LOVE OF ENEMIES AND RECAPITULATION

BY

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The idea of recapitulation dominates the theology of the second century. Adumbrated by Justin, it is expounded endlessly by Irenaeus and given decisive place in Tertullian. Clement of Alexandria takes the important step of uniting it to the Platonic nous so that Christian theology becomes biblical and Platonic without a break (strom.4.25.156f.). The complexity of the concept is formidable. At least ten ideas (redemption, perfection, inauguration and consummation; totality, economy (saving history) and Christus Victor; ontology, epistemology and ethics (or being, truth and goodness) are combined with the root idea of unification in different permutations. Are all these ideas necessary to the concept? They are an understatement because everything that God does is part of his economy and every part of his economy is defined in relation to its recapitulation. So Irenaeus speaks of the message of the prophets: 'And all the other economies of his recapitulation, some they saw through visions, others they announced by word, while others they indicated typically by action (haer.4.20.8)'. Redemption (or correction), perfection and inauguration are inseparable from being (or life), truth and goodness. We may distinguish redemption and perfection and see Irenaeus as trying to bridge two different concepts; but it is certain that Irenaeus does not keep them apart.

Consummation is tied to inauguration. The other three ideas are of

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1 Irenaeus should be approached from the background of Norbert Brox, Irenaeus von Lyon, Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum, Lieferung 142, col. 820-854, and Jacques Fantino, La théologie d'Irénée (Paris, 1994).


3 At some points he does not even differentiate between redemption and perfection or fulfilment. e.g., see N. Brox, Offenbarung, Gnosis und gnostischer Mythos bei Irenaeus von Lyon, Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum, Lieferung 142, col. 820-854, and Jacques Fantino, La théologie d'Irénée (Paris, 1994).
different orders: economy (the coherent history of salvation) is the concept which depends on recapitulation for its coherence and which defines the place of the central event. Some would rank it higher in Irenaeus' theology than recapitulation. Totality is simply an aspect of economy which is applicable to the other different variables because God contains all things and is not himself contained. Christus Victor is one of the persistent images which are used sometimes to tie the logic of recapitulation together. It is hard to make sense of recapitulation without any of the ten variables and the root idea with their differing relationships. Recapitulation cannot be reduced to a rhetorical metaphor, for the summing up in Christ is not the same as repeating main headings. Christ's summing up is ontological in seipso as well as an abbreviation in compendio.

Two problems are evident. First, we are left with an idea which was meant to simplify and to unify soteriology, but which demands a high degree of conceptual stamina. Second, there is a danger that, worn down by the mass of material, we may miss key elements. One way forward is to look for a salient point which does not encumber or evacuate the content, but may freshly illuminate.

This essay began as an attempt to examine one such point which was either a verbal chance or a way to fresh insight. The word recapitulare or ἀνακεφαλαίομαι is used in NT and elsewhere in Christian literature in two distinct ways. It describes the ontological perfection of all being in Christ (Eph. 1:10). It describes the ethical perfection of all law in the love command (Rom. 13:9f). Is there any relation between these two applications (ontological and ethical) of the word? The answer, if any, should lie in Irenaeus who quotes Rom. 13:10 to the effect that love is the pleroma of the law. Closely related is the Sermon on the Mount which talks about fulfilment as the work (ontological) of Christ and as the perfection (ethical)

Lyen (Salzburg und München, 1966), 186-9. If we separate the different elements of the complex and retain the idea of recapitulation for one of them, the complexity remains under different names.

4 Another is the tree of paradise and the tree of the cross.

5 For Irenaeus and Tertullian the gospel is nothing if not simple.


7 He does not quote Rom. 13:9 where ἀνακεφαλαίομαι is used.