

Is the Peacock My Brother?

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Donatello

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Introduction

Homer, so dreamt Ennius, remembered that he was once a peacock; however, I cannot for my part believe poets, even when wide awake. A peacock, no doubt, is a very pretty bird, pluming itself, at will, on its splendid feathers; but then its wings do not make amends for its voice, which is harsh and unpleasant; and there is nothing that poets like better than a good song. His transformation, therefore, into a peacock was to Homer a penalty, not an honor.

Tertullian – “A Treatise on the Soul”, Chapter 33¹

The title “Is the Peacock My Brother?” is a bit of a play on the title of James White's book “Is the Mormon My Brother?”². Not only does it refer to the above quote, where Tertullian recounts Ennius' statement that Homer's soul had once resided in the body of a peacock, but also to the more general claim, by the advocates of reincarnation, that the soul of one's sibling could potentially transmigrate into a peacock upon their death. In the context of Christian theology, the acceptance of this theory would, furthermore, allow the peacock to be considered a potential brother or sister in Christ (pending their acceptance of Christ in a future incarnation). The purpose of this book, therefore, will be to examine whether or not the belief in reincarnation is compatible with the Christian faith.

This examination will be divided into three parts:

First, the theory of reincarnation will be explained and several possible variations of the theory will be explored. Possible purposes and consistency will determine which of these variations is most compatible with the Christian faith.

Second, a historical analysis will be made, primarily according to the testimonies of the early Church fathers. Since supporters of the doctrine of reincarnation often consider it to have been accepted by many of the early Christians before its supposed rejection at the council of Nicea, the focus of this section will be on the works of the ante-Nicene Church fathers.

Third, a biblical analysis will be made of the passages that are commonly given to support the doctrine of reincarnation, those that are used to deny the doctrine, and those that are relevant supplemental to the discussion.

1 (cf. <http://www.ccel.org>, for now)

2 (cf. <http://www.aomin.org>)

PART 1:
“Christian” Reincarnation

PART 2:
Historical Analysis

2.1. Justin Martyr

2.1.1. Biography

(c.100–c.165). Born at Flavia Neapolis, of pagan Greco-Roman parents, he studied philosophy, rhetoric, history, and poetry, and was inspired by a meeting with an old man at Ephesus, where he taught for a time, to study Christian Scripture. When about thirty, Justin became a Christian and devoted himself to expounding his new faith to his fellow men. He traveled about debating with pagan philosophers and eventually he came to Rome, where he opened a school of philosophy.

He incurred the enmity of a Cynic named Crescens for besting him in debate and was denounced, probably at the instigation of the Crescens, to the authorities as a Christian. He was brought to trial with six companions, Charita, Chariton, Euelpistus, Hierax, Liberianus, and Pæon, before the Roman prefect, Rusticus. When they refused to sacrifice to the gods, they were scourged and beheaded.

*Dictionary of Saints, John J. Delaney – Justin Martyr*³

We still have the authentic account of their martyrdom ("Acta SS.", April, II, 104-19; Otto, "Corpus Apologetarum", III, Jena, 1879, 266-78; P. G., VI, 1565-72). The examination ends as follows:

"The Prefect Rusticus says: Approach and sacrifice, all of you, to the gods. Justin says: No one in his right mind gives up piety for impiety. The Prefect Rusticus says: If you do not obey, you will be tortured without mercy. Justin replies: That is our desire, to be tortured for Our Lord, Jesus Christ, and so to be saved, for that will give us salvation and firm confidence at the more terrible universal tribunal of Our Lord and Saviour. And all the martyrs said: Do as you wish; for we are Christians, and we do not sacrifice to idols. The Prefect Rusticus read the sentence: Those who do not wish to sacrifice to the gods and to obey the emperor will be scourged and beheaded according to the laws. The holy martyrs glorifying God betook themselves to the customary place, where they were beheaded and consummated their martyrdom confessing their Saviour." ...

The role of St. Justin may be summed up in one word: it is that of a witness. We behold in him one of the highest and purest pagan souls of his time in contact with Christianity, compelled to accept its irrefragable truth, its pure moral teaching, and to admire its superhuman constancy. He is also a witness of the second-century Church which he describes for us in its faith, its life, its worship, at a time when Christianity yet lacked the firm organization that it was soon to develop (see St. Irenaeus), but the larger outlines of whose constitution and doctrine are already luminously drawn by Justin. Finally, Justin was a witness for Christ unto death.

*The Catholic Encyclopedia – Justin*⁴

Justin is the first Christian apologist, and a layman, to have written on Christianity at any length, and in his writings he sought to reconcile the claims of faith and reason. Two of his most important works are still extant:

3 Delaney, John J. "Justin Martyr." Dictionary of Saints. New York: Doubleday, 1980, 335.

4 The Catholic Encyclopedia, "Justin".

His Apologies, addressed to Emperor Antoninus and the first document addressed to the enemies of Christianity, defends the Christians, replies to charges of immorality leveled against them, explains how they are loyal subjects based on their beliefs in the teaching of Christ, and goes on to explain immortality, free will, and fasting; and *Dialogue with Trypho*, in which he debates the merits of Christianity over Judaism in a dialogue with Trypho, a Jew.

*Dictionary of Saints, John J. Delaney – Justin Martyr*⁵

5 Delaney, John J. "Justin Martyr." Dictionary of Saints. New York: Doubleday, 1980, 335.

2.1.2. Dialogue of Justin With Trypho, a Jew

2.1.2.1. Introduction

(110-165AD) Justin deals with the concept of reincarnation only once in his dialogue with Trypho, but his testimony is strong and clear. He presents his view on the doctrine early on in the dialogue, as he introduces himself to his audience and answers their preliminary questions.

When Trypho asks Justin to describe his views on God and other matters of philosophy (Chapter 1), Justin recounts his philosophical wanderings and his subsequent conversion to Christianity (Chapters 2 and 3). This conversion was brought about, in part, by his meeting with an old man in a field by the sea, an unnamed Christian, who engages him in a conversation that quickly turns to matters of philosophy.

During this conversation, Justin reveals his belief in God and his support for Plato's ideas on who He is (Chapter 3). Knowing this, the Christian raises challenges against a number of Plato's doctrines – including the belief in the transmigration of the soul.

The old man starts his challenge by establishing Justin's position on a number of issues:

1. According to Justin, the souls of man and animal are not necessarily incompatible.
2. Only a temperate and righteous man or a free soul can see God.
3. An animal cannot see God, due to the interference of its body.

All these points are conceded by the Christian for the sake of discussion.

He then moves on to his main argument, demonstrating two important points:

1. The fact that a man has seen God (or gained any other experience at all) has no positive (lasting) effect on him if he cannot remember this experience in his subsequent incarnations.
2. If a man does not know that he is being punished, he receives no true punishment. It profits him nothing then, if he is imprisoned in the body of a beast as a punishment for actions taken in a previous (and forgotten) incarnation.

Since, then, neither the previous incarnation nor the subsequent re-incarnation serve a proper purpose (they neither benefit the man as proper rewards, nor serve as proper punishments), they must be rejected altogether. If transmigrations really do occur, they must serve a purpose – but since no relevant purpose can be found to make this doctrine profitable, it cannot be logically held. Indeed, for this doctrine to have any merit at all, the reincarnated man must remember all of his previous incarnations, but this is clearly not the case.

Justin agrees with these conclusions and the men continue on in their discussion with other matters of philosophy, and then prophecy. When the two finally part, Justin professes that, *“straightway a flame was kindled in my soul; and a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me; and whilst revolving his words in my mind, I found this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable”* (Chapter 8).

It is evident from this account that Justin not only agreed, but continues to agree with the old man's argument against the transmigration of the soul – otherwise, he would not have included this portion of their argument in the account of his conversion from Platonic

philosophy to Christianity. This conclusion is further evidenced in Justin's later references to the resurrection of the dead, and its universal application to both the righteous and the unrighteous (Chapter 117, cf. First Apology Chapters 8, 18, 52, etc.).

As the first Christian apologist, Justin's work bears an important witness to the attitude of the early Christian Church on the doctrine of reincarnation. Not only is Justin's personal testimony against the doctrine important here, but also his attestation of an earlier rejection of the doctrine by the Christians who preceded him.

2.1.2.2. Extracts

CHAPTER 4 **THE SOUL OF ITSELF CANNOT SEE GOD**

[Justin's account of his conversion: His dialogue with a Christian:]

... "And do all the souls of all living beings comprehend Him?" he asked; "or are the souls of men of one kind and the souls of horses and of asses of another kind?"

"No; but the souls which are in all are similar," I answered.

"Then," says he, "shall both horses and asses see, or have they seen at some time or other, God?"

"No," I said; "for the majority of men will not, saving such as shall live justly, purified by righteousness, and by every other virtue."

"It is not, therefore," said he, "on account of his affinity, that a man sees God, nor because he has a mind, but because he is temperate and righteous?"

"Yes," said I; "and because he has that whereby he perceives God."

"What then? Do goats or sheep injure any one?"

"No one in any respect," I said.

"Therefore these animals will see [God] according to your account," says he.

"No; for their body being of such a nature, is an obstacle to them."

He rejoined, "If these animals could assume speech, be well assured that they would with greater reason ridicule our body; but let us now dismiss this subject, and let it be conceded to you as you say. Tell me, however, this: Does the soul see [God] so long as it is in the body, or after it has been removed from it?"

"So long as it is in the form of a man, it is possible for it," I continue, "to attain to this by means of the mind; but especially when it has been set free from the body, and being apart by itself, it gets possession of that which it was wont continually and wholly to love."

"Does it remember this, then [the sight of God], when it is again in the man?"

"It does not appear to me so," I said.

"What, then, is the advantage to those who have seen [God]? or what has he who has seen

more than he who has not seen, unless he remember this fact, that he has seen?"

"I cannot tell," I answered.

"And what do those suffer who are judged to be unworthy of this spectacle?" said he.

"They are imprisoned in the bodies of certain wild beasts, and this is their punishment."

"Do they know, then, that it is for this reason they are in such forms, and that they have committed some sin?"

"I do not think so.'

"Then these reap no advantage from their punishment, as it seems: moreover, I would say that they are not punished unless they are conscious of the punishment."

"No indeed."

"Therefore souls neither see God nor transmigrate into other bodies; for they would know that so they are punished, and they would be afraid to commit even the most trivial sin afterwards. But that they can perceive that God exists, and that righteousness and piety are honourable, I also quite agree with you," said he.

"You are right," I replied.

CHAPTER 117
MALACHI'S PROPHECY CONCERNING
THE SACRIFICES OF THE CHRISTIANS...

... But these filthy garments, which have been put by you on all who have become Christians by the name of Jesus, God shows shall be taken away from us, *when He shall raise all men from the dead, and appoint some to be incorruptible, immortal, and free from sorrow in the everlasting and imperishable kingdom; but shall send others away to the everlasting punishment of fire...*

2.1.3. Fragments of the Lost Work of Justin on the Resurrection

2.1.3.1. Introduction

(110-165AD) While the authorship of this work on the resurrection has not been conclusively established, its probable author is Justin Martyr (Catholic Encyclopedia). Regardless of its author's identity, it is certain that its composition date lies within the Ante-Nicene period (no later than the third century A.D. [ANF Vol 1]). And whether or not Justin is its proper author, this work remains an authentic example of Ante-Nicene, Christian literature.

In this work, the author argues his case for the resurrection of the flesh by emphasizing the unity of the body and soul. Man cannot be understood as a complete man apart from his body, or his soul; *"only that which is made up of the two together is called man"* (Chapter 8). If, then, man is called to eternal life, it is the complete man, not a part, that is called.

This unity is established by two main arguments: one based on the design and purpose of man, the other on the co-operative nature of his actions.

First, since man was created in God's image with flesh, he would be an incomplete image of God without this flesh. It is on account of the body that the material world was made, and as such, this body is valuable in God's sight, and cannot be simply discarded or considered disposable (Chapter 7). Indeed, God would be negligent and unjust if he showed preference to the soul and judged the flesh (which he himself created) to be insignificant (Chapter 8).

Second, the body and soul of man act together like a yoke of oxen, *"if one or [the] other is loosed from the yoke, neither of them can plough alone; so neither can soul or body alone effect anything, if they be unyoked from their communion"* (Chapter 8). Thus, whenever the body and soul act, they act together, and, *"would it not be unquestionably absurd, if, while these two are in the same being and according to the same law, the one were saved and the other not?"* (Chapter 8). This unity of body and soul brought about in the actions of man, calls therefore, for an equivalent unity to be expressed in the rewards for and consequences of those actions.

Although the doctrine of reincarnation is not explicitly denied in the above arguments, its denial follows as a logical consequence of their acceptance. A further, more direct rejection of the doctrine can be found later on in the work, where he writes,

... why do we any longer endure those *unbelieving and dangerous arguments*, and fail to see that *we are retrograding when we listen to such an argument* as this: that the soul is immortal, but the body mortal, and incapable of being revived? *For this we used to hear from Pythagoras and Plato, even before we learned the truth.* (Chapter 10).

Here, the false doctrines of the Greek philosophers Pythagoras and Plato are placed in sharp contrast to the true doctrines of Christianity. The doctrines of the transmigration of the soul and the worthlessness of the mortal flesh are replaced by the superior doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh, one that proclaims a *"new and strange hope"* (Chapter 10) to man as he truly exists in soul and body. The author, therefore, rejects the primary doctrines of the soul held by Pythagoras and Plato, including their doctrines on its transmigration. To have accepted these doctrines would have negated the author's arguments for the necessity of the resurrection. Indeed, if the body and soul of man are bound together in such an intimate union, their separation would necessarily destroy the man as he is known; and

thus, even if a reasonable purpose could be found for reincarnation, it could not be held due to this separation.

The following extracts demonstrate the arguments that have been presented above. Many of these arguments are used by the other Church fathers to support these and similar conclusions regarding the inimitable truth of the resurrection.

2.1.3.2. Extracts

CHAPTER 7 THE BODY VALUABLE IN GOD'S SIGHT

But the proof of the possibility of the resurrection of the flesh I have sufficiently demonstrated, in answer to men of the world. And if the resurrection of the flesh is not found impossible on the principles even of unbelievers, how much more will it be found in accordance with the mind of believers! But following our order, we must now speak with respect to those who think meanly of the flesh, and say that it is not worthy of the resurrection nor of the heavenly economy, because, first, its substance is earth; and besides, because it is full of all wickedness, so that it forces the soul to sin along with it. *But these persons seem to be ignorant of the whole work of God, both of the genesis and formation of man at the first, and why the things in the world were made. For does not the word say, "Let Us make man in our image, and after our likeness?" What kind of man? Manifestly He means fleshly man, For the word says, "And God took dust of the earth, and made man." It is evident, therefore, that man made in the image of God was of flesh.* Is it not, then, absurd to say, that the flesh made by God in His own image is contemptible, and worth nothing? *But that the flesh is with God a precious possession is manifest, first from its being formed by Him, if at least the image is valuable to the former and artist; and besides, its value can be gathered from the creation of the rest of the world. For that on account of which the rest is made, is the most precious of all to the maker.*

CHAPTER 8 DOES THE BODY CAUSE THE SOUL TO SIN?

Quite true, say they; yet the flesh is a sinner, so much so, that it forces the soul to sin along with it. And thus they vainly accuse it, and lay to its charge alone the sins of both. But in what instance can the flesh possibly sin by itself, if it have not the soul going before it and inciting it? *For as in the case of a yoke of oxen, if one or other is loosed from the yoke, neither of them can plough alone; so neither can soul or body alone effect anything, if they be unyoked from their communion.* And if it is the flesh that is the sinner, then on its account alone did the Saviour come, as He says, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Since, then, the flesh has been proved to be valuable in the sight of God, and glorious above all His works, it would very justly be saved by Him.

We must meet, therefore, those who say, that even though it be the special handiwork of God, and beyond all else valued by Him, it would not immediately follow that it has the promise of the resurrection. Yet is it not absurd, that that which has been produced with such circumstance, and which is beyond all else valuable, should be so neglected by its Maker, as to pass to nonentity? Then the sculptor and painter, if they wish the works they have made to endure, that they may win glory by them, renew them when they begin to decay; but God would so neglect His own possession and work, that it becomes annihilated, and no longer exists. Should we not call this labour in vain? As if a man who has built a house should forthwith destroy it, or should neglect it, though he sees it falling into decay, and is able to repair it: we would blame him for labouring in vain; and should we not so blame God? But not such an one is the Incorruptible, — not senseless is the Intelligence of

the universe. Let the unbelieving be silent, even though they themselves do not believe.

But, in truth, He has even called the flesh to the resurrection, and promises to it everlasting life. *For where He promises to save man, there He gives the promise to the flesh. For what is man but the reasonable animal composed of body and soul? Is the soul by itself man? No; but the soul of man. Would the body be called man? No, but it is called the body of man. If, then, neither of these is by itself man, but that which is made up of the two together is called man, and God has called man to life and resurrection, He has called not a part, but the whole, which is the soul and the body. Since would it not be unquestionably absurd, if, while these two are in the same being and according to the same law, the one were saved and the other not? And if it be not impossible, as has already been proved, that the flesh be regenerated, what is the distinction on the ground of which the soul is saved and the body not? Do they make God a grudging God? But He is good, and will have all to be saved. And by God and His proclamation, not only has your soul heard and believed on Jesus Christ, and with it the flesh, but both were washed, and both wrought righteousness. They make God, then, ungrateful and unjust, if, while both believe on Him, He desires to save one and not the other.* Well, they say, but the soul is incorruptible, being a part of God and inspired by Him, and therefore He desires to save what is peculiarly His own and akin to Himself; but the flesh is corruptible, and not from Him, as the soul is. Then what thanks are due to Him, and what manifestation of His power and goodness is it, if He purposed to save what is by nature saved and exists as a part of Himself? For it had its salvation from itself; so that in saving the soul, God does no great thing. For to be saved is its natural destiny, because it is a part of Himself, being His inspiration. But no thanks are due to one who saves what is his own; for this is to save himself. For he who saves a part himself, saves himself by his own means, lest he become defective in that part; and this is not the act of a good man. For not even when a man does good to his children and offspring, does one call him a good man; for even the most savage of the wild beasts do so, and indeed willingly endure death, if need be, for the sake of their cubs. But if a man were to perform the same acts in behalf of his slaves, that man would justly be called good. Wherefore the Saviour also taught us to love our enemies, since, says He, what thank have ye? So that He has shown us that it is a good work not only to love those that are begotten of Him, but also those that are without. And what He enjoins upon us, He Himself first of all does.

CHAPTER 10

THE BODY SAVED, AND WILL THEREFORE RISE

The resurrection is a resurrection of the flesh which died. For the spirit dies not; the soul is in the body, and without a soul it cannot live. The body, when the soul forsakes it, is not. *For the body is the house of the soul; and the soul the house of the spirit. These three, in all those who cherish a sincere hope and unquestioning faith in God, will be saved.* Considering, therefore, even such arguments as are suited to this world, and finding that, even according to them, it is not impossible that the flesh be regenerated; and seeing that, besides all these proofs, the Saviour in the whole Gospel shows that there is salvation for the flesh, *why do we any longer endure those unbelieving and dangerous arguments, and fail to see that we are retrograding when we listen to such an argument as this: that the soul is immortal, but the body mortal, and incapable of being revived? For this we used to hear from Pythagoras and Plato, even before we learned the truth. If then the Saviour said this, and proclaimed salvation to the soul alone, what new thing, beyond what we heard from Pythagoras and Plato and all their band, did He bring us? But now He has come proclaiming the glad tidings of a new and strange hope to men. For indeed it was a strange and new thing for God to promise that He would not keep incorruption in incorruption, but would make corruption incorruption. ...*

2.2. Theophilus

2.2.1. Biography

Bishop of Antioch. Eusebius in his "Chronicle" places the name of Theophilus against that of Pope Soter (169-77), and that of Maximinus, Theophilus's successor, against the name of Eleutherus (177-93). This does not mean that Maximinus succeeded Theophilus in 177, but only that Theophilus and Maximinus flourished respectively in the times of Soter and Eleutherus. Lightfoot and Hort showed that Eusebius, having no such precise chronological data for the bishops of Antioch as he had for those of Rome and Alexandria, placed the names of the Antiochene bishops against those of contemporary Roman bishops (Lightfoot, "St. Ignatius", etc., II, 468 sq., and St. Clement", etc., I, 224 sqq.). When therefore we find in the third book of Theophilus, "Ad Autolychum", that the writer was alive after the death (180) of Marcus Aurelius, it does not follow, as even writers like Harnack and Bardenhewer suppose, that Eusebius made a chronological blunder.

The "Ad Autolychum", the only extant writing of Theophilus, is an apology for Christianity. It consists of three books, really separate works written at different times, and corresponds exactly to the description given of it by Eusebius as "three elementary works" (Hist. eccl., IV, xxiv). The author speaks of himself as a convert from heathenism. He treats of such subjects as the Christian idea of God, the Scripture accounts of the origin of man and the world as compared with pagan myths. On several occasions he refers (in connection with the early chapters of Genesis) to an historical work composed by himself. Eusebius (op. cit.) speaks of refutations of Marcion and Hermogenes, and "catechetical books". To these St. Jerome (De vir. illust., xxv) adds commentaries on Proverbs and the Gospels. He speaks of the latter in the prologue to his own commentary on the Gospels, and also in his epistle "Ad Algasiam", where we learn that Theophilus commented upon a Diatessaron or Gospel Harmony composed by himself ("Theophilus . . . quattuor Evangelistarum in unum opus compingens"). A long quotation in the same epistle is all that survives of this commentary, for Zahn's attempt to identify it with a Latin commentary ascribed in some manuscripts to Theophilus has found no supporters.

*The Catholic Encyclopedia – Theophilus*⁶

6 The Catholic Encyclopedia, "Theophilus".

2.2.2. Theophilus to Autolyclus

2.2.2.1. Introduction

(115-181AD) The doctrine of metempsychosis is dealt with most directly by Theophilus in his third book to Autolyclus. Here he comments on Plato's version of the theory, a theory he considers contradictory to several of Plato's other tenets. Theophilus judges this theory a "dreadful and monstrous" theory considering its devaluation of humanity to the level of "irrational animals".

While the thrust of his argument focuses on the concept of transmigrations occurring from humans to animals, it would be difficult to maintain that Theophilus could have agreed with the theory in any form – even if its proposed transmigrations were limited to those occurring between humans. Several factors make this clear:

First, when Theophilus speaks of the doctrine, he mentions both transmigrations from human to human, and transmigrations from human to animal. Although he does not directly condemn the doctrine when it is said to occur in like species only, neither does he give it his support. When he does attack Plato's theory, he attacks its obvious deficiencies as an example of the caliber of the conflicting doctrines of heathen philosophers. It would not be unnatural to infer from his argument that since both forms are mentioned together, both are rejected.

Second, in his first two books, Theophilus clearly demonstrates that he believes that both the righteous and the wicked will be judged at the resurrection. Autolyclus will not be given further chances in some other life to come; he must either accept God's truth or face the fires of hell. This proclamation is extended to include all unbelievers; all who follow heresies and err from the truth will be "totally ruined by their error". They will not be given a chance to turn to the truth in another life since they have been given sufficient proofs in this life. Although one might allow the possibility that Theophilus could have considered a theory of human to human reincarnation that would allow those who have never heard the message of truth a chance to hear it in another life, the possibility of this occurring is extremely remote. Theophilus' analogy of the sea leaves little room for any who would follow falsehoods, nor does he seem to consider it possible for any to be left without a witness to the truth (as is evident from his comments in Chapter 14 of Book 1).

While some may consider the testimony of Theophilus to be less than conclusive against human to human reincarnations, his position against human to animal reincarnations is undeniable. As one of the earliest of the Church fathers whose writings are still available, Theophilus leaves little room for the theory of reincarnation, if he leaves any at all.

2.2.2.2. Extracts

BOOK 1

CHAPTER 8

FAITH REQUIRED IN ALL MATTERS

But you do not believe that the dead are raised. *When the resurrection shall take place, then you will believe, whether you will or no; and your faith shall be reckoned for unbelief, unless you believe now. ...*

CHAPTER 14
THEOPHILUS AN EXAMPLE OF CONVERSION

... Admitting, therefore, the proof which events happening as predicted afford, I do not disbelieve, but I believe, obedient to God, whom, if you please, do you also submit to, believing Him, *lest if now you continue unbelieving, you be convinced hereafter, when you are tormented with eternal punishments*; which punishments, when they had been foretold by the prophets, the later-born poets and philosophers stole from the holy Scriptures, to make their doctrines worthy of credit. *Yet these also have spoken beforehand of the punishments that are to light upon the profane and unbelieving, in order that none be left without a witness, or be able to say, "We have not heard, neither have we known."*...

BOOK 2

CHAPTER 14
THE WORLD COMPARED TO THE SEA

... And as in the sea there are islands, some of them habitable, and well-watered, and fruitful, with havens and harbours in which the storm-tossed may find refuge, — so God has given to the world which is driven and tempest-tossed by sins, assemblies — we mean holy churches — in which survive the doctrines of the truth, as in the island-harbours of good anchorage; *and into these run those who desire to be saved, being lovers of the truth, and wishing to escape the wrath and judgment of God.* And as, again, there are other islands, rocky and without water, and barren, and infested by wild beasts, and uninhabitable, and serving only to injure navigators and the storm-tossed, on which ships are wrecked, and those driven among them perish, — *so there are doctrines of error — I mean heresies — which destroy those who approach them.* For they are not guided by the word of truth; but as pirates, when they have filled their vessels, drive them on the fore-mentioned places, that they may spoil them: *so also it happens in the case of those who err from the truth, that they are all totally ruined by their error.*

BOOK 3

CHAPTER 7
VARYING DOCTRINE CONCERNING THE GODS

... *And Plato, who spoke so much of the unity of God and of the soul of man, asserting that the soul is immortal, is not he himself afterwards found, inconsistently with himself, to maintain that some souls pass into other men, and that others take their departure into irrational animals? How can his doctrine fail to seem dreadful and monstrous — to those at least who have any judgment — that he who was once a man shall afterwards be a wolf, or a dog, or an ass, or some other irrational brute? Pythagoras, too, is found venting similar nonsense, besides his demolishing providence. ...*

2.3. Tatian

2.3.1. Biography

A second-century apologist about whose antecedents and early history nothing can be affirmed with certainty except that he was born in Assyria and that he was trained in Greek philosophy. While a young man he travelled extensively. Disgusted with the greed of the pagan philosophers with whom he came in contact, he conceived a profound contempt for their teachings. Repelled by the grossness and immorality of the pagans and attracted by the holiness of the Christian religion and the sublimity and simplicity of the Scriptures, he became a convert, probably about A.D. 150. He joined the Christian community in Rome, where he was a "hearer" of Justin. There is no reason to think he was converted by the latter. While Justin lived Tatian remained orthodox. Later (c. 172) he apostatized, became a Gnostic of the Encratite sect, and returned to the Orient. The circumstances and date of his death are not known. Tatian wrote many works. Only two have survived. One of these, "Oratio ad Graecos" (Pros Hellenas), is an apology for Christianity, containing in the first part (i-xxxi) an exposition of the Christian Faith with a view to showing its superiority over Greek philosophy, and in the second part a demonstration of the high antiquity of the Christian religion. The tone of this apology is bitter and denunciatory. The author inveighs against Hellenism in all its forms and expresses the deepest contempt for Greek philosophy and Greek manners.

The other extant work is the "Diatesseron", a harmony of the four Gospels containing in continuous narrative the principle events of the life of Our Lord. ... Several other works written by Tatian have disappeared. In his apology (xv) he mentions a work "on animals" and (xvi) one on the "nature of demons". Another work in refutation of the calumnies against the Christians (xl) was planned but perhaps never written. He also wrote a "Book of Problems" (Eus., "Hist. Eccl.", V, 13), dealing with the difficulties in the Scriptures, and one "On Perfection according to the Precepts of Our Saviour" (Clem. Alex., "Strom.", III, 12, 81).

The Catholic Encyclopedia – Tatian⁷

⁷ [The Catholic Encyclopedia](#), "Tatian".

2.3.2. Address of Tatian to the Greeks

2.3.2.1. Introduction

(110-172AD) Tatian's comments on the return of souls into bodies focus partially on the tenets of Zeno and the Stoics who followed him. The system as employed by the Stoics, however, does not necessarily follow the traditional model of reincarnation. As Origen illustrates in his fourth book against Celsus:

Celsus, however, says that it is only “the course of mortal things which, according to the appointed cycles, must always be the same in the past, present, and future;” whereas the majority of the Stoics maintain that this is the case not only with the course of mortal, but also with that of immortal things, and of those whom they regard as gods. For after the conflagration of the world, which has taken place countless times in the past, and will happen countless times in the future, there has been, and will be, the same arrangement of all things from the beginning to the end. The Stoics, indeed, in endeavoring to parry, I don't know how, the objections raised to their views, allege that as cycle after cycle returns, all men will be altogether unchanged from those who lived in former cycles; so that Socrates will not live again, but one altogether like to Socrates, who will marry a wife exactly like Xanthippe, and will be accused by men exactly like Anytus and Melitus. I do not understand, however, how the world is to be always the same, and one individual not different from another, and yet the things in it not the same, though exactly alike.⁸

While some may consider this a reincarnation of sorts, the type of reincarnation described does not so much describe the reincarnation of a man's soul into another body as it does the reconstruction of the whole man, without any regard to the man's actions in his previous life. Although it would be oversimplification to reduce all Stoic thought to this summary of their view, it does seem to describe the crux of Tatian's comments, as is evident in his consequent remarks on the views of Pythagoras et al.

Regardless of whether or not Tatian believed Zeno's views to correspond to that of Pythagoras and those who followed, his views on the Pythagorean theory of transmigration are clear. Tatian believes the view of Pythagoras (and Pherecydes, from whom he inherited the doctrine) to be simply laughable (Chapter 3). That the doctrine Tatian points to in Chapter 3 is that of the transmigration of souls is evident for at least three reasons:

1. The theory of the transmigration of souls (reincarnation) is one of the two best known tenets of Pythagoras – the other being his theory “that numbers constitute the true nature of things.”⁹
2. In chapter 25, Tatian comments on Pythagoras' claim that he was the reincarnation of Euphorbus. This passage clearly speaks of the Pythagorean theory of the transmigration of souls, and closely parallels the passage given in Chapter 3, (where Tatian also links the Pythagorean doctrine to Pherecydes).
3. The immediate context of the passage at hand deals with matters relating to the destination of souls after death. Zeno's theory is touched upon, then Tatian speaks of Empedocles (who also taught the theory of transmigration), and then he speaks of Pythagoras, Pherecydes, and Plato – all of whom supported a reincarnation of sorts.

⁸ Origen, *Against Celcus*, Ch 68, ANF Vol 4

⁹ [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#), “Pythagoras”

For a further confirmation of Tatian's view on the soul's destination after death, one need only look at Chapter 13 of his work, where it is presented with vivid clarity.

One must conclude from the above facts that the “laughable” doctrine of Pherecydes referred to in Chapter three of Tatian's “Address” is that of reincarnation. There is no doubt, then, that Tatian opposed the doctrine of reincarnation while he remained a Christian; and though he later apostatized to Gnosticism, his early witness continues to stand as an example of its rejection by the early Christian Church.

2.3.2.2. Extracts

CHAPTER 3 RIDICULE OF THE PHILOSOPHERS

Then, one cannot listen to Zeno, who declares that at the conflagration the same man will rise again to perform the same actions as before; for instance, Anytus and Miletus to accuse, Busiris to murder his guests, and Hercules to repeat his labors; and in this doctrine of the conflagration he introduces more wicked than just persons — one Socrates and a Hercules, and a few more of the same class, but not many, for the bad will be found far more numerous than the good. And according to him the Deity will manifestly be the author of evil, dwelling in sewers and worms, and in the perpetrators of impiety. The eruptions of fire in Sicily, moreover, confute the empty boasting of Empedocles, in that, though he was no God, he falsely almost gave himself out for one. I laugh, too, at the old wife's talk of Pherecydes, and the doctrine inherited from him by Pythagoras, and that of Plato, an imitation of his, though some think otherwise.

CHAPTER 6 CHRISTIANS' BELIEF IN THE RESURRECTION

And on this account we believe that there will be a resurrection of bodies after the consummation of all things; not, as the Stoics affirm, according to the return of certain cycles, the same things being produced and destroyed for no useful purpose, but a resurrection once for all, when our periods of existence are completed, and in consequence solely of the constitution of things under which men alone live, for the purpose of passing judgment upon them. Nor is sentence upon us passed by Minos or Rhadamanthus, before whose decease not a single soul, according to the mythic tales, was judged; but the Creator, God Himself, becomes the arbiter. And, although you regard us as mere triflers and babblers, it troubles us not, since we have faith in this doctrine. For just as, not existing before I was born, I knew not who I was, and only existed in the potentiality of fleshly matter, but being born, after a former state of nothingness, I have obtained through my birth a certainty of my existence; in the same way, having been born, and through death existing no longer, and seen no longer, I shall exist again, just as before I was not, but was afterwards born. Even though fire destroy all traces of my flesh, the world receives the vaporized matter; and though dispersed through rivers and seas, or torn in pieces by wild beasts, I am laid up in the storehouses of a wealthy Lord. And, although the poor and the godless know not what is stored up, yet God the Sovereign, when He pleases, will restore the substance that is visible to Him alone to its pristine condition.

CHAPTER 13 THEORY OF THE SOUL'S IMMORTALITY

The soul is not in itself immortal, O Greeks, but mortal. Yet it is possible for it not to die. If, indeed, it knows not the truth, it dies, and is dissolved with the body, but rises again at last at the end of the world with the body, receiving death by punishment in immortality. But,

again, if it acquires the knowledge of God, it dies not, although for a time it be dissolved. In itself it is darkness, and there is nothing luminous in it. And this is the meaning of the saying, "The darkness comprehendeth not the light." For the soul does not preserve the spirit, but is preserved by it, and the light comprehends the darkness. The Logos, in truth, is the light of God, but the ignorant soul is darkness. On this account, if it continues solitary, it tends downward towards matter, and dies with the flesh; but, if it enters into union with the Divine Spirit, it is no longer helpless, but ascends to the regions whither the Spirit guides it: for the dwelling-place of the spirit is above, but the origin of the soul is from beneath.

CHAPTER 25 **BOASTINGS AND QUARRELS OF THE PHILOSOPHERS**

You follow the doctrines of Plato, and a disciple of Epicurus lifts up his voice to oppose you. Again, you wish to be a disciple of Aristotle, and a follower of Democritus rails at you. *Pythagoras says that he was Euphorbus, and he is the heir of the doctrine of Pherecydes; but Aristotle impugns the immortality of the soul. You who receive from your predecessors doctrines which clash with one another, you the inharmonious, are fighting against the harmonious.*

2.4. Athenagoras

2.4.1. Biography

A Christian apologist of the second half of the second century of whom no more is known than that he was an Athenian philosopher and a convert to Christianity. Of his writings there have been preserved but two genuine pieces -- his "Apology" or "Embassy for the Christians" and a "Treatise on the Resurrection". The only allusions to him in early Christian literature are the accredited quotations from his "Apology" in a fragment of Methodius of Olympus (d. 312) and the untrustworthy biographical details in the fragments of the "Christian History" of Philip of Side (c. 425). It may be that his treatises, circulating anonymously, were for a time considered as the work of another apologist. His writings bear witness to his erudition and culture, his power as a philosopher and rhetorician, his keen appreciation of the intellectual temper of his age, and his tact and delicacy in dealing with the powerful opponents of his religion. The "Apology", the date of which is fixed by internal evidence as late in 176 or 177, was not, as the title "Embassy" (presbeia) has suggested, an oral defence of Christianity but a carefully written plea for justice to the Christians made by a philosopher, on philosophical grounds, to the Emperors Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus, conquerors, "but above all, philosophers". He first complains of the illogical and unjust discrimination against the Christians and of the calumnies they suffer (i-iii), and then meets the charge of atheism (iv). He establishes the principle of monotheism, citing pagan poets and philosophers in support of the very doctrines for which Christians are condemned (v-vi), and demonstrates the superiority of the Christian belief in God to that of pagans (vii-viii). This first strongly reasoned demonstration of the unity of God in Christian literature is supplemented by an able exposition of the Trinity (x). Assuming then the defensive, the apologist justifies the Christian abstention from worship of the national deities (xii-xiv) on grounds of its absurdity and indecency, quoting at length the pagan poets and philosophers in support of his contention (xv-xxx). Finally, he meets the charges of immorality by exposing the Christian ideal of purity, even in thought, and the inviolable sanctity of the marriage bond. The charge of cannibalism is refuted by showing the high regard for human life which leads the Christian to detest the crime of abortion (xxxi-xxxvi). The treatise on the "Resurrection of the Body", the first complete exposition of the doctrine in Christian literature, was written later than the "Apology", to which it may be considered as an appendix. Athenagoras brings to the defence of the doctrine the best that contemporary philosophy could adduce. After meeting the objections common to his time (i), he demonstrates the possibility of a resurrection in view either of the power of the Creator (ii-iii), or of the nature of our bodies (iv-viii). To exercise such powers is neither unworthy of God nor unjust to other creatures (ix-xi). He shows that the nature and end of man demand a perpetuation of the life of body and soul.

*The Catholic Encyclopedia – Athenagoras*¹⁰

¹⁰The Catholic Encyclopedia, "Athenagoras".

2.4.2. A Plea for the Christians

2.4.2.1. Introduction

(177 AD) While Athenagoras does not explicitly name the doctrine of the transmigration of souls in this work, he does directly imply it in Chapter 31. While speaking about the resurrection of the dead Athenagoras states, “we shall live another life, better than the present one, and heavenly, not earthly”. It is evident from this statement (and from the comments that follow) that Athenagoras wished to clearly delineate between the doctrines of the resurrection of the dead and reincarnation; the former, he contends, will occur in the future, (according to Christian doctrine,) while the latter will not. For Athenagoras there could be no legitimate admixture of these doctrines in Christian theology – this fact is evident both in this work and particularly in his associated “Treatise”.

Both extant works of Athenagoras are worthy of study in the analysis of the historic position of the Church on the theory of reincarnation. In his “Plea”, Athenagoras refers the reader to his “Treatise” for further clarifications, and so, while the “Treatise” does not deal directly with the subject of reincarnation, it is reasonable that it should be referenced to take his views on the subject into fuller consideration. To that effect, “The Treatise of Athenagoras” will be addressed as well, following the current work.

2.4.2.2. Extracts

CHAPTER 31 CONFUTATION OF THE OTHER CHARGES BROUGHT AGAINST THE CHRISTIANS

For as you excel all men in intelligence, you know that those whose life is directed towards God as its rule, so that each one among us may be blameless and irreproachable before Him, will not entertain even the thought of the slightest sin. For if we believed that we should live only the present life, then we might be suspected of sinning, through being enslaved to flesh and blood, or overmastered by gain or carnal desire; *but since we know that God is witness to what we think and what we say both by night and by day, and that He, being Himself light, sees all things in our heart, we are persuaded that when we are removed from the present life we shall live another life, better than the present one, and heavenly, not earthly (since we shall abide near God, and with God, free from all change or suffering in the soul, not as flesh, even though we shall have flesh, but as heavenly spirit), or, falling with the rest, a worse one and in fire;* for God has not made us as sheep or beasts of burden, a mere by-work, and that we should perish and be annihilated. On these grounds it is not likely that we should wish to do evil, or deliver ourselves over to the great Judge to be punished.

2.4.3. The Treatise of Athenagoras

2.4.3.1. Introduction

(~177 AD) “The Treatise of Athenagoras” is an apologetic work by Athenagoras on the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Athenagoras deals with this doctrine in a systematic fashion: first showing that the resurrection of the dead is not impossible, given the power of God, and answering the objections of the skeptics; then showing that the resurrection of the dead is logical, given the nature of man, the purpose of his creation, and his future judgement. Athenagoras was well acquainted with the Greek philosophers and poets, and it is therefore unlikely that he could have been ignorant of their theories concerning the doctrines of metempsychosis. On the contrary, though he does not mention their doctrines by name, it is clear that he does have these theories in mind while he defends against their possible objections and competing views.

Given his views on the resurrection of the dead, there is little question as to where Athenagoras stands on the question of reincarnation. At least three of Athenagoras' main arguments have a direct bearing on his position on the subject:

First, Athenagoras makes clear distinctions between the class of men and that of the irrational animals; not only is the nature of man distinct from that of animals, but also the purpose of his creation. It would be improper, in his view, to put the futures of man and animal at the same level – and since human to animal transmigrations would remove the distinctions between these two classes, (and make their futures identical,) it would be impossible for Athenagoras to have ever tolerated such a theory.

Second, Athenagoras believes that both those who will be judged, and those who will not (very young children), will take part in the resurrection. He does not consider it to be necessary for the souls of young children to be reincarnated to give them a second chance to come to Christ. Although he does not go into much detail concerning what will happen to these children, there is no question that Athenagoras believes that all men, regardless of their circumstance will take part in the resurrection – to impose any theory of reincarnation on this model would seriously undermine the force of its argument.

Third, contrary to metempsychosis, Athenagoras believes that the bodies and souls of men must exist together, both in this life and in the life to come. It is not enough for any body to be united with any soul, the *same* body with which the soul shares its life in this life must exist with the soul in the life to come. If a different body was to be united with the soul, the man himself could no longer be properly perpetuated – since the man himself consists in the unity of body and soul. Nor could a man's soul be justly punished alone or in another body for the sins which it committed in union with a previous body. The previous body must share in the punishment of the man along with the soul. Thus, it is impossible to harmonize the beliefs of Athenagoras with the theory of reincarnation – as transmigrations would, by definition, separate the body and soul and destroy the unity required in the nature of man.

Thus, while his apologetics avoid direct contact with the theory, Athenagoras' arguments evidence some of the strongest rejections of reincarnation that could be made. In combination with his comments in his “Plea”, it must be concluded that Athenagoras had no room for the idea of reincarnation in his theology – neither human to human, nor human to animal.

2.4.3.2. Extracts

CHAPTER 14
THE RESURRECTION DOES NOT REST SOLELY
ON THE FACT OF A FUTURE JUDGMENT

For many, in discussing the subject of the resurrection, have rested the whole cause on the third argument alone, deeming that the cause of the resurrection is the judgment. But the fallacy of this is very clearly shown, from the fact that, although all human beings who die rise again, yet not all who rise again are to be judged: *for if only a just judgment were the cause of the resurrection, it would of course follow that those who had done neither evil nor good — namely, very young children — would not rise again; but seeing that all are to rise again, those who have died in infancy as well as others, they too justify our conclusion that the resurrection takes place not for the sake of the judgment as the primary reason, but in consequence of the purpose of God in forming men, and the nature of the beings so formed.*

CHAPTER 15
ARGUMENT FOR THE RESURRECTION FROM THE NATURE OF MAN

But while the cause discoverable in the creation of men is of itself sufficient to prove that the resurrection follows by natural sequence on the dissolution of bodies, yet it is perhaps right not to shrink from adducing either of the proposed arguments, but, agreeably to what has been said, to point out to those who are not able of themselves to discern them, the arguments from each of the truths evolved from the primary; and first and foremost, the nature of the men created, which conducts us to the same notion, and has the same force as evidence of the resurrection. For if the whole nature of men in general is composed of an immortal soul and a body which was fitted to it in the creation, and if neither to the nature of the soul by itself, nor to the nature of the body separately, has God assigned such a creation or such a life and entire course of existence as this, but to men compounded of the two, in order that they may, when they have passed through their present existence, arrive at one common end, with the same elements of which they are composed at their birth and during life, it unavoidably follows, since one living-being is formed from the two, experiencing whatever the soul experiences and whatever the body experiences, doing and performing whatever requires the judgment of the senses or of the reason, that the whole series of these things must be referred to some one end, in order that they all, and by means of all, namely, man's creation, man's nature, man's life, man's doings and sufferings, his course of existence, and the end suitable to his nature, — may concur in one harmony and the same common experience. *But if there is some one harmony and community of experience belonging to the whole being, whether of the things which spring from the soul or of those which are accomplished by means of the body, the end for all these must also be one. And the end will be in strictness one, if the being whose end that end is remains the same in its constitution; and the being will be exactly the same, if all those things of which the being consists as parts are the same. And they will be the same in respect of their peculiar union, if the parts dissolved are again united for the constitution of the being. And the constitution of the same men of necessity proves that a resurrection will follow of the dead and dissolved bodies; for without this, neither could the same parts be united according to nature with one another, nor could the nature of the same men be reconstituted.* And if both understanding and reason have been given to men for the discernment of things which are perceived by the understanding, and not of existences only, but also of the goodness and wisdom and rectitude of their Giver, it necessarily follows that, since those things continue for the sake of which the rational judgment is given, the judgment given for these things should also continue. *But it is impossible for this to continue, unless the nature which has received it, and in which it adheres, continues. But that which has received both understanding and reason is man, not the soul by itself. Man,*

therefore, who consists of the two parts, must continue for ever. But it is impossible for him to continue unless he rise again. For if no resurrection were to take place, the nature of men as men would not continue. And if the nature of men does not continue, in vain has the soul been fitted to the need of the body and to its experiences; in vain has the body been fettered so that it cannot obtain what it longs for, obedient to the reins of the soul, and guided by it as with a bridle; in vain is the understanding, in vain is wisdom, and the observance of rectitude, or even the practice of every virtue, and the enactment and enforcement of laws, — to say all in a word, whatever is noble in men or for men's sake, or rather the very creation and nature of men. But if vanity is utterly excluded from all the works of God, and from all the gifts bestowed by Him, the conclusion is unavoidable, that, along with the interminable duration of the soul, there will be a perpetual continuance of the body according to its proper nature.

CHAPTER 16
ANALOGY OF DEATH AND SLEEP,
AND CONSEQUENT ARGUMENT FOR THE RESURRECTION

This is what is meant by the doctrine of the resurrection; and, looking to this, we both await the dissolution of the body, as the sequel to a life of want and corruption, and after this we hope for a continuance with immortality, *not putting either our death on a level with the death of the irrational animals, or the continuance of man with the continuance of immortals, lest we should unawares in this way put human nature and life on a level with things with which it is not proper to compare them.*

CHAPTER 21
CONTINUATION OF THE ARGUMENT

Nor, again, if faults are judged, is the soul dealt fairly with, supposing it alone to pay the penalty for the faults it committed through being solicited by the body and drawn away by it to its own appetites and motions, at one time being seized upon and carried off, at another attracted in some very violent manner, and sometimes concurring with it by way of kindness and attention to its preservation. How can it possibly be other than unjust for the soul to be judged by itself in respect of things towards which in its own nature it feels no appetite, no motion, no impulse, such as licentiousness, violence, covetousness, injustice, and the unjust acts arising out of these? For if the majority of such evils come from men's not having the mastery of the passions which solicit them, and they are solicited by the neediness and want of the body, and the care and attention required by it (for these are the motives for every acquisition of property, and especially for the using of it, and moreover for marriage and all the actions of life, in which things, and in connection with which, is seen what is faulty and what is not so), *how can it be just for the soul alone to be judged in respect of those things which the body is the first to be sensible of, and in which it draws the soul away to sympathy and participation in actions with a view to things which it wants;* and that the appetites and pleasures, and moreover the fears and sorrows, in which whatever exceeds the proper bounds is amenable to judgment, should be set in motion by the body, and yet that the sins arising from these, and the punishments for the sins committed, should fall upon the soul alone, which neither needs anything of this sort, nor desires nor fears or suffers of itself any such thing as man is wont to suffer? But even if we hold that these affections do not pertain to the body alone, but to man, in saying which we should speak correctly, because the life of man is one, though composed of the two, yet surely we shall not assert that these things belong to the soul, if we only look simply at its peculiar nature. For if it is absolutely without need of food, it can never desire those things which it does not in the least require for its subsistence; nor can it feel any impulse towards any of those things which it is not at all fitted to use; nor, again, can it be grieved at the want of money or other property, since these are not suited to it. And if, too, it is superior to

corruption, it fears nothing whatever as destructive of itself: it has no dread of famine, or disease, or mutilation, or blemish, or fire, or sword, since it cannot suffer from any of these any hurt or pain, because neither bodies nor bodily powers touch it at all. *But if it is absurd to attach the passions to the soul as belonging specially to it, it is in the highest degree unjust and unworthy of the judgment of God to lay upon the soul alone the sins which spring from them, and the consequent punishments.*

CHAPTER 24

ARGUMENT FOR THE RESURRECTION FROM THE CHIEF END OF MAN

If this is evident, and natural and artificial powers, and the actions arising from these, must by all means be accompanied by an end in accordance with nature, *it is absolutely necessary that the end of men, since it is that of a peculiar nature, should be separated from community with the rest; for it is not lawful to suppose the same end for beings destitute of rational judgment, and of those whose actions are regulated by the innate law and reason, and who live an intelligent life and observe justice.*

CHAPTER 25

ARGUMENT CONTINUED AND CONCLUDED

Nor again is it the happiness of soul separated from body: *for we are not inquiring about the life or final cause of either of the parts of which man consists, but of the being who is composed of both; for such is every man who has a share in this present existence, and there must be some appropriate end proposed for this life. But if it is the end of both parts together, and this can be discovered neither while they are still living in the present state of existence through the numerous causes already mentioned, nor yet when the soul is in a state of separation, because the man cannot be said to exist when the body is dissolved, and indeed entirely scattered abroad, even though the soul continue by itself — it is absolutely necessary that the end of a man's being should appear in some reconstitution of the two together, and of the same living being. And as this follows of necessity, there must by all means be a resurrection of the bodies which are dead, or even entirely dissolved, and the same men must be formed anew, since the law of nature ordains the end not absolutely, nor as the end of any men whatsoever, but of the same men who passed through the previous life; but it is impossible for the same men to be reconstituted unless the same bodies are restored to the same souls. But that the same soul should obtain the same body is impossible in any other way, and possible only by the resurrection; for if this takes place, an end befitting the nature of men follows also.*

2.5. Irenaeus

2.5.1. Biography

Information as to his life is scarce, and in some measure inexact. He was born in Proconsular Asia, or at least in some province bordering thereon, in the first half of the second century; the exact date is controverted, between the years 115 and 125, according to some, or, according to others, between 130 and 142. It is certain that, while still very young, Irenaeus had seen and heard the holy Bishop Polycarp (d. 155) at Smyrna. During the persecution of Marcus Aurelius, Irenaeus was a priest of the Church of Lyons. The clergy of that city, many of whom were suffering imprisonment for the Faith, sent him (177 or 178) to Rome with a letter to Pope Eleutherius concerning Montanism, and on that occasion bore emphatic testimony to his merits. Returning to Gaul, Irenaeus succeeded the martyr Saint Pothinus as Bishop of Lyons. During the religious peace which followed the persecution of Marcus Aurelius, the new bishop divided his activities between the duties of a pastor and of a missionary (as to which we have but brief data, late and not very certain) and his writings, almost all of which were directed against Gnosticism, the heresy then spreading in Gaul and elsewhere. In 190 or 191 he interceded with Pope Victor to lift the sentence of excommunication laid by that pontiff upon the Christian communities of Asia Minor which persevered in the practice of the Quartodecimans in regard to the celebration of Easter. Nothing is known of the date of his death, which must have occurred at the end of the second or the beginning of the third century. In spite of some isolated and later testimony to that effect, it is not very probable that he ended his career with martyrdom. His feast is celebrated on 28 June in the Latin Church, and on 23 August in the Greek.

Irenaeus wrote in Greek many works which have secured for him an exceptional place in Christian literature, because in controverted religious questions of capital importance they exhibit the testimony of a contemporary of the heroic age of the Church, of one who had heard St. Polycarp, the disciple of St. John, and who, in a manner, belonged to the Apostolic Age. None of these writings have come down to us in the original text, though a great many fragments of them are extant as citations in later writers (Hippolytus, Eusebius, etc.). Two of these works, however, have reached us in their entirety in a Latin version:

A treatise in five books, commonly entitled *Adversus haereses*, and devoted, according to its true title, to the "Detection and Overthrow of the False Knowledge" ... Of this work we possess a very ancient Latin translation, the scrupulous fidelity of which is beyond doubt. It is the chief work of Irenaeus and truly of the highest importance; it contains a profound exposition not only of Gnosticism under its different forms, but also of the principal heresies which had sprung up in the various Christian communities, and thus constitutes an invaluable source of information on the most ancient ecclesiastical literature from its beginnings to the end of the second century. In refuting the heterodox systems Irenaeus often opposes to them the true doctrine of the Church, and in this way furnishes positive and very early evidence of high importance. ...

Of a second work, written after the "*Adversus Haereses*", an ancient literal translation in the Armenian language. This is the "Proof of the Apostolic Preaching." The author's aim here is not to confute heretics, but to confirm the faithful by expounding the Christian doctrine to them, and notably by demonstrating the truth of the Gospel by means of the Old Testament prophecies. Although it contains fundamentally, so to

speak, nothing that has not already been expounded in the "Adversus Haereses", it is a document of the highest interest, and a magnificent testimony of the deep and lively faith of Irenaeus.

Of his other works only scattered fragments exist; many, indeed, are known only through the mention made of them by later writers, not even fragments of the works themselves having come down to us. ...

*The Catholic Encyclopedia – Irenaeus*¹¹

¹¹ The Catholic Encyclopedia, "Irenaeus".

2.5.2. Against Heresies

2.5.2.1. Introduction

(182-188AD) There is no question as to where Irenaeus stands on the issue of reincarnation; he speaks directly against the doctrine in several places and puts forth specific arguments against the theory (cf. 2.34-35 esp.). As “Against Heresies” was written against the Gnostic heretics of his day, the arguments used by Irenaeus center around the Gnostic doctrines of transmigration; but regardless of this focus, the arguments he presents in these five books clearly constitute a broad rejection of the theory in all its forms. An exposition of the Gnostic doctrines is given in the first book, then refutations are raised with philosophical arguments in the second, and further refutations are documented using Scriptural arguments in the remaining three.

In the first book, Irenaeus exposes the Gnostic doctrines of reincarnation taught by Simon Magus (the “father” the Gnostic heresies, cf. Acts 8:9-25), Carpocrates, and the Cainites. In addition to this, Gnostic doctrines closely related to reincarnation, such as the belief that Christ did not assume actual flesh, and that the physical part of man will not take part in salvation with the soul, are also described.

Simon's view of reincarnation is not fully described except for his claim that Helena (his prostitute companion) had transmigrated from body to body before he came to search for her. According to Magus, Helena was his “lost sheep”, the “first conception of his mind”, and the “mother of all” (1.23.2). Irenaeus gives little treatment to these ideas, noting merely the disgrace Simon imposes on his so-called “first conception”, and the general impiety of his doctrines.

A more complete exposition is given to the views of Carpocrates and Cain. These Gnostics and their followers believed that a man must be continually reincarnated from body to body until he has come to attain all possible experiences (1.25.4; 1.31.2-4). These doctrines, it seems, were regularly employed by their followers to justify the committal of all sorts of evil actions – “An angel, they maintain, attends them in every one of their sinful and abominable actions, and urges them to venture on audacity and incur pollution.”(1.31.2)

After he has thoroughly laid out these (and many of the other) Gnostic systems and has briefly commented on several of the main points, Irenaeus concludes, “They have now been fully exposed; and simply to exhibit their sentiments, is to obtain a victory over them.”(1.31.3) The remainder of his work is dedicated to a more comprehensive overthrow of these systems using refutations drawn from philosophy and employing various passages of Scripture.

Irenaeus uses two main arguments to refute the above heresies: The first directly attacks the theory of reincarnation using the Gnostic's own systems of belief; the second is used in an affirmation of the resurrection of the body and its participation in salvation with the soul and spirit.

First, Irenaeus attacks the belief that a soul could gain new experiences by passing from body to body. If this were the case then it would be necessary for the soul to remember what it had participated in in its past lives, otherwise it could hardly be considered to be “gaining” these experiences. But since souls do not remember the actions they have committed in past lives, the doctrine of the transmigration of souls as held by these heretics cannot be true (2.33.1, 2.33.5).

Nor can Plato's "cup of oblivion" alleviate this matter, since this cup's effect would make it impossible for him to have even remembered drinking it. Plato's testimony on the existence and use of this "cup" is therefore void (2.33.3). And if the body is substituted for the cup as the cause of the soul's apparent amnesia, (as some would have it), the situation only gets worse – for then no man could ever retain memory even in this present life (2.33.4).

Furthermore, aside from the above internal contradictions, these "solutions" engage in contradictions with the Scriptures. This is most evident in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, which demonstrates,

"that souls not only continue to exist, *not by passing from body to body*, but that they preserve the same form [in their separate state] as the body had to which they were adapted, *and that they remember the deeds which they did in this state of existence, and from which they have now ceased...*"(2.34.1).

The basis of the Gnostic system is therefore false, and the entire system is proven not only to be philosophically inconsistent, but contrary to the testimony of the Scriptures and therefore incompatible with the Christian faith.

Second, Irenaeus confronts the Gnostic's claim that the body does not participate in salvation or judgment with the soul. He argues that those who would take Paul's statement that, "*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*" (1 Cor 15:50) without thought do not consider Paul's contrasts between the "fleshly nature" and the "spiritual nature" of man. Man's body can indeed go to heaven if it has been "infused" with the Spirit, but no man who lives by the flesh can. (5.10.2)

Like Justin and Athenagoras, Irenaeus argues that since the body participates with the soul in its actions, it must also participate with the soul in the rewards or punishments that these actions merit. He writes,

"all those who have been enrolled for life [eternal] shall rise again, *having their own bodies*, and having also their own souls, and their own spirits, *in which they had pleased God*. Those, on the other hand, who are worthy of punishment, shall go away into it, they too having their own souls and *their own bodies, in which they stood apart from the grace of God.*" (2.33.5, cf. 2.29.2).

If the soul attains to life eternal, so must the body; and if the body is worthy of punishment, so is the soul.

But this common destiny is not due only according to the shared actions of the body and soul; for Irenaeus, the connection between the body and soul of man is even more intimate. Fundamentally, a man consists properly in the union of his body and his soul (along with his spirit if a man has been perfected by God's Spirit), and he cannot properly exist (as a *complete* man) where one of these elements is missing (5.6.1-2; 5.19.2; 5.20.1, etc.). Since this is the case, it would be improper to consider a man to be the same man if his soul had transmigrated to another body; only if he were resurrected could he truly be considered the same man.

Irenaeus' view on the issue of reincarnation is uncompromising. There is no room in the Christian system for a belief in the transmigration of souls, nor for any system other than the resurrection of the dead. He clearly affirms that both the righteous and the unrighteous will be resurrected – some to life (having been perfected in the Spirit), and others to judgement (receiving just punishments for their actions). (cf. 1.22.1; 2.33.5; 4.22.2; 5.13.1; 5.35.2). There is no hint given of a third category of the dead needing a second chance

through reincarnation; nor could there be, given his beliefs on the co-accountability of the body with the soul and the fundamental unity of the body and soul in man's full constitution.

The early and direct nature of Irenaeus' testimony on this issue (especially when viewed in light of the testimonies of his contemporaries) establishes with a significant degree of certainty that the early Christian view on the destiny of man after death did not include any form of reincarnation. Moreover, this testimony establishes that the biblical doctrine of the resurrection of the dead was already fully developed in his time, and was in agreement with the Scriptures as they are found today.

The following extracts focus on the main themes relevant to the current discussion, some of the supplementary material has been left out for the sake of brevity (see esp. Book 5). A further exposition of Irenaeus' views in his other works will follow.

2.5.2.2. Extracts

BOOK 1

CHAPTER 22

DEVIATIONS OF HERETICS FROM THE TRUTH

1. ... Holding, therefore, this rule, we shall easily show, notwithstanding the great variety and multitude of their opinions, that these men have deviated from the truth; for almost all the different sects of heretics admit that there is one God; but then, by their pernicious doctrines, they change [this truth into error], even as the Gentiles do through idolatry, — thus proving themselves ungrateful to Him that created them. Moreover, they despise the workmanship of God, speaking against their own salvation, becoming their own bitterest accusers, and being false witnesses [against themselves]. *Yet, reluctant as they may be, these men shall one day rise again in the flesh, to confess the power of Him who raises them from the dead; but they shall not be numbered among the righteous on account of their unbelief.*

CHAPTER 23

DOCTRINES AND PRACTICES OF SIMON MAGUS AND MENANDER

2. ... [Simon Magus taught that:] She [Helena] suffered all kinds of contumely from them, so that she could not return upwards to her father, *but was even shut up in a human body, and for ages passed in succession from one female body to another, as from vessel to vessel.* She was, for example, in that Helen on whose account the Trojan war was undertaken; for whose sake also Stesichorus was struck blind, because he had cursed her in his verses, but afterwards, repenting and writing what are called *palinodes*, in which he sang her praise, he was restored to sight. *Thus she, passing from body to body, and suffering insults in every one of them, at last became a common prostitute; and she it was that was meant by the lost sheep.*

CHAPTER 25

DOCTRINES OF CARPOCRATES

4. So unbridled is their madness, that they declare they have in their power all things which are irreligious and impious, and are at liberty to practice them; for they maintain that things are evil or good, simply in virtue of human opinion. *They deem it necessary, therefore, that by means of transmigration from body to body, souls should have experience of every kind of life as well as every kind of action (unless, indeed, by a single incarnation, one may be able to prevent any need for others, by once for all, and with equal completeness, doing all*

those things which we dare not either speak or hear of, nay, which we must not even conceive in our thoughts, nor think credible, if any such thing is mooted among those persons who are our fellow-citizens), in order that, as their writings express it, their souls, having made trial of every kind of life, may, at their departure, not be wanting in any particular. It is necessary to insist upon this, lest, on account of some one thing being still wanting to their deliverance, they should be compelled once more to become incarnate. They affirm that for this reason Jesus spoke the following parable: — “Whilst thou art with thine adversary in the way, give all diligence, that thou mayest be delivered from him, lest he give thee up to the judge, and the judge surrender thee to the officer, and he cast thee into prison. Verily, I say unto thee, thou shalt not go out thence until thou pay the very last farthing.” They also declare the “adversary” is one of those angels who are in the world, whom they call the Devil, maintaining that he was formed for this purpose, that he might lead those souls which have perished from the world to the Supreme Ruler. *They describe him also as being chief among the makers of the world, and maintain that he delivers such souls [as have been mentioned] to another angel, who ministers to him, that he may shut them up in other bodies; for they declare that the body is “the prison.” Again, they interpret these expressions, “Thou shalt not go out thence until thou pay the very last farthing,” as meaning that no one can escape from the power of those angels who made the world, but that he must pass from body to body, until he has experience of every kind of action which can be practiced in this world, and when nothing is longer wanting to him, then his liberated soul should soar upwards to that God who is above the angels, the makers of the world. In this way also all souls are saved, whether their own which, guarding against all delay, participate in all sorts of actions during one incarnation, or those, again, who, by passing from body to body, are set free, on fulfilling and accomplishing what is requisite in every form of life into which they are sent, so that at length they shall no longer be [shut in the body].*

CHAPTER 31

DOCTRINES OF THE CAINITES

2. I have also made a collection of their writings in which they advocate the abolition of the doings of Hystera. Moreover, they call this Hystera the creator of heaven and earth. *They also hold, like Carpocrates, that men cannot be saved until they have gone through all kinds of experience. An angel, they maintain, attends them in every one of their sinful and abominable actions, and urges them to venture on audacity and incur pollution.* Whatever may be the nature of the action, they declare that they do it in the name of the angel, saying, “O thou angel, I use thy work; O thou power, I accomplish thy operation!” And they maintain that this is “perfect knowledge,” without shrinking to rush into such actions as it is not lawful even to name.

3. ... But let them rather, learning to good effect from us the wicked tenets of these men, look with contempt upon their doctrines, while at the same time they pity those who, still cleaving to these miserable and baseless fables, have reached such a pitch of arrogance as to reckon themselves superior to all others on account of such knowledge, or, as it should rather be called, ignorance. *They have now been fully exposed; and simply to exhibit their sentiments, is to obtain a victory over them.*

4. ... So, in our case, since we have brought their hidden mysteries, which they keep in silence among themselves, to the light, it will not now be necessary to use many words in destroying their system of opinions. For it is now in thy power, and in the power of all thy associates, to familiarize yourselves with what has been said, to overthrow their wicked and undigested doctrines, and to set forth doctrines agreeable to the truth. Since then the case is so, I shall, according to promise, and as my ability serves, labor to overthrow them, by refuting them all in the following book....

BOOK 2**CHAPTER 29****REFUTATION OF THE VIEWS OF THE HERETICS
AS TO THE FUTURE DESTINY OF THE SOUL AND BODY**

2. *For it is manifest that those acts which are deemed righteous are performed in bodies. Either, therefore, all souls will of necessity pass into the intermediate place, and there will never be a judgment; or bodies, too, which have participated in righteousness, will attain to the place of enjoyment, along with the souls which have in like manner participated, if indeed righteousness is powerful enough to bring thither those substances which have participated in it. And then the doctrine concerning the resurrection of bodies which we believe, will emerge true and certain [from their system]; since, [as we hold,] God, when He resuscitates our mortal bodies which preserved righteousness, will render them incorruptible and immortal. For God is superior to nature, and has in Himself the disposition [to show kindness], because He is good; and the ability to do so, because He is mighty; and the faculty of fully carrying out His purpose, because He is rich and perfect.*

CHAPTER 33**ABSURDITY OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS**

1. *We may subvert their doctrine as to transmigration from body to body by this fact, that souls remember nothing whatever of the events which took place in their previous states of existence. For if they were sent forth with this object, that they should have experience of every kind of action, they must of necessity retain a remembrance of those things which have been previously accomplished, that they might fill up those in which they were still deficient, and not by always hovering, without intermission, round the same pursuits, spend their labor wretchedly in vain (for the mere union of a body [with a soul] could not altogether extinguish the memory and contemplation of those things which had formerly been experienced), and especially as they came [into the world] for this very purpose. For as, when the body is asleep and at rest, whatever things the soul sees by herself, and does in a vision, recollecting many of these, she also communicates them to the body; and as it happens that, when one awakes, perhaps after a long time, he relates what he saw in a dream, so also would he undoubtedly remember those things which he did before he came into this particular body. For if that which is seen only for a very brief space of time, or has been conceived of simply in a phantasm, and by the soul alone, through means of a dream, is remembered after she has mingled again with the body, and been dispersed through all the members, much more would she remember those things in connection with which she stayed during so long a time, even throughout the whole period of a bypast life.*

2. *With reference to these objections, Plato, that ancient Athenian, who also was the first to introduce this opinion, when he could not set them aside, invented the [notion of] a cup of oblivion, imagining that in this way he would escape this sort of difficulty. He attempted no kind of proof [of his supposition], but simply replied dogmatically [to the objection in question], that when souls enter into this life, they are caused to drink of oblivion by that demon who watches their entrance [into the world], before they effect an entrance into the bodies [assigned them]. *It escaped him, that [by speaking thus] he fell into another greater perplexity. For if the cup of oblivion, after it has been drunk, can obliterate the memory of all the deeds that have been done, how, O Plato, dost thou obtain the knowledge of this fact (since thy soul is now in the body), that, before it entered into the body, it was made to drink by the demon a drug which caused oblivion?* For if thou hast a remembrance of the demon, and the cup, and the entrance [into life], thou oughtest also to be acquainted with other things; but if, on the other hand, thou art ignorant of them, then there is no truth in*

the story of the demon, nor in the cup of oblivion prepared with art.

3. In opposition, again, to those who affirm that the body itself is the drug of oblivion, this observation may be made: How, then, does it come to pass, that whatsoever the soul sees by her own instrumentality, both in dreams and by reflection or earnest mental exertion, while the body is passive, she remembers, and reports to her neighbors? *But, again, if the body itself were [the cause of] oblivion, then the soul, as existing in the body, could not remember even those things which were perceived long ago either by means of the eyes or the ears; but, as soon as the eye was turned from the things looked at, the memory of them also would undoubtedly be destroyed. For the soul, as existing in the very [cause of] oblivion, could have no knowledge of anything else than that only which it saw at the present moment. How, too, could it become acquainted with divine things, and retain a remembrance of them while existing in the body, since, as they maintain, the body itself is [the cause of] oblivion?* But the prophets also, when they were upon the earth, remembered likewise, on their returning to their ordinary state of mind, whatever things they spiritually saw or heard in visions of heavenly objects, and related them to others. *The body, therefore, does not cause the soul to forget those things which have been spiritually witnessed; but the soul teaches the body, and shares with it the spiritual vision which it has enjoyed.*

4. For the body is not possessed of greater power than the soul, since indeed the former is inspired, and vivified, and increased, and held together by the latter; but the soul possesses and rules over the body. It is doubtless retarded in its velocity, just in the exact proportion in which the body shares in its motion; but it never loses the knowledge which properly belongs to it. For the body may be compared to an instrument; but the soul is possessed of the reason of an artist. As, therefore, the artist finds the idea of a work to spring up rapidly in his mind, but can only carry it out slowly by means of an instrument, owing to the want of perfect pliability in the matter acted upon, and thus the rapidity of his mental operation, being blended with the slow action of the instrument, gives rise to a moderate kind of movement [towards the end contemplated]; so also the soul, by being mixed up with the body belonging to it, is in a certain measure impeded, its rapidity being blended with the body's slowness. Yet it does not lose altogether its own peculiar powers; but while, as it were, sharing life with the body, it does not itself cease to live. Thus, too, while communicating other things to the body, it neither loses the knowledge of them, nor the memory of those things which have been witnessed.

5. *If, therefore, the soul remembers nothing of what took place in a former state of existence, but has a perception of those things which are here, it follows that she never existed in other bodies, nor did things of which she has no knowledge, nor [once] knew things which she cannot [now mentally] contemplate. But, as each one of us receives his body through the skillful working of God, so does he also possess his soul. For God is not so poor or destitute in resources, that He cannot confer His own proper soul on each individual body, even as He gives it also its special character. And therefore, when the number [fixed upon] is completed, [that number] which He had predetermined in His own counsel, all those who have been enrolled for life [eternal] shall rise again, having their own bodies, and having also their own souls, and their own spirits, in which they had pleased God. Those, on the other hand, who are worthy of punishment, shall go away into it, they too having their own souls and their own bodies, in which they stood apart from the grace of God. Both classes shall then cease from any longer begetting and being begotten, from marrying and being given in marriage; so that the number of mankind, corresponding to the foreordination of God, being completed, may fully realize the scheme formed by the Father.*

CHAPTER 34

SOULS CAN BE RECOGNIZED IN THE SEPARATE STATE, AND ARE IMMORTAL ALTHOUGH THEY ONCE HAD A BEGINNING

1. *The Lord has taught with very great fullness, that souls not only continue to exist, not by passing from body to body, but that they preserve the same form [in their separate state] as the body had to which they were adapted, and that they remember the deeds which they did in this state of existence, and from which they have now ceased, — in that narrative which is recorded respecting the rich man and that Lazarus who found repose in the bosom of Abraham. In this account He states that Dives knew Lazarus after death, and Abraham in like manner, and that each one of these persons continued in his own proper position, and that [Dives] requested Lazarus to be sent to relieve him — [Lazarus], on whom he did not [formerly] bestow even the crumbs [which fell] from his table. [He tells us] also of the answer given by Abraham, who was acquainted not only with what respected himself, but Dives also, and who enjoined those who did not wish to come into that place of torment to believe Moses and the prophets, and to receive the preaching of Him who was to rise again from the dead. By these things, then, it is plainly declared that souls continue to exist, that they do not pass from body to body, that they possess the form of a man, so that they may be recognized, and retain the memory of things in this world; moreover, that the gift of prophecy was possessed by Abraham, and that each class [of souls] receives a habitation such as it has deserved, even before the judgment.*

2. But if any persons at this point maintain that those souls, which only began a little while ago to exist, cannot endure for any length of time; but that they must, on the one hand, either be unborn, in order that they may be immortal, or if they have had a beginning in the way of generation, that they should die with the body itself — let them learn that God alone, who is Lord of all, is without beginning and without end, being truly and for ever the same, and always remaining the same unchangeable Being. But all things which proceed from Him, whatsoever have been made, and are made, do indeed receive their own beginning of generation, and on this account are inferior to Him who formed them, inasmuch as they are not unbegotten. Nevertheless they endure, and extend their existence into a long series of ages in accordance with the will of God their Creator; so that He grants them that they should be thus formed at the beginning, and that they should so exist afterwards.

3. For as the heaven which is above us, the firmament, the sun, the moon, the rest of the stars, and all their grandeur, although they had no previous existence, were called into being, and continue throughout a long course of time according to the will of God, so also any one who thinks thus respecting souls and spirits, and, in fact, respecting all created things, will not by any means go far astray, inasmuch as all things that have been made had a beginning when they were formed, but endure as long as God wills that they should have an existence and continuance. The prophetic Spirit bears testimony to these opinions, when He declares, “For He spake, and they were made; He commanded, and they were created: He hath established them for ever, yea, forever and ever.” *And again, He thus speaks respecting the salvation of man: “He asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest him length of days for ever and ever;” indicating that it is the Father of all who imparts continuance for ever and ever on those who are saved.* For life does not arise from us, nor from our own nature; but it is bestowed according to the grace of God. And therefore he who shall preserve the life bestowed upon him, and give thanks to Him who imparted it, shall receive also length of days for ever and ever. But he who shall reject it, and prove himself ungrateful to his Maker, inasmuch as he has been created, and has not recognized Him who bestowed [the gift upon him], deprives himself of [the privilege of] continuance for ever and ever. And, for this reason, the Lord declared to those who showed themselves ungrateful towards Him: “If ye have not been faithful in that which is little, who will give you that which is great?” indicating that those who, in this brief temporal life, have shown themselves ungrateful to Him who bestowed it, shall justly not receive from Him length of days for ever and ever.

4. But as the animal body is certainly not itself the soul, yet has fellowship with the soul as

long as God pleases; so the soul herself is not life, but partakes in that life bestowed upon her by God. Wherefore also the prophetic word declares of the first-formed man, "He became a living soul," teaching us that by the participation of life the soul became alive; so that the soul, and the life which it possesses, must be understood as being separate existences. When God therefore bestows life and perpetual duration, it comes to pass that even souls which did not previously exist should henceforth endure [for ever], since God has both willed that they should exist, and should continue in existence. For the will of God ought to govern and rule in all things, while all other things give way to Him, are in subjection, and devoted to His service. Thus far, then, let me speak concerning the creation and the continued duration of the soul.

BOOK 4

CHAPTER 22

**CHRIST DID NOT COME FOR THE SAKE OF THE MEN OF ONE AGE ONLY,
BUT FOR ALL WHO, LIVING RIGHTEOUSLY AND PIOUSLY,
HAD BELIEVED UPON HIM; AND FOR THOSE, TOO, WHO SHALL BELIEVE**

2. For it was not merely for those who believed on Him in the time of Tiberius Caesar that Christ came, nor did the Father exercise His providence for the men only who are now alive, but for all men altogether, who from the beginning, according to their capacity, in their generation have both feared and loved God, and practiced justice and piety towards their neighbors, and have earnestly desired to see Christ, and to hear His voice. *Wherefore He shall, at His second coming, first rouse from their sleep all persons of this description, and shall raise them up, as well as the rest who shall be judged, and give them a place in His kingdom. ...*

BOOK 5

CHAPTER 6

**GOD WILL BESTOW SALVATION UPON THE WHOLE NATURE OF MAN,
CONSISTING OF BODY AND SOUL IN CLOSE UNION, SINCE THE WORD
TOOK IT UPON HIM, AND ADORNED WITH THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, OF
WHOM OUR BODIES ARE, AND ARE TERMED, THE TEMPLES**

1. Now God shall be glorified in His handiwork, fitting it so as to be conformable to, and modeled after, His own Son. For by the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit, man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the likeness of God. *Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a part of the man, but certainly not the man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was molded after the image of God.* For this reason does the apostle declare, "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect," terming those persons "perfect" who have received the Spirit of God, and who through the Spirit of God do speak in all languages, as he used Himself also to speak. In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the Church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit the hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of God, whom also the apostle terms "spiritual," they being spiritual because they partake of the Spirit, and not because their flesh has been stripped off and taken away, and because they have become purely spiritual. *For if any one take away the substance of flesh, that is, of the handiwork [of God], and understand that which is purely spiritual, such then would not be a spiritual man but would be the spirit of a man, or the Spirit of God.* But when the spirit here blended with the soul is united to [God's] handiwork, the man is rendered spiritual and perfect because of the outpouring of the Spirit, and this is he who was made in the image and likeness of God. But if the Spirit be

wanting to the soul, he who is such is indeed of an animal nature, and being left carnal, shall be an imperfect being, possessing indeed the image [of God] in his formation (*in plasmate*), but not receiving the similitude through the Spirit; and thus is this being imperfect. Thus also, if any one take away the image and set aside the handiwork, he cannot then understand this as being a man, but as either some part of a man, as I have already said, or as something else than a man. For that flesh which has been molded is not a perfect man in itself, but the body of a man, and part of a man. Neither is the soul itself, considered apart by itself, the man; but it is the soul of a man, and part of a man. *Neither is the spirit a man, for it is called the spirit, and not a man; but the commingling and union of all these constitutes the perfect man. And for this cause does the apostle, explaining himself, make it clear that the saved man is a complete man as well as a spiritual man; saying thus in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, "Now the God of peace sanctify you perfect (perfectos); and may your spirit, and soul, and body be preserved whole without complaint to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." Now what was his object in praying that these three — that is, soul, body, and spirit — might be preserved to the coming of the Lord, unless he was aware of the [future] reintegration and union of the three, and [that they should be heirs of] one and the same salvation?* For this cause also he declares that those are "the perfect" who present unto the Lord the three [component parts] without offense. Those, then, are the perfect who have had the Spirit of God remaining in them, and have preserved their souls and bodies blameless, holding fast the faith of God, that is, that faith which is [directed] towards God, and maintaining righteous dealings with respect to their neighbors.

2. Whence also he says, that this handiwork is "the temple of God," thus declaring: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man, therefore, will defile the temple of God, him will God destroy: for the temple of God is holy, which [temple] ye are." Here he manifestly declares the body to be the temple in which the Spirit dwells. As also the Lord speaks in reference to Himself, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. He spake this, however," it is said, "of the temple of His body." And not only does he (the apostle) acknowledge our bodies to be a temple, but even the temple of Christ, saying thus to the Corinthians, "Know ye not that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot?" *He speaks these things, not in reference to some other spiritual man; for a being of such a nature could have nothing to do with an harlot: but he declares "our body," that is, the flesh which continues in sanctity and purity, to be "the members of Christ;"* but that when it becomes one with an harlot, it becomes the members of an harlot. And for this reason he said, "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy." How then is it not the utmost blasphemy to allege, that the temple of God, in which the Spirit of the Father dwells, and the members of Christ, do not partake of salvation, but are reduced to perdition? Also, that our bodies are raised not from their own substance, but by the power of God, he says to the Corinthians, "Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. But God hath both raised up the Lord, and shall raise us up by His own power."

CHAPTER 10

... HE POINTS OUT ALSO THAT MAN WITHOUT THE SPIRIT IS NOT CAPABLE OF BRINGING FORTH FRUIT, OR OF INHERITING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

2. ... Rightly therefore does the apostle declare, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God;" and, "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God:" not repudiating [by these words] the substance of flesh, but showing that into it the Spirit must be infused. And for this reason, he says, "This mortal must put on immortality, and this corruptible must put on incorruption." And again he declares, "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." He sets this forth still more plainly, where he says, "The body indeed is dead, because of sin; but the Spirit is life, because of righteousness.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, because of His Spirit dwelling in you." ...

CHAPTER 13
**IN THE DEAD WHO WERE RAISED BY CHRIST WE POSSESS
 THE HIGHEST PROOF OF THE RESURRECTION ...**

1. ... As, therefore, those who were healed were made whole in those members which had in times past been afflicted; and the dead rose in the identical bodies, their limbs and bodies receiving health, and that life which was granted by the Lord, who prefigures eternal things by temporal, and shows that it is He who is Himself able to extend both healing and life to His handiwork, that His words concerning its [future] resurrection may also be believed; so also at the end, when the Lord utters His voice "by the last trumpet," the dead shall be raised, as He Himself declares: "The hour shall come, in which all the dead which are in the tombs shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth; those that have done good to the resurrection of life, and those that have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."

CHAPTER 19
... VARIOUS AND DISCORDANT HERESIES ARE MENTIONED

2. ... And still further, some affirm that neither their soul nor their body can receive eternal life, but merely the inner man. Moreover, they will have it that this [inner man] is that which is the understanding (*sensum*) in them, and which they decree as being the only thing to ascend to "the perfect." *Others [maintain], as I have said in the first book, that while the soul is saved, their body does not participate in the salvation which comes from God; in which [book] I have also set forward the hypotheses of all these men, and in the second have pointed out their weakness and inconsistency.*

CHAPTER 20
... POSSESSING ONE AND THE SAME DOCTRINE OF SALVATION ...

1. ... *But the path of those belonging to the Church circumscribes the whole world, as possessing the sure tradition from the apostles, and gives unto us to see that the faith of all is one and the same, since all receive one and the same God the Father, and believe in the same dispensation regarding the incarnation of the Son of God, and are cognizant of the same gift of the Spirit, and are conversant with the same commandments, and preserve the same form of ecclesiastical constitution, and expect the same advent of the Lord, and await the same salvation of the complete man, that is, of the soul and body. ...*

CHAPTER 35
... AND THE RESURRECTION ...

2. ... *And he sets forth, too, the things connected with the general resurrection and the judgment, mentioning "the dead, great and small." "The sea," he says, "gave up the dead which it had in it, and death and hell delivered up the dead that they contained; and the books were opened. Moreover," he says, "the book of life was opened, and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the books, according to their works; and death and hell were sent into the lake of fire, the second death." Now this is what is called Gehenna, which the Lord styled eternal fire. "And if any one," it is said, "was not found written in the book of life, he was sent into the lake of fire." ...*

2.5.3. The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching

2.5.3.1. Introduction

(~180AD) Since his “Demonstration” is not an apologetic work, but rather an exposition of Christian doctrine, Irenaeus spends much less time dealing with opposing doctrines here than he does in “Against Heresies”. It comes as no surprise, then, that Irenaeus does not here address the issue of reincarnation directly; but even though he does not handle it directly, he does make statements that demonstrate a viewpoint that is in harmony with that displayed in his earlier work.

In both works Irenaeus expresses his belief in the unity of the body and soul, in terms of both the composition, and the responsibility of the complete man. Just as man exists as body and soul united, so must he be pure in both if he is to have hope in the life to come. This is an argument commonly used by Irenaeus (cf. comments on “Against Heresies”) as will be seen in the quote below, and in the fragments that follow.

2.5.3.2. Extract

2. Now, since man is a living being compounded of soul and flesh, he must needs exist by both of these: and, whereas from both of them offences come, purity of the flesh is the restraining abstinence from all shameful things and all unrighteous deeds, and purity of the soul is the keeping faith towards God entire, neither adding thereto nor diminishing therefrom. For godliness is obscured and dulled by the soiling and the staining of the flesh, and is broken and polluted and no more entire, if falsehood enter into the soul: but it will keep itself in its beauty and its measure, when truth is constant in the soul and purity in the flesh. For what profit is it to know the truth in words, and to pollute the flesh and perform the works of evil? Or what profit can purity of the flesh bring, if truth be not in the soul? For these rejoice with one another, and are united and allied to bring man face to face with God. ...¹²

2.5.4. Fragments

2.5.4.1. Introduction

(130-200AD) There are five fragments attributed to Irenaeus that are available in the ANF collection that deal with the resurrection of the dead. Two of these are relevant in the determination of his view on the doctrine of the transmigration of the soul. (The others are 28, 35, and 50.)

The first fragment gives a general summary of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. The significance of this fragment lies near its end, where the actions of man are once again bound both to the soul and to the body. The body that participated with the soul is therefore to be judged with the soul – not apart from it, as the doctrine of reincarnation would require (cf. comments on “Against Heresies”).

The second fragment goes beyond the argumentation provided in “Against Heresies”. Here Irenaeus asserts that the body and the soul are produced at the same time – directly negating any views that would require the existence of either the body or the soul to precede it's counterpart. Thus, a central requirement of reincarnation is explicitly denied: the possibility of the soul's existence prior to its reincarnation.

While the authorship of the following extracts may not be as firmly established for these fragments as they are for his principle works, (and should not, therefore, be used as a primary source for the determination of his position,) Irenaeus' position on the issue of the transmigration of souls has already been conclusively determined in his principle works, and therefore is not in doubt. This material does, however, serve well as a supplement to the assessment previously established.

2.5.4.2. Extracts

12. We therefore have formed the belief that [our] bodies also do rise again. For although they go to corruption, yet they do not perish; for the earth, receiving the remains, preserves them, even like fertile seed mixed with more fertile ground. Again, as a bare grain is sown, and, germinating by the command of God its Creator, rises again, clothed upon and glorious, but not before it has died and suffered decomposition, and become mingled with the earth; so [it is seen from this, that] we have not entertained a vain belief in the resurrection of the body. But although it is dissolved at the appointed time, because of the primeval disobedience, it is placed, as it were, in the crucible of the earth, to be recast again; not then as this corruptible [body], but pure, and no longer subject to decay: *so that to each body its own soul shall be restored;* and when it is clothed upon with this, it shall not experience sorrow, but shall rejoice, continuing permanently in a state of purity, *having for its companion a just consort, not an insidious one, possessing in every respect the things pertaining to it, it shall receive these with perfect accuracy; it shall not receive bodies diverse from what they had been, nor delivered from suffering or disease, nor as [rendered] glorious, but as they departed this life, in sins or in righteous actions: and such as they were, such shall they be clothed with upon resuming life; and such as they were in unbelief, such shall they be faithfully judged.*

49. Now therefore, by means of this which has been already brought forth a long time since, the Word has assigned an interpretation. We are convinced that there exist [so to speak] two men in each one of us. The one is confessedly a hidden thing, while the other stands apparent; one is corporeal, the other spiritual; although the generation of both may be compared to that of twins. *For both are revealed to the world as but one, for the soul*

was not anterior to the body in its essence; nor, in regard to its formation, did the body precede the soul: but both these were produced at one time; and their nourishment consists in purity and sweetness.

2.6. Minucius Felix

2.6.1. Biography

Christian apologist, flourished between 160 and 300; the exact date is not known. His "Octavius" has numerous points of agreement with the "Apologeticum" of Tertullian, similarities that have been explained by the theory of a common source -- an apology written in Latin, and which is supposed to have disappeared without leaving any trace, not even in the name of its author. This hypothesis is now generally abandoned. ... The most natural supposition is that one of the two writers, Minucius or Tertullian, is directly dependent on the other. Formerly, Minucius was regarded as posterior to Tertullian. ... M. Waltzing, the scholar best acquainted with Minucius Felix and what has been written about him, is inclined to think him anterior to Tertullian. The arguments in favour of one or the other of these theories are not decisive. However, it may be said that in the passages taken from the ancient authors, such as Seneca, Varro, and especially Cicero, Minucius seems to be more exact and closer to the original; consequently he seems to be intermediary between them and Tertullian. ...

The birthplace of the author is believed to be Africa. This is not proved by Minucius's imitation of African authors, any more than it is by the resemblance between Minucius and Tertullian. ... The "Octavius" is a dialogue of which Ostia is the scene. Caecilius Natalis upholds the cause of paganism, Octavius Januarius that of Christianity; the author himself is the judge of the debate. ...

The persons are real. The dialogue may likewise be so, despite the fact that Minucius has transformed into an almost judicial debate what must have been a mere conversation or series of conversations. ... The dialogue therefore consists of two discourses, the attack of Caecilius and the refutation of Octavius.

*The Catholic Encyclopedia – Minucius Felix*¹³

¹³The Catholic Encyclopedia, "Minucius Felix".

2.6.2. The Octavius of Minucius Felix

2.6.2.1. Introduction

(210AD) Minucius Felix's estimation of reincarnation is most evident in the 34th chapter of this work. Here, and in the chapter that follows, Octavius, the advocate of Christianity, responds to the challenges given to him by Caecilius in chapter 11. Both of these arguments will be relevant in the attempt to establish the historic view of the early Christian Church on the doctrine of reincarnation.

When Caecilius challenges the prospect of a bodily resurrection he establishes two significant facts, undisputed by Octavius: that Christians believe in the resurrection of the dead, and that they believe in a judgement after death with eternal consequences. Caecilius makes no mention of a Christian belief in reincarnation, nor does he suggest one as a central tenet of Christianity. Although he does not deny this doctrine to Christians outright, his testimony on the Christian view of judgement and punishment after death leaves little room for other forms of judgement or punishment.

The reply of Octavius confirms the indications given by Caecilius. Though Octavius merely passes over the Pythagorean doctrine of transmigration in the 19th chapter, (as he demonstrates the divergence of the opinions of the heathen philosophers,) he handles the issue directly in the 34th chapter. Octavius plainly considers the doctrine of reincarnation to be an imitation of the truth of the resurrection and the broadening of this doctrine to include transmigrations into animals as farcical at best. The doctrines of the resurrection, judgement, and punishment are confirmed and defended by Octavius, while the grounds for the necessity of reincarnation are completely undermined in the 35th chapter. The combination of these evidences clearly demonstrate an early Christian viewpoint that wholly excludes and opposes the theory of reincarnation.

2.6.2.2. Extracts

CHAPTER 11

[Caecilius to Octavius:] *“And, not content with this wild opinion, they add to it and associate with it old women’s fables: they say that they will rise again after death, and ashes, and dust; and with I know not what confidence, they believe by turns in one another’s lies: you would think that they had already lived again. It is a double evil and a twofold madness to denounce destruction to the heaven and the stars, which we leave just as we find them, and to promise eternity to ourselves, who are dead and extinct — who, as we are born, so also perish! It is for this cause, doubtless, also that they execrate our funeral piles, and condemn our burials by fire, as if every body, even although it be withdrawn from the flames, were not, nevertheless, resolved into the earth by lapse of years and ages, and as if it mattered not whether wild beasts tore the body to pieces, or seas consumed it, or the ground covered it, or the flames carried it away; since for the carcasses every mode of sepulture is a penalty if they feel it; if they feel it not, in the very quickness of their destruction there is relief. Deceived by this error, they promise to themselves, as being good, a blessed and perpetual life after their death; to others, as being unrighteous, eternal punishment. ... Yet I should be glad to be informed whether or no you rise again with bodies; and if so, with what bodies — whether with the same or with renewed bodies? Without a body? Then, as far as I know, there will neither be mind, nor soul, nor life. With the same body? But this has already been previously destroyed. With another body? Then it is a new man who is born, not the former one restored; and yet so long a time has passed away, innumerable ages have flowed by, and what single individual has returned from the dead either by the fate of Protesilaus, with*

permission to sojourn even for a few hours, or that we might believe it for an example?

CHAPTER 19

[Octavius to Caecilius:] Afterwards Anaximenes, and then Diogenes of Apollonia, decide that the air, infinite and unmeasured, is God. The agreement of these also as to the Divinity is like ours. But the description of Anaxagoras also is, that God is said to be the motion of an infinite mind; *and the God of Pythagoras is the soul passing to and fro and intent, throughout the universal nature of things, from whom also the life of all animals is received.* ... Plato has a clearer discourse about God, both in the matters themselves and in the names by which he expresses them; and his discourse would be altogether heavenly, if it were not occasionally fouled by a mixture of merely civil belief.

CHAPTER 34

You observe that philosophers dispute of the same things that we are saying, *not that we are following up their tracks, but that they, from the divine announcements of the prophets, imitated the shadow of the corrupted truth. Thus also the most illustrious of the wise men, Pythagoras first, and Plato chiefly, have delivered the doctrine of resurrection with a corrupt and divided faith; for they will have it, that the bodies being dissolved, the souls alone both abide for ever, and very often pass into other new bodies. To these things they add also this, by way of misrepresenting the truth, that the souls of men return into cattle, birds, and beasts. Assuredly such an opinion as that is not worthy of a philosopher's inquiry, but of the ribaldry of a buffoon. But for our argument it is sufficient, that even in this your wise men do in some measure harmonize with us.* But who is so foolish or so brutish as to dare to deny that man, as he could first of all be formed by God, so can again be re-formed; that he is nothing after death, and that he was nothing before he began to exist; and as from nothing it was possible for him to be born, so from nothing it may be possible for him to be restored? Moreover, it is more difficult to begin that which is not, than to repeat that which has been. Do you think that, if anything is withdrawn from our feeble eyes, it perishes to God? Every body, whether it is dried up into dust, or is dissolved into moisture, or is compressed into ashes, or is attenuated into smoke, is withdrawn from us, but it is reserved for God in the custody of the elements. Nor, as you believe, do we fear any loss from sepulture, but we adopt the ancient and better custom of burying in the earth. See, therefore, how for our consolation all nature suggests a future resurrection. The sun sinks down and arises, the stars pass away and return, the flowers die and revive again, after their wintry decay the shrubs resume their leaves, seeds do not flourish again unless they are rotted: thus the body in the sepulcher is like the trees which in winter hide their verdure with a deceptive dryness. Why are you in haste for it to revive and return, while the winter is still raw? We must wait also for the spring-time of the body. And I am not ignorant that many, in the consciousness of what they deserve, rather desire than believe that they shall be nothing after death; for they would prefer to be altogether extinguished, rather than to be restored for the purpose of punishment. And their error also is enhanced, both by the liberty granted them in this life, and by God's very great patience, whose judgment, the more tardy it is, is so much the more just.

CHAPTER 35

And yet men are admonished in the books and poems of the most learned poets of that fiery river, and of the heat flowing in manifold turns from the Stygian marsh, — things which, prepared for eternal torments, and known to them by the information of demons and from the oracles of their prophets, they have delivered to us. And therefore among them also even king Jupiter himself swears religiously by the parching banks and the black abyss; for, with foreknowledge of the punishment destined to him, with his worshippers, he shudders.

Nor is there either measure or termination to these torments. There the intelligent fire burns the limbs and restores them, feeds on them and nourishes them. As the fires of the thunderbolts strike upon the bodies, and do not consume them; as the fires of Mount Aetna and of Mount Vesuvius, and of burning lands everywhere, glow, but are not wasted; so that penal fire is not fed by the waste of those who burn, but is nourished by the unexhausted eating away of their bodies. *But that they who know not God are deservedly tormented as impious, as unrighteous persons, no one except a profane man hesitates to believe, since it is not less wicked to be ignorant of, than to offend the Parent of all, and the Lord of all. And although ignorance of God is sufficient for punishment, even as knowledge of Him is of avail for pardon,* yet if we Christians be compared with you, although in some things our discipline is inferior, yet we shall be found much better than you.

PART 3:
Biblical Analysis

