

2019 - Issue One

# Man Fully Alive

ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS

*St. Irenaeus was Bishop of Lyon, France during the latter quarter of the second century. As a youth he was acquainted with Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who was a disciple of St. John the Apostle. Irenaeus' principal work was Against Heresies in which he refuted the many forms of Christian Gnosticism which in various ways disparaged the material world. The following excerpt is found in the middle of Book IV in which Irenaeus expounds on the unity of God and of his activity vis-à-vis the world from Creation to Redemption. It is in Christ, who was with the Father from the beginning, says Irenaeus, that creation is brought to its full maturity. For in revealing the Father to man and presenting man in turn to the Father, creation receives the Life of its life. This is what he means when he says: "The Glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God."*

Men therefore shall see God, that they may live, being made immortal by that sight, and attaining even unto God; which, as I have already said, was declared figuratively by the prophets, that God should be seen by men who bear His Spirit [in them], and do always wait patiently for His coming. As also Moses says in Deuteronomy, "We shall see in that day that God will talk to man, and he shall live" (Deut 5:24). For certain of these men used to see the prophetic Spirit and His active influences poured forth for all kinds of gifts; others, again, [beheld] the advent of the Lord, and that dispensation which obtained from the beginning, by which He accomplished the will of the Father with regard to things both celestial and terrestrial; and others [beheld] paternal glories adapted to the times, and to those who saw and who heard them then, and to all who were subsequently to hear them. Thus, therefore, was God revealed; for God the Father is shown forth through all these [operations], the Spirit indeed working, and the Son ministering, while the Father was approving, and man's salvation being accomplished. As He also declares through Hosea the prophet: "I," He says, "have multiplied visions, and have used similitudes by the ministry (*in manibus*) of the prophets" (Hos 12:10). But the apostle expounded this very passage, when he said, "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are differences of ministrations, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (1 Cor 12:4-7). But as He who worketh all things in all is God, [as to the points] of what nature and how great He is, [God] is invisible and indescribable to all things which have been made by Him, but He is by no means unknown: for all things learn through His Word that there is one God the Father, who contains all things, and who grants existence to all, as is written in the Gospel: "No man hath seen God at any time, except the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father; He has declared [Him]" (Jn 1:18).

Therefore the Son of the Father declares [Him] from the beginning, inasmuch as He was with the Father from the beginning, who did also show to the human race prophetic visions, and diversities of gifts, and His own ministrations, and the glory of the Father, in regular order and connection, at the fitting time for the benefit [of mankind]. For where there is a regular succession, there is also fixedness; and where fixedness, there suitability to the period; and where suitability, there also utility. And for this reason did the Word become the dispenser of the paternal grace for the benefit of men, for whom He made such great dispensations, revealing God indeed to men, but presenting man to God, and

preserving at the same time the invisibility of the Father, lest man should at any time become a despiser of God, and that he should always possess something towards which he might advance; but, on the other hand, revealing God to men through many dispensations, lest man, falling away from God altogether, should cease to exist. For the glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God. For if the manifestation of God which is made by means of the creation, affords life to all living in the earth, much more does that revelation of the Father which comes through the Word, give life to those who see God.

(Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. IV, Ch. XX, no. 6□7.)

*St. Irenaeus was Bishop of Lyon, France in the 2nd century.*

Keep reading! Click [here](#) to read our next article, *Economic Dislocations of Young Adults in the Secular Age*

