THE ORIGIN OF SIN IN IRENAEUS AND JEWISH PSEUDEPIGRAPHICAL LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to argue that Irenaeus depended on an earlier Jewish tradition for the final formulation of his own ideas on sin and its origin. This earlier Jewish tradition is substantially available to us in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament. For Irenaeus, the Old Testament Apocrypha belonged to the Biblical canon, but the article mainly focuses on pseudepigraphical material which even from Irenaeus's standpoint was non-Biblical. The motifs from this literature which shaped his thinking about sin and its origin were pseudepigraphical.

The article does not aim at providing a new view concerning the meaning of sin in the theology of Irenaeus. Rather, it is the intention of the article only to identify the sources of Irenaeus's various statements about the origin of sin.

Though the article explicitly concludes to Irenaeus's dependence on the pseudepigraphical tradition for his thinking about sin's origin, it raises the question of how dependent on such sources was the entire body of Patristic thought.

An inquiry into Irenaeus's notions on sin reveals that he offers many and varied explanations for sin and its origin. Another inquiry into late Jewish pseudepigraphical literature reveals ideas so similar to those of Irenaeus that more than coincidence must be posited as a cause for likeness. In fact, some dependence and familiarity on the part of Irenaeus with non-canonical pseudepigraphical notions must be maintained.

The method of this article will be to treat the most important themes which relate to Irenaeus's speculations on sin and its origin. These themes concern Adam, Angels, and the fusion of these two motifs. Within the treatment of each of these themes the influence of late Jewish pseudepigraphical ideas upon the thought of Irenaeus will be shown.
ADAM

We know that Irenaeus contrasts Adam and Christ more or less as does Paul in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. In fact, Irenaeus’s use of these passages, combined with some texts of Ephesians, in this view, formed the basis upon which the early Church Father constructed his Adam-Christ typology, in which the first Adam is paralleled with the second Adam. At least Irenaeus’s exegesis of Romans 5,19, as found in Adversus Haereses 3,21,16 (3,30), includes his understanding of 1 Corinthians 15,21–25 and Ephesians 1,10. That is, the letters to Romans and 1 Corinthians treat the theme of first and second Adam, while Ephesians provides the terminology (the verb form of ἄνακεφαλαίωσις) for Irenaeus to speak about the relationship between the two Adams.

Recapitulatio, for Irenaeus, is basically the link between the two motifs of exalted and sinful Adam. It is God’s plan that Adam be once in his pristine glory, become sinful, and once again be restored to his original exalted state in the second Adam. On the other hand, Paul’s emphasis on Adam’s sin is chiefly intended to contrast Adam’s disobedience with Christ’s obedience. In order to speak of death, Paul speaks of Adam, but


2 F. Schiele, Die rabinischen Parallelen zu 1 Kor.15:45–50, Ztschrift für Theologie 42 (1899) 20–31, concludes that Paul first uses the term “first” and “second” Adam.

3 “For as by one man’s disobedience, sin entered, and death obtained (a place) through sin; so also, by the obedience of one man, righteousness, having been introduced, shall cause life to fructify in those persons who in times past were dead ... so did He who is the Word, recapitulating Adam in Himself, rightly receive a birth, enabling Him to gather up Adam (into Himself) ... It was that there might not be another formation called into being, nor any other which should (require to) be saved, but that very same formation should be summed up (in Christ as it had existed in Adam), the analogy having been preserved.” Since the English translation is based on Stieren’s paragraph numbering system – A. Stieren, Sancti Irenaei Episcopi Lugdunensis quae Supersunt Omnia (Leipzig 1848–1853) vols. I–II – those numbers will be first cited. References to Harvey’s edition – W. W. Harvey, Sancti Irenaei Episcopi Lugdunensis libros quinque adversus haereses (Cambridge 1857) vols. I–II – follow in brackets. The English translation, except where otherwise indicated, is that of A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds.), The Ante-Nicene Fathers (New York, Scribners & Sons, 1899) vol. I.

4 Compare Rom.5,19; 1 Cor.15,21–22. 45–49; Eph.1,10. 23 with Adversus Haereses (Henceforth simply shortened to A.H.) 3,16,6 (3,17,6); 3,18,7 (3,19,6); 3,19,3 (3,20,3); 3,21,10 (3,30); 5,1,2 (ibid.); 5,14,1 (ibid.).

5 A.H. 3,22,3 (3,32,1).