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A Rejoinder to Dr. Bebis

WRITTEN BY THEODORE SHIMMYO

Shimmyo, Theodore T.

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Vassilios Bebis, who serves as a Chaplain at Harvard University (Cambridge, MA) and Professor of Eastern Orthodox and Ecumenical Theology at Graduate Theological Foundation (Sarasota, FL), kindly wrote a “supplementary note” on my article, “The Unification Doctrine of the Fall,” published in *Journal of Unification Studies* XX (2019). It talks about similarities between the theology of St. Irenaeus and the Divine Principle regarding the Human Fall.

To explain a little about Irenaeus, he was born of Greek parents in Smyrna, Asia Minor (now Izmir, Turkey) in the first half of the second century. As a Christian leader, he produced his important writings such as *Against Heresies* and *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* in Greek originally, but he also served as the Bishop of Lyons in the West. While he firmly refuted the heresy of Gnosticism, he apparently had a broad mind to be able to bridge between the East and West, helping to clarify the apostolic tradition in the formative years of Christianity. He is recognized as a saint both in the Eastern Orthodox Church and in the Catholic Church.

Bebis’ supplementary note is of much use, as it talks about something that my article does not: similarities between Irenaeus’ thought and the Divine Principle regarding the Human Fall. When writing my article, I was not unaware of those similarities, but I ended up not touching upon them, perhaps because I was more preoccupied with comparing between the Western theology of St. Augustine and the Divine Principle. I welcome Professor Bebis’ ecumenical approach from an Eastern Orthodox perspective, which led him to show an interest in my article.

In fact, I have always appreciated the theological tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy, which undoubtedly includes Irenaeus, because it has profound beliefs such as: 1) a doctrine of the *theosis* (deification) of believers in the context of the Incarnation of God; 2) a doctrine of the Trinity that takes threeness in God more seriously than in the West, thereby making God more relevant to the world; and 3) a theory of the atonement, called the “classic theory,” which holds that the atonement through the death of Christ on the cross consists in spiritually liberating us sinners from the reign of the devil first rather than in simply propitiating God, as believed in the West. Similarly, the Divine Principle holds: 1) that we human beings can acquire “a divine nature” as we become one with God;^[1] 2) that threeness in God (meaning that “God is the absolute reality in whom the dual characteristics interact in harmony”) is important because it can help to secure a real closeness between God and the created world with its own threeness;^[2] and 3) that the atonement through the sacrifice of the Messiah, True Parents, consists in our liberation from the dominion of Satan first, if we are to be actually reunited with God at all. These things are dealt with in more detail in my other writings.^[3]

Let us now turn to Bebis’ supplementary note itself. It focuses on the Human Fall, showing three points of similarity between the Irenaean and Unificationist views on the subject: 1) that Adam and Eve were not created as perfect beings but had the ability to achieve perfection gradually; 2) that Lucifer was responsible for the fall of Adam and Eve out of his envy for them; and 3) that while the sexual interpretation of the Fall and original sin, seen in the Divine Principle, may not appear directly in Irenaeus’ writings, it appears indirectly in his *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* at least.

Let me comment on them. The first point of similarity is a significant one, as it shows that both Irenaeus and the Divine Principle distinguish themselves from the Augustinian and traditionally Western idea that Adam and Eve were created as perfect (if finitely) and mature adults but fell—an idea that may be harder to comprehend. Given the fact of their fall, it would be more comprehensible if they were *not* created as perfect and mature beings from the beginning. In resemblance to Irenaeus, therefore, the Divine Principle states: “When did the first human ancestors fall? They fell during their growing period, when they were still immature.”^[4]

This is supported by Irenaeus’ own celebrated theory of recapitulation as well, although Bebis does not explicitly mention about it. According to the Irenaean theory of recapitulation, Christ, who was the Word incarnate to be the second Adam, recapitulated Adam in order to undo what Adam mistakenly did to fall. Further, Christ in himself recapitulated all the descendants of Adam as well to save them: “He... summed up in Himself all nations dispersed from Adam downwards, and all languages and generations of men, together with Adam himself.”^[5] In order to save them all, Christ also went through all their ages, “becoming an infant for infants... a child for children... a youth for youths... an old man for old men.”^[6] There is a parallelism here between Christ and Adam (and his descendants), and it means to say that because Christ was actually born as an infant, Adam also must have been born/created as an infant and not as a mature adult from the beginning.

Needless to say, the Divine Principle accepts this Irenaean idea of parallelism between Christ and Adam that argues that Adam was created as an infant. But the Divine Principle seems to have still another argument coming directly from its Principle of Creation, which maintains that “All phenomena... are designed to reach completion only after passing through a set *growing period*,” given that it even took God a certain lapse of time to complete the creation of the universe, as recorded in the Bible.^[7] So Adam and Eve were supposed to go through the growing period of infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood to eventually become perfect human beings.

Let us now proceed to the second similarity. It seems that when Irenaeus and the Divine Principle similarly hold that Lucifer’s envy for Adam and Eve led to their fall, both of them together are quite dissimilar from Augustine’s thought, which distinguishes *pride* from envy to say that the former is prior to the latter. According to Augustine, Lucifer had already fallen alone, not involving Adam and Eve, because of his pride, i.e., his “craving for undue [self-]exaltation” to think of becoming like God to the neglect of his own creaturely status.^[8] It was only after that that Lucifer’s envy for Adam and Eve, who were not fallen yet, now occurred to lead to their fall. This two-stage fall of Lucifer through his pride *and* envy, as understood by Augustine, seems not to be stressed in Irenaeus and the Divine Principle.

While both Irenaeus and the Divine Principle similarly believe that Lucifer’s envy for Adam and Eve led to their fall, however, they seem to diverge from each other a little, in that the latter seems to have a little more appreciation of envy than the former, saying that it does not necessarily have to lead to the Fall. The Divine Principle holds that Lucifer was “endowed with both desire and intellect as a part of original nature” which had nothing to do with the Fall; that because of his intellect he could naturally “compare and discern that God’s love for human beings was greater than the love God gave him”; and that because of his desire he “had a natural yearning for God to love him

more.”^[9] In an ideal and unfallen world, therefore, envy as “an inevitable byproduct of the original nature” can be “channeled into spurring the progress of humanity,” not leading to the fall.^[10]

What about the final, third point of similarity? Bebis admits that Irenaeus’ doctrine of the fall of Adam was not explicitly a sexual interpretation yet. He, however, reports that the Bishop of Lyons’ interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4 in his *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preachings* shows the “sons of God” were angels who illicitly took the “daughters of men” on the earth as their wives for their amours. This supposedly indicates that Irenaeus may have thought about the sexual fall between the serpent (an angel) and Eve as a possibility.

This equation of the sons of God with fallen angels, which Irenaeus accepted, was commonly accepted among early Christians especially in the first two centuries. This means that early Christians in those centuries perhaps thought about the sexual fall of the angel with Eve at least as a possibility. In fact, St. Clement of Alexandria, a contemporary of Irenaeus, went so far as to say clearly, like the Divine Principle, that the Human Fall took place sexually.

Later on, however, Augustine popularized a different interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4, according to which the sons of God were not fallen angels at all but human descendants of Seth while the daughters of men were women from the line of Cain.^[11] This interpretation remained the most widely held view afterwards. Perhaps it led to the idea that the fall did not involve the angel’s sexual relationship with Eve. This can probably explain why Augustine did not have a sexual interpretation of the human fall.

According to this non-sexual interpretation by Augustine, the three figures of Lucifer, Eve and Adam, each endowed with “free will” (*liberum arbitrium*), freely and severally fell. This non-sexual, individualist interpretation by the Bishop of Hippo emerged also because he was stressing the importance of individual free will against Manichaean fatalism during the Manichaean controversy, although during the later Pelagian controversy he came to develop a sexual theory of the transmission of original sin that holds that it is transmitted from parents engaged in procreative sex to their children.

We are now aware that although Irenaeus’ doctrine of the Fall of Adam was not explicitly a sexual interpretation, he may have thought about a sexual fall between the serpent (an angel) and Eve as a possibility, given his belief that the sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4 were angels. This possibility of a sexual fall between the angel and Eve in the mind of Irenaeus may have been the reason why he, unlike Augustine, developed the idea that human beings, after the Human Fall, were “led captive” by Satan in his “bonds of condemnation.”^[12] This very much resembles the Divine Principle notion of Satan’s “yoke,”^[13] “dominion”^[14] or “sovereignty,”^[15] although Irenaeus did not go so far as to talk about Satan’s “lineage,”^[16] which is a rather stronger Divine Principle notion to indicate the sexual nature of the Fall. Needless to say, for both Irenaeus and the Divine Principle, the atonement begins with Christ’s work to liberate us sinners from this bondage of Satan.

In fine, Professor Bebis’ supplementary note has correctly pointed out the above amazing similarities between Irenaeus’ theology and the Divine Principle regarding the Human Fall. I hope to be able to continue this kind of theological dialogue with him and others with the spirit of ecumenism.

Notes

^[1] *Exposition of the Divine Principle* (New York: HSA.-UWC, 1996), pp. 34, 164. Henceforth abbreviated as EDP.

^[2] EDP, pp. 41-42.

^[3] For these three things, see, for example, the following three articles of mine, respectively: “Unification Christology,” *Journal of Unification Studies* XXI (2020):51-75; “God and the World: Advantages of the Unification Doctrine of God’s Dual Characteristics,” *Journal of Unification Studies* XVI (2015):27-64; and “The Unification Doctrine of the Atonement,” *Journal of Unification Studies* XII (2011):11-40.

^[4] EDP, p. 42.

^[5] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.XXII.3 (<http://gnosis.org/library/advh3.htm>).

^[6] *Ibid.*, II.XXII.4 (<http://gnosis.org/library/advh2.htm>).

^[7] EDP, p. 41. Italics original.

^[8] Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods, Book XIV, Chap. 13. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120114.htm>.

^[9] EDP, p. 73.

^[10] *Ibid.*

^[11] Augustine, *ibid.*, Book XV, Chap. 23 (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120115.htm>).

^[12] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III.XXIII.1 (<http://gnosis.org/library/advh3.htm>).

^[13] EDP, p. 97.

^[14] EDP, p. 175.

^[15] EDP, p. 68.

^[16] EDP, pp. 60, 65.