

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON IRENAEUS SCRIPTURE AS ORACULAR STANDARD

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Abstract

Irenaeus' (c.135-202) five books Adversus Haereses (Against the Heresies) give evidence of a mature and circumscribed concept of Scripture. From an analysis of relevant passages, using a philological method, this article demonstrates that Irenaeus suggested to his readers that:

- 1) The Scriptures are divine oracles of God, revealed from heaven.*
- 2) The Scriptures are without lies, expressive of God's truth, and may consequently be used as proof to establish religious views.*
- 3) Old and New Testament Scripture find their unity in their joint origin in the Creator God, and in effectively serving as Words of Christ.*

1. Introduction

Irenaeus (c.135-202), the second century Church father from the south of France, has gained in stature and appreciation over the last few decades. Scholarship has come a long way since the 1930's, an era dominated by Friedrich Loofs and his belief that Irenaeus was not really the author of most of the books ascribed to him. In the post-war years, the scene in the English speaking world was dominated by Lawson who accused Irenaeus of historical ignorance and a primitive worldview (1948: 23, 95).

Subsequent years slowly, but surely, saw a change in attitude. Bengsch (1957) showed that Irenaeus made a lot of theological sense after all. Eventually, Loof's theory of a literary dependency on Theophilus of Antioch was criticized by Hitchcock (1981). Later, Grant (1997) would go even further and propose the very opposite of Loofs' theory, namely that Irenaeus consciously corrected Theophilus. Irenaeus is firmly back at scholarly stardom status and recognized as a reliable author who reflects the state of affairs towards the end of the second century in a trustworthy manner (cf. Rogers 2002:113).

If the latest perspectives on Irenaeus are correct, this calls for a greater input of his writings into establishing one's view of the early Church. This article singles out Irenaeus' view of the Scriptures. On the basis of the old view, Lawson (1948: 105-111, 293) argued at the time that it was not so much Scripture but the Church as a "living voice" who was able to define and if necessary change truth for believers. This article will examine this thesis on the basis that Irenaeus is a reliable author who reflects what was thought in the Christian Church in the second half of the first century. This is even more fascinating, as Irenaeus repeatedly claims continuance with the days and doctrines of the Apostles. The gap between him and the last Apostle (John) still alive according to tradition (e.g. Eusebius), was not much greater than that between scholarship today and the days of Friedrich Loofs. If Irenaeus is reliable, particularly in his appreciation of Biblical material and Apostolic teaching, he is likely to be representative not only for his own time, but for earlier days also, as Irenaeus makes much of claiming agreement with the Apostolic era.

This article will demonstrate that Irenaeus' concept of Scripture and divine revelation did not find its relevance in the "living voice" of the Church. On the contrary, *Adversus Haereses* (Against the Heresies) shows a mature and circumscribed, if not static concept of Scripture. This is not without significance, as it was recently argued to be the case with Irenaeus' contemporary on the other side of the Mediterranean, Clement of Alexandria (Cf. Zuiddam 2010:307-319). This agreement indicates that the new perspectives on Irenaeus are on the right track in treating him as a reliable author again. While lacking in public decisions on the issue of canon at general Church councils, Irenaeus' work indicates that early Christianity had definite ideas on Scripture, both in its Old Testament and New Testament appearance.

The five books that Irenaeus of Lyons wrote Against the Heresies indicate that much of the present Bible was established by the end of the second century. Irenaeus quotes nearly all alleged biblical authors and from almost all books that would become part of the canon of the Old and New Testament (as the Church officially acknowledged these books in later years). The extent of Irenaeus' reference to the Scriptures is astounding: more than 1600 firm quotes in his main work *Adversus Haereses* only,¹ and that is not counting deutero-canonical references to the Septuagint.

While it is widely acknowledged that Irenaeus knew most of the present Bible, it should be helpful to establish his view on Scripture. How definite was it? Did it specifically include books of the New Testament? What was Irenaeus' attitude to these Scriptures? What was the role of Scripture in relation to divine revelation? How authoritative was holy writ? Did early Christians think that the Bible had a supernatural source, or did it come up organically from the religious community?

This article explores the theoretical premise that Scripture already functioned as a spiritual standard for Christianity by the latter half of the second century. Using a philological method, this article will present relevant passages that shed light on the church father's view of Scripture. It will follow the order of *Adversus Haereses* and

¹ Benno Zuiddam, *Heilige Letters en Lettergrepen, de functie en het karakter van Schriftgezag in de 2e eeuw*, *Teologia*, Dordrecht 2007: 293-297, shows that in *Adversus Haereses* Irenaeus quotes most books of the Old Testament en nearly all books of the New Testament, except Philemon and 3 John.

quote relevant passages in English.² The Latin text of the three main manuscripts (following Stieren's critical edition)³ is given in footnotes. When a reliable Greek text (using Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, 2006 edition) is available for a particular passage, this is provided as well.

2. *Adversus Haereses I: Oracles from heaven*

In his first book *Against the Heresies*, Irenaeus treats the Scriptures as oracles, which were revealed from heaven by God, the Creator of all things. He confirms the truthfulness and clarity of these Scriptures and uses this to declare the Gnostic teachings a misrepresentation of Scripture.

2.1 *The Oracles of the Creator*

Irenaeus treats the Scriptures as divine oracles that are revealed from heaven, originating with the God who made heaven and earth. For Irenaeus it is the Creator who communicates with his creation by means of Scripture.

I.1.

*Since there are some, who, putting the truth away from them, introduce in its stead false tales and vain genealogies, which minister questions, according to the saying of the Apostle, rather than godly edifying which is of faith, and by cunningly putting together plausible topics pervert the mind of the simpler sort, and lead them away captive, adulterating the oracles of the Lord: so becoming evil expounders of good words, and subvert many, withdrawing them, under pretence of knowledge, from him by whom this universe was framed and adorned, as though they had something higher and greater to show them than God who made heaven and earth and all things that are therein;*⁴

² For the English translation dependence on John Keble's is acknowledged. Keble's translation of the works of Irenaeus probably remains one of the most literal translations of the Latin. Older expressions, like "rule" where "ruler," "standard" or "rod of truth" are intended, have been updated with their modern equivalents (cf. Minns 2009:11). Keble's translation was published posthumously in 1872. Cf. Austin Cooper, *The Library of the Fathers*, *Pacifica* 15 (2002): 294-306. For a more recent edition, see Robert McQueen Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, Routledge, Oxford: 1997. Keble was one of the leaders of the Oxford movement and a friend of Newman's.

³ Adolphus Stieren, *Sancti Irenaei episcopi lugdunensis quae supersunt omnia*, Weigel, Lipsiae (Leipzig) 1853. It contains all the main manuscript alternatives for *Adversus Haereses* (Clermont, Vossius and Arundel). There are no textcritical issues that have a bearing on the meaning in the passages discussed in this article. See: Henry Dodwell, *Anglican Scholarship gone mad?* In: C. R. Ligota, Jean-Louis Quantin, *History of Scholarship*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006: 317-318 Cf. F. R. Montgomery Hitchcock, *Irenaeus of Lugdunum: a study of his teaching*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1981: 46-47.

⁴ Adv. Haer. I.1 (cf. Eusebius HE, V.7).

ἘΠΙ Ι. Ἐπεὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν παραπεμπόμενοι τινες, ἐπεισάγουσι λόγους ψευδεῖς καὶ γενεαλογίας ματαίας, αἵτινες ζητήσεις μᾶλλον παρέχουσι, καθὼς ὁ Ἀπόστολός φησιν, ἢ οἰκοδομὴν Θεοῦ τὴν ἐν πίστει· καὶ διὰ τῆς πανούργως συγκεκριμένης πιθανότητος παράγουσι τὸν νοῦν τῶν ἀπειροτέρων, καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζουσιν αὐτοὺς, ῥαδιουργοῦντες τὰ λόγια Κυρίου, ἐξηγηταὶ κακοὶ τῶν καλῶς εἰρημένων γινόμενοι· καὶ πολλοὺς ἀνατρέπουσιν, ἀπάγοντες αὐτοὺς προφάσει γνώσεως ἀπὸ τοῦ τῶδε τὸ πᾶν συστησαμένου καὶ κεκοσμηκότος, ὡς ὑψηλότερόν τι καὶ μείζον ἔχοντες ἐπιδειξάμενοι τοῦ τὸν οὐρανὸν, καὶ τὴν γῆν, καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς πεποιηκότος Θεοῦ·

I.1 Quatenus veritatem refutantes quidam inducunt verba falsa et genalogias infinitas, quae quaestiones magis praestant, quemadmodum apostolus ait, quam aedificationem Dei, quae est in fide; et per eam, que est

It is significant that Irenaeus uses the expression oracles (τὰ λόγια Κυρίου). While the commonly used λόγος is primarily word, a communicative vehicle of any sort, this is not true about λόγιον. Like λόγος it is a word, but it is much more restricted in its meaning. The ancient Greeks used it to describe an oracle (cf. Liddell & Scott 1996:1056), i.e. an authoritative pronouncement of the gods.

In other words, while the author of λόγος could be human or divine, λόγιον was always produced in the heavenlies. This express way of putting it shows that the church father has divine revelation in mind with an origin out of this world. The context in which he presents this, with God as the Creator of heaven and earth, including everything these contain, reinforces this. It also indicates that Irenaeus is not referring to a compilation of sayings of Christ, but is using Lord in the same way as the writers of the Septuagint, as a reference to the God of the covenant. The Scriptures are not mere words of the Lord, but Oracles of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Irenaeus' use of τὰ λόγια in the Greek version one finds with Eusebius seems to support the theory that the church father originally wrote in Greek. The Vulgate translations of the passages in the New Testament that carry the same expression (Acts 7:38,⁵ Romans 3:2,⁶ Hebrews 5:12⁷ and 1 Peter 4:11⁸) are general, and do not specifically reflect the oracular nature of the communication. Read within the context of the passages, words like *verbum*, *eloquium* and *sermo* reflect the divine nature of the communication, just like "Word of God" is a modern equivalent. The more literal rendering of the τὰ λόγια, *oraculis*, may have had a pagan connotation in Latin at the time.

While this is fairly self-explanatory if Irenaeus wrote in Greek originally, the process poses problems if tried the other way around. A Greek translator would not easily have included τὰ λόγια with its specific oracular connotation, unless there was a specific warrant in the Latin text: probably *oraculis*. Otherwise he would have opted for λόγοι, which is used for Words of God as well. Using τὰ λόγια would have been considered undue initiative. For this reason it is likely that Irenaeus wrote his books *Adversus Haereses* originally in Greek.

2.2 *The Scriptures as Oracles of God*

The same thought of the Scriptures as supernatural communication from the realms of the divine returns in the early part of *Adversus Haereses*. Had the Greek preservation of Irenaeus been available for more passages, this would have left interesting avenues

subdole exercitata verisimilitude, transducunt sensum eorum, qui sunt inexpertiores et in captivitatem ducunt eos falsantes verba Domini, interpretatores mali eorum, quae bene dicta sunt, effecti; et multos evertunt, attrahentes eos sub occasione agnitionis ab eo, qui hanc universitatem constituit et ordinavit, quasi altius aliquid et maius habentes ostendere, quam eum, qui caelum et terram et omnia, que in eis sunt, fecit.

⁵ Acts 7:38: 38 Hic est qui fuit in ecclesia in solitudine cum angelo, qui loquebatur ei in monte Sina, et cum patribus nostris : qui accepit **verba** vitæ dare nobis.

⁶ Rom 3:2: Multum per omnem modum. Primum quidem quia credita sunt illis **eloquia** Dei.

⁷ Heb 5:12: Etenim cum deberetis magistri esse propter tempus, rursum indigetis ut vos doceamini quæ sint elementa exordii **sermonum** Dei: et facti estis quibus lacte opus sit, non solido cibo.

⁸ 1 Pet 4:11: Si quis loquitur, quasi **sermones** Dei : si quis ministrat, tamquam ex virtute, quam administrat Deus: ut in omnibus honorificetur Deus per Jesum Christum : cui est gloria et imperium in sæcula sæculorum. Amen.

to explore. On the basis of I.1 and I.8.1 it is not unreasonable to suppose that the use of *verbum*, *eloquium* and *sermo* in the Latin version of *Adversus Haereses* may indicate the use of λόγιον in the Greek original in more than one place. The following passage shows two incidents of *eloquia* (for λόγια).

1.8.1

Now such being their theory (which the Prophets didn't proclaim, the Lord didn't teach, and the Apostles didn't preach) whereby they flatter themselves that they know more concerning the universe than all others, reading it, out of what was never written, and as the saying is: studying to twist ropes out of sand. They endeavour plausibly to accommodate to what has been said either in the Parables of our Lord, or prophetic sayings or discourses of the Apostles, that their fiction may not appear to be without witness. The order indeed and connection of the Scriptures they overpass, and as much as they can, disjoin the members of the Truth. And they transfer and transform, and make one thing out of another, and so deceive many, by their perverse skill in tacking together the Lord's oracles which they so apply. Much as if there were an image of a king, made beautiful out of brilliant pebbles by some skilful artificer. But if someone else should do away with the form of man which exists in it, and transfer those pebbles, and rearrange them in the form of a dog, or a fox, and that vilely put together, but still definitively affirming this to be that beautiful Image of the King which the skilful Artist constructed, pointing out the pebbles which were well combined by the first work-man to make the Image of the King, but badly rearranged by the later one into the form of a dog. Someone like that thinks that he can mislead by the mere and empty show of the pebbles unskilful people who have no conception of a royal form, and persuade them that this unsound form of a fox is that same beautiful image of the King. In the same way, I say, these <Gnostics> also, having stitched together some old women's fables, then drag off from this quarter and that words and sayings and parables; endeavouring to adapt the Oracles of God to their fables.⁹

⁹ I.8.1 (Migne 1.1.15) Τοιαύτης δὲ τῆς ὑποθέσεως αὐτῶν οὔσης, ἣν οὔτε Προφῆται ἐκήρυξαν, οὔτε ὁ Κύριος ἐδίδαξεν, οὔτε Ἀπόστολοι παρέδωκαν, ἦν περὶ τῶν ὅλων ἀυχούσι πλεῖον τῶν ἄλλων ἐγνωκέναι, ἐξ ἀγράφων ἀναγινώσκοντες, καὶ τὸ δὴ λεγόμενον, ἐξ ἄμμου σχοινία πλέκειν ἐπιτηδεύοντες, ἀξιοπίστως ἀξιοπίστα Assem. προσαρμόζειν πειρῶνται τοῖς εἰρημένοις, ἦτοι παραβολὰς κυριακάς, ἢ ῥήσεις προφητικὰς, ἢ λόγους ἀποστολικούς, ἵνα τὸ πλάσμα αὐτῶν μὴ ἀμάρτυρον εἶναι δοκῆ· τὴν μὲν τάξιν καὶ τὸν εἰρμόν τῶν γραφῶν ὑπερβαίνοντες, καὶ, ὅσον ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς, λύοντες τὰ μέλη τῆς ἀληθείας. Μεταφέρουσι δὲ καὶ μεταπλάττουσι, καὶ ἄλλο ἐξ ἄλλου ποιοῦντες ἐξαπατῶσι πολλοὺς τῆ τῶν ἐφαρμοζομένων κυριακῶν λογίων κακοσυνθέτῳ σοφίᾳ φαντασίᾳ Ephr. S.. Ὅνπερ τρόπον εἴ τις βασιλέως εἰκόνας καλῆς κατεσκευασμένης ἐπιμελῶς ἐκ ψηφίδων ἐπισήμων ὑπὸ σοφοῦ τεχνίτου, λύσας τὴν ὑποκειμένην τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἰδέαν, μετενέγκῃ τὰς ψηφίδας ἐκεῖνας, καὶ μεθαρμόσοι, καὶ ποιήσῃ μορφήν κυνὸς ἢ ἀλώπεκος, καὶ ταύτην φαύλως κατεσκευασμένην, ἔπειτα διορίζοιτο, καὶ λέγοι ταύτην εἶναι τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως ἐκείνην εἰκόνα τὴν καλὴν, ἣν ὁ σοφὸς τεχνίτης κατεσκεύασε, δεικνὺς τὰς ψηφίδας τὰς καλῶς ὑπὸ τοῦ τεχνίτου τοῦ πρώτου εἰς τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως εἰκόνα συντεθείσας, κακῶς δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ ὑστεροῦ εἰς κυνὸς μορφήν μετενεχθείσας, καὶ διὰ τῆς τῶν ψηφίδων φαντασίας μεθοδεύοι τοὺς ἀπειροτέρους, τοὺς κατάληψιν βασιλικῆς μορφῆς οὐκ ἔχοντας, καὶ πείθοι ὅτι αὕτη ἢ σαπρὰ τῆς ἀλώπεκος ἰδέα ἐστὶν ἐκείνη ἢ καλὴ τοῦ βασιλέως εἰκῶν· τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον καὶ οὔτοι γραφῶν μύθους συγκαττύσαντες, ἔπειτα ῥήματα καὶ λέξεις καὶ παραβολὰς ὅθεν καὶ πόθεν ἀποσπῶντες, ἐφαρμόζειν βούλονται

The first reference to oracles (κυριακῶν λογίων) seems to refer to Jesus' teaching on earth. Unlike I.1, where τὰ λόγια Κυρίου was used in the context of the Creator God, here the context mentions Jesus' parables (παραβολὰς κυριακὰς). Linguistically there is a difference between the adjective *dominicus* (*abl. pl.*)/κυριακῶν and the straightforward genitive singular (Κυρίου) with the plural accusative (λόγια). The adjective case could refer to a collection of sayings rather than to Scripture as a more formal entity, also in the sense of a literary unity. Twisting the Lord's oracles is the issue here for Irenaeus. The Gnostics take from and mix from his parables as they please for their own purposes.

However, the reference to "Oracles of the Lord" should not be used to conjure up a collection of Jesus-sayings exclusively, or worse, some 'Logia Quelle'. The context in Irenaeus does not justify the assumption of a separate literary unit. Elsewhere he makes much of stressing four authoritative Gospels, containing the parables of the Lord, only. For Irenaeus it is just Jesus' particular sayings, teachings in the forms of parables that are being abused by the Gnostics. These are not used in isolation, but are mentioned with a larger body of "truth" in one breath: ἡ ῥήσεις προφητικὰς, ἡ λόγους ἀποστολικοῦς. In other words, the oracles that belong to the Lord come in a package and may as well refer to the four Gospels that Irenaeus makes so much of elsewhere (*III.11.8*). That the reference does not concern parables only seems to be confirmed by the ending of this passage where Irenaeus refers to "words, and sayings and parables" (ῥήματα καὶ λέξεις καὶ παραβολὰς) rather than to parables only.

To translate ῥήσεις προφητικὰς as "prophetic sayings" is probably too weak. In the light of Irenaeus' use of the terms, Grant (1997:23) is not wrong to introduce oracles as translation: "Ptolemaeus seemed especially dangerous because he distorted texts from the Lord's mysterious parables, the oracles of the prophets, and the words of the apostles." In the end, however, whether it is the Scriptures containing the Word of the Lord, the Prophets or the Apostles, for Irenaeus these all function on the same oracular level in principle, that of divine revelation.

τοῖς μύθοις αὐτῶν ἑαυτῶν Ephr. S. τὰ λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ ὅσα μὲν ἐν τοῖς I. τοῖς ἐντὸς τοῦ Πληρώματος ἐφαρμόζουσιν, εἰρήκαμεν.

I.8.1 Quum sit igitur tale illorum argumentum, quod neque prophetae praedicaverunt, neque Dominus docuit, neque apostoli tradiderunt, quod abundantius gloriantur plus quam ceteri gonovisse, de iis quae non sunt scripta legentes, et, quod solet dici de arena resticulas nectere affectantes, fide digna aptare conantur iis quae dicta dunt, vel parabolas dominicas, vel dictiones propheticas, aut sermones apostolicos, ut figmentum illorum non sine teste esse videatur; ordinem quidem et textum Scripturarum supergredientes, et, quantum in ipsis est, solvents membra veritatis. Transferunt autem et transfigunt et alterum ex altero facientes, seducunt multos, ex iis, quae aptant ex dominicus eloquiis male composito phantasmati. Quomodo si quis regis imaginem bonam, fabricatam diligenter ex gemmis pretiosis a sapiente artifice, solvens subiacentem hominis figuram, transferat gemmas illas, et reformans faciat ex iis formam canis, vel vulpeculae, et hanc male dispositam; dehinc confirmet et dicat, hanc esse regis illam imaginem bonam, quam sapiens artifex fabricavit, ostendens gemmas, quae bene quidem a primo artifice in regis imaginem compositae errant, male vero a posterior in canis figuram translatae sunt; et per gemmrum phantasiam decipiat idiotas, qui comprehensionem regalis formae non habeant, et suadeat quoniam haec turpis vulpeculae figura illa est bana regis imago: eodem modo et hi anicularum fabulas adsuentes, post deinide sermones et dictiones et parabolas hinc inde auferentes adaptare volunt fabulis suis eloquia Dei.

2.3 *Gnostic inventions versus Scripture*

The great antithesis which Irenaeus identifies in *Adversus Haereses*, is one between the sacred Scriptures and the Gnostic writings. According to the church father the main problem with the Gnostics' approach is that they "misrepresent" or "find fault with" (*calumniantes*) the Scriptures.

I.9.1

*You see, dearly beloved, their craft! Those who use it, deceive themselves, dealing rudely with the Scriptures, in their endeavours to make good out of them their own fiction. And this is why I have quoted from their own words, that by them you might discern their cunning craftiness and wicked deceptions.*¹⁰

Although Eric Francis Osborn (Irenaeus of Lyons, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001:180) makes much of alleged "canonical uncertainties of Irenaeus' time," this uncertainty is not reflected in *Adversus Haereses*. Any reference to Scripture is presented by Irenaeus forcefully and authoritatively, and without apology or clarification which would have been present if his readership would need any enlightenment on the subject. Irenaeus refers to most books of the Bible. The most natural explanation for this is that he and his readers shared a concept of Scripture that was not troubled by canonical uncertainties, either because they didn't mind (which is unlikely in the light of Irenaeus' concerns about other, heretical books in *Adversus Haereses*, e.g. I.9.1) or because they didn't have any.

2.4 *Mutilating the Scriptures is adulterating the truth*

For Irenaeus the Scriptures, God and truth are treated on the same level. This becomes clear as the church father fulminates against Marcion's teaching that Abel, Enoch and Noah were lost, but that Cain and the Sodomites were saved.

I.27.4

*Because he alone dared openly both to mutilate the Scriptures, and to revile God more shamelessly than all others; indeed him we will refute in a separate place, convicting him out of his own writings: and by those discourses of our Lord and the Apostle, which are retained by him, we will by God's help overthrow. But we were obliged to mention him now, that you might know of all who in any way adulterate the truth, and damage the preaching of the Church, how that they are disciples and successors of Simon the sorcerer of Samaria.*¹¹

Interestingly, while Irenaeus speaks about "the apostle" in the singular (*apostoli*, gen.) this should not be taken to read that there was some super apostle status attached to the Apostle Paul on the basis of his prolific writing. In this passage it not a reference to

¹⁰ I.9.1 *Vides igitur, dilectissime, adinventionem, qua utentes seducunt semetipsos, calumniantes Scripturis, fictionem suam ex eis constare adnitentes. Propter hoc enim et ipsas eorum apposui astutias et dictiones, ut ex eis consideres malitiam inventionis et nequitiam erroris. (Ed. St, 107)*

¹¹ I.27.4 *Sed huic quidem, quoniam et solus manifeste ausus est circumcidere Scripturas et impudorate super omnes obtrechare Deum, seorsum contradicemus, ex eius scriptis arguentes eum; et ex iis sermonibus, qui apud eum observati sunt, Domini et apostoli, quibus ipse ulitur, eversionem eius faciemus, praestante Deo. Nunc autem necessario meminimus eius, ut scires, quoniam omnes, qui quoquo modo adulterant veritatem et praeconium ecclesiae ladedunt, Simonis Samaritani magi discipuli et successors sunt.*

Paul at, but to the Apostle Peter who confronted Simon Magnus, the sorcerer from Samaria (Acts 8:9-25).

2.5 *Clarity of Scripture*

According to Irenaeus the Scriptures are God's vehicle to communicate clearly to the human race.

II.27.1

*The sound, and safe, and cautious, and truth-loving mind, whatsoever things God has put within the power of man, and has submitted to our knowledge, in those it will thoroughly exercise itself with all readiness, and in them will make progress, by such daily exercise facilitating its own improvement. And these are, partly, such as fall under our very sight, partly such as are openly and unambiguously expressed in terms in the divine Scriptures.*¹²

The Greek (ἐν ταῖς θεείαις γραφαῖς) is more outspoken than the Latin (*Scripturis*), but the omission of a translation for θεείαις is probably due to the fact that Scriptura (fem. sing.) had become a synonym for divine revelation in writing in that language already. For Irenaeus this revelation is *aperte et sine ambiguo*, clear and with no uncertain meaning. The mind of God reveals itself clearly to those who are willing to learn from the Scriptures.

From the first book *Adversus Haereses* the following is clear about Irenaeus's view of the Scriptures.

- a) For the church father they are the Creator of heaven and earth's vehicle to communicate with the human race;
- b) Irenaeus treats the Scriptures specifically as a body of divine oracles that are revealed from heaven;
- c) The oracular quality extends not to Old Testament writings only, but also to the Gospels and Apostolic writings;
- d) According to Irenaeus God communicates in those Scriptures in a clear way that can be picked up by those who read.
- e) On the basis of the perspicuity of the Scriptures, the Gnostic teachings may be rejected as being a misrepresentation of Scripture, which for Irenaeus equals a misrepresentation of the truth and the mind of God.

3. *Adversus Haereses II: Scripture as basis for Irenaeus' teaching*

In book II of *Adversus Haereses* Irenaeus presents Scripture as the basis for his teachings. What the Church says must agree with holy writ. He tells his readers that Scripture is the test to discern whether teaching agrees with the mind of God in this

¹² II.39.1 (Migne) Ὁ ὑγιῆς νοῦς, καὶ ἀκίνδυνος, καὶ εὐλαβῆς, καὶ φιλαληθῆς, ὅσα μὲν ἐν τῇ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐξουσία δέδωκεν ὁ Θεὸς, καὶ ὑποτέταχε τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ γνώσει, ταῦτα προθύμως ἐκμελετήσῃ, καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς προκόψει, διὰ τῆς καθημερινῆς ἀσκήσεως ῥαδίαν τὴν μάθησιν ἑαυτῷ ποιούμενος. Ἔστι δὲ ταῦτα, τὰ τε ὑπ' ὄψιν πίπτοντα τὴν ἡμετέραν, καὶ ὅσα φανερώς καὶ ἀναμφιβόλως αὐτολεξεῖ ἐν ταῖς θεείαις γραφαῖς λέλεκται.

II.27.1 *Sensus autem sanus et qui sine periculo est et religiosus et amans verum, quae quidem dedit in hominum postestatem Deus et subdidit nostrae scientiae, haec promte meditabitur, et in ipsis proficiet, diuturno studio facilem scientiam eorum efficiens. Sunt autem haec, quae ante oculos nostros occurrunt, et quaecunque aperte et sine ambiguo ipsis dictionibus posita sunt in Scripturis.*

way. The Church father makes it clear that as far as he is concerned, God used the mouth of Moses, the Prophets, the Lord, the writers of the four Gospels and the Apostles alike to make his truth known on earth.

3.1 Scripture as proof, source of light, standard of interpretation

Irenaeus reckons both the Prophets and the Gospels as part of the Scriptures. Book two contains a clear example of this. It is again with the God who spoke as Creator that the Church father connects God's speaking through sacred Scripture (cf. 2.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.2, 4.4).

II.27.2

And so on this plan a man will be always seeking but will never find, because he will have cast away the very rule of discovery. And when the Bridegroom is come, that person who has his lamp unprepared, shining with no radiance of open light, has recourse to such as distort in the dark their solutions of parables, forsaking him who by open proclamation bestows free admission where He is, and so is excluded from his hall where the marriage feast takes place.

Since then all the Scriptures, both Prophecies and Gospels may be heard openly, and unequivocally, and alike, by all, though not all believe; since they set forth one only God, exclusive of others, who made all by His Word, visible and invisible, in heaven and in earth, in water and under the earth;—as we have demonstrated from the very words of the Scriptures, the creature itself also wherein we are, witnessing the same by what comes in sight.¹³

Again Irenaeus stresses the perspicuity of the Scriptures (*in aperto et sine ambiguitat*), both the Prophets and the Gospels. That he really sees this on the same level as God's revelation through Moses becomes clear when Irenaeus connects them with the Creator God, who had but to speak and it was. He made all things through his Word (*omnia fecisse per Verbum suum, sive visibilia sive invisibilia sive caelestia sive terrena sive aqatilia sive subterranea*) and continues to speak through the Scriptures, not only through the record of these events in Moses, but through the Prophets and the Gospels as well.

3.2 God's Scriptures (the Lord, Moses, prophets) proclaim the truth

Irenaeus presents the Scriptures as a body of truth, measured against which the Gnostic teachers fall short.

¹³ II.27.2 *Itaque secundum hanc rationem homo quidem semper inquiret, nunquam autem inveniet, eo quod ipsam inventionis abiecerit disciplinam. Et quum venerit sponsus, is qui imparatam habet lampadem, nulla manifesti luminis claritate fulgentem, recurrit ad eos qui absolutiones parabolarum in tenebris distrahunt, relinquens eum qui per manifestam praedicationem gratis donat ad eum ingressum, et excluditur a thalamo eius.*

Quum itaque universae Scripturae, et prophetiae et evangelia, in aperto et sine ambiguitate et similiter ab omnibus audiri possint, etsi non omnes credunt; unum et solum Deum, ad excludendos alios, praedicent omnia fecisse per Verbum suum, sive visibilia sive invisibilia sive caelestia sive terrena sive aqatilia sive subterranea, sicut demonstravimus ex ipsis Scripturarum dictionibus; et ipsa autem creatura, in qua sumus, per ea, quae in aspectum veniunt, hoc ipsum testante, unum esse qui eam fecerit et regat.

II.30.6

*First of all, we have shown from the divine Scriptures that all the aforesaid things, visible and invisible, are made by one God. For these men are not more competent than the Scriptures; nor ought we leave the words of the Lord, and Moses, and of the other Prophets, proclaimers of the truth, to trust these men, who say nothing sound, but are restless and doting.*¹⁴

As Irenaeus had already shown from the Scriptures that God made all things - and was really the Creator God as well as the Saviour – *ostendimus* should be read as a perfect rather than a present active indicative.

Again it is the proclamation of “the truth” and them being vehicles of communication for God that binds the Lord, Moses and the other prophets together. In the mind of Irenaeus this creates a basis for trust, for believing (*credere*). As the Gnostics do not speak the mind of God and fall short when compared with the body of truth, they cannot be trusted. They lack foundation in the truth. As a result they are unwholesome and unstable, if not deranged and mad (*delirantibus*). The latter should be understood against the background of their rejection of the all-powerful Creator God. A dangerous thing to do, and for Irenaeus their attitude was worse than unwise or silly.

3.3 Scripture as divine proof, the basis of Irenaeus teaching

As Irenaeus closes book II of *Adversus Haereses* he announces what he is going to do in his next book Against the Heresies: he is going to use Scripture as divine proof.

II.35.4

*And that with our sayings agrees the preaching of the Apostles, and the teaching of the Lord, and the announcement of the Prophets, and that which is put into our mouths by the Apostles, and the ministration of the Jewish—all of them praising one and the same God of all, the Father ; and not now one and now another, nor as having had substance from various Gods or Powers; but all are of one and the same Father (adapted however by Him to the natures and state of the several subjects): and that neither by Angels, nor by any other virtue, but by God the Father alone, were made things both visible and invisible, and all things whatsoever: has been indeed, as I think, sufficiently shown hereby, many as the points are, in that we have proved that there is one God, the Father, Maker of all. But that we may not be thought to shrink from that mode of proof which the Scriptures of Christ furnish; although those Scriptures of themselves do much more distinctly and clearly declare the same;—to such as are rightly considerate we will present a special book, tracing out those Scriptures: so out of the divine writings will our arguments be set within reach of all who love the Truth.*¹⁵

¹⁴ II.30.6 *Primo quidem ex dominicis Scripturis ostendimus, omnia, quae praedicta sunt, visibilia et invisibilia ab uno Deo facta. Non enim sunt magis idonei hi quam Scripturae; nec relinquentes nos eloquia Domini et Moysen et reliquos prophetas, qui veritatem praeconaverunt, his credere oportet, sanum quidem nihil dicentibus, instabilia autem delirantibus.*

¹⁵ II.35.4 *Quoniam autem dictis nostris consonant praedicatio apostolorum et Domini magisterium et prophetarum annuntiatio et apostolorum dictation et legislationis ministration, unum eundemque omnium*

Again (cf. 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 4.2, 4.4) one meets with the Creator God in the context of Scripture. With Irenaeus it is a recurring concept that the Maker of heaven and earth is the source of the Bible. As they reveal the mind of God, the Scriptures have authority and can be used as proof to establish religious views.

In summary, *Adversus Haer.* II demonstrates the following insights in Irenaeus' view of the Scriptures:

- a) Irenaeus presents Scripture as the basis for his teachings.
- b) They express the mind of the Creator of heaven and earth to the human race.
- c) They proclaim the truth.
- d) They serve as proof.

4. *Adversus Haereses* III: Scripture as infallible revelation

4.1 *NT Scriptures as pillar and ground of truth*

Although Irenaeus was straightforward in his treating the New Testament productions of the four Gospel writers and the Apostles as Scripture, perhaps his clearest statement to this effect may be read in his preface to book III.

III.pref.

For indeed the Lord of all gave to His Apostles the power of the Gospel;¹⁶ and by them we have known the Truth, i. e., the teaching of the Son of God: To whom also the Lord said, "He who hears you, hears me: and he who despises you, despises me, and Him who sent me" [Luke 10:16].

III.1.1.

For by no others have we known how we could be saved, than those by whom the Gospel came to us: which was in the first place preached by them, and afterwards by the will of God handed down to us in the Scriptures, about to be the ground and pillar of our faith.^{17 18}

Deum Patrem laudantium; et non alium atque alium, neque ex diversis Diis aut virtutibus substantiam habentem; sed ex uno et eodem Patre omnia, (qui tamen aptat secundum subiacentium naturas et dispositionem), et neque ab angelis, neque ab alia quadam virtute, sed a solo Deo Patre visibilia atque invisibilia et omnia omnino quaecunque facta sunt; arbitror quidem sufficienter ostensum et per haec tanta uno ostenso Deo Patre factore omnium. Sed ne putemur fugere illam, quae ex Scripturis dominicis est probationem, ipsis Scripturis multo manifestius et clarius hoc ipsum praedicantibus, his tamen qui non prave intendunt eis proprium librum, qui sequitur has scripturas, reddentes, ex Scripturis divinis probationes apponemus in medio omnibus amantibus veritatem.

¹⁶ Some prefer to read a *genitivus objectivus* instead of a *genitivus explicativus*, translating "power over the Gospel," but this does not do justice to Irenaeus' concept of truth as an independent reality in the very context of this passage, nor to his concept of revelation, where the Apostles are servants, not creators or selectors of truth. Grant (1997:123) supports this translation. Cf. Vgl. Muskens, G.L. & Ysebaert, J.; *Latijnse Grammatica ten dienste van het Onderwijs, opnieuw bewerkt door J. Ysebaert*; Uitgeverij J. Schenk; Maastricht 1984, p. 22, 23.

¹⁷ Grant (1997:124): "and what they then first preached they later, by God's will, transmitted to us in the scriptures so that would be the foundation and pillar of our faith."

¹⁸ *III.pref. Etenim Dominus omnium dedit apostolis suis potestatem evangelii, per quos et veritatem hoc est Dei Filii doctrinam cognovimus; quibus et dixit Dominus: Qui vos audit, me audit; et qui vos contemnit, me contemnit et eum, qui me misit.*

The Apostles received the power of the Gospel (*evangelium*), which for Irenaeus was just another access point to reliable divine communication, the truth on how God sees things. It was through the apostolic preaching that the truth spread and the good news was passed on. However, “by the will of God” (*per Dei voluntatem*) it was also “handed down in in the Scriptures” (*per Dei voluntatem in Scripturis nobis tradiderunt*). Not only does Irenaeus use the term Scripture for Apostolic writ, he also attributes this process of inscribing specifically to the will of God. The Apostolic writings that have been passed on by the Church are not only Scripture, but they are so by the will of God. If there was any doubt in his readers’ minds that Irenaeus was suggesting anything less than divine, this specific way of putting it settles the matter. Irenaeus, although he has made himself extremely clear already, doesn’t stop even there. He continues to present these Apostolic Scriptures as “the ground and pillar of our faith”¹⁹ (*fundamentum et columnam fidei nostrae futurum*). This shows that attempts to reduce Scripture and make it part of an all-embracing authoritative tradition of truth (e.g. Minns 2009:137; although Minns, 2009:136, allows that for Irenaeus tradition doesn’t imply a body of doctrine distinct from the Scriptures) simply does not do justice to the linguistic context and philological specifics with which Irenaeus presents his argument. For Irenaeus Scripture is a distinct channel of revelation, put there by the will of God and preserved that future generations should walk by this measuring rod of faith as well.

Translations tend to ignore *futurum* in the Latin manuscript tradition. Both as an adjective (about to be, future) and future participle it probably conveys the idea that the Scriptures served as “future foundation” for believers of a later time, like Irenaeus.²⁰

4.2 Scriptural teaching also preserved by oral tradition

For Irenaeus the Church is the keeper of God’s truth, God’s communications. The Church has preserved these truths in the form of the Apostolic Scriptures, but also in oral tradition.

III.4.2.

And to this rule consent many nations of the Barbarians, those I mean who believe in Christ, having salvation written by the Spirit in their hearts, without paper and ink, and diligently keeping the old Tradition: who believe in wise and

III.1.1. Non enim per alios dispositionem salutis nostrae cognovimus, quam per eos, per quos evangelium pervenit ad nos; quod quidem tunc praeconaverunt, postea vero per Dei voluntatem in Scripturis nobis tradiderunt, fundamentum et columnam fidei nostrae futurum.

¹⁹ Bengsch (1957:63) confirms that truth, Scripture and the voice of God function on the same level with Irenaeus: “Was die Apostel zuerst gepredigt und dann nach dem Willen Gottes niedergeschrieben haben, das sollte Fundament und Säule unseres Glaubens sein. Die apostolische Tradition enthält die ganze Wahrheit, denn die Apostel hatten die vollkommene Erkenntnis aus der Kraft des Heiligen Geistes, den sie nach der Auferstehung des Herrn empfangen hatten.”

²⁰ Although Migne (2006) contains a large portion of Adv. Haer. III.1, the Greek text of the preface and early part of the first chapter is not present (Stieren, 1853:422). The Greek text for this passage may not reflect the original but should perhaps be traced back to an attempt by Heinrich Wilhelm Josias Thiersch (1817-1885) to restore the Greek text (cf. Theologische Studien und Kritiken, 1842/2:512).

*one God the Maker of heaven and earth and of all things that are in them, by Christ Jesus the Son of God.*²¹

For Irenaeus all theological truth is the Creator's truth (cf. 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.4), whether it is written down in Scripture or passed on verbally in a sermon, personal teaching or otherwise. Even in the hypothetical situation that the Apostles hadn't left the Church any Scripture, faith isn't based on paperwork only. For Irenaeus it is the Scriptures that confirm the truth of Christian teachings, like: Jesus being the Son of the Creator, born of a virgin, his suffering in the times of Pontius Pilate and his expected return as Judge of the whole earth. As Jaschke (1980:106) puts it: "Time and again he uses the text of the Gospel to demonstrate the veracity of what the Church believes."²²

4.3 Apostolic Scriptures without lies

According to Irenaeus the Scriptures speak truthfully. As they are the mouth of God, so to speak, he even connects this to the theological concept that God, unlike human productions, is unable to lie.

III.5.1

*This then being the case of the Apostolic Tradition in the Church, we having it so abiding among us; let us return to our argument from the writings of those Apostles who composed the Gospel, proving from what they have set down as their view concerning God, that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Truth, and in Him is no lie [John 16:6]. Even as David also, prophesying His Birth of the Virgin and His Resurrection from the dead, says: "Truth hath sprung out of the earth" [Ps 85:11]. And the Apostles too, being disciples of the Truth, are apart from all lying: for lying has no fellowship with the Truth, as darkness has no fellowship with light, but the presence of the one excludes the other.*²³

Irenaeus argues that Jesus as the personification of truth was unable to lie, and that his followers, the Apostles conformed to this principle as well as they composed the Gospels. It doesn't mean that he declared the Apostles infallible in everything they did and spoke. Irenaeus is simply making the point that speaking for God, being used as his mouthpiece, cannot incorporate lies. Again the oracular nature of Irenaeus' concept of divine revelation is clear.

²¹ *III.4.2 Cui ordinationi assentiunt multae gentes barbarorum, eorum qui in Christum credunt, sine charta et atramento scriptam habentes per Spiritum in cordibus suis salutem et veterem traditionem diligenter custodientes; in unum Deum credentes fabricatorem caeli et terrae, et omnium quae in eis sunt, per Christum Dei Filium.*

²² "Immer wieder kommt er auch auf Texte des Evangeliums zu sprechen, um an ihnen die Wahrheit des kirchlichen Glaubens zu demonstrieren."

²³ *III.5.1 Traditione igitur, quae est ab apostoli, sic se habente in ecclesia et permanente apud nos, revertamur ad eam, quae est ex Scripturis ostensionem eorum, qui evangelium conscripserunt, apostolorum, ex quibus conscripserunt de Deo sententiam, ostendentes quoniam Dominus noster Iesus Christus veritas est et mendacium in eo non est. Quemadmodum et David eam, quae est ex virgine, generationem eius, et eam, quae est ex mortuis, resurrectionem prophetans ait: Veritas de terra orta est. Et apostoli autem discipuli veritatis existentes, extra omne mendacium sunt: non enim communicat mendacium veritati, sicut non communicant tenebrae luci; sed praesentia alterius excludit alterum.*

4.4 God of Prophets and Evangelists the same

Irenaeus puts emphasis on the fact that it is God, the creator of heaven and earth, speaking through the Gospel and the Prophets.

III.10.6.

Again, in the end of his Gospel Mark [16:19] says, the Lord Jesus, after He had spoken unto them, was taken up into Heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, confirming what is said by the Prophet: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit on My right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." Thus again it is one and the same God and Father, who was first announced by the Prophets, then taught by the Gospel; whom we Christians venerate and love with all our heart, as the Maker of heaven and earth, and of all that therein is.²⁴

In this way Irenaeus refutes the Gnostic tendencies to make a distinction between a lower and possibly evil Old Testament creator and the saviour God of the New Testament. The Church father speaks up against this and makes it clear that it is one and the same Creator God speaking in the Old and New Testament. This emphasizes his power, but, more importantly, also God's rights of ownership over his creation, particularly as he reaches out and speaks to the human race. Throughout *Adversus Haereses* the Scriptures are portrayed as the voice of the Creator God (cf. 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.2).

4.5 Only four authoritative Gospels

Irenaeus attaches a lot of worth to the fact that the canonical Gospels are four in number. He bases this on the analogy of four creatures that are found in Ezekiel 1:1-14 (cf. 10:1-22) and Revelation 4:5-11.

III.11.8.

For it is impossible that the Gospels should be in number either more or fewer than these. For since the world we live in has four regions, also the Gospel has four principal winds, and the Church is as seed sown in the whole earth, and the Gospel is the Churches whereon pillar and ground, and the breath of life. It is natural that it should have four pillars: from all quarters breathing incorruption, and kindling men into life. Whereby it is evident, that the Maker of all things, the Word, who sits upon the Cherubim, and keeps all together, when He was made manifest unto men, gave us his Gospel in four forms, kept together by the one Spirit.²⁵

²⁴ III.10.6. *In fine autem evangelii ait Marcus: Et quidem Dominus Iesus, postquam locutus est eis, receptus est in caelos, et sedet ad dexteram Dei; confirmans quos a propheta dictum est: Dixit Dominus Domino meo: Sede a dextris meis, quoadusque ponam inimicos tuos suppedaneum pedum tuorum. Sic quidem unus et idem Deus et Pater est, qui a prophetis quidem annuntiatus, ab evangelio vero traditus, et quem Christiani colimus et diligimus ex toto corde, factorem caeli et terrae et omnium, quae in eis sunt.*

²⁵ III.11.8. *Τί δήποτε οὔτε πλείονα οὔτε ἐλάττονα τὸν ἀριθμὸν εἰσι τὰ εὐαγγέλια; Ἐπεὶ γὰρ τέσσαρα κλίματα τοῦ κόσμου ἐν ᾧ ἔσμεν καὶ τέσσαρα καθολικὰ πνεύματα, κατέσπαρται δὲ ἡ ἐκκλησία ἐπὶ πάσης τῆς γῆς, στῦλος δὲ καὶ στήριγμα ἐκκλησίας τὸ εὐαγγέλιον καὶ Πνεῦμα ζωῆς, εἰκότως τέσσαρας ἔχειν αὐτὴν στῦλους πανταχόθεν πνέοντας τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν καὶ ἀναζωπυροῦντας τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Ἐξ ὧν φανερόν ἐστι ὅτι ὁ τῶν ἀπάντων Τεχνίτης Λόγος, ὁ καθημένος ἐπὶ τῶν Χερουβὶμ καὶ συνέχων τὰ πάντα, φανερωθεὶς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἔδωκεν ἡμῖν τετράμορφον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, ἐνὶ δὲ Πνεύματι συνεχόμενον.*

Irenaeus refers in this context to the four faces of the Cherubim (Ps 80:1) that supposedly reflect the four ways the Son of God is described: as a lion (princely ruler), calf (priesthood and sacrifice), man (human form) and eagle (the wings of the Holy Ghost). Those would apply to John, Luke, Matthew and Mark respectively.

It is important to note that Irenaeus' interpretation of these symbols differs from those of Augustine and other Church fathers. Later Christian art followed Augustine's interpretation (cf. *De consensu evangelistarum* 1.6.9, *De consensu evangelistarum* 4.10.11 and *Tractatus in Joannis evangelium* 36.5). Matthew (human) and Luke (ox/calf) are indicated by the same creatures, but Mark (lion) and John (eagle) are different.

For Irenaeus these four faces of Christ (divine king, priestly sacrifice, son of man, prophet of the Spirit) also agreed with God's four covenants with mankind: Noah (sign of the rainbow), Abraham (sign of Circumcision), Moses (Law), the Gospels (Lord Jesus Christ).

4.6 Paul also a truthful Apostle

For Irenaeus there was no contradiction or rivalry between a Pauline Christianity and that of the regular Apostles. Even in the school of Ferdinand Bauer and his Tübingen School the supposed antithesis between Jewish and Pauline Christianity was well and truly synthesized by the time of Irenaeus.

III.15.1.

*For neither can they maintain Paul not to be an Apostle, since for this he was chosen, nor can they make out Luke to be a liar, who declares unto us the truth with all diligence.*²⁶

In this passage it is the adversaries outside the Church who doubted Paul's legitimacy. As in his youth Irenaeus was not only raised in a Christian family, but also connected to Polycarp, a student of the Apostle John, it is unlikely that Paul's apostleship was in serious doubt in any of the Church circles he moved in. Against the Heresies seems to claim quite the contrary.

4.7 Septuagint as inspired translation²⁷

Irenaeus particularly valued the Greek translation of the Old Testament, particularly as the Jewish translators in the third century before Christ were not biased by a rejection

III.11.8. Neque autem plura numero quam haec sunt, neque rursus pauciora capit esse evangelia. Quoniam enim quatuor regions mundi sunt in quo sumus, et quatuor principals spiritus, et disseminate est ecclesia super omnem terram, columna autem et firmamentum ecclesiae est evangelium et spiritus vitae; consequens est, quatuor habere eam columnas, undique flantes incorruptibilitatem et vivificantes homines. Ex quibus manifestum est, quoniam qui est omnium artifex Verbum, qui sedet super Cherubim et continent omnia, declaratus hominibus, dedit nobis quadriforme evangelium, quos uno spiritu continetur.

²⁶ *III.15.1. Neque enim contendere possunt Paulum non esse apostolum, quando in hoc sit electus; neque Lucam medacem esse possunt ostendere, veritatem nobis cum omni diligentia annuntiantem. Fortassis enim et propter hoc operates est Deus plurima evangelii ostendi per Lucam, quibus necesse haberent omnes uti: ut sequenti testificationi eius, quam habet de actibus ete doctrina apostolorum, omnes sequentes, et regulam veritatis²⁶ inadulteratam habentes, salvari possint. Igitur testificatio eius vera et doctrina apostolorum manifesta et firma, et nihil subtrahens neque alia quidem in abscondito, alia vero in manifesto docentium.*

²⁷ Cf. Eusebius H.E.V.viii, 10-15.

of Jesus. For Irenaeus the Septuagint embodies the Scriptures of the Old Testament as the authoritative word of the reign of God, the kingdom that was on its way and announced by Moses and the Prophets.

III.21.3.

But firm, and unfeigned, and alone true. Ours is the faith which we have, clearly evidenced by those Scriptures the translation of which was conducted in the aforesaid manner: and the Church's message is without interpolation. Indeed, and the Apostles too, who are more ancient than all these, agree with the aforesaid translation, and the translation harmonizes with the Apostolic tradition. Peter, I say, and John, and Matthew, and Paul, and the rest in order, and their followers, have put forth all Prophetic sayings according to the tenor of the translation of the Elders.

III.21.4.

Because one and the same Spirit of God, who in the Prophets first was as a herald of the Coming of the Lord and the manner thereof, and then in the Elders did well translate what had been well prophesied: He did also in the Apostles proclaim that the fullness of the times of adoption had come, and that the Kingdom of Heaven had drawn near, and is abiding within such men as believe in Him who was born of a virgin, even Emmanuel;²⁸

For Irenaeus the authorship of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament is crucial. They ultimately come from God as divine oracles, but it was the Spirit of God who moved the lips of Apostles and Prophets alike.

In summary, *Adv. Haer.* III suggests the following conclusions about Irenaeus' view of the Scriptures:

- a) New Testament Scriptures, the Gospels in particular, are considered as pillar and ground of truth.
- b) Scriptural teaching is also preserved by oral tradition, as written and verbal expressions of the same truth respectively.
- c) The Apostolic Scriptures are without lies.
- d) The OT Prophets and NT Evangelists express the mind of the same God.
- e) Only four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) are considered authoritative in the Church.
- f) Paul is also a truthful Apostle.
- g) The Greek Septuagint was an inspired translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.
- h) All Scripture is united through the authorship of the Holy Spirit.

²⁸ *III.21.3. Firma est autem et non ficta et sola vera, quae secundum nos est fides, manifestam ostensionem habens ex his Scripturis, quae interpretatae sunt illo modo, quo praediximus; et ecclesiae annuntiatio sine interpolatione. Etenim apostoli, quum sint his omnibus vetustiores, consonant praedictae interpretation, et interpretation consonant apostolorum traditioni. Etenim Petrus et Ioannes et Matthaues et Paulus et reliqui deinceps et horum sectatores prophetica omnia ita annuntiaverunt, quemadmodum Seniorum interpretation continent.*

III.21.4. Unus enim et idem Spiritus Dei, qui in prophetis quidem praeconavit, quis eet quails esset adventus Domini, in Senioribus autem interpretatus est bene quae bene prophetata fuerant; ipse et in apostoli annuntiavit plenitudinem temporum adoptionis venisse, et proximasse regnum caelorum, et inhabitare intra homines credentes in eum, qui ex virgine natus est, Emmanuel.

5. *Adversus Haereses IV: the unity of OT and NT Scripture*

Towards the end of book III, Irenaeus emphasized the Holy Spirit as the author of all Scripture. He moved Prophets and Apostles alike. In book IV Against the Heresies, Irenaeus continues this theme and underlines the unity of all Scripture in the Christian tradition.

5.1 *Words of Moses and the prophets are Words of Christ*

(In which Irenaeus reinforces the idea of the Scriptures as kingdom words, utterances of the coming king who requires obedience.)

IV.2.3.

*Moreover, that the writings of Moses are the words of Christ, He Himself tells the Jews, as John has recorded in the Gospel: "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have also believed Me, for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, neither will ye believe My words": most clearly implying, that Moses's writings are His own words. If then Moses's words are His, so without doubt are the other Prophets' also: as we have demonstrated.*²⁹

5.2 *All Scripture comes from God the Father*

Irenaeus states that the Scriptures not only come from God, but contain the voice of Christ as well as the Father preparing the world for the advent of his Son. Writing towards the end of the second century, Irenaeus is by no means the only Church father with this approach.³⁰

IV.10.1.

*Well therefore doth John also make mention of the Lord saying to the Jews, Search the Scriptures, in which ye think ye have eternal life: they are they which testify of Me [John 5:39-40]. And ye will not come unto Me, that ye may have life [John 5:46]. How then did the Scriptures testify of Him, if they came not of one and the same Father, informing men before of the coming of His Son, and foretelling the salvation which is from Him? "For had ye believed Moses," says he, "ye would have believed Me also": for he wrote of Me: meaning that the Son of God is as seed scattered everywhere in His Scriptures, at one time speaking with Abraham [Gen.18:5], at another with Noah [Gen.6:15], giving them His measures: at another time seeking out Adam [Gen.3:9]; at another again bringing judgement upon the Sodomites [Gen.19:24]: as also when He appears and guides Jacob in the way [Gen.28:13], and speaks out of the Bush with Moses [Ex.3:4]. Neither can one count the instances wherein the Son of God is set forth by Moses.*³¹

²⁹ IV.2.3. Quoniam autem Moysi litterae verba sint Christi, ipse ait ad Iudaeos, quemadmodum Iohannes in evangelio commemoratus est: Si credidissetis Moysi, credidissetis et mihi: de me enim ille scripsit. Si autem illius litteris non creditis, neque meis sermonibus creditis. Manifestissime significans, Moysi litteras suos esse sermones. Ergo si Moysi, et reliquorum sine dubio prophetarum sermones ipsius sunt, quemadmodum demonstravimus.

³⁰ Osborne (1989:53) confirms that Irenaeus' approach is not unlike that of Clement of Alexandria's: "The Lord gives, through the prophets, gospel and apostles, in different ways and at different times, all truth from beginning to end. If a more ultimate source be sought, then we should be caught in infinite regress. The only first principle is the voice of the Lord and from this all else is tested and proved."

³¹ IV.10.1. Bene igitur et Iohannes meminit dicentem Dominum Iudaeis: Scrutamini Scripturas, in quibus putatis vos vitam aeternam habere: illae sunt quae testimonium perhibent de me. Et non vultis venire ad me, ut vitam

5.3 *Law and Gospel about the same: love*

Irenaeus sets forth the Old and the New Testament as one and the same revelatory tradition, united in theme with its origin in the same God.

IV.12.3.

*Wherefore, since in the Law and in the Gospel the first and greatest precept is, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and next one like unto it, to love his neighbour as himself: one and the same is shown to be the Founder of the Law and of the Gospel. That is, the precepts of perfect life being the same in both Testaments, showed their God to be the same; Who while He laid down His precepts of detail as suited each of the two, did in both recommend the very same as the higher and chiefest, without which is no salvation.*³²

For Irenaeus Law, Prophets and Gospel are about the same thing. This is reflected by Bingham (1998:304) in his studies on Irenaeus' use of Matthew's Gospel: "This pattern would be consistent with the belief of Irenaeus and his community in the unity of the prophetic, dominical, and apostolical testimonies. This is why his proof from the Scriptures consists in demonstrating the harmony between the prophets and the New Testament and why he insists upon the perfection and harmony in the testimonies of both the Lord and the Apostles (3. Pref.1-1.2). This is also why he speaks of all the Scriptures being found perfect in harmony (2.27.2) and able of being understood harmoniously (2.27.2). It is this faith that allows him to show his community the proofs of the Scriptures from the Scriptures."

5.4 *The Scriptures contain the Word of God*

Irenaeus shows that reading the Scriptures is required in the quest for mature discipleship.

IV. 26.1. If a man therefore reads the Scriptures attentively, he will find in the same the word concerning Christ, and the prefiguring of the New Calling. For Christ is the treasure hid in the field [Matt 13:44] —i. e., in this world: for the field is the world:— and Christ in the Scriptures is a hidden treasure, because He was indicated by types and parables.

... Therefore, as we have shown, if a man reads the Scriptures (for so the Lord also discoursed unto His Disciples after His resurrection from the dead, showing them from the same Scriptures [Luke 24:26], that Christ should suffer, and enter into His Glory, and that in His Name remission of sins should he

habeatis. Quomodo igitur testabantur de eo Scripturae, nisi ab uno et eodem essent Patre, praeinstruentes homines de adventu Filii eius et praenuntiantes salutem, quae est ab eo? Si enim crederetis Moysi, inquit, crederetis et mihi: de me enim ille scripsit; scilicet quod inseminatus est ubique in Scripturis eius Filius Dei; aliquando quidem cum Abraham loquens, aliquando cum Noe, dans eis mensuras; aliquando autem quaerens Adam; aliquando autem Sodomitis inducens iudicium; et rursus quum videretur, et in viam dirigit Iacob et de rubo loquitur cum Moyse. Et non est numerum dicere in quibus a Moyse ostenditur Filius Dei.

³² IV.12.3. *In lege igitur et in evangelio quum sit primum et maximum praeceptum, diligere Dominum Deum ex toto corde; dehinc simile illi, diligere proximum sicut seipsum: unus et idem ostenditur legis et evangelii donditor. Consummatae enim vitae praecepta in utroque Testamento quum sint eadem, eundem ostenderunt Deum, qui particularia quidem praecepta apta utrisque praecepit; sed eminentiora et summa, sine quibus salvari non est, in utroque eadem suasit.*

*preached in the whole world): he will be even a perfect disciple, and like unto a householder, who brings out of his treasure things new and old.*³³

In summary, *Adv. Haer.* IV shows the following about Irenaeus' view of the Scriptures:

- a) Old and New Testament Scriptures comes from the same God, the Father.
- b) The Old Testament is thoroughly Christian. The words of Moses and the prophets are Words of Christ.
- c) The Law and Gospel are united in the same commandment to love.
- d) The Scriptures contain the Word of God.

6. *Adversus Haereses V: Feed on the Scriptures*

In his last book *Against the Heresies*, Irenaeus turns to his readers.

6.1 *Proclamation of the Church fed by the truth of the Scriptures*

Book five contains a final call to be nourished by the Scriptures that are available in the bosom of the Church, not just a few favourite passages, but "all the Lord's Scripture" (*ab omni Scriptura dominica*).

V.20.1.

As for the Church: her preaching is true and stable. In her through the whole world one and the same way of salvation is declared. For to her is entrusted the Light of God. And therefore the Wisdom of God, whereby He saves all men, is sung in the place of going forth. In the streets it deals fearlessly, is preached on the top of the walls, and speaks boldly in the gates of the city. For the Church everywhere preaches the Truth: and this is the candlestick with seven wicks bearing the light of Christ.

V.20.2.

So those people who forsake the preaching of the Church, impute lack of skilfulness to the holy Elders, not considering how much worthier is a devout but untaught person than a blaspheming and shameless Sophist. But such are all Heretics, and they who imagine themselves to be discoverers of something more besides the Truth; following what has been foretold, performing their journey in many ways and in many forms, and in much weakness, not having always the same opinions on the same subjects, they are led about as blind men by the blind: justly they will fall into the hidden pit of ignorance, always seeking, and never finding the Truth.

We must therefore fly from their views, and watch very carefully lest at any time we be disturbed by them. And we must fly for refuge to the Church, and be

³³ IV. 26.1. *Si quis igitur intentus legat Scripturas, inveniet in iisdem de Christo sermonem et novae vocationis praefigurationem. Hic est enim thesaurus absconsus in agro, id est – in isto mundo: (Ager enim mundus est,) absconsus vero in Scripturis thesaurus Christus, quoniam per typos et parabolas significabatur. ...Quemadmodum igitur ostendimus, si quis legat³³ Scripturas, etenim Dominus sic disseruit discipulis post resurrectionem suam a mortuis, ex ipsis Scripturis ostendens eis, quoniam oportebat pati Christum, et intrare in gloriam suam, et in nomine eius remissionem peccatorum praedicari in toto mundo) et erit consummates discipulus, et similis patrifamilias, qui de thesauro suo profert nova et vetera.*

*trained in her bosom, and be nourished up in the Scriptures of the Lord. For the Church is planted, a Paradise in this world. "Of every tree then you shall eat morsels," says the Spirit of God: in other words: you must feed on all the Lord's Scripture. But you mustn't eat of a mind that is lifted up, neither touch anywhere the contentiousness of heretics.*³⁴

Irenaeus leaves his readers with a comprehensive call:

- a) To spiritually feed on the Scriptures.
- b) To accept a gracious invitation to do so in a balanced way: on all the Scriptures.
- c) To keep away from any teaching that doesn't agree with these.

For the man from Lyons it is not sufficient to have the right view of Scripture. His readers should make an effort to hear or read the Word of God and digest it. Not just a few favourite passages, but in a balanced way: to eat from *all* the Lord's Scriptures. He also defines the nature of the Church in terms of the availability of Scripture and its nourishing and life-giving quality. Without food the soul dies. Irenaeus even refers to the Church as the spiritual paradise of the present for that reason. As this is the place where God's Word is preserved, that is where people may safely flee to and eat, as they draw closer to their Creator.

7. Conclusion

In his case against the Gnostics, Irenaeus presents himself as the servant of a higher authority. The material collected from *Adversus Haereses* warrants three main conclusions about Irenaeus' view of Scripture:

- 1) The Scriptures are divine oracles of God, revealed from heaven.
- 2) The Scriptures are without lies, expressive of God's truth, and may consequently be used as proof to establish religious views.
- 3) Old and New Testament Scripture find their unity in their joint origin in the Creator God, and in effectively serving as Words of Christ.

For Irenaeus, Scripture and divine revelation did not find their relevance or authority in the "living voice" of the Church (cf. Lawson). On the contrary, the passages from *Adversus Haereses* show a mature and circumscribed view of Scripture, where the

³⁴ V.20.1. *Et ecclesiae quidem praedicatio vera et firma, apud quam una et eadem salutis via in universe mundo ostenditur. Huic enim creditum est lumen Dei, et propter hoc sapiential Dei, per quam salvat omnes homines, in exitu canitur, in plateis autem fiducialiter agit, in summis muris praedicatur, in portis autem civitatis constanter loquitur. Ubique enim exlesia praedicat veritatem: et haec est lucerne, Christi baiulans lumen.*
V.20.2. *Qui ergo relinquunt praeconium ecclesiae, imperitiam sanctorum presbyterorum arguunt, non contemplantes, quanto pluris sit idiota religios a blasphemo et impudente sophista. Tales sunt autem omnes haeretici, et qui se plus aliquid praeter veritatem invenire putant; sequentes ea quae praedicta sunt, varie et multiformiter et imbecille facientes iter, de iisdem non semper easdem sententias habentes, velut caeca a caecis circumducuntur; iuste cadent in sublatentem ignorantiae foveam,³⁴ semper quaerentes et nunquam verum invenientes. Fugere igitur oportet sententias ipsorum, et intentius observare, necubi vexemur ab ipsis; con fugere autem ad ecclesiam, et in eius sinu educari, et dominicis Scripturis enutriri. Plantata est enim ecclesia, paradus in hoc mundo. Ab omni ergo lingo pradis escas manducabitis, ait Spiritus Dei; id est, ab omni Scriptura dominica manducate; super elato autem sensu ne manducaveritis, neque tetigeritis³⁴ universam haeticam dissensionem.*

“living voice” of God is to be found in the Scriptures, as the pillar of faith and standard of truth. The voice of the Church is a servant’s voice as keeper and preserver of God’s holy writ. For Irenaeus the primary authority is in the Oracles of God and the relevance of the Church is measured by faithfulness to this standard.

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