

Friends of the Center

Totally Alive?!

A few years ago, while talking with Justo at his home in Decatur, I asked him who in church history we needed to resurrect today in our reading and formation as Christian leaders. Without much hesitation, he said: “Irenaeus, who lived in the second century and presents us with a message centered on Christian unity.” Of course, as a good student, the first thing I did was complete my library with everything I could find about and by Irenaeus. How enriching it has been to read the thoughts of this presbyter, defender of the faith, survivor of persecutions, and martyr himself! Irenaeus, who, when speaking about the image of God, points us to Christ, whose incarnation was already God’s purpose even before the creation of humankind or even sin.

And Justo is right. Irenaeus tells us that God made humanity to be able to progress in a useful, harmonious, and consonant way. He speaks to us of Christ as the dispenser of the Father’s grace for our holistic health and well-being. That day, Justo invited me to consider that this is why Genesis begins in a garden and ends in a city, something not negative, but rather a sign that God is at work in history for advancement, growth, prosperity, and care for each of us, even despite the presence of sin.

No wonder one of Irenaeus’s best known phrases is: “For the glory of God is a human being fully alive, and the life of the human is the vision of God” (IV, 20.7). A challenging call in a world full of signs of death all around. It’s very easy to die today amid the flood of bad news, the harm we cause one another as humanity, the exhaustion of daily stress, the draining interruptions of digital life. Yes, today it seems easier to give in to apathy in the face of catastrophe—the destruction of the Holy Land and those in it, the struggle for control of Europe, the inaction toward Haiti, the deaths of Christians in Africa, or the criminalization of migrants in the United States. It seems easier to let ourselves die from discouragement than to hold on to hope, cultivate life, or speak good news.

But we, who so often sing about “the glory of God” or shout “glory to God” in nearly every one of our weekly services, perhaps could begin by asking ourselves: How am I the glory of God here, today, now? How do I live out His glory in my body, in my family, in my community, in my city? How do I stay alive to give glorious life to those around me?

If creation is only the beginning of God’s purposes, then remember that whatever you do with your physical being on a daily basis, with the full integration of your senses and energies, with the life you have received in Christ, which is also God’s creation and re-creation, with all of that, you are manifesting the glory of God.

In every small effort to seek well-being, in every ministry call of comfort or service, in every day spent at the gym fighting those extra pounds or that cholesterol, or in the communion of forgiveness and reconciliation at the table



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open to everyone, in every follow-up visit to the doctor or therapist, whether for yourself or accompanying someone else, there, too, is the glory of God. I believe that in us, as Irenaeus said, God is “that which is worth seeing” (IV, 37.3).

**The use of both exclamation and question in the title is not an editing mistake. I intended to anticipate the theme of the reflection. Perhaps the awe of still being alive can give rise to a new question about how to continue spreading the life we've been given.*

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RESOURCE CENTER