

# Explaining the Death of Jesus: Irenaeus and Origen

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# Economy of Salvation

- Death and Resurrection of Jesus solves the fundamental problem of humanity.
  - Jesus takes on the problem—disobedience, death, curse—in a way that does not allow it to dominate him.
  - Jesus solves that problem in his own humanity.
  - Jesus communicates that solution to Christians (and to other humans?).
- Defining the problem is essential to understanding the solution.
  - Sin: disobedience, violation of law & covenant with God
  - Death: futility of human life and achievement
  - Weakness in willing and performing
  - Domination by evil in personal and social life

# Irenaeus (died @ 200)

- God created the bodily world good but imperfect; it is meant to attain perfection and immortality.
- Intellectual beings can grow into knowledge and love of God by developing in judgment and forming commitments to good.
- Adam and Eve were formed immature and shown the path to knowledge and goodness.
  - Success was probable but not inevitable
- Immortality should be given only after a person is confirmed in good knowing, judging, and willing.
- God would grant immortality by becoming human.
  - Manifestation of divine goodness in sensible form
  - Flesh of a divine human is life-giving

# Irenaeus 2

- The first humans deviated in seeking knowledge of God. They voluntarily failed to develop properly.
  - Humans became mortal; they suffer pain and frustration.
  - They generate similar offspring.
- Experience of good and evil builds knowledge and appreciation of good.
  - People learn by error and pain, success and satisfaction.
- Experience of both good and evil forms a person's commitment to good and rejection of evil.
- Life comes through knowledge and love of God.
  - No suffering/satisfaction means no correction and no advance

# Christ's Mission

- Incarnation of divine perfects humanity in Christ's own person: gives divine knowledge, goodness, and life.
- Christ communicates those goods through his humanity
  - Teaching and Example
  - Eucharist—Life-giving flesh
  - Gift of the Holy Spirit
- Christ's suffering and death are necessary only because of human sin and death.
  - Christ reverses the disobedience of Adam
  - Demonstrates faith in and obedience to God
  - Frees humans from domination by sin
- Reverses the process of death in his own humanity
  - Manifests the divine and gives life-giving knowledge.
  - Makes his life-giving flesh accessible to Christians.

# Irenaeus: Christ's Resurrection

- Perfects the humanity of Christ (New Adam)
  - Union of divine and human in one individual
- Initiates the restoration of whole creation
  - That one individual affects the situation of all
- Christians are resurrected to immortal earthly life
  - Through a bodily union with Christ
- Heavenly Jerusalem descends to earth
  - Evil humans and demons are condemned
  - Human society perfected on earth
- Saints move gradually into heavenly existence

# Origen (186-254)

## Creation

- God creates equal spiritual beings endowed with intelligence and freedom
  - God cannot discriminate or differentiate between individuals
  - All differences—even bodily ones—arise through personal choice and action
- Creatures must change
  - advance or decline in knowledge and love of God
  - Introduces differentiation of beings into different kinds and qualities.
- Failure to progress means decline
  - Mind does not turn away from good toward “evil”
  - Mind can become “bored” or “tired”
- Change continues
  - Mind can be drawn back toward true and good
- “Stability” requires cumulative and accelerating growth

# Origen: Universe

- Word is the divine image of the one God
  - Unchanging in Being, Goodness, and Truth
- Minds are created in the image of Word
  - Capable of knowing and loving God in/through Word.
  - Minds rise or fall by advance or decline in knowledge and love of God
- Material world created to assist and recover failing minds
  - Earthly bodies slow their decline
  - The universe manifests God and promotes progress
  - Suffering prods toward mental focus and advance
- Some minds decline further and become demons
  - Despair of advance.

# Origen: Savior

- One mind (that of Christ) freely exercised mental powers to bring itself into union of knowledge and love with the Word of God
- The Word of God shared its divine love and knowledge with the mind of Christ:
  - Partnership stabilized the creature mind in goodness.
- Mind (of Christ) accepted an earthly body and became human to assist others who had fallen.
- Savior is divine Word united to human mind of Christ, who was then united to body, acting as a soul
- Jesus is a union of Word and a particular human mind functioning as a soul (organizing and running an earthly body). “Word and Christ are two in one flesh.”
- Primary scriptural text is Col 1:15-20

# Origen: Salvation

- Jesus Christ and Word of God demonstrated through bodily life how fallen minds (souls) could return to a higher status.
- Guided by Word, Christ uses his earthly body to communicate with sinful humans.
  - Teaches, exemplifies, and urges the right way to live.
  - Manifests the divine truth and goodness.
  - Promises a higher and fuller existence beyond earth.
  - Engages even the demons.
- Anticipates and responds to his rejection in love
  - Jesus's death saves by showing the way to advance
  - Jesus liberates from the tyranny of ignorance and death
  - Bodily resurrection is not to be taken literally

# Origen: Evaluation

- The mission of Word/Jesus did not effect a permanent change in other humans.
  - That could be achieved only by individual minds achieving the same relationship to the Word that Christ had attained.
- Jesus provided assistance to fellow creatures
  - His death illustrates and exemplifies the conflicts of earthly life with the despairing demons and confused humans
  - His appearances after death illustrate the nature of the higher life to be attained by his followers

# Arius of Alexandria

- Only one God
- The Word is the first and greatest of the creatures
  - Word is changeable has freedom of choice between good and evil
- The Word takes a human body and enters the bodily world to bring salvation to humans
  - Attacked the powers of evil and defeated them by fidelity to God (martyr)
  - Weakened demonic power in world
  - Taught and demonstrated the true form of life required by God.

# Arius: Savior

- Savior gains higher status by work in world
  - Made unchangeable and incorruptible by God
  - Given divine power for forgiveness and judgment
  - Uses Phil. 2.6-11 for guidance and proof
- Savior weakens the power of evil
  - Christians can overcome evil and live well
  - Thereby earning a heavenly reward of permanent goodness
  - God makes the creature stable in the direction chosen
  - Confirms a voluntary decision made by creature
- God can make creatures stable in the goodness they have freely chosen.
  - Contradicts Origen