

# On the Refutation and Overthrow of the So-Called Knowledge

## Excerpts from Book V\*

### The Doctrine of Redemption

...We could in no other way have learned the things of God unless our Teacher, being the Word, had been made man. For none could declare to us the things of the Father, except His own Word. "For who else has known the mind of the Lord, or who has become His counselor?"<sup>1</sup> Nor again could we have learned in any other way than by seeing our Teacher, that we might become imitators of His works and doers of His words and so have communion with Him, receiving our increase from Him who is perfect and before all creation. We were but recently made by Him who is the highest and best, by Him who is able to bestow the gift of incorruptibility, made according to the image that is with Him and predestined according to the foreknowledge of the Father to be what we were not yet. Made the beginning of [his new] creation, we have received [this gift] in times foreknown by the dispensation of the Word, who is perfect in all things; for He is the mighty Word, and true man. Redeeming us by His blood in accordance with his reasonable<sup>2</sup> nature, He gave Himself as a ransom for those who had been led into captivity. Since the apostasy tyrannized over us unjustly and — when we belonged by nature to God Almighty — had unnaturally alienated us, God's Word, mighty in all things, [reclaimed us], making us His own disciples. Not failing in His quality of justice, He acted justly against the apostasy itself, not redeeming His own from it by force — as it is fitting for God to receive what He wishes by gentleness and not by force. So neither was the standard of what is just infringed nor did the ancient creation of God perish.

So, then, since the Lord redeemed us by His own blood and gave His soul for our souls and His flesh for our bodies and poured out the Spirit of the Father to bring about the union and communion of God and man — bringing God down to men by [the working of] the Spirit and again raising man to God by His incarnation and, by His coming, firmly and truly giving us incorruption — by our communion with God, all the teachings of the heretics are destroyed.

Vain are those who say that His appearance [on earth] was a mere fiction. These things did not take place fictitiously but in reality. If He had appeared as man when he was not really human, the Spirit of God could not have rested on Him, as was the case, since the Spirit is invisible,<sup>3</sup> nor would there have been any truth in him — what was [then taking place] not being what it seemed to be. As I said before, Abraham and the other prophets saw Him prophetically, prophesying by vision what was to be. If He then had appeared without really being what He appeared to be, this would have been just another prophetic vision for men, and they would have had to wait for another coming in which He would be indeed what now was seen prophetically. I have shown too that to say that His appearance was only seeming is the same as to say that He took nothing from Mary. He would not have had real flesh and blood, by which He paid the price [of our salvation], unless He had indeed recapitulated in Himself the ancient making of Adam. Vain, therefore, are the Valentinians who teach this, and so reject the [new] life of the flesh and scorn what God has made.

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\*The entire book can be read here:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.vii.html>

<sup>1</sup> Ro 11:34

<sup>2</sup> A play on words: the Greek for "reasonable" is derived from Logos.

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<sup>3</sup> He seems to be arguing the something invisible does not rest on something invisible.

Vain also are the Ebionites, who do not accept in their souls by faith the union of God and man but remain in the old leaven of [merely] human birth — not wishing to understand that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, and “the power of the Most High overshadowed” her, and so what was born [of her] is holy and the Son of God Most High, the Father of all who thus brought about His incarnation and displayed the new birth, so that — as we by the former birth were heirs of death — by this birth we should be heirs of life. They reject the mixture of the heavenly wine, and wish to be only the water of the world, not receiving God into their mixture,<sup>4</sup> but remaining in that Adam who was conquered and driven out of paradise. They do not reflect that — as at the beginning of our creation in Adam, the breath of life from God, united with the created substance, animated man, and made Him a rational animal — so also at the end, the Word of the Father and the Spirit of God, united with the ancient substance of the creation of Adam, made a living and perfect man, receiving the perfect Father, so that, as in the animal we were all dead, in the spiritual we are all made alive. For Adam never escaped those hands of God<sup>5</sup> to whom the Father said, “Let us make man after our image and likeness.” And therefore, at the last, it was not by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of a man, but by the decree of the Father that His hands perfected a living man, so that there might be a [Second] Adam after the image and likeness of God.

Vain indeed are they who say that God [the Son] came to things not His own, as if covetous of things belonging to another, in order to hand over the man who was made by another to the God who neither made nor created Him, who indeed from the beginning had nothing to do with the true fashioning of man.<sup>6</sup> For a coming such as they allege — to what was another's — would not have been just. Nor would He have truly redeemed us by

His blood if he had not been truly made man, restoring again to His own creation what was said [of it] in the beginning, that man was made according to the image and likeness of God — not snatching by deceit what was another's but justly and graciously claiming what was His own. For with reference to the apostasy, He justly redeemed us from it by His own blood, but with reference to us, who have been redeemed, He acted graciously. For we gave nothing to Him first, nor does He desire anything from us, as if needing it; but we are in need of communion with Him. Therefore, he graciously poured Himself out that He might gather us together into the bosom of the Father.

Vain above all are they who despise the whole dispensation of God and deny the salvation of the flesh and reject its rebirth, saying that it is not capable of incorruption. For if this [mortal flesh] is not saved, then neither did the Lord redeem us by His blood, nor is the cup of the Thanksgiving the communion of His blood or the bread that we break the communion of His body. For blood is only to be found in veins and flesh and the rest of [physical] human nature, which the Word of God was indeed made [partaker of, and so] he redeemed us by His blood. So also, His Apostle says, “In whom we have redemption by his blood, and the remission of sins.”<sup>7</sup> For since we are His members and are nourished by [His] creation — and He Himself gives us this creation, making the sun to rise and sending the rain as He wills — He declares that the cup, [taken] from the creation, is His own blood, by which He strengthens our blood. And He has firmly assured us that the bread, [taken] from the creation, is His own body, by which our bodies grow....

And just as the wooden branch of the vine, placed in the earth, bears fruit in its own time — and as the grain of wheat, falling into the ground and there dissolved, rises with great increase by the Spirit of God, who sustains all things and then by the wisdom of God serves

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<sup>4</sup> The Ebionites only drank water at their Communion.

<sup>5</sup> Irenaeus used these terms for the other members of the Trinity. This was before the term “Trinity” was later invented.

<sup>6</sup> He is speaking of the Marcionites.

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<sup>7</sup> Col 1:14

for the use of men... — so also our bodies, which are nourished by it and then fall into the earth and are dissolved therein, shall rise at the proper time, the Word of God bestowing on them this rising again, to the glory of God the Father. It is He who indeed grants to this mortal immortality, and gives to the corruptible the gracious gift of incorruption, for God's power is made perfect in weakness,<sup>8</sup> so that we should not be puffed up as if we had life from ourselves and be exalted against God, developing ungrateful minds. But we learn by experience that our survival forever comes from His greatness, not from our nature, so that we may neither ignore the glory that surrounds God as He is nor be ignorant of our own nature but may see what it is that God can do and what man receives as a gift [from Him] — and so may not wander from the true conception of the reality of things, with reference to both God and man. May it not be, as I have said, that God allows our dissolution into the earth for this very purpose, that being instructed in every way we should for the future be quite definite about all [these] things, being ignorant neither of God nor of ourselves?

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So the Lord now manifestly came to His own, and — born by His own created order that He Himself bears — He, by his obedience on the tree, renewed [and reversed] what was done by disobedience in [connection with] a tree. And [the power of] that seduction by which the virgin Eve, already betrothed to a man, had been wickedly seduced was broken when the angel in truth brought good tidings to the virgin Mary, who already [by her betrothal] belonged to a man. For as Eve was seduced by the word of an angel to flee from God, having rebelled against His Word, so Mary by the word of an angel received the glad tidings that she would bear God by obeying his Word. The former was seduced to disobey God [and so fell], but the latter was persuaded to obey God, so that the virgin Mary might become the advocate of the

virgin Eve. As the human race was subjected to death through [the act of] a virgin, so was it saved by a virgin, and thus the disobedience of one virgin was precisely balanced by the obedience of another. Then indeed the sin of the first-formed man was amended by the chastisement of the First-begotten, the wisdom of the Serpent was conquered by the simplicity of the Dove,<sup>9</sup> and the chains were broken by which we were in bondage to death.

Therefore, He renews these things in Himself, uniting man to the Spirit and placing the Spirit in man, He Himself is made the head of the Spirit and gives the Spirit to be the head of man, for by Him we see and hear and speak.

He, therefore, completely renewed all things, both taking up the battle against our enemy and crushing him who at the beginning had led us captive in Adam, trampling on his head, as you find in Genesis that God said to the serpent, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed; He will be on the watch for your head, and you will be on the watch for His heel." From then on, it was proclaimed that He who was to be born of a virgin, after the likeness of Adam, would be on the watch for the Serpent's head — this is the seed of which the Apostle says in the Letter to the Galatians, "The law of works was established until the seed should come to whom the promise was made." He shows this still more clearly in the same Letter when he says, "But when the fullness of time was come, God sent His Son, made of a woman." The enemy would not have been justly conquered unless it had been a man [made] of woman who conquered him. For it was by a woman that he had power over man from the beginning, setting himself up in opposition to man. Because of this, the Lord also declares Himself to be the Son of Man, so renewing in Himself that primal man from whom the formation [of man] by woman began — that, as our race went down to death by a man who was conquered, we might ascend again to life by a man who

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<sup>8</sup> See 1 Co 15:53; 2 Co 12:9.

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<sup>9</sup> See Mt 10:16.

overcame. And as death won the palm of victory over us by a man, so we might by a man receive the palm of victory over death.

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Since the opinions of some have been affected by the discourses of the heretics, and they are ignorant of the dispensations of God and the mystery of the resurrection of the just and the Kingdom that is the beginning of incorruption — by which Kingdom those who are worthy will gradually be accustomed to receive [the fullness of] God — it is necessary to speak about these things. For the righteous must first rise again at the appearance of God to receive in this created order — then made new — the promise of the inheritance that God promised to the Fathers and will reign in this order. After this will come the judgment. It is right that, to the same extent in which they labored and were afflicted and tried by all kinds of suffering, they should receive the fruits of [their suffering]; that to the same extent in which they were put to death for the love of God they should again be made alive; and that to the same extent in which they suffered bondage they should reign. For God is rich in all things, and all things are his.<sup>10</sup> It is right, therefore, for this created order to be restored to its pristine state and to serve the just without restraint. The Apostle made this clear in the Letter to the Romans, saying, “For the expectation of the creation awaits the revelation of the sons of God. For the creation was subject to vanity, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope; for the creation itself shall be freed from the servitude of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God.”

So, then, God’s promise that he promised to Abraham remains firm. For he said, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you now are to the north and south and east and west; for all this land that you see I will give to you and to your seed forever.” And again He says, “Arise and go through the land in its length

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<sup>10</sup>See Ro 10:12.

and its breadth, for I will give it to you.”<sup>11</sup> Yet he received no inheritance in it, not even a footprint, but was always a pilgrim and a stranger in it. And when Sarah his wife was dead and the Hittites wanted to give him freely a place for her burial, he would not accept it, but bought a tomb, for which he gave four hundred didrachmas of silver, from Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite.<sup>12</sup> He awaited the promise of God, and did not wish to seem to accept from men what God had promised to give him, saying to him again, “To your seed will I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates.”<sup>13</sup> If, then, God promised him the inheritance of the [Promised] Land, but in all his sojourning there he did not receive it, it must be that he will receive it with his seed, that is, with those who fear God and believe in Him, at the resurrection of the just. For his seed is the Church, which receives through the Lord adoption to God, as John the Baptist said, “That God is able from these stones to raise up sons of Abraham.”<sup>14</sup> The Apostle also says in the Letter to the Galatians, “But you, brothers, are like Isaac, the sons of the promise.” Again, in the same [place] he says clearly that those who have believed in Christ will receive Christ, the promise of Abraham, saying, “To Abraham were the promises uttered and to his seed. And it does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your seed,’ which is Christ.” And again he says, confirming what has been said, “Even as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. You know therefore, that those who are of faith, they are the sons of Abraham. Now the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, foretold to Abraham, ‘In you will all nations be blessed. Therefore those who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham, and they are sons of Abraham. Now God promised the inheritance of the land to Abraham and his seed, and neither

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<sup>11</sup>Gen 13:14-15, 17

<sup>12</sup>See Gen 23.

<sup>13</sup>Gen 15:18

<sup>14</sup>Mt 3:9; Lk 3:8

Abraham nor his seed, that is, those who are justified by faith, have any inheritance in it now, but they will receive it at the resurrection of the just. For God is true and faithful, and therefore, he says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."<sup>15</sup>

Because of this, when He came to His Passion, that He might declare to Abraham and those with him the glad tidings of the opening of the inheritance, after He had given thanks as He held the cup and had drunk of it and given to the disciples, He said to them: "Drink of this, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. For I say to you that I will not drink of the produce of this vine, until that day when I shall drink it with you new in the Kingdom of My Father."<sup>16</sup> Then, He Himself will renew the inheritance of the land, and will re-establish the mystery of the glory of the sons, as David said, "He who renewed the face of the earth."<sup>17</sup> He promised that he would drink of the produce of the vine with His disciples, thus showing both the inheritance of the earth, in which the new produce of the vine is drunk, and the physical resurrection of His disciples. For the new flesh that rises again is the same that has received the new cup. For He cannot be understood as drinking the produce of the vine when established on high with His own, somewhere above the heavens. Nor again are they who drink it without flesh, for it belongs to flesh and not to spirit to receive the drink of the vine.

Because of this, the Lord said, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not invite the rich nor your friends and neighbors and relations, lest they should invite you in return and you receive a reward from them; but invite the lame, the blind, the beggars, who have nothing with which to reward you; for you will be rewarded at the resurrection of the just."<sup>18</sup> And again He says, "Whoever has left fields, or

houses, or parents, or brothers, or sons for my sake shall receive a hundredfold in this world, and in the one to come will inherit eternal life."<sup>19</sup> Where are the hundredfold rewards in this age, the dinners offered to the poor, and the suppers for which a reward is received? These things are [to be] in the times of the Kingdom, that is, on the seventh day, which is sanctified, in which God rested from all his works that He made. This is the true Sabbath of the just, in which they will have no earthly work to do, but will have a table prepared before them by God, who will feed them with dainties of all kinds.

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...So the aforementioned benediction<sup>21</sup> undoubtedly refers to the times of the Kingdom, when the just, rising from the dead, will reign, when the created order will be made new and set free and will produce an abundance of all kinds of food from the dew of heaven and of the fertility of the earth. So the elders remembered, who had seen John the disciple of the Lord, that they had heard from him how the Lord taught about those days and said, "The days will come, in which vines will be produced, each one having a thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and on each twig ten thousand shoots, and on each shoot ten thousand clusters, and in each cluster ten thousand grapes, and each grape when pressed will give twenty-five metretes of wine. And when one of the saints takes hold of a cluster, another will cry, 'I am a better cluster, take me, bless the Lord through me.' Similarly a grain of wheat will produce ten thousand ears, and each ear will have ten thousand grains, and each grain [will yield] ten pounds of clear pure flour; and the other fruits and seeds and grass will produce in the same proportion, and all the animals, using the foods which come from the earth, will be peaceful and harmonious with each other, and perfectly

<sup>15</sup>Mt 5:5

<sup>16</sup>Mt 26:27-29

<sup>17</sup>Ps 104:30

<sup>18</sup>Lk 14:12-14

<sup>19</sup>Mt 19:29; Lk 18-29-30

<sup>20</sup>Irenaeus goes on to similarly show how neither Isaac nor Jacob received the Promised Land either.

<sup>21</sup>to Jacob

subject to man.” Papias, who was a hearer of John and an associate of Polycarp, a fine old man, bore witness to these things in writing, in his fourth book (for there were five books that he compiled<sup>22</sup>). And he went on and said, “These things are credible to believers, and when Judas, the traitor, did not believe, and asked, ‘How can such kinds of production be accomplished [even] by the Lord?’ the Lord answered, ‘Those who come to these things will see them.’” Isaiah, prophesying about these times, said, “And the wolf will feed with the lamb and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the calf and bull and lion will feed together, and a little boy will lead them. The ox and the bear will feed together, and their young ones will be together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. A little child will put his hand in the den of the asps and into the nest of the young of the asps, and they shall do no harm, nor will they be able to injure anyone in my holy mountain.” And again, summarizing, he says, “The wolves and sheep will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and the serpent eat earth like bread; and they will not injure nor disturb in my holy mountain, says the Lord.”<sup>23</sup> I am not unaware that some try to refer these [prophecies] to fierce men of diverse nations and of different kinds of behavior who have believed, and when they have believed have come to agree with the righteous. But although this be now true of various kinds of men who have come from different nations to the one conviction of the faith, nevertheless [it will also be true] in the resurrection of the just with reference to these animals, as it is said, “God is rich over all.” And when the created order is renewed, then the animals ought to be subject to man and return to the food which God gave them at the first, the fruit of the earth, as they were subject and obedient to Adam. Some other time — not now — [will be the occasion] to show how the lion will eat straw. But this is enough to show the size and richness of the

fruits [then to be produced]. For if such an animal as the lion feeds on straw, what kind of grain must it be whose very straw is suitable food for lions?

Since men are real, they must have a real existence, not passing away into things that are not, but advancing [to a new stage] among things that are. Neither the substance nor the essence of the created order vanishes away, for He is true and faithful who established it, but the pattern of this world passes away,<sup>24</sup> that is, the things in which the transgression took place, since in them man has grown old. Therefore, God, foreknowing all things, made this pattern of things temporary, as I showed in the book before this, pointing out as far as I could the reason for the creation of the temporal universe. But when this pattern has passed away and man is made new and flourishes in incorruption, so that he can no longer grow old, then there will be new heavens and a new earth. In this new order, man will always remain new, in converse with God. That this state of things will remain without end, Isaiah says, as follows, “As the new heavens and the new earth, which I make, remain before Me, says the Lord, so your seed and your name will stand.”<sup>25</sup> As the elders say, “Then those who are thought worthy of abode in heaven will go there, others will enjoy the delights of paradise, others will possess the splendor of the city; for everywhere the Savior will be seen, according as those who see him will be worthy.”<sup>26</sup>

This is the distinction of the dwelling place of those who bring forth fruit a hundredfold, sixtyfold, and thirty, respectively;<sup>27</sup> for some will be taken up into the heavens, others will dwell in paradise, and others will inhabit the city. This is why the Lord said, “In my Father’s house are many mansions.”<sup>28</sup> For all things are of God, who provides for all a suitable dwelling place. As His Word says, “The Father divides to all

<sup>22</sup>Sadly, the works of Papias, one of the Apostolic Fathers, are lost to us today, except in a few quotations such as these from other writers.

<sup>23</sup>Is 11:6-9; 65:25

<sup>24</sup>See 1 Co 7:31.

<sup>25</sup>Is 66:22

<sup>26</sup>It is not known what source Irenaeus is using here.

<sup>27</sup>See Mt 13:8; Mk 4:8.

<sup>28</sup>Jn 14:2

according to what each is or will be worthy of; and this is the couch on which those who are invited to the marriage will feast.”<sup>29</sup> This is the ordering and arrangement of those who are saved, say the elders, the disciples of the Apostles, and they advance by such degrees, and by the Spirit they ascend to the Son and by the Son to the Father. Finally, the Son will yield His work to the Father, as is said by the Apostle, “For he must reign, until he shall put all enemies under his feet; death will be destroyed as the last enemy.” For in the times of the Kingdom, the just man then upon earth will already have forgotten how to die. “For when He says, ‘All things will be subject,’ He clearly excepts Him who subjected all things. But when all things are subject to Him, then will the Son Himself be subject to Him who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.”<sup>30</sup>

John, therefore, predicted precisely the first resurrection of the just and [their] inheritance of the earth in the Kingdom, and the prophets prophesied about this in agreement with each other. The Lord also taught thus, promising that he would enjoy the new mixture of the chalice with [His] disciples in the Kingdom. The Apostle also confessed that the creation would be free from the bondage of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God. In all and through all these things, the same God the Father is manifest, who formed man and promised to the Fathers the inheritance of the earth, who brings this [promise] forth at the resurrection of the just, and fulfills the promises in the Kingdom of His Son, afterwards bestowing with paternal love those things that eye has not seen nor ear heard nor have they entered into the heart of man.<sup>31</sup> Then, there is one Son, who accomplished the Father's will, and one human race, in which the mysteries of God are accomplished, which angels long to behold.<sup>32</sup> For they cannot search out the wisdom of God — by which what He had fashioned is perfected

by being conformed and incorporated with the Son — or how that his offspring, the first-begotten Word, could descend into his creation — that is, into what He had fashioned — and be contained within it; or [how] that the creation again should lay hold on the Word and should ascend to Him — passing beyond the angels — and be made [anew] according to the image and likeness of God.

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<sup>29</sup>See Mt 22:2-10.

<sup>30</sup>1 Co 15:27-28

<sup>31</sup>See 1 Co 2:9.

<sup>32</sup>See 1 Pe 1:12.