shepherd* as others, dismissing the suggestion of a rescue from coming tribulation and judgment by simply quoting a later passage that suggests believers will be purified by the coming judgment.¹² Regarding Irenaeus, Gundry predictably cites passages that indicate the church suffers at the hands of the Antichrist (e.g., *Haer.* 5.26.1; 5.30.4; 5.34.3; 5.35.1). Conspicuously missing is any mention of the actual assumption passage in *Haereses* 5.29.1.¹³

Roland Rasmussen argues that posttribulationism is the historical position of the church, noting, “As a student and faculty member at a pretribulationist university, the writer acquired the false view that pretribulationism was taught by the early church fathers. However, the early fathers were not pretribulationist; they were posttribulationist. Accordingly, pretribulationism is not the historical position; *posttribulationism is the historical position.*”¹⁴ Rasmussen summons *Barnabas*, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and others as unimpeachable posttribulationist witnesses. Regarding Irenaeus in particular, he quotes passages that indubitably portray the church enduring persecution by the Antichrist (e.g., 5.26.1; 5.35.1), but he fails to mention Irenaeus’s nettlesome assertion in *Haereses* 5.29.1.¹⁵ He also attends to the *Shepherd* in a way that pits those who endure the coming tribulation for refinement against those rescued from the tribulation as a reward.¹⁶ Despite his selective and unreflective treatment of the evidence, Rasmussen exclaims, “It is disgusting to see what some pretribulationist leaders have done with the historical writings of some of the early church fathers.”¹⁷

⁹ George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 31.

¹⁰ William R. Kimball, *The Rapture: A Question of Timing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 20.

¹¹ Bob Gundry, *First the Antichrist* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 144.

¹² Gundry, *First the Antichrist*, 146–47.

¹³ Gundry, *First the Antichrist*, 147–48.

¹⁴ Ronald Rasmussen, *The Post-Trib, Pre-Wrath Rapture* (Canoga Park, CA: The Post-Trib Research Center, 1996), 345.

¹⁵ Rasmussen, *Post-Trib, Pre-Wrath Rapture*, 352–53.

¹⁶ Rasmussen, *Post-Trib, Pre-Wrath Rapture*, 349–50.

¹⁷ Rasmussen, *Post-Trib, Pre-Wrath Rapture*, 349.

Millard Erickson notes regarding the early church, “Rather than anticipating a deliverance from the tribulation that was to come, the early Christians evidently expected to experience that great affliction personally.”¹⁸ He cites *Didache* 16 and *Barnabas* as chiliastic but posttribulational as well as Irenaeus, noting the latter “did not believe in a pretribulational rapture. Rather, he saw Christ coming at the end of the tribulation to destroy the Antichrist and to deliver His church.”¹⁹ Erickson makes no mention of the apparent counterevidence of *Haereses* 5.29.1, quoting instead from 5.30.4 and 5.35.1.²⁰

Paul Thigpen, writing from a Roman Catholic perspective, asserts that the fathers “know nothing of an extra, ‘third’ coming of Christ—a secret snatching away of believers to escape the final tribulation. Like the writers of Scripture itself, with one voice they speak of a single advent, glorious and terrifying, bringing history to a close. And they assume that Christ’s earthshaking arrival comes after the Church has suffered severely at the hands of the Antichrist.”²¹ Like others, Thigpen cites *Haereses* 5.26.1 and 5.35.1 as proof that Irenaeus taught the church would go through the tribulation. He passes over 5.29.1 entirely.²²

Two Peoples in Tension (*Haereses* 5.35.1)

It is a well-worn fact that Irenaeus’s concept of the coming kingdom included an intermediate period of progress in the history of personal and cosmic redemption. As such, Irenaeus viewed the millennial kingdom as the initial stage of the new heavens and the new earth. That intermediate kingdom would be uniquely characterized by some elements of the present age and some of the future—particularly the presence in the same world of both immortal, glorified saints reigning with Christ and mortal humans repopulating the world and living under the reign of the saints. Irenaeus sets forth this picture in *Haereses* 5.35.1. That two distinct categories of humanity—immortal and mortal—will occupy the same place and time in Irenaeus’s eschatology is not really disputed.²³ Antonio Orbe writes, “Por su medio distingue los dos grupos de santos que habitarán la tierra nueva: los resucitados en la *prima resurrectio*, y los ‘remanentes’—aún vivos, a pesar de la persecución del Anticristo.”²⁴

¹⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *A Basic Guide to Eschatology: Making Sense of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 128.

¹⁹ Erickson, *Basic Guide to Eschatology*, 129.

²⁰ Erickson, *Basic Guide to Eschatology*, 129–30.

²¹ Paul Thigpen, *The Rapture Trap: A Catholic Response to “End Times” Fever* (West Chester, PA: Ascension, 2001), 131–32.

²² Thigpen, *Rapture Trap*, 132–33.

²³ Cf. Dom Cyril Pasquier, *Approches du millénium: Et si Irénée de Lyon avait raison?*, *Studia Oecumenica Friburgensia*, no. 103 (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2021), 128, 500, 569, 583–84.

²⁴ Antonio Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo: Comentario al Libro V del «Adversus haereses»*, vol. 3, *Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos* 33 (Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1988), 506. English: “Through it he distinguishes the two groups of saints who will inhabit the new earth: those resurrected in the *prima resurrectio*, and ‘those who remain’—still alive, despite the persecution of the Antichrist.”

<i>Adversus Haereses 5.35.1</i> ²⁵	
<i>Haec enim alia universa in resurrectionem justorum sine controversia dicta sunt quae fit post adventum Antichristi et perditionem omnium genium sub eo existentium in qua regnabunt justi in terra crescentes ex visione Domini et per ipsum assuescent capere gloriam Dei Patris et cum sanctis angelis conversationem et communionem et unitatem spiritalium in regno capient</i>	For all these and others [passages of Scripture] were without controversy spoken with regard to the resurrection of the just which will happen after the advent of Antichrist and the perdition of all nations existing under him at which time the righteous will rule in the earth growing greater by the vision of the Lord and through him they will become accustomed to receive the glory of God the Father and, with the holy angels, they shall receive in the kingdom conversation and fellowship and union with spiritual beings,
<i>et illos quos Dominos in carne inveniet exspectantes eum de coelis et perpersos tribulationem qui et effugerint iniqui manus. Ipsi autem sunt de quibus ait propheta: et derelicti multiplicabuntur in terra. Et quotquot ex credentibus ad hoc praeparavit Deus ad derelictos multiplicandos in terra et sub regno sanctorum fieri et ministrare huic Jerusalem et regnum in ea significavit Jeremias propheta</i>	and [the words of the prophecies about the millennium were spoken with reference to] ²⁶ those whom the Lord shall find in the flesh expecting him from heaven, and suffered tribulation, who also escaped the hands of the Wicked One. For it is in reference to them [those in the flesh expecting him after the reign of Antichrist] that the prophet says “And those that remain will multiply on the earth” [Isa 6:12]. And however many of the believers God has prepared for this, to multiply those remaining on the earth and to both be under the rule of the saints and to minister to this Jerusalem and reigning in it Jeremiah the prophet speaks about

In a 1983 article, Orbe also argued that the second category—the mortals—should be further sub-divided into Jewish and Gentile survivors of the future Tribulation, each with distinct roles in the millennial kingdom.²⁷ He is followed, with little critical engagement, in Calvo’s 1999 treatment of Irenaeus’s eschatology,²⁸ as well as in Rebaque’s 2022 article on the distinction between heavenly and earthly dwellers in Irenaeus’s millennialism.²⁹

While Orbe, Calvo, and Rebaque are certainly correct in seeing Irenaeus making a distinction between the immortal, resurrected saints reigning with Christ during the millennium and the mortal, un-resurrected survivors of the Tribulation who are repopulating the earth, the further distinction between Jewish and Gentile mortal survivors is not as clear. Orbe reads *Haereses* 5.35.1 (like Unger) thusly: “And all from among the Gentiles whom God prepared for this: to multiply those who were left on the earth, for belonging to the reign of the saints, and for serving in Jerusalem.” The term “from among the Gentiles” (*ex gentibus*, SC) could also be read “from among

²⁵ Unless otherwise noted, Latin (and Greek) texts from Book 5 of *Adv. Haer.* are from Adelin Rousseau, Louis Doutreleau, and Charles Mercier, eds., *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les Hérésies Livre V*, vol. 2, *Texte et Traduction*, Sources Chrétiennes (SC), no. 153 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2013)—abbreviated as SC. Unless noted, English translation is from Dominic Unger and Scott D. Moringiello, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies Books 4 and 5*, Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation, vol. 72 (New York: Newman, 2024)—abbreviated as Unger.

²⁶ Irenaeus here picks up the plural accusative again, *illos*, designating a new group different from the first category of people (“*resurrectionem justorum*”) which he just described.

²⁷ Antonio Orbe, “San Ireneo y el régimen del milenio,” *Studia Missionalia* 32 (1983): 345–372. He makes the same case in his commentary (*Teología de San Ireneo*, 3: 504–510).

²⁸ Juan José Ayán Calvo, “Escatología cósmica y Sagrada Escritura en Ireneo de Lyon,” *Annali di Storia dell’Egesi* 16.1 (1999): 197–233.

²⁹ Fernando Rivas Rebaque, “‘Quienes Fueren Dignos de Morar en los Cielos, Entrarán en Ellos’ (*Adversus Haereses* V,36,1): Ireneo de Lyon Milenarista,” *Cauriensia* 16 (2022): 825–26.

the believers” (*ex credentibus*, Migne).³⁰ Orbe identifies the category of mortal survivors “from Israel” as such because of the likely reference to Isaiah 6:12, which, in its original context, refers specifically to the remnant of Israel.³¹ Thus, if the first group of mortals refers to Israel, then the further description of those *ex gentibus* (assuming, for the sake of argument, that this is the original reading) refers to Gentile survivors. In this case, then, Irenaeus not only distinguishes glorified saints ruling with Christ over mortal survivors of the tribulation, but he further distinguishes between Israel and the Gentile nations in the millennial kingdom.

Orbe rightly describes the character of the first category—the resurrected, immortal saints—as twofold: 1) they will be on the earth associated with Christ’s reign (cf. Rev 20:4–6) while the rest are submitting to their rule; and 2) they will not engage in sexual reproduction but will increase by the vision of the Lord, growing toward the nature of glorious angelic beings.³² Regarding the second category—those who physically survive the reign of the Antichrist—Orbe distinguishes them sharply from the first category of the resurrected saints: “Los «hijos de la resurrección» serán como ángeles de Dios; no se casarán. En cambio los «remanentes», traspuestos, sin Muerte, de un regimen transitorio a otro también transitorio, se casarán y se multiplicarán en la tierra.”³³

Orbe further divides this second category of mortal survivors into two groups—Jews and Gentiles.³⁴ How does he arrive at this conclusion? According to Orbe, these “remanentes de Israel” have two characteristics: 1) the Lord finds them “in the flesh,” that is, alive; and 2) they had suffered persecution under the Antichrist.³⁵ Orbe links this “remnant” to those frequently alluded to by the prophets, citing especially Micah 4:7 and Isaiah 1:24 as well as the Pauline promises of restoration of Israel in Romans 9:29 and 11:5. He also refers to Justin Martyr’s subtle hints at a national repentance and restoration of Israel at the second coming of Christ in *Dialogue* 32.2 (cf. also *Dial.* 55.3).

While plausible, it appears to me that Orbe’s interpretation of the *derelicti* as the remnants of surviving Israel (Jews) treats the term in an unwarranted quasi-technical manner: “El mismo término, con análogo tecnicismo («*residuos* de Israel») aparece en la apocalíptica hebrea.”³⁶ He cites 4 Esdras 13:16–19; 2 Baruch 40:2 (cf. 2 Bar 29:4; 44:3; 46:2; 63:3; 77:2, 4). These passages, set in clear eschatological and even sometimes messianic contexts, do, indeed, use “remnant” language and imagery with direct reference to the remnant of Israel in particular. But this is to be expected in apocalyptic texts that arise in an exclusively Jewish historical context. That Irenaeus was relying upon any one of these or even all of them in a generalized sense while carrying over their very

³⁰ Calvo summarizes various reconstructions of the text from W. W. Harvey, Rousseau (SC), and Orbe (“Escatología cósmica,” 220).

³¹ Orbe also points to 4 Esdras 13:16–19, 24 as a possible background for the destiny of “those who survive” the devastations of the end times judgments and thus enter into the kingdom (Orbe, “Ireneo y el regimen,” 346n3).

³² Orbe, “Ireneo y el regimen,” 347. Orbe is clear that Irenaeus is not asserting that the resurrected saints actually become angels, as angels themselves do not increase in glory; rather, those of the first resurrection are unique in that they increase progressively in glory by perfect union with the Spirit while communing with angelic beings, on the trajectory of ultimately beholding the glorious Father (Orbe, “Ireneo y el regimen,” 347–353).

³³ Orbe, “Ireneo y el regimen,” 357. English: “The ‘sons of the resurrection’ will be like angels of God; they will not marry. On the other hand, those ‘who remain,’ transferred from one transitory regime to another without death, will marry and multiply on earth.”

³⁴ Orbe, “Ireneo y el regimen,” 353.

³⁵ Orbe, “Ireneo y el regimen,” 354.

³⁶ Orbe, “Ireneo y el regimen,” 357. English: “The same term, with a similar technicality (‘remnants of Israel’) appears in Hebrew apocalyptic literature.”

specific reference to a Jewish remnant does not necessarily follow. Quite plausibly, Irenaeus was simply adopting the idea of physical survivors of the coming period of tribulation with no particular emphasis on whether they were Jewish or Gentile. Nothing in Irenaeus's actual language narrows the category of *derelicti* to "those who remain of Israel." This is why when Orbe quotes from the passage, he places "of Israel" in parentheses.³⁷ Orbe explicitly admits this weakness: "Ni *Is* 6, 12 ni Ireneo los identificaban de modo explícito con los « residuos *de Israel* » Solo por cotejo con otros lugares de *IV Esdrae*, *II Baruch*, y lugares análogos, cabía presumir se trataba de israelitas."³⁸

At the same time, we cannot rule out the possibility that Irenaeus did intend to narrow the scope of *derelicti* to the Jewish remnant of believers who would constitute the restoration of the nation of Israel under the coming Messiah after the reign of the Antichrist. I have argued elsewhere that such a salvation of a believing remnant of Israel was possibly an aspect of Irenaeus's eschatological expectations, along with others from the second century.³⁹ But the evidence for such a narrow meaning of *derelicti* in *Haereses* 5.35.1 is underdeterminative. Only with the narrower identification of the supposed second subgroup of the category of mortal survivors of the Tribulation as Gentiles (*ex gentibus*) does Orbe's argument for narrowing *derelicti* to the remnant of Israel become stronger: "Lo confirman las líneas que consagra Ireneo al grupo último."⁴⁰

But what is the case for identifying the next group as limited to Gentile survivors?

Here Orbe introduces what he believes to be the third group in view in *Haerese* 5.35.1—survivors of the Antichrist from among the Gentiles. He writes, "Distingue Ireneo dos grupos: el de los « derelicti », y el de los que Dios preparó para multiplicarlos. Ambos pertenecen al número de los justos que el Señor hallará con vida en la tierra."⁴¹ However, Irenaeus describes this very group of allegedly Gentile survivors as those "whom God prepared for this: to multiply those who were left on the earth (*ad hoc praeparaverit Deus ad derelictos multiplicandos in terra*)" (*Haer.* 5.35.1). The "*ad hoc*" seems to refer most naturally to the immediately preceding loose quotation from Isaiah—"they who were left on the earth shall be multiplied (*et derelicti multiplicabuntur in terra*)"—and thus only one group is really in view: mortal survivors of the Tribulation, distinct from the immortal resurrected saints, without specific reference to whether they are Jews or Gentiles. To reinforce the distinction between the *derelicti* of Israel and the survivors of the Gentiles, Orbe relies heavily on the reading "*ex Gentibus*"—rendered from the Armenian version—rather than "*ex credentibus*" supported from what Orbe calls a "lectura ininteligible (*cētibz*)."⁴² He is not wrong. The Latin *cētibz*, while it seems to bear almost no vestiges of an earlier *gentibus*, also appears equidistant from *credentibus*. Nevertheless, the editions of François Feuarent (1639), William Wigan Harvey (1857), and Adolphus Stieren (1853) all adopted the *ex credentibus* reading,

³⁷ Orbe writes, "Mientras los redivivos ignorarán nupcias, los « remanentes (de Israel) » se multiplicarán en jijos" (Orbe, "Ireneo y el regimen," 357–58).

³⁸ Orbe, "Ireneo y el regimen," 358. English: "Neither Isaiah 6:12 nor Irenaeus explicitly identified them with the 'remnants of Israel.' Only by comparison with other places in 4 Esdras, 2 Baruch, and similar places, could it be presumed that they were Israelites."

³⁹ Svigel, *Fathers on the Future*, 172–73; Michael J. Svigel, "Go Deeper Excursus 21: The Future Restoration of Israel in the Early Church," available online at www.fathersonthefuture.com.

⁴⁰ Orbe, "Ireneo y el regimen," 358. English: "This is confirmed by the lines Irenaeus dedicates to the last group."

⁴¹ Orbe, "Ireneo y el regimen," 358. English: "Irenaeus distinguishes two groups: the 'derelicti' and the group of those whom God prepared to multiply. Both belong to the number of the righteous whom the Lord will find alive on earth."

⁴² Orbe, "Ireneo y el regimen," 359.

as did Migne (1857). Unger’s recent edition, however, adopts the Armenian reading supporting an original “*ex gentibus*.”⁴³

Yet Orbe seems to settle the matter not based on a careful weighing of the textual evidence (which, in my opinion, constitutes an evidential “wash”), but by an appeal to the context: “El contexto reclama « *gentibus* », en antítesis con los « *derelicti* » o residuos de Israel.”⁴⁴ However, Orbe had earlier argued that at least part of the argument for the identification of the *derelicti* as restricted to “Israel” was the subsequent identification of the allegedly distinct group in the next line as restricted to (according the Armenian text) “Gentiles”;⁴⁵ which conclusion itself relied upon a settled identification of *derelicti* as Israel to settle the textual problem in the next line as “*ex gentibus*.” This appears to be a circular argument. In the end, neither the interpretation of *derelicti* as restricted to the remnant of Israel nor the reading *ex gentibus* instead of *ex credentibus* can be confirmed or rejected based on the available evidence.⁴⁶

Despite the unresolved question of whether the category of mortals in *Haereses* 5.35.1 should be further divided between Jewish and Gentile survivors of the Tribulation, this passage undoubtedly refers to two quite distinct categories of humanity during the future millennial kingdom—mortals and immortals.⁴⁷ How can this fact be reconciled with the view presented in 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 that when Christ comes and resurrects the “dead in Christ,” all those who are alive at the time will themselves be transformed into immortal bodies (1 Cor 15:51–52; Phil 3:20–21) and caught up with them? In Irenaeus’s reckoning, from where do the mortal surviving believers of the Tribulation under the Antichrist come—those believers who will be expecting Christ from heaven (*expectantes eum de coelis*) (*Haer.* 5.35.1)?

If Irenaeus coordinated the transformation and assumption of the church at the same time as the resurrection of the righteous dead, all occurring simultaneously at the moment of Christ’s descent from heaven after the reign of the Antichrist, all the wicked would be killed, all the

⁴³ It seems to me most responsible to suspend judgment on the text-critical issue, pray for new manuscript evidence to emerge, and simply refuse to rest any exegetical conclusions on one reading or another.

⁴⁴ Orbe, “Ireneo y el regimen,” 359. English: “The context calls for ‘*gentibus*’, in antithesis to the ‘*derelicti*’ or remainders of Israel.”

⁴⁵ Orbe, “Ireneo y el regimen,” 359.

⁴⁶ Yet even if *ex gentibus* proved to be the original reading, this would not necessarily establish a contrast between a previous group of *derelicti* limited to Israel and a different group limited to Gentiles. The term *ex gentibus* could also be interpreted as “from among the nations” or “out of the nations” and, in keeping with the Old Testament prophecies of a return of the remnant of Israel from exile from among the nation (*ex gentibus*) (cf. *Haer.* 5.34.1), the second category of mortal survivors of the Antichrist’s reign of terror would still be limited to the Jewish remnant, and we would still be left with just two groups—immortal resurrected saints ruling over mortal Jewish survivors of the Tribulation. That is, though usually expressed by the phrase *ab [universis/cunctis] gentibus* (cf. Jer 29:14; 43:5; Ezek 36:24), the phrase *ex gentibus* could also signify a geographical extent of the Jewish diaspora (1 Chron 18:1), not an identification of non-Jewish ethnicity. This is the case in *Haer.* 5.34.1, where Irenaeus uses the phrase *ex omnibus gentibus* in his interpretive gloss of Jer 16:14–15 (cf. 23:7–8), which he quotes as *Vivit Dominus, qui eduxit filios Israel ab Aquilone, et ab omni regione quo expulsi fuerant*.

⁴⁷ This notion is not unique to Irenaeus; the third-century Commodianus echoes the same idea: “We shall arise again to Him, who have been devoted to Him. And they shall be incorruptible, even already living without death. And neither will there be any grief nor any groaning in that city. They shall come also who overcame cruel martyrdom under antichrist, and they themselves live for the whole time, and receive blessings because they have suffered evil things; and they themselves marrying, beget for a thousand years [*Et generant ipsi per annos mille nubentes*]” (*Instructiones*, 44 [ANF 4]). It must be stated that such a notion of mortal and immortal humans occupying the same world during the same period of time is not at all absurd. Jesus walked and talked with his disciples in his immortal condition for forty days after his own resurrection (Acts 1:3).

righteous dead would be raised, all the living righteous would be transformed and caught up, and no mortals would be left to multiply on the earth. Yet Irenaeus certainly expected mortals to be left to multiply upon the earth (*ad derelictos multiplicandos in terra*)—the very saints who will have escaped the Antichrist while awaiting Christ’s coming from heaven to save them (5.29.1); thus, these could not be unbelievers or last-minute converts but those who faithfully persevered during the coming Tribulation. This seems to weaken a strict post-tribulation or pre-wrath assumption of the church as an explanation.

Perhaps, one may argue, the conclusion of the Tribulation involves a resurrection of only departed (dead) saints and martyrs, that Irenaeus had no concept of a transformation of surviving (living) saints from mortality to immortality along with their catching up in the air. Perhaps only the resurrected saints would be caught up. That is, Irenaeus may have believed only in a resurrection and transformation of dead saints to be raised immortal to reign; the living saints would simply enter the kingdom in their original state. In short, to be assumed to heaven, one would first have to be resurrected. In this solution, Irenaeus apparently made no effort to coordinate 1 Corinthians 15:51; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; and Philippians 3:21. However, as we will see, Irenaeus’s earlier reference to Enoch and Elijah as precursors of the future assumption of the church does not allow for this otherwise plausible option (*Haer.* 5.5.1).

Another possible explanation for the presence of both resurrected saints reigning with Christ and mortal saints repopulating the world is that the church of living and departed saints will be raised first, then a period of Tribulation will lead to the salvation of a host of Jewish and Gentile converts. The former group will constitute the resurrected, immortal saints while the latter, having survived the persecutions of the Antichrist, will constitute the mortals who multiply on the earth. This would require a space of time between the assumption of the living saints described in *Haereses* 5.29.1 and the conclusion of the reign of the Antichrist. Such a view would be consistent with both the pre-tribulation and mid-tribulation rapture views.

As tempting as the pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation rapture positions may be for providing simple solutions to this problem, these solutions create another problem. As I demonstrate in the next section, Irenaeus describes the church as present during the coming Tribulation, enduring the persecutions of the Antichrist.

Church Left or Church Lifted? (*Haereses* 5.5.1, 5.29.1, and 5.26.1)

In *Haereses* 5.5.1, Irenaeus introduces the idea of the eschatological assumption of the church by pointing to the bodily assumptions into heaven of Enoch and Elijah as types or prophecies of the assumption: “Enoch, for example, because he *was pleasing to God*, was transferred (*translatus est*) in the body in which he pleased him. This revealed beforehand the transfer of the just. And Elijah, while he was in the substance of the created order, was assumed (*assumptus est*). Thus he prophesied the assumption of the spiritual men.⁴⁸ Certainly, they received this assumption and transfer by the very hands by which they were fashioned in the beginning” (*Haer.* 5.5.1).

⁴⁸ While SC presents both the Latin *patrum prophetans* and the Greek πνευματικῶν προφητεύων, they provide the translation “prophétisant par là l’enlèvement des hommes spirituels.” The textual evidence is noted as “πνευματικῶν gr. arm. : πατέρων lat.” Rightly, the translators side with the Greek and Armenian against the Latin.

Enoch and Elijah experienced the translation (*translatus est*) and assumption (*assumptus est*)—the terms are used interchangeably—as a prophecy of the future translation of the “just” and the “spiritual.” Because of their exceptional righteousness amidst their crooked generations, Enoch and Elijah had been transferred to paradise. Thus, Irenaeus sets forth Enoch and Elijah as types of the future assumption of the spiritual. Later, in summing up his argument that God can and has preserved the physical life of some for very long periods of time, Irenaeus says with reference to Enoch and Elijah, “Those who were transferred (*translatus sunt*) are living as a type of the future (*ad exemplum futurae*) length of days” (5.5.2). With these concluding statements, Irenaeus dispels all doubt that he intended to cast the catching up of Enoch and Elijah as prophetic types of the future assumption of saints, almost certainly with reference to 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and possibly Philippians 3:21.

Furthermore, Irenaeus asserts that Enoch and Elijah were transferred/assumed to the same heavenly paradise to which the apostle Paul had been caught up (*Haer.* 5.5.1–2), claiming that “the presbyters, who were the disciples of the apostles, say that those who were transferred (*translati sunt*) [i.e., Enoch, Elijah, and Paul] were transferred there (*translatos esse*)” (5.5.1). In fact, “paradise was prepared for the just (*justis*) and for those who possess the Spirit (*Spiritum habentibus*).” And while Irenaeus uses the phrase “Paul was also carried (*apportatus*)” in reference to the apostle’s experience of being caught up to the third heaven in 2 Corinthians 12:4, Paul himself used the Greek term ἀρπάζω. This is the same term Paul used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 with reference to the future catching up of the resurrected and living saints at the coming of Christ.⁴⁹ Thus, Irenaeus understood the assumption/translation of Enoch and Elijah in their bodies as prophetic types of the future assumption of the “just” or “spiritual ones”—that is, the eschatological catching up of the church.

Much later, in *Haereses* 5.29.1, Irenaeus directly addresses Enoch’s and Elijah’s eschatological antitype: the future assumption of the church. The English translation with both the Latin text and extant Greek fragment are included below for comparison:

<i>Adversus Haereses</i> 5.29.1		
For this reason, when in the end the Church will of a sudden be taken hence,	<i>Et propterea cum in fine repente hinc Ecclesia assumetur,</i>	Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο, ἐν τῷ τέλει ἀθρώως ἐντεῦθεν τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀναλαμβανομένης,
[Scripture] says, <i>There will be tribulation such as has not been from the beginning no, and never will be.</i> [Matt 24:21]	<i>erit, inquit, tribulatio qualis non est facta ab initio, neque fiet</i> [Matt 24:21]	« ἔσται », φησὶν, « θλίψις, οἷα οὐκ ἐγένετο ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς οὐδ’ οὐ μὴ γένηται » [Matt 24:21]
For this is the last contest of the just. If they are victorious in it, they will be crowned with imperishability.	<i>novissimus enim agon hic justorum, in quo vincentes coronantur incorruptelam.</i>	Ἐσχατος γὰρ ἀγὼν οὗτος τῶν δικαίων, ὃν νικήσαντες στεφανοῦνται τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν.

Unger’s ACW edition also renders the “spiritual men” reading, noting, “‘Spiritual’ as in Greek and Arm. Iren, in place of Lat. Iren. *partum*.” This textual matter seems to be undisputed.

⁴⁹ Though paradise is seen as a place of “waiting,” it is not a place of torment or punishment but of rest and repose—the heavenly destination of “righteous men, such as have the Spirit (δικαίοις γὰρ ἀνθρώποις, καὶ πνευματοφόροις ἡτοιμάθη ὁ παράδεισος/*justis enim hominibus, et Spiritum habentibus praeeparatus est paradus*)” (*Haer.* 5.5.1). It is worth noting that in the 2 Cor passage Irenaeus cites, Paul used the verb ἀρπάζω (*Vulgata raptus est*), and Paul expressed uncertainty whether that catching up to paradise occurred physically or spiritually—“whether in the body or apart from the body, I do not know (εἴτε ἐν σώματι εἴτε χωρὶς τοῦ σώματος οὐκ οἶδα)” (2 Cor 12:3)

In this crucial passage, Irenaeus describes a future sudden assumption from this earth to heaven.⁵⁰ Although Orbe notes that the assumption will occur for “los justos supervivientes,”⁵¹ he later suggests, “Con mucha probabilidad, piensa en los mártires, justos violenta y repentinamente arrebatados al Cielo.”⁵² If by “mártires” Orbe understands Irenaeus as suggesting the righteous martyrs are caught up following a sudden death and instantaneous resurrection, as taught later by Tertullian and favored by Augustine,⁵³ this view would contradict Irenaeus’s own assertion that Enoch and Elijah prefigured the future assumption of the spiritual ones precisely because those two righteous men had been caught up in their bodies without tasting death (5.5.1–2). Thus, the Tertullianic/Augustinian explanation of the assumption of the church is not the intention of Irenaeus. The living saints—not the dead or spontaneously slain and resurrected—are caught up in the assumption of *Haereses* 5.29.1.

To understand what earthly conditions the church will be suddenly taken from (*hinc*), we must return to the wider context of the passage. In *Haereses* 5.28, Irenaeus discussed the separation of the righteous and the wicked, alluding to Matthew 25:34 and 41 and the separation of the sheep

⁵⁰ Here the eschatological assumption of the church (*Ecclesia assumetur*), is modified by *repente*—“suddenly.” The sudden assumption will occur *in fine*—“in the end.” And the assumption, or “taking up” will be *hinc*—“from here” or “hence.” Cf. Orbe, *Theologia de San Ireneo*, 220: “En nuestro caso, Ireneo le refiere a los justos; a su ascensión en masa, de repente, de la tierra al cielo.” English: “In our case, Irenaeus refers to the righteous; to their mass ascension, suddenly, from earth to heaven.”

⁵¹ Orbe, *Theologia de San Ireneo*, 220. English: “the righteous survivors.”

⁵² Orbe, *Theologia de San Ireneo*, 220. English: “Most likely, he is thinking of the martyrs, the righteous, suddenly and violently snatched up to heaven.”

⁵³ Tertullian understood the catching up described in 1 Thess 4:17 this way: “Before we put off the garment of the flesh, we wish to be clothed with the celestial glory of immortality (*virtutem caelestem aeternitatis*). Now the privilege of this favour awaits those who shall at the coming of the Lord be found in the flesh, and who shall, owing to the oppressions of the time of Antichrist, deserve by an instantaneous death (*merebuntur compendio mortis*), which is accomplished by a sudden change, to become qualified to join the rising saints; as he writes to the Thessalonians: ‘For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we too shall ourselves be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord’” (*Res.* 41; ANF 3:575). Cf. Augustine, *Civ.* 20.20: “It is usual in this connection to raise the question whether those who will be living when Christ comes are to escape death altogether or are to experience a flash of death while passing into immortality in that moment during which they are to be ‘caught up,’ together with those who have risen, ‘in clouds to meet the Lord in the air.’... In favor of the view that even those will suffer momentary death before their immortality whom the Lord will find alive, we have the argument implied in the Apostle’s words: ‘In Christ all will be made to live,’ and those later words which deal with the resurrection: ‘What thou thyself sowest is not brought to life unless it dies.’ In the light of these last words, surely, we must conclude that those who are alive at Christ’s coming can only be brought by Him to immortal life on condition that they die.... Another argument in favor of this momentary death is found in an expression which St. Paul used in writing to the Corinthians concerning the resurrection of our bodies: ‘We shall all rise’ or, as some manuscripts have it, ‘We shall all sleep.’ Seeing that there can be no resurrection without a preceding death, and granted that ‘sleep’ must here mean death, how can it be true that ‘all’ will either ‘rise’ or ‘sleep,’ if the many who are alive at the coming of Christ are neither to ‘sleep’ nor to ‘rise?’” (Gerald G. Walsh and Daniel J. Honan, trans., *Saint Augustine: The City of God, Bookx XVII–XXII*, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, vol. 24 [Washington, DC.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008], 302–303)

and the goats.⁵⁴ Irenaeus applied this to the time of the Antichrist.⁵⁵ Irenaeus also quoted Revelation 13, applying the description of the beast (13:2–10) to the same figure who will deceive the world (5.28.2). He also referred to the second beast as “the armor bearer,” that is, “the false prophet,” who will work wonders by the power of demonic magic (5.28.2). He then suggested the number of the beast—666—represents “the recapitulation of his entire rebellion which happened in six thousand years” (5.28.2). During this entire period of the world’s history, humanity has been engaged in rebellion against God, and the future Antichrist will sum up this rebellion in himself during his three-and-a-half-year reign.

In Irenaeus’s discussion of the ongoing apostasy and rebellion throughout history—of which the future Antichrist and Tribulation will be the climax and recapitulation—he writes, “For this reason, in every age, man, who in the beginning had been formed by God’s hands, namely, by the Son and the Spirit, is *made after the image and likeness of God*, when he had discarded the straw, which is apostasy, but *has gathered the grain into the barn* [cf. Matt 3:12; Luke 3:17], which is those who make faith bear fruit for God” (*Haer.* 5.28.4). Here Irenaeus says, “Tribulation is necessary for those who are saved, that having been, in a sense, ground fine, and kneaded together with patience by the Word of God, and baked, they may be fit for the King’s banquet” (5.28.4). That is, tribulations throughout human history—“in every age (*in omni tempore*)”—at the hands of the wicked nations has served to refine the saved.⁵⁶

On the heels of this fact of tribulations experienced by God’s people throughout the previous millennia, Irenaeus writes:

In the preceding books we have given the reasons on account of which God permitted these things to happen thus. We showed that all such things were made for man who is saved. Those things would make his free will and self-determining power grow to the mature state of immortality and would prepare it for a more suitable eternal submissiveness to God. For this reason creation is at the service of man. Man, indeed, was not made for the sake of creation, but creation was made for the sake of man. For, Scripture rightly accounted *the nations like a drop of water from a bucket, and as the dust on the scales, and as nothing* [Isa 40:15, 17], because they, too, did not lift their eyes to heaven or give thanks to their Creator, or wish to see the light of the Truth, but were as blind mice hidden in the depths of stupidity. They were, however, of use and service to the just, to the extent that the stem is of use to the growth of the wheat, and as its straw is of use for fire in making gold. (*Haer.* 5.29.1)

⁵⁴ “That is why he said that those who are on his right will be called into his Father’s kingdom, while those who are on his left will be thrown into eternal fire” (*Haer.* 5.28.1). He then quotes 2 Thess 2:10–12, applying this prophecy to those who would ultimately be thrown into eternal fire: “*Because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness*” (5.28.2).

⁵⁵ “For he will come and of his own choice he will recapitulate the apostasy. He will work whatever he does work by his own free will and choice, and sit in the temple of God, so that those who are led astray by him would adore him as Christ, for which he will be justly thrown into the pool of fire” (5.28.2).

⁵⁶ Réal Tremblay writes concerning this reference to tribulation, “Nous croyons que notre auteur vise plutôt l’expérience actuelle du martyr, expérience qui se retroyve, comme nous l’avons montré ailleurs, tout au long de l’« économie »” (“Le Martyre selon saint Irénée de Lyon,” in *Irénée de Lyon « L’empreinte des doigts de Dieu »*, ed. Réal Tremblay and Hans-Jochen Jaschke, *Eirenaïos : Etudes irénéennes* 1 [Rome : Academiae Alfoniana, 1979], 113).

In this immediate context, the *hinc* (“from here,” “hence”) in 5.29.1 refers most naturally to the present order in which the righteous had been experiencing purifying persecutions and refining tribulations at the hands of the wicked nations “in every age.” So, Irenaeus’s reference to the future assumption should be understood thusly: “For this reason [i.e., because the wicked nations have served in the past for purifying the righteous in this world], when in the end [i.e., at the end of this period of present tribulations in this world] the Church will of a sudden be taken hence [i.e., the church alive at the time of ‘the end’ will be suddenly removed from this present earth and its refining tribulations], Scripture says, *There will be tribulation* [i.e., at the time of the assumption of the church, there will be Tribulation.]”

In this connection, what can be said with confidence regarding the actual timing of the assumption of the church relative to the coming Tribulation period, which will be the “the last contest of the just”? Admittedly, the Latin translation of Irenaeus could have been clearer here. On the one hand, the use of *antequam* would have unambiguously asserted that the assumption of the church was going to follow the period of future Tribulation, making a post-tribulation assumption clear. On the other hand, the use of *postquam* would have asserted a pre-tribulation assumption of the church. Instead, the translator’s *cum* most naturally indicates concurrence of events without taking interpretive liberties with the genitive absolute in the restored Greek fragment.⁵⁷ Yet in this passage, the sudden and instantaneous event of the assumption of the church coincides not with another momentary event of judgment but with a prolonged period of Tribulation under a three-and-a-half-year reign of the Antichrist. The grammar and syntax of the clauses in both the Latin and Greek texts most naturally point to an assumption of the church that precedes the start of the future period of Tribulation.

The extant Greek fragment preserved in the *Scholia in Apocalypsin*⁵⁸ is adopted *in toto* in the SC critical text of the close reconstruction of the original Greek. Its genitive absolute—τῆς

⁵⁷ The *cum...assumetur* (third-person singular, future passive indicative from *assumo*) qualifies the timing of *erit tribulatio* (third-person singular future active indicative of *sum*). Because both the verb of the subordinate clause with *assumetur* and the main clause with *erit* are in the future indicative, the events are most naturally understood as occurring contemporaneously. That is, *cum...assumetur* indicates the time at which *erit...tribulatio*—at the time the church is suddenly caught up from this, then [at that time] there will be Tribulation. Cf. Vulgate of John 4:26—*Cum ergo venerit, ille nobis annuntiabit omnia* (“When, therefore, he will come, he will tell us all things”). The construction does not mean the church will be caught up after the Tribulation or even during it, but that the unprecedented Tribulation will occur at the time of the assumption of the church “from this place” (*hinc*). For discussions on the temporal use of *cum* with the indicative in the same tense as the main verb, see Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *Harpers’ Latin Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891), 489; H. P. V. Nunn, *An Introduction to Ecclesiastical Latin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 74–75; J. H. Allen and J. B. Greenough, *Allen and Greenough’s New Latin Grammar*, ed. J. B. Greenough et al. (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1903), 353; Harm Pinkster, *The Oxford Latin Syntax*, vol. 2, *The Complex Sentence and Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 243–45.

⁵⁸ T.C. Schmidt notes, “The *Scholia* are preserved in codex Metamorphosis 573, which dates from the 9th or 10th century and is made up of 290 folios. Folios 1r–245r contain various patristic works from writers like Hippolytus, Cyril of Alexandria, and possibly John Cassian, as well as a complete copy of the Apocalypse. The remainder of the manuscript...contains another copy of the Apocalypse up to chapter 14, verse 5, with thirty-nine scholia inserted at various intervals” (T.C. Schmidt, “Introduction: *Anonymous Greek Scholia on the Apocalypse*,” in *Cassiodorus, St. Gregory the Great, and Anonymous Greek Scholia: Writings on the Apocalypse*, trans. Francis X. Gumerlock, Mark Delcogliano, and T.C. Schmidt, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 144 [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022], 86–87).

ἐκκλησίας ἀναλαμβανομένης⁵⁹—is thus taken as a circumstantial participle of time by the extant Latin translation—*cum...Ecclesia assumetur*. This is also how Rousseau renders it in the French translation in SC: “Et c’est pourquoi, à la fin, lorsque l’Église sera enlevée d’un seul coup d’ici-bas...”⁶⁰ In short, the Greek and Latin texts agree that the “taking up” of the church “from here” is an event concurrent with the time that “there will be tribulation” (*erit...tribulatio*/ἔσται...θλίψις).⁶¹

If the original Greek text employed a “genitive absolute” in the subordinate clause as indicated by the reconstruction, this may have some exegetical significance for the relationship between the church and the Tribulation. Runge explains, “If the subject of the participle is not involved at all in the main clause, a genitive form will be used for both the subject and the participle. This is generally called a ‘genitive absolute’” and adds, “The genitive absolute signals the reader not to expect the subject of the participle to be involved in the main clause, whereas the other forms do not carry this expectation.”⁶² The main clause of Irenaeus’s sentence is, without a doubt, the run-in quotation from Matthew 24:21: “ἔσται...θλίψις” (“there will be tribulation”). Daniel Wallace describes the structure of the genitive absolute as consisting of “a noun or pronoun in the genitive case” (in our instance, τῆς ἐκκλησίας); “a genitive *anarthrous* participle (always)” (ἀναλαμβανομένης); and “the entire construction is at the front of a sentence (usually)” (as it is in our passage).⁶³ With regard to semantics, Wallace notes that “this construction is unconnected with the rest of the sentence (i.e., its subject—the genitive noun or pronoun—is different from the subject of the main clause); “the participle is *always* adverbial (circumstantial) or, at least, dependent-verbal (i.e., it cannot be an adjectival or substantival participle);” and “the participle is normally (about 90% of the time) *temporal*, though it can on occasion express any of the adverbial ideas.”⁶⁴

While it would be exegetically irresponsible to suggest that the use of the genitive absolute in the subordinate clause, ἐν τῷ τέλει ἀθρόως ἐντεῦθεν τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀναλαμβανομένης, means that the church is completely removed from the events of the main clause, ἔσται...θλίψις, οἷα οὐκ ἐγένετο ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς οὐδ’ οὐ μὴ γένηται, it is grammatically and syntactically consistent to affirm that the Latin text, with its temporal use of *cum*, appears to reflect the intention of the original Greek. The precise relationship between the catching up of the church and the coming Tribulation, though, must be ascertained by a close analysis of the terms in the passage and the broader theme of the assumption of the church elsewhere in Irenaeus’s writing. Smith reminds us, “Like other circumstantial participles, the genitive absolute expresses time, cause, condition, concession, or simply any attendant circumstance.”⁶⁵ As the majority of genitive absolutes are temporal, this also fits the context with the phrase itself beginning with a temporal indicator (ἐν τῷ τέλει), confirmed

⁵⁹ ἀναλαμβανομένης is a present middle/passive participle, feminine genitive singular, modifying τῆς ἐκκλησίας and thus constituting a genitive absolute.

⁶⁰ SC, 365.

⁶¹ On the genitive absolute, see Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900), 174–75; A. T. Robertson, *A Short Grammar of the Greek New Testament, for Students Familiar with the Elements of Greek* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908), 195–196;

⁶² Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2010), 250, cf. 255–61.

⁶³ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 654–655.

⁶⁴ Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, 655.

⁶⁵ Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, rev. ed., ed. Gordon M. Messing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 459.

by the Latin translation's temporal use of *cum*.⁶⁶ As a temporal participle, the genitive absolute in the present is usually translated as “while.”⁶⁷

Admittedly, the reference to the assumption of the church in 5.29.1 could be read in a couple ways, but given the preceding context and the nature of the temporal clauses in both Latin and Greek, the period of future Tribulation appears to follow—not precede—the assumption of the church. On the heels of the assumption comes the Tribulation for which Irenaeus quotes Matthew 24:21. Coupled with the fact that Irenaeus understood Enoch and Elijah as types of the coming bodily assumption of the “just” and “spiritual” ones (5.5.1), *Haereses* 5.29.1 sounds very much like a pre-tribulation assumption. On this passage, Adela Yarbro Collins writes, “The notion that ‘the church will be taken up’ may have been inspired by 1 Thess 4:17. This suggestion is supported by the fact that not long after that statement and in the context of a reference to οἱ χρόνοι καὶ οἱ καιροί and the Day of the Lord, Paul mentions the ‘sudden destruction,’ from which there will be no escape, that will come upon those who say, ‘peace and security’ (1 Thess 5:3).”⁶⁸ Collins, then, agrees that in *Haereses* 5.29.1, Irenaeus portrays the church taken up before the Tribulation just as in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 the church is taken up before the Day of the Lord.⁶⁹

Yet Irenaeus also refers to the ultimate Tribulation as “the last contest of the just. If they are victorious in it, they will be crowned with imperishability” (*Haer.* 5.29.1). And earlier in 5.26.1, Irenaeus asserted that the church would certainly suffer under the three-and-a-half-year reign of the Antichrist (cf. Rev 13:5). During that time, the Antichrist and those kings who will rule with him will “put the Church to flight (*et effugabunt Ecclesiam*),” and “after that they [the Antichrist and his collaborators] will be destroyed by the Lord’s coming” (*Haer.* 5.26.1). In Irenaeus’s mind,

⁶⁶ In any case, none of the other types of circumstances make sense of the clause.

⁶⁷ Cf. William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 275.

⁶⁸ Adela Yarbro Collins, “Paul in Irenaeus on the Last Things,” in *Irenaeus and Paul*, ed. Todd D. Still and David E. Wilhite, Pauline and Patristic Scholars in Debate (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 260.

⁶⁹ In his response to Collins, Todd Still makes no effort to refute the fact that Irenaeus, indeed, taught a rapture in *Haer.* 5.29.1; instead, Still faults Irenaeus for doing so: “Irenaeus may be granted an interpretive pardon...for reading the rapture of the church into 1 Thess 4:17,” noting that “he may have been one of the first to make this misstep, but his interpretive heirs are legion” (Todd D. Still, “Response: Appropriating Paul: Irenaeus’s Use of the Apostle in Forming and Expressing His Eschatological Thought,” in *Irenaeus and Paul*, ed. Todd D. Still and David E. Wilhite, Pauline and Patristic Scholars in Debate [London: T&T Clark, 2020], 271). Cf. also J.A.A. Geerts, “De Belofte van het Koninkrijk: Een vergelijking tussen de eschatologie van Irenaeus van Lyon en de Gereformeerde Belijdenisgeschriften” (master’s thesis, Universiteit Utrecht, 2010), 24, who writes, “Dan zal er een verschrikkelijke vervolging losbarsten over de aarde. De Kerk van Christus zal dit echter niet mee hoeven te maken want in *AH* V.29.1 schrijft Irenaeus: *Als bij het plotselinge einde de Kerk daaruit zal genomen worden, zegt daarom de (Heer): ‘Er zal een verdrukking zijn zoals er van den beginne nooit geweest is, noch ooit wezen zal.’* In de Duitse vertaling van Brox luidt deze zin: *Wenn deshalb am Ende die Kirche plötzlich von hier entrückt wird, dann ‘wird eine Not sein,’ heißt es, ‘wie es sie nicht gegeben hat von Anfang an noch geben wird.’* Het is niet duidelijk hoe Irenaeus zich dat precies voorstelt. De wijze waarop hij zich hier uitdrukt, lijkt een soort ‘opname van de Gemeente’ te suggereren, al is dit leerstuk van later datum. Als dat zo zou zijn, dan is het in ieder geval bijzonder opmerkelijk dat hij hier zo beknopt over schrijft. Toch doet hetgeen hij eerder schrijft in *AH* V.5.1 hier wel terdege aan denken. Het gaat hier over het lange leven van de patriarchen. Hij stelt hier Henoch en Elia ten voorbeeld die allebei lichamelijk weggenomen zijn. Irenaeus ziet hierin al een vooruitwijzing naar de opname van de rechtvaardigen. De rechtvaardigen zullen volgens Irenaeus lichamelijk worden weggenomen naar het paradijs in Eden. Dit heeft de apostel Paulus ook gezien toen hij opgetrokken geweest is in de derde hemel en daar onuitsprekelijke dingen gezien heeft. Hier zullen ze tot het einde blijven.” Not only does Geerts read the text as indicating some kind of removal prior to the coming Tribulation, he finds confirmation for this in the illustration of the assumptions of Enoch and Elijah.

the “church” will be present during what is commonly called the Tribulation period.⁷⁰ Hence the conundrum: if the “church” will be caught up from present tribulations of this age prior to the future ultimate Tribulation (5.29.1), who is the “church”—the “just”—who will endure that future coming Tribulation? Understandably, many have pitted Irenaeus’s description of the church enduring the Tribulation in passages like 5.26.1 against his description of an apparent pre-tribulation assumption in 5.29.1, allowing the former to simply negate the latter.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Though most of Irenaeus’s descriptions of events of the Tribulation uses the third person indicating experiences that will happen to people alive at the time, he does seem to include himself with a first-person plural “we” in *Haer.* 5.30.4: “But as the case is, he [John] gives the number of the name, so that when he comes, if we know who he is, we might be on guard against him (*caveamus illum*).” However, this does not necessarily imply that Irenaeus expected all Christians—including himself—to go through the Tribulation, as this could be a general or categorical use of the first-person plural (e.g., “We’ll one day go to Mars”). For biblical examples in which the author does not necessarily include himself in the category, see 1 Cor 15:51—“We will not all sleep”; that is, we (Christians) will not all die if we are still alive when the resurrection occurs, though most will (and have), including Paul. This same categorical use is found in the corresponding passage of 1 Thess 4:17—“We who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them.” In this case, Paul, having died, was not part of the category of those living at the time of Christ’s return, who will be caught up without having tasted death. Of course, in both of instances, somebody in the category of “Christian” would be alive, and Paul believed it was possible, depending on God’s timing, that he himself could have been part of that subset of the larger categorical “we.” But simply using “we,” especially with regard to eschatological events subject to God’s plan, does not prove the speaker necessarily included himself in that category. Irenaeus himself uses the categorical “we” as “we Christians” in contexts with future conditions in which some Christians will experience the things he describes while others will not. For instance, in *Haer.* 5.9.3, he says, “Since, therefore, we cannot be saved without God’s Spirit, the Apostle admonished us to preserve God’s Spirit through faith and a chaste manner of living, in order that we might not be without the communion of the Holy Spirit and lose (*amittamus*) the kingdom of heaven.” Of course, it is doubtful whether Irenaeus believed he himself belonged to the category of those Christians who will forsake the Spirit to such a degree that he would be among the “we” who lost the kingdom of heaven; but it was certainly a hypothetical possibility, and it would certainly be a reality for some of his category of “we Christians.” Likewise, not knowing whether he would be alive and among the Christians when the Antichrist appears and rises to power, Irenaeus could say “in order that we might be on guard against him” (*ut caveamus illum*), as if he were part of this group, because, depending on when the eschatological events would begin to unfold, he could be in that category. Yet even this does not necessarily mean he believed that he would suffer under the Antichrist even if he were still alive at the time. As he rises to power, the early career of the Antichrist figure prior to his forty-two-month reign of terror from Jerusalem will take time. And Irenaeus uses the “we” category not for suffering persecution and martyrdom under the Antichrist, but being able to determine the identity of the Antichrist by using the number 666. So, regardless of one’s views on the timing of the assumption of the church, it is quite likely that knowing the number of the Antichrist would allow Christians to identify this figure prior to the specific events of the Tribulation. In that case, even if Irenaeus believed he would likely be included in the number of the Christians taken up prior to the Tribulation under the Antichrist, he would still be among those who, prior to that Tribulation, were equipped to identify the Antichrist by the number of his name. Of course, it is also possible that Irenaeus included himself in the “we” because he could not presume to be among the “spiritual” and “perfect” who would be rescued. In fact, once one realizes that the “spiritual” and “perfect” may represent a small minority of all Christians, it is possible Irenaeus expected most Christians—perhaps even himself in a posture of humility—would be left to endure the Antichrist of the future, rendering his categorical use of “we” quite appropriate.

⁷¹ Even after quoting the relevant portion of *Haer.* 5.29.1 that appear to assert an assumption of the church prior to the Tribulation, Sung Wook Chung notes, “In terms of timeline and overall structure, Irenaeus’s eschatology coincides with that of historic premillennialism” (Sung Wook Chung, “Historic Premillennialism,” in Sung Wook Chung and David Mathewson, *Models of Premillennialism* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018], 10). Note that Chung adds an interpretive introduction to Irenaeus’s quotation not found or even implied in the original quoted material—“regarding the church’s being caught up in the air to receive the returning Lord” (“Historic Premillennialism,” 10–11). Nothing in the text links Irenaeus’s description of the assumption of the church to the return of Christ after the Tribulation. Failing to recognize that Irenaeus is referring here to general tribulations and persecutions at the hands

Solving the Conundrum

The following facts present us with a conundrum:

- 1) Irenaeus anticipated mortal survivors of the Tribulation repopulating the kingdom as well as immortal saints reigning during the kingdom (*Haer.* 5.35.1).
- 2) Irenaeus taught that the church would endure persecution during the coming Tribulation (5.26.1).
- 3) Irenaeus described the church being caught up before the coming Tribulation (5.29.1).
- 4) A post-tribulation timing of #3 would mean the assumption corresponds to the crowning of the victors over the Antichrist with incorruption; thus, the referent for the reward of incorruption would have to be living survivors of the Tribulation, disallowing #1.⁷²

of wicked nations experienced throughout history—distinct in severity from the unparalleled future Tribulation—lies at the heart of Martin’s argument that this passage cannot refer to anything like an assumption of some members of the church from the earth prior to that future Tribulation. See Gordon Wood Martin, “Eschatology in the Early Church: with Special Reference to the Theses of C. H. Dodd and M. Werner” (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1971), 519. The same author also argues against the “pretribulation” position by pointing out that elsewhere in Irenaeus the church suffers under the coming Antichrist.

⁷² In the post-tribulation rapture solution, Irenaeus’s language in *Haer.* 5.29.1 should be understood as affirming the following: though the church presently endures tribulations at the hands of the wicked nations, the church in the end will suffer through the ultimate Tribulation under the Antichrist and will be assumed to heaven as a reward for their victory, at which time they will be crowned with immortality. Both the Latin and Greek text could be read in this way, though if that were the order of events in Irenaeus’s mind, one would expect that the subordinate clause—*et propterea cum in fine repente hinc Ecclesia assumetur*/καὶ διὰ τοῦτο, ἐν τῷ τέλει ἀθρόως ἐντεῦθεν τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀναλαμβανομένης—would follow rather than precede the main clause mentioning the future Tribulation. The placement of the *hinc* points to the present world and its ongoing tribulations as the place from which the church will be assumed. We have also seen that the grammar and syntax of the passage most naturally coordinates the assumption of the church from this place with the phrase “there will be Tribulation” (*erit...tribulatio*/ἔσται...θλίψις). Irenaeus’s understanding of the future Tribulation involved a protracted period, not a brief moment. It would involve “the last contest of the just,” requiring perseverance and victory during the reign of the Antichrist (*Haer.* 5.29.2). Thus, the *repente...assumetur* could conceivably occur at the commencement of the event described by *erit...tribulatio*, in its midst, or even at its close. The placement of the *assumetur* clause between Irenaeus’s discussion of present tribulations and the future ultimate Tribulation does seem to weigh against the post-tribulation reading. Also, Irenaeus’s teaching of mortal survivors of the Tribulation who are still in the flesh to repopulate the earth seems to rule out a post-tribulation interpretation. The text tells us that those who are victorious over the Antichrist during the future Tribulation period will be “crowned with imperishability” (*coronantur incorruptelam*/στεφανοῦνται τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν). If Irenaeus is coordinating the assumption with the conclusion of the Tribulation period, and if this assumption is the reward for those who endured persecution throughout the reign of the Antichrist, then there would be no doubt that he was coordinating the assumption of the church with the transformation and translation of the just from a mortal to immortal condition (1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:17). In this case, all those who were victorious over the Antichrist will be assumed to heaven and crowned with incorruption. If, however, the assumption in *Haer.* 5.29.1 is placed at the commencement of the coming Tribulation, then the crowning of the just with incorruption for their victory during the reign of the Antichrist would not refer to the catching up of the saints in 1 Thessalonians 4 but to the crowning with life in Rev 2:10 and Rev 20:4. That is, the Tribulation martyrs would be crowned with resurrection and incorruption at the end of the Tribulation as a reward for their suffering unto death (Rev 20:4). However, the survivors of the Tribulation would remain in their mortal bodies to repopulate the earth in keeping with *Haer.* 5.35.1. That the

- 5) A pre-tribulation rapture of the whole church addresses the concern of #1 but works against #2.⁷³

To solve this lingering puzzle in a plausible fashion, we need to return to Irenaeus's typology of the future assumption of the church in the experiences of Enoch and Elijah in 5.5.1:

Enoch, for example, because he *was pleasing to God*, was transferred in the body in which he pleased him. This revealed beforehand the transfer of the just [τῆν

assumption of the church mentioned in 5.29.1 is limited only to resurrected saints but not to those living at the time of the assumption is not sustainable in light of the examples of Enoch and Elijah as prefiguring the future translation and assumption of the just. As such, Irenaeus emphasizes the fact that they had been assumed to heaven without experiencing death.

⁷³ This pre-tribulation solution leads to another potential problem. Will the living survivors of the reign of the Antichrist not be transformed into an immortal, incorruptible state as a reward for their perseverance? The text promises “*novissimus enim agon hic justorum, in quo vincentes coronantur incorruptelam*” (*Haer.* 5.29.1). Who are the “just” who, when victorious, are crowned with incorruption? Would such a crowning with incorruption necessarily involve something like a transformation from mortality to immortality and thus something like an assumption? At this point it is necessary to recall Irenaeus's explicit statements regarding the actual destiny of the survivors of the Antichrist's reign of terror. *Haer.* 5.35.1 says, “Those, too, whom the Lord will find on the earth in the flesh awaiting him from heaven, and who have suffered affliction (*perpeccos tribulationem*) and have escape the hands of the evil One, are the ones of whom the Prophet says, *They who were left on the earth shall be multiplied.*” Thus, within six chapters, Irenaeus clarifies the destiny of the survivors of those who suffered Tribulation under the Antichrist: they remain in their mortal bodies (*in carne*) and multiply upon the earth. Since this is the case, who are those mentioned in *Haer.* 5.29.1 who are victorious in the Tribulation and are crowned with incorruption (*in quo vincentes coronantur incorruptelam*/ὄν νικῆσαντες στεφανοῦνται τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν)? The most plausible explanation is that this refers to those who had been martyred under the Antichrist. Orbe has noted the likely background of “la tribulación de los diez días” in Rev 2:10 with reference to the coming Tribulation in *Haer.* 5.29.1 (Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo*, 220). In that passage, the victor (ὁ νικῶν) is told, “You will have tribulation (θλίψιν) for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life (τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς).” Yet Orbe reasonably suggests the most direct influence on the image of being crowned with incorruptibility after being victorious in the coming contest is *Mart. Pol.* 17.1: “But the jealous and envious and evil one who opposes the family of the righteous, having seen both the greatness of his martyrdom and his irreproachable way of life from the beginning, both that he was now crowned with the crown of immortality (τὸν τῆς ἀφθαρσίας στέφανον) and had won a prize nobody could deny, he took care that not even his poor body should be taken away by us, although many desired to do this and to have a share in his holy flesh.”⁷³ Irenaeus's promise of a “crown of incorruption,” then, seems to refer to those who were faithful unto death and thus received the incorruptible crown of life (Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo*, 221). Restricting this promise of incorruption to the category of martyrs under the Antichrist who are then perhaps regarded as raised to reign with Christ at the commencement of the kingdom (cf. Rev 20:4) would relieve the tension with the need for mortal survivors to repopulate the earth (*Haer.* 5.35.1). Thus, reading the assumption of the church in *Haer.* 5.29.1 as a pre-tribulation translation to heaven of the whole church and understanding the subsequent crowning of victors with incorruption at the end of the future Tribulation as a reference to converts during the Tribulation resolves the problem of 5.35.1. However, this does not address Irenaeus's insistence that the church will, in fact, suffer persecution under the Antichrist during the Tribulation. One possible resolution of this tension would be to understand the term “church” as flexible for Irenaeus. That is, the term refers to any group of Christians—believers in Christ—and thus the group of the just assumed into heaven at the start of the Tribulation can be called “the church” and the group of the just who come to faith during the future Tribulation can also be called “the church.” This solution is not unreasonable, but it does not take into account Irenaeus's language with reference to Enoch and Elijah as types of the “spiritual” who will be assumed in the future. That description, we will see, suggests that Irenaeus held to an assumption of only part of the church, not the whole church.

μετάθεσιν⁷⁴ τῶν δικαίων προμηνύων/*translationem justorum praemonstrans*). And Elijah, while he was in the substance of the created order, was assumed. Thus he prophesied the assumption of the spiritual men (τὴν ἀνάληψιν τῶν πνευματικῶν προφητεύων/*assumptionem patrum prophetans*).⁷⁵

What does Irenaeus mean by “the assumption of the spiritual”?⁷⁶ And how might this identification of the “spiritual ones” resolve our apparent contradiction regarding Irenaeus’s apparent pre-tribulation assumption of the church and the fact that the church also suffers under the Antichrist during the Tribulation?

In *Haereses* 4.33.1, Irenaeus describes the “truly spiritual” disciple: “Such a disciple, truly spiritual, who receives the Spirit of God—the Spirit who was with men in all God’s economies from the beginning, and announced future things and pointed out present things and narrated past things—such a one *judges all men but is himself judged by no one*” (4.33.1). For the truly spiritual one, “all things are consistent for him. There is one faith intact in the one God Almighty, *from whom are all things*. There is one secure persuasion in God’s Son, Christ Jesus our Lord, *through*

⁷⁴ On the use of μετάθεσις here see G. W. H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), 851, s.v. μετάθεσις.

⁷⁵ The Greek text and Latin translations diverge at one significant point. Likely reflecting the original wording of Irenaeus, the Greek asserts that the catching up of Elijah to heaven is a prophecy of “the assumption of those who are spiritual” (τὴν ἀνάληψιν τῶν πνευματικῶν), while the Latin text refers to “the assumption of the fathers” (*assumptionem patrum*). The Latin translation appears to interpret Irenaeus’s “those who are spiritual” as a reference to the Old Testament saints—the “fathers”—thus indicating the place to which the departed saints went upon death. While SC presents both the Latin *patrum prophetans* and the Greek πνευματικῶν προφητεύων, they provide the translation “prophétisant par là l’enlèvement des hommes spirituels.” The textual evidence is noted as “πνευματικῶν gr. arm. : πατέρων lat.” Rightly, the translators side with the Greek and Armenian against the Latin. Unger’s ACW edition also renders the “spiritual men” reading, noting, “‘Spiritual’ as in Greek and Arm. Iren, in place of Lat. Iren. *partum*.” This textual matter seems to be undisputed.

⁷⁶ Of course, Irenaeus famously recounts the Gnostics’ three divisions of the elements into material, ensouled, and spiritual, dividing all people into one of three groups (*Haer.* 1.7.5; 2.14.4; 2.29.3; 2.30.8), with the Gnostics themselves comprising the highest form of being: “The spiritual element is the spiritual persons who possess the perfect knowledge about God, and have been initiated into the mysteries of Achamoth; and they assume that they themselves are these” (1.6.1). Valentinians call themselves “spiritual” because “a certain particle of the Father of all things was deposited in their souls” (2.19.3). In the future, the Gnostics expect to put off their souls and “become intellectual spirits” because “they claim to be spiritual” in nature (2.29.1). In short, the followers of Valentinus “call themselves ‘spiritual’ (*spirituales/πνευματικούς*)” to the exclusion of all other categories of humanity. This term is not a reference to the quality of their lives but to the very essence of their being. According to Irenaeus, though the Gnostics claim to the “spiritual,” actually “they are shamefully carnal because of their great impiety” (2.30.1). Here Irenaeus is playing on the equivocation of the term “spiritual,” as Gnostics define the word in terms of spiritual substance while Irenaeus is now using the term in its qualitative sense. Moringiello summarizes the contrast between Irenaeus’s view of the “spiritual/carnal” distinction and that of the Gnostic *Tripartite Tractate*: “For the *Tractate*, a person is a *pneumatikos* because he is a different class of human being. For Irenaeus, the *pneumatikos* is a *pneumatikos* because he has accepted the Spirit of God and interpreted the Scriptures rightly because of that acceptance. The spiritual man receives salvation, Irenaeus tells us, because he understands the Scriptures—both the old covenant and the new—according to the revelation of Christ’s death and resurrection” (Scot D. Moringiello, “The *Pneumatikos* as Scriptural Interpreter: Irenaeus on 1 Cor. 2:15,” *Studia Patristica* 65 [2013]: 112). Moringiello also suggests, “Even though Irenaeus does not say this specifically, we can be sure that he thinks each martyr is a *pneumatikos*” (Moringiello, “The *Pneumatikos*,” 113). Cf. Paulo Sérgio Lopes Gonçalves and Leonardo Henrique Piacente, “Antropologia espiritual de Irineu de Lião,” *Teocomunicação* 47.1 (2017): 39–50.

whom are all things, and in the economies relative to him, through which God's Son was made man. This [persuasion] is by God's Spirit, who furnishes us with *the knowledge of the Truth*" (4.33.7). Also, "the man who is truly spiritual will explain that the Prophets spoke all the other things which we have demonstrated by such abundance [of Scripture texts]. He will point out regarding which feature of the Lord's economies each one of the things mentioned was spoken, and [he will manifest] the organic whole of the work of God's Son. He will always know the same God; he will always recognize the same Word of God, even though he has now appeared to us; and he will always recognize the same Spirit of God, even though in the last times he is poured out on us in a new manner, but [was poured out] on the entire human race from the creation until the end. From him [the Spirit], those who believe in God and follow his Word, receive salvation that comes from him" (4.33.15). Irenaeus expressly contrasts the "truly spiritual" from "those...who separate from him, and hold his precepts in contempt, and by their deeds dishonor him who made them, and by their doctrines blaspheme him who nourished them, heap up against themselves a most just judgment" (4.33.15). The truly spiritual one "neither blasphemes his Father, nor sets aside as worthless his economies; nor makes accusations against the Patriarchs, nor dishonors the Prophets, nor says that the Prophets were from another god, or that the prophecies were from different substances" (4.33.15).

In a significant passage establishing the clear distinction between "spiritual" and "carnal" Christians, Irenaeus appeals to Paul's distinction between those fed with milk and those with solid food, the infantile being "of the flesh" (1 Cor 3:2–3). Irenaeus interprets Paul's language of being "fleshly" and behaving like "ordinary men," as indicating that "the Father's Spirit was not yet with them, because of their imperfection and weakness in their mode of living" (4.38.2). Though they were counted among the Christians, the Corinthians' carnality expressed in jealousy and strife prevented the full reception and manifestation of the Spirit, resulting in their carnal condition. Simply put, "It is good to obey God, to believe in him, and to keep his commandment; that is life for man; just as not to obey God is evil, and that is death for man" (4.39.1).

For Irenaeus, those who begin the journey of the Christian life must continue in obedience or they can fall away—"Since God showed himself magnanimous, man knew both the good of obedience and the evil of disobedience in order that the eyes might experience both, and might choose with discernment what is better, with the result that he might never become indolent and neglectful of God's command, and that he might learn by experience that to disobey God takes life away from him, and this is evil, and that he would never attempt this. On the contrary, that he might know that what preserves life, namely, to obey God, is good, and that he might guard it diligently with all care" (4.39.1). That these warnings against failure to persevere in life by obedience to God are not merely hypothetical, Irenaeus makes clear: "How can he be immortal who in his mortal nature did not obey his Maker?...By guarding what has been fashioned, you will ascend to the Perfect One.... If, on the contrary, you have become hardened immediately and reject his art and are ungrateful toward God, you have lost at the same time his art and his life.... So if you give to him what is your own, namely, faith in him and subjection, you will receive his art and will be God's perfect work" (4.39.2). He continues, "If, on the contrary, you do not believe in him and flee from his hand, you will be the cause of imperfection in yourself—but not in him who called you—because you have not obeyed.... Light will not subject anyone to itself necessarily; neither does God force anyone who does not wish to keep his art. So those who have apostatized from the Father's light and have transgressed the law of freedom have apostatized through their own fault, since they had been created with free will and power of self-determination" (4.39.3).

In Irenaeus's soteriology, not all who were once "saved" and made part of the church would ultimately be saved. He did not, in other words, believe in a fixed election and security for the believer.⁷⁷ Cooperation with God's grace, obedience to his commands, and perseverance in spiritual growth was necessary after conversion. In 4.15.2, Irenaeus makes it clear that "many are called, but few are chosen"—"In our own calling, *many are called but few are chosen*, and...some are wolves inwardly but outwardly they are clothed with sheep skins. [They will also find] that God has always guarded both the free will and autonomy in man, and his admonitions, so that those who do not obey him would be justly judged precisely because they had not obeyed him; and that those who do obey him and believe in him would be crowned with imperishability" (4.15.2). Since imperishability is received at resurrection, Irenaeus establishes that simply being counted among the sheep outwardly or among the "called" is not enough; rather, one must believe and obey in order to ultimately be crowned with imperishability.

Later he notes that the heretics forget that "just as in those days God *was not pleased with most of them* who sinned, so now *many are called, but few are chosen*, and that just as then the unrighteous and the idolators and the immoral lost their lives, so it is now" (4.27.4). After reviewing the vice list of 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, he concludes, "That he is not saying this of those who are outside, but to us, lest we can cast outside the kingdom of God if we do such things, he continues, *And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of God*" (4.27.4). In that same context of destruction and judgment for the wicked as well as those from among those who fall away, Irenaeus cites 1 Corinthians 5:11; Ephesians 5:6–7, noting, "And as then also the rest who approved them and associated with them, shared in the condemnation of sinners, so now *a little leaven ferments the whole lump*" (4.27.4). He also applies to the "unrighteous" the eschatological judgments described in Romans 1:18; Luke 18:7–9; and even 2 Thessalonians 1:6–10, which draws on Day of the Lord imagery. This latter text warns of tribulation for the afflictors of the righteous when the Lord is revealed in flaming fire—a Day of the Lord theophanic visitation in judgment. In that day, though, the saints will be glorified and have rest (4.27.4).

Again, commenting on the "many are called, few are chosen" passage (Matt 22:14), Irenaeus notes, "Furthermore, he revealed that it was necessary for us to be adorned with the calling and the deeds of righteousness, in order that God's Spirit might rest upon us" (4.36.6). He continues, "But those who were invited to God's supper and did not share in the Holy Spirit, because of their evil mode of living, *will be cast into outer darkness*, the Scripture says. He manifestly points out that the same King who invited the faithful from everywhere to the wedding of his Son and who gave to them the imperishable banquet likewise commands the one who has no wedding garment, namely, a contemptuous person, to be cast into outer darkness. For just as in the first covenant, *with most of them [God] was not pleased*; so now, too, *many are called, but few are chosen*" (4.36.6).

Those who exercise their free will in obedience and endurance will receive salvation; that is, for Irenaeus, "salvation is the result of a synergy between God who invites and man who responds and

⁷⁷ In his excellent work on significant of Christ's incarnation in the soteriology of Irenaeus of Lyons, González Faus notes that for Irenaeus, "Ya en cuanto es consumación y trascendencia, la salvación está necesariamente sometida a una evolución lenta que encierra, además, la posibilidad de frustrarse a sí misma" (José Ignacio González Faus, *Carne de Dios: Significado salvador de la Encarnación en la teología de san Ireneo* [Barcelona: Herder, 1969], 137). See especially Chapter 4, "El Progreso como Dimensión de la Salud" (93–117).

cooperates.”⁷⁸ Thus, in Irenaeus, a Christian may fall away: “He placed in man the power of choice, as also in the angels—for the angels are intellectual—in order that those who obey him would justly possess the good, which was given by God but preserved by them; those, however, who disobeyed will justly not possess the good and will receive a deserved punishment, since God in kindness bestowed a good on them, but they did not guard it with care or consider it precious, but despised his supereminent goodness. So, since they reject the good and, so to say, vomit it out, they all deservedly fall under God’s just judgment” (4.37.1). Irenaeus expressly quotes Romans 2:4–5, with its promise of “glory and honor to everyone who does good” reserved only for “the good,” that is, those who do “good when they had it in their power not to do so” while “those, however, who do not do good will receive God’s just judgment since they did not do good when they had it in their power to do so” (4.37.1). He ties eternal reward explicitly to those who do good: “For what enjoyment of the good is there for those who are ignorant of it? And what glory is there for those who did not strive for the good? And what assurance is there for those who did not endure anything? And what crown is there for those who did not acquire it as winners in a contest” (4.37.6). Hitchcock notes, “In his ethical and religious system of salvation Irenaeus insists upon certain fundamental principles. He recognized that salvation is a process, a growth, a gradual development in the grace of a new spiritual life, which is obtained through the life-giving Spirit.”⁷⁹

In 4.37.7, Irenaeus says that the kingdom of heaven comes to those “who are constantly vigilant” and “take it by force and struggle” (quoting Matt 11:22). He then ties this thought to 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, noting, “So, the good athlete [Paul] admonishes us in regard to the contest for imperishability, in order that we might receive the crown and might esteem the crown precious, namely, since it is won by us in a contest and is not spontaneously implanted in us” (4.37.7).

In 5.6.1, Irenaeus identifies the “perfect” (*perfectos*) as those “who have received God’s Spirit (*qui perceperunt Spiritum Dei*),” and these are also called “spiritual (*spiritales*), since they are spiritual by virtue of the participation of the Spirit (*participationem Spiritus*),” and concludes that such a person “has become spiritual and perfect (*spiritales et perfectus*)” (5.6.1). Ultimately, it is only “the perfect and spiritual man, who is saved” (5.6.1). Paul “called those *perfect* who present all three *blameless* to God. So those are *perfect* who continuously possess God’s Spirit within themselves and *preserve* their souls and bodies *blameless*, that is, they keep the faith in God and practice justice toward their neighbor” (5.6.1).⁸⁰ Not all have the Spirit in this way, and therefore not all may be regarded as “spiritual and perfect.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Demetrios J. Constantelos, “Irenaeos of Lyons and His Central Views on Human Nature,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 33.4 (1989): 360.

⁷⁹ F. R. Montgomery Hitchcock, *Irenaeus of Lugdunum: A Study of His Teaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 301.

⁸⁰ In an article drawing parallels between Wesleyan approaches to perfection in love and the soteriology of Irenaeus, Christopher Bounds notes, “Irenaeus teaches that the final work of redemption begins with the grace of God, but it must be united with humanity’s obedience. In his synergistic understanding, Christian perfection is possible only through Christ’s recapitulation of human life and the Spirit’s union with body and soul, but it is experienced only through the exercise of faith, choice of the good, and obedience to God. Humanity is empowered to do all this through the gift of free will” (Christopher T. Bounds, “Irenaeus and the Doctrine of Christian Perfection,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 45.2 [2010]: 171).

⁸¹ This is a fact not directly addressed in Briggman’s treatment of Irenaeus’s view of perfection, likeness, and eternity (Briggman, *Irenaeus and the Theology of the Spirit*, 173–181). Though correct that the “perfect” and “spiritual” are those who receive the Holy Spirit and thus increase in power and grace, Briggman does not adequately develop the very Irenaeian doctrine that those who once receive the Spirit can, by their free will, resist the increase in

In *Haereses* 5.8, Irenaeus further contrasts the spiritual from the carnal, noting that “at present we receive a certain part of his Spirit for the perfection and preparation of imperishability, so we may gradually become accustomed to receiving and bearing God” (5.8.1). This pledge of the Spirit in the present age “already makes us spiritual, and *what is mortal may be swallowed up by the immortal*. He says, *For you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you*. But this does not take place by the boasting of the flesh, but by communion with the Spirit” (5.8.1). Irenaeus expressly connects the present condition of those who are spiritual by the indwelling Spirit to the eschatological hope of resurrection and eternal life: “If, therefore, at present with the aid of the pledge we cry *Abba, Father*, what will happen when on rising *we shall see him face-to-face*, when all the members will overflow with a hymn of joy, glorifying him who raised them from the dead and gave them the gift of eternal life?” (5.8.1). Thus, “the Apostle rightly calls those spiritual who have the pledge of the Spirit, because God’s Spirit dwells in them, and they do not serve the lusts of the flesh but subject themselves to the Spirit and live according to reason in every respect” (5.8.2). It should be noted that Irenaeus does not categorize as “spiritual ones” those who simply have received the Spirit; rather, they must also subject themselves to God and forsake serving the lusts of the flesh (5.8.2). In contrast, “The Apostle rightly calls those carnal who reject the counsel of the Spirit but serve the lusts of the flesh, and live senselessly and without restraint give themselves over to their own lusts, since they have no inspiration from the divine Spirit, but live like pigs and dogs, because they think of nothing but carnal things” (5.8.2).

At this point we must address whether Irenaeus is contrasting baptized Christians as “spiritual ones” and unbaptized non-Christians as “carnal ones,” or whether the carnal may also include the tragic sub-category of baptized Christians who have failed to live a spiritual life by the indwelling Spirit. Irenaeus’s typological treatment of the Mosaic dietary regulations answers this question. He sets up the categorization as follows: “[The Law] proclaims clean whatever have cloven hoof and chew the cud; but whatever lacks both or either of those, it sets aside as unclean” (5.8.3). The clean (those with cloven hoof who chew the cud) are “those who through faith securely journey toward the Father and the Son”—represented by the stability of the cloven hoof—and “*meditate on the words of God day and night*, in order to be adorned with good works”—represented by chewing the cud (5.8.3).

The category of the “unclean” has at least two sub-categories. The first Irenaeus refers to the Jews, “who *chew the cud* but do not have *the cloven hoof*”—that is, they “certainly have the words of God in their mouth but do not have their root firmly fixed in the Father and the Son” (5.8.3). The second sub-category refers both to the heretics and “those who have the cloven hoof but do not chew the cud”—that is, “those who do not *meditate on the words of God* and are not adorned with works of righteousness....Such people indeed say that they believe in the Father and the Son but never *mediate on the words of God* as is proper and are not adorned with the works of righteousness; but as we have said, they have lived the life of pigs and dogs, giving themselves over to uncleanness and gluttony and the rest of the carefree life. Rightly, then, does the Apostle call carnal and animal all such who on account of their unbelief and licentious living do not obtain the divine Spirit, and cast away, by their various traits, the Word that gives life, and live irrationally in their lusts” (5.8.3). Though Irenaeus does not address a possible third category—those who neither

power and grace, fall back toward imperfection and carnality, and ultimately not receive the blessings of communion with the Spirit. On the other hand, Briggman does not necessarily reject this aspect of Irenaeus’s pneumatology and soteriology; he simply does not develop it.

have cloven hooves nor chew the cud—we can surmise that these would involve all non-Christian pagans who have never confessed belief in the Father and Son in baptism nor meditate on the words of God to be adorned with righteousness. In any case, it should be clear that the label “carnal” is applied to those who claim to believe in the Father and Son—that is, they were baptized—but live their lives in wicked living.

Irenaeus further describes the “spiritual” in *Haereses* 5.9.2: “Whoever fears God and believes in the coming of his Son, and who through faith establish God’s Spirit in their hearts, such are rightly called men, *pure, spiritual, and living for God (mundi et spiritales et viventes Deo)* because they have the Father’s Spirit (*habent Spiritum Patris*), who purifies man and elevates him unto God’s life.” Such people who add the “willingness of the spirit to the weakness of the flesh” are “no longer carnal but spiritual (*talis non jam carnalem, sed spiritalem*) on account of communion in the Spirit” (5.9.2). Irenaeus present the sobering implications of being “carnal” rather than “spiritual”: “So the flesh without God’s Spirit is dead, since it has no life; it has no power to *inherit the kingdom of God*” (5.9.3). Irenaeus draws a clear soteriological line between the carnal and spiritual: “Now we have received the Spirit and *we walk in a new life*, inasmuch as we obey God. Since, therefore, we cannot be saved without God’s Spirit, the Apostle admonished us to preserve God’s Spirit through faith and a chaste manner of living, in order that we might not be without the communion of the Holy Spirit and lose the kingdom of heaven (*amittamus regnum caelorum*)” (5.9.3).⁸² And later, he warns, “In order that we might not lose life (*ut non amittentes ...vitam*) by losing the Spirit (*Spiritum amittamus*) who inherits us, the Apostle admonished us to communion in the Spirit (*ad Spiritus communicationem*)” (5.9.4).

D’Alès introduces a potential problem based on a very brief statement in *Haereses* 5.12.2 that “l’Esprit divin, après avoir investi l’homme, ne l’abandonne jamais.”⁸³ Distinguishing between the breath of life given to all humanity for their physical life and the Spirit of God given for spiritual vivification, Irenaeus notes, “So breath is temporal while the Spirit is eternal. And breath is vigorous for a while and continues on for some time, then it departs, leaving that [body, in which it was, breathless. The Spirit, however, envelops men from within and without. And of course, since he always continues, he will never forsake him” (5.12.2). In light of clear warnings that a person can, in fact, resist the Spirit and lose their spiritual life, Irenaeus’s words here must not be taken in an absolute sense, but in the sense that whereas mortal breath will simply quit from humans regardless of their disposition, the Spirit will continue to abide among humans in general and—for those who walk in the Spirit—will remain forever. D’Alès notes, “Par ailleurs, il [Irenaeus] n’ignore pas, et répète souvent que l’homme a le fatal pouvoir de se dérober à l’Esprit de Dieu et de frustrer ses avances” and “A condition de ne se point dérober et de garder l’amitié avec Dieu, l’homme obtiendra la participation à Dieu. La participation à Dieu est vie et lumière, jouissance des biens qu’il répand. Ceux qui veulent se séparer de Dieu, il les sépare de lui.”⁸⁴

⁸² Though it is not a matter decisive for this study, I side with Briggman contra Behr on the nature of humanity and his relationship to the Spirit: “Irenaeus believes the presence of the Holy Spirit is limited to the followers of God.... This position entails a reading that limits the constitution of the human being to the body and soul alone: temporal life comes to human beings by the instrumentality of the Spirit, not its presence” (Anthony Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Oxford Early Christian Studies [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], 151.

⁸³ Adhémar D’Alès, “La Doctrine de L’Esprit en Saint Irénée,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 14.6 (1924): 519.

⁸⁴ D’Alès, “Doctrine de L’Esprit,” 520; cf. 534.

In any case, Irenaeus concludes that “these are the things that will be inherited by the Spirit when they have been transferred to the kingdom of heaven (*translata in regnum caelorum*)” (5.9.4), linking the inheritance of the kingdom of God by the “spiritual” to the future translation of the just discussed a few chapters earlier (5.5.1–2).

Irenaeus further develops his description of the “spiritual” in *Haereses* 5.10: “If men have through faith made progress toward what is better and have received God’s Spirit and produced his fruit, they will be spiritual (*erunt spirituales*) (cf. 5.10.2)...But if they reject the Spirit and continue to be what they were before, wishing to belong to the flesh rather than to the Spirit, quite rightly it is said of such, *Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*” (5.10.1). Even though he speaks in these stark terms, Irenaeus does allow that “men who are unfruitful in righteousness and, so to say, covered with brambles, if they accept care and receive the Word of God as a graft, they return to man’s pristine nature” (5.10.1). That is, a person who has slid into a carnal state may repent and return to the spiritual condition.

Finally, based on Galatians 5—the deeds of the flesh and fruit of the Spirit—Irenaeus defines the “carnal” and the “spiritual” (*Haer.* 5.11.1). He concludes, “Hence, just as one who has made progress toward what is better and has produced fruit of the Spirit is altogether saved because of communion of the Spirit, so one who continues in the aforementioned deeds of the flesh is considered carnal, because he does not accept God’s Spirit and *cannot inherit the kingdom of God*” (5.11.1). At this point, we must not lose sight of the eschatological nature of Irenaeus’s concept of inheriting the kingdom of God; he is not talking about entrance into the church nor about dying and going to heaven; he is speaking throughout this work about the resurrection of the flesh and the assumption of that flesh into the heavenly kingdom—“These are the things that will be inherited by the Spirit when they have been transferred to the kingdom of heaven (*translata in regnum caelorum*)” (5.9.4).

Toward the end of book 5, Irenaeus makes a case that some—“whom the Lord will deem worthy of this”—will be taken up upon their resurrection. He writes: “For since the Lord departed to *the midst of the shadow of death*, where the souls of the dead were, and then rose bodily, and after the resurrection was taken up, it is evident that also the souls of his disciples, on account of whom the Lord wrought these things, will go to the invisible place determined for them by God and will sojourn there, awaiting the resurrection. Then they will receive their bodies and rise integrally, that is, bodily, so that just as the Lord rose, they also will come to the vision of God. *For a disciple is not above his teacher, but every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher.* Consequently, as our Teacher did not directly fly away but awaited the time of his resurrection as appointed by the Father, which was also disclosed by Jonah, and then rose after three days and was taken up, so we too ought to await the time of our resurrection appointed by God, which was foretold by the Prophets, and on rising thus be taken up (*et sic resurgentes assumi*), [that is] all whom the Lord will deem worthy of this” (5.31). The final phrase—*quotquot Dominus hoc dignos habuerit*—may indicate a less-than-total number of saints who will experience the assumption immediately upon resurrection.

Throughout his writings, Irenaeus uses the phrase “those who are spiritual” with reference to a subset of Christians—the righteous who have become more perfect in faith and obedience (*Haer.* 5.6.1) and thus have truly received the Spirit of God (*recipiens Spiritum Dei*) (*Haer.* 4.33.1; cf. 5.6.1). Further, he explains that the Holy Spirit “dwelling in us, renders us spiritual [*spirituales*] even now”

(5.8.1). This does not, however, negate the need for continual spiritual growth toward perfection.⁸⁵ In Irenaeus's soteriology not all Christians can be rightly counted among this category of "the spiritual"; these are carnal (5.8.2, 4; 5.9.2).⁸⁶ According to Irenaeus, then, all humanity can be divided into two categories: the "spiritual" who not only believe in Christ but also walk in the Spirit and are adorned in works of righteousness; and the "carnal" who do not believe, had once believed but had apostatized, or who claim to believe but do not walk in the Spirit nor are adorned in righteous works. In the resulting ecclesiology, then, the "church" is composed of both "spiritual" and "carnal," each ostensibly with distinct eschatological destinies and destinations.

Thus, when Irenaeus describes "the assumption of those who are spiritual" (τὴν ἀνάληψιν τῶν πνευματικῶν) in *Haereses* 5.5.1, he is referring to true Christians who are living lives of righteousness in contrast to unbelievers and carnal Christians who are not living such lives. This, then, would lead one to conclude that the promise of being caught up in the likeness of Enoch and Elijah is limited to those who are "perfect and spiritual," while those who are imperfect and carnal will be left along with the unbelievers to endure the purifying trials of the future Tribulation. This solves the conundrum presented in 5.26.1 and 5.29.1, allowing for Irenaeus's language to stand "as is"—part of the church (the spiritual) will be assumed prior to the coming Tribulation (5.29.1) while the rest of the church (the carnal) will have to endure Tribulation (5.26.1). This solution allows for immortal saints—caught up prior to the Tribulation—to reign during the future kingdom over mortal survivors of the Tribulation left to repopulate the earth (5.35.1).

Rather than simply asserting that Irenaeus unwittingly contradicts himself, perhaps a better solution can be found. We have to realize that Irenaeus's ecclesiology and soteriology are pre-Augustinian and certainly pre-Reformation. So, when he uses terms like "church," we cannot assume he means the same thing as later theologians do. For Irenaeus, as was typical in the second century, the "church" refers to those baptized into the new covenant community of the Spirit, and ultimate salvation comes not to every baptized person, nor even necessarily to anyone who has once experienced the transformative grace of God. Rather, salvation involves perseverance in baptism and continued communion with the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit. Salvation was not merely a state of being, but a journey toward a destination, a journey that could go awry and end in tragedy through apostasy.⁸⁷ We have already visited these themes in Irenaeus above in our discussion of his distinction between the "spiritual" and "carnal."

The best solution, given Irenaeus's second-century ecclesiology and soteriology, is that the rescue from the coming Tribulation in *Haereses* 5.29.1 was viewed as a special privilege not of all baptized Christians but of the "spiritual," ready and waiting, spiritually prepared in holy living. This makes the best sense of the appeal to Enoch and Elijah, who were taken not simply because they were believers but because they were especially holy and pure believers in their corrupt

⁸⁵ Jeff Vogel, "The Haste of Sin, the Slowness of Salvation: An Interpretation of Irenaeus on the Fall and Redemption," *Anglican Theological Review* 89.3 (2007): 455–6.

⁸⁶ Cf. also *Haer.* 5.10.1; 5.10.2; 5.12.2.

⁸⁷ For a more thorough description of Irenaeus's soteriology, see Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 117–140, 256–62. Osborn writes that in Irenaeus's soteriology, "our offerings to God have moral conditions, for it is the pure conscience of the offerer that sanctifies the offering (4.18.4). We are sons of God only through obedience and doctrine (4.41.2); those who disobey their parents do not inherit (4.41.3). The earnest of the spirit dwells in us to make us spiritual even now while the mortal is swallowed up in immortality. By the spirit we are no more slaves of fleshly lusts, but ruled by the spirit. Following the light of reason, we become spiritual men (5.8.1, 2)" (Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 130).

generation. Others were left to endure the hardships on earth in their day. Likewise, in Irenaeus's mind, part of the church—the spiritual ones—will be assumed prior to the future Tribulation. The rest of the church will then be tested and purified through the last contest of the righteous, having to face the ordeal of the Antichrist.

Where did Irenaeus get this view of a partial assumption of the “spiritual” church prior to the coming Tribulation? I suggest he adapted it from the late-first-century eschatological sections of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, which Irenaeus not only knew but also quoted from in *Haereses* 4.20.2.⁸⁸ In light of an analysis of Visions 2–4 of the *Shepherd of Hermas*,⁸⁹ I suggest Hermas's eschatology involved a scenario in which those who maintain single-minded repentance in this age, who are perfectly fitted into the tower of refuge—the church—will have a glorious destiny in company with angels, distinct from the sorry fate of lackluster believers. In the *Shepherd*, though some are cast so far from the tower that they have no hope (Vis. 3), others are close to it and will therefore have a second chance. While those in the tower seem to be promised salvation and refuge from the Tribulation coming upon the earth that will destroy the wicked and purify the righteous, those who are close to the tower will have to endure the Tribulation for the purification of their sins. Even these will enter into eschatological reward, yet they will be in a position subordinate to those in the tower who were incorporated while it was still being built prior to the appointed “Day” for repentance (Vis. 2).

Hermas, then, becomes the interpretational key for understanding the conundrum posed by Irenaeus's apparent contradiction between the church caught up *prior to* the coming Tribulation and the church purified *by* the coming Tribulation. Irenaeus argued that he received the following from those elders that preceded him: “And as the presbyters say, “Then those who are deemed worthy of an abode in heaven shall go there, others shall enjoy the delights of paradise, and others shall possess the splendor of the city” (*Haer.* 5.36.1). He continues, “They say [moreover], that there is this distinction between the habitation of those who produce a hundred-fold, and that of those who produce sixty-fold, and that of those who produce thirty-fold: for the first will be taken up into the heavens, the second will dwell in paradise, the last will inhabit the city....The presbyters, the disciples of the apostles, affirm that this is the gradation and arrangement of those who are saved” (5.36.2).

Recall that Irenaeus's premillennial eschatology even distinguishes between two different groups of people in the coming age, which corresponds well with Hermas's own categorization of those who were incorporated into the tower and those who are saved but relegated to a “much subordinate place” (Vis. 3.7.6). That is, the immortal, glorified saints are those who are rescued prior to the Tribulation, and the mortal survivors of the Tribulation correspond to those Christians who were not spiritually prepared and go through the Tribulation, some of whom survive and enter the kingdom in their moral bodies (*Haer.* 5.35.1).

⁸⁸ On the likelihood that Irenaeus knew the *Shepherd of Hermas*, see Svigel and Buie, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 11–13. Whether Irenaeus regarded the *Shepherd of Hermas* as authoritative “apostolic Scripture” or as a “faithful exposition of the apostolic faith” is not directly relevant to this study. For explorations of the issues, see D. Jeffrey Bingham, “Senses of Scripture in the Second Century: Irenaeus, Scripture, and Noncanonical Christian Texts,” *Journal of Religion* 97 (2017): 26–55; Charles E. Hill, “‘The Writing which Says...’ *The Shepherd of Hermas* in the Writings of Irenaeus,” *Studia Patristica* 65 (2013): 127–138; M. C. Steenberg, “Irenaeus on Scripture, *Graphe*, and the Status of *Hermas*,” *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 53 (2009): 29–66.

⁸⁹ Svigel and Buie, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 88–89; 120–124; 137–139; Svigel, *Fathers on the Future*, 236–239; Svigel, “Go Deeper Excursus 27: Escape from the Coming Wrath in the *Shepherd of Hermas*.”

Though Irenaeus does not delve into an explanation as to how he arrived at this distinction between the resurrected, glorified saints and those who are still in their mortal bodies, Hermas's description in Vision 4 of an escape from the beast for some while others are left to endure Tribulation and his description in Vision 3 of those who occupy a much inferior place provides the clue to solving Irenaeus's puzzle. This also explains Irenaeus's apparent contradiction in his eschatology, wherein "the church" appears to be taken up from present persecutions inflicted on them by the nations prior to the eschatological Tribulation while others endure that "last contest of the righteous" (*Haer.* 5.29.1).

Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that Irenaeus held to a future Tribulation period in which the church will endure persecution (*Haer.* 5.26.1; 5.35.1). He also asserted that the church would be caught up prior to the Tribulation (5.29.1). Further, he taught that at the end of the Tribulation, those saints who survive the persecution of the Antichrist will enter the kingdom in their mortal bodies and repopulate the world (5.35.1), which will be ruled over by resurrected saints (5:35.1). Reading Irenaeus's eschatological expectations in light of the eschatological teachings of the *Shepherd of Hermas* (Vis. 2, 3, 4), I suggest the best solution to this conundrum is that Irenaeus held to something like a partial pre-tribulation rapture of the "spiritual" or "repentant" Christians, while the "double-minded" or "carnal" will be left to endure the purifying fires of the Tribulation.

Surprisingly, Clement of Alexandria may also represent this view. In a rare treatment of eschatological matters in *Stromata* 6.13–14, he reserves the catching up of the saints in the clouds—clearly a reference to 1 Thessalonians 4:17—for "the chosen of the chosen (τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν, ἐκλεκτότεροι)" (6.13), that is, "those who by reason of perfect knowledge are called [as the best] from the Church itself, and honored with the most august glory (οἱ κατὰ τελείαν, γνῶσιν καὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας αὐτῆς ἀπηνθισμένοι, καὶ τῇ μεγαλοπρεπεστάτῃ δόξῃ τετιμημένοι)" (6.13). Clement then makes a distinction between this grade of highest glory and "other sheep...which are not of this fold—deemed worthy of another fold and mansion, in proportion to their faith" (6.14). The distinction here is made between the mere professors of faith and those who demonstrate true faith with works: "So when we hear, 'Thy faith hath saved thee,' we do not understand Him to say absolutely that those who have believed in any way whatever shall be saved, unless also works follow.... No one, then, can be a believer and at the same time be licentious; but though he quit the flesh, he must put off the passions, so as to be capable of reaching his own mansion" (6.14). He continues this distinction between the merely saved and the "gnostic" or "perfect" Christians in language similar to Irenaeus's own distinction between the fleshly and the spiritual *Christians*—

Now to know is more than to believe, as to be dignified with the highest honour after being saved is a greater thing than being saved. Accordingly the believer, through great discipline, divesting himself of the passions, passes to the mansion which is better than the former one, viz., to the greatest torment, taking with him the characteristic of repentance from the sins he has committed after baptism. He is tortured then still more—not yet or not quite attaining what he sees others to have acquired. Besides, he is also ashamed of his transgressions. The greatest torments, indeed, are assigned to the believer. For God's righteousness is good, and His goodness is righteous. And though the punishments cease

in the course of the completion of the expiation and purification of each one, yet those have very great and permanent grief who are found worthy of the other fold, on account of not being along with those that have been glorified through righteousness. (*Strom.* 6.14)

Despite the similarities with Irenaeus's eschatological distinction between the fates of the spiritual and carnal, Clement's view has some real differences. Clement's more realized eschatology, seemingly devoid of an imminent earthly Tribulation and millennial reign in which both purification and glorification may occur, results in a purification and glorification post-mortem. By turning the eschatological expectations from a horizontal orientation to a vertical orientation, Clement expects the distinction between the perfect and imperfect to occur after death. A person who dies without perfect repentance and righteousness will suffer torment in the intermediate state; a person who dies with perfect knowledge and obedience will begin the ascent in glory. In contrast, for Irenaeus the spiritual will experience the assumption to heavenly glory prior to the earthly torment of the Tribulation while the carnal will be left to experience the purification of fire of the coming Tribulation period.

Like Irenaeus, then, Clement has divided humanity into three groups: "As, then, to be simply saved is the result of medium actions, but to be saved rightly and becomingly is right action, so also all action of the Gnostic may be called right action; that of the simple believer, intermediate action, not yet perfected according to reason, not yet made right according to knowledge; but that of every heathen again is sinful. For it is not simply doing well, but doing actions with a certain aim, and acting according to reason, that the Scriptures exhibit as requisite" (*Strom.* 6.14). Each group is subjected to distinct eschatological destinies. The difference, though, is that Irenaeus conceived of the destinies of the three classes in terms of his horizontal, futurist, and premillennial eschatology while Clement conceived of the destinies of terms of his vertical, realized, and apparently amillennial eschatology.