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St. Irenaeus of Lyon on Humanity's Salvation

We're sometimes asked "Are you sure the adoption of humanity is the gospel? I've never heard it before." In this light we find it helpful to look at the writings of other Christians who have expressed the gospel clearly.

Irenaeus of Lyon, writing in the 2nd century, addressed the question of whether Adam (and Eve) are saved in Christ. He makes this argument (emphasis ours):

*. . . inasmuch as humanity is saved, it is fitting that he who was created the original human should be saved. For it is too absurd to maintain that he who was so deeply injured by the enemy, and was the first to suffer captivity, was not rescued by Him who conquered the enemy, but that his children were — those whom he had begotten in the same captivity. Neither would the enemy appear to be as yet conquered, if the old spoils remained with him. *Against All Heresies, Book 3, Chap. 23, Para. 2.**

Does his argument seem radical to us? Many of us wouldn't know whether Adam is saved or not, but it is quite clear to Irenaeus. He says "it's absurd to think that Jesus would save the human race and not save the father of the human race!"

Is Irenaeus, then, a universalist? No - he understands that all humanity has been adopted into the life of the Trinity and saved from the devil, but that doesn't mean that all humanity believes this truth about themselves. In our distinction we can still choose to believe the enemy's lie that we are his captives, even when the truth is that Jesus has rescued us all.