Locating Truth in the Search for Certainty: A Comparison of Foundationalism in Irenaeus' Second-Century Writings and in Twenty-First-Century Evangelicalism

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Section II: Evangelical Adoptions & (Mis)Appropriations of Irenaeus

Abbreviations

1 Apol.	Justin Martyr, *First Apology*
ApJohn	*Secret Book of John* (or *Apocryphon of John*)
ApocPet	(Coptic) *Apocalypse of Peter*
Comm. Jo.	Origen, *Commentary on John*
Dem. or *Demonstration*	Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*
Dial. or *Dialogue*	Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*
FLett. 39	Athanasius, *Festal Letter 39*
GJudas	*Gospel of Judas*
GM.	Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Martyrs*
GPhil	*Gospel of Philip*
GThom	*Gospel of Thomas*
GTruth	*Gospel of Truth*
Haer. or *Haereses*	Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (trans. *Adversus Haereses*)
Hist. eccl.	Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* (trans. *Historia Ecclesiae*)
Pan.	Epiphanius, *Panarion*
Pol.	Aristotle, *Politics*
Vita Const.	Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* (trans. *Vita Constantini*)

A note on language

This essay will use contracted verb and (pro)noun forms. It increases readability and doesn't hinder the essay in any way I'm aware of. Prepositions may also appear at the end of sentences. As Mark Schaefer notes, these are entirely permissible in the English language, plus not doing so would unnecessarily increase the number of words needed to say the same thing. Therefore, I prefer to use these functions.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is the result of a discourse I saw emerging in my final year of undergraduate studies which involved study of early Christianity, the nature of religion and truth, and my own journey with evangelical Christianity at university. I consider this work, of course, to be the fruit of a lot of effort, but also to be the beginning of a life of deep thought, reflection and continuing studentship. I am beyond grateful for the people who modelled this lifestyle to me – whether in aspect or more fully – whilst also offering me the most liberating intellectual and spiritual education I could have hoped for when I moved to Durham five years ago. Specifically my thanks go to these people:

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Introduction

There exist vast collections of literature in the areas of second-century Christianity and modern evangelicalism. However, these two fields are rarely – if ever – brought together for mutual learning. This thesis will cover the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons and will conclude with an investigation into the legacy this bishop still holds today within US Protestant evangelicalism. The first section could be taken as an essay in itself, commenting on the scholarship of Irenaeus and its future direction. During an appraisal of the bishop's strongest themes – the divine economy, the location of truth, the role of free will, and rhetoric – literature which position themselves as introductions to his thought will also be assessed. This is because the overwhelming pattern in these pieces is for Irenaeus to be lauded as the normative voice for second-century Christians and victor against the pernicious force of the 'gnostics' or 'heretics.' Yet, it will be demonstrated that both Irenaeus and his contemporary analysts often fail to show critical empathy, that is, intellectual rigour which questions the arguments made, especially more extreme allegations against one's ideological opponents. Whilst engaging in this process isn't necessary in order to construct a swaying and influential message, it is necessary if one wishes to argue on the merit of ideas.

Furthermore, it will be shown that gathering the targets of Irenaeus' polemic – like the Valentinians, Simonians, and Marcionites – into a singular group of 'gnostics' or

'heretics' primarily serves rhetorical aims to restrict the number of those who can call themselves Christian, rather than a historiological aim to discuss the holistic Christian milieu of the second century. This section will therefore conclude that in order to achieve a historiological aim, critical empathy must be employed. Moreover, in order to achieve critical empathy, scholars of Irenaeus studies must integrate either a speculative interest in the position of those Irenaeus denigrated or integrate studies of literature likely written by people representing these targets.

The second section will introduce evangelicalism. This is far too great a phenomenon to cover comprehensively in this essay, however there is an aspect of (at least) US evangelicalism which has been described in various ways, but this essay will call 'the fundamentalist mentality' after Harris' insightful analysis of James Barr's seminal book, *Fundamentalism*.[1] This term is helpful in mitigating the risk of labelling all evangelicals 'fundamentalists,'[2] but maintains that something of the self-styled fundamentalists of the early twentieth century remains in the present-day evangelical approach to Christian religion. After this introduction, three sources from self-identifying evangelicals will be consulted. Even more, these sources are concerned directly with Irenaeus and his significance for Christians today. Throughout the analysis of the sources, the study of Irenaeus in section one will be raised at relevant intersections.

Irenaeus remains such a significant aspect of study for theologians in patristics and for evangelicals because of his place in time.[3] For theologians, Irenaeus is important because he is a key writer in-between the earliest, first-century followers of Jesus – including the apostles attested in scriptural accounts – and the fourth-century

[1] Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 11-15, and James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1977), p. 71, 331.

[2] Although some do not mind the connection; see I. Howard Marshall, 'Are Evangelicals Fundamentalists? (The Laing Lecture for 1991)' *Vox Evangelica*, Vol. 22 (1992), pp. 7-24.

[3] For an approximate timeline of the mid to late second-century, see Sara Parvis and Paul Foster (eds.), *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), p. xv.

solidification of orthodox Christianity, established together with the Roman authorities.[4] There do not remain many texts from this period and so Irenaeus' thought is an important insight into early Christianity. Moreover, through study of particularly *Haereses*, we will see how important this notion of time-placement is for the bishop. It is paramount for his foundationalist verification method that he can access the testimony of Jesus' apostles, those who witnessed his ministry and received his teaching. As the student of Polycarp, who was a follower of the apostle John, Irenaeus holds absolute certainty in his ability to locate truth, to further spread that truth to others, and to correct those who claim something else is truth. This particular locating of truth and Irenaeus' certainty bear significant ramifications for Christian faith. Literature which assumes Irenaeus as normative rarely acknowledges these aspects of his theology and can thus miss important insights.

Placement in time is also an important theme in the writings of the bishop regarding how he locates truth. As we will see in the network of connections Irenaeus draws between the ultimate divine source of truth and the various sub-sources which make the truth available to humans, Irenaeus deems proximity to the apostles as proximity to truth. It is also one of the reasons why evangelicals should not be too ready to claim identification with his ideas. Evangelicals live in a time where to speak of the 'Bible' (a rigidly defined set of specific books different to Irenaeus' identified written sources of authority) and of its agency (which begets phrases like 'the Bible says…') is the norm. These have arisen through elapsed time. Very often, Irenaeus' location in time is described as a benefit by evangelicals regarding their theology. However, it is also a hazard.

This essay will convey that Irenaeus' writings remain very significant. For Irenaeus

[4] Some have even called Irenaeus part of a 'proto-orthodoxy.' See Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 12. However, this is not uncontentious given the implication of historical determinism. See Rowan Williams, 'Does It Make Sense to Speak of Pre-Nicene Orthodoxy?' in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. by Rowan Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 1–23.

studies in academic settings, it is important that Irenaeus' significance be recognised by an approach which includes a holistic context of the bishop via critical empathy. For evangelicalism studies, Irenaeus' writings signify that the pervasive fundamentalist mentality does not originate from modernity but key aspects are displayed as early as the second century. For evangelicals themselves, it means that a rushed action to claim the bishop as a fellow evangelical who believed in a foundationalist epistemology centring around the Protestant Bible will generate what they perhaps fear most in 'liberalism': imposing one's desired meaning on to the text. Irenaeus was not a fundamentalist but shares some important qualities; not least the tendency to condemn intellectual opponents as thinking differently due to profound moral fault. In the cases of evangelicalism and Irenaeus studies – and their convergence – this essay will show this is a rhetorical tool more than an accurate claim researched with rigour on the level of ideas.

SECTION I

Irenaeus & Second-Century Christianity

CHAPTER ONE

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Introduction

1.1: Irenaeus' Writings

In the latter half of the second century, Irenaeus wrote several treatises, two of which we have extant today.[5] These are called *Against Heresies* (from the Latin, *Adversus Haereses*) and *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*.[6] *Haereses*, as its Greek title details, is an elucidation and refutation issued by Irenaeus against various groups of thinkers claiming the name 'Christian' for their theories. The bishop writes that these thinkers also claim for themselves that which is falsely called *gnōsis* ('knowledge'), which is where the later terms 'gnostic' and 'gnosticism' originate, though Irenaeus doesn't use these terms himself.[7] In particular, he writes that second-century theologian Valentinus

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[5] For more details, see Parvis and Foster (eds.), *Irenaeus*, pp. xi-xiii.

[6] *Haereses* is also known as *On the Detection and Overthrow of the So-Called Gnosis* from the Greek manuscripts. Citations are taken from *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Vol. 1*, ed. by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. by Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103.htm> [accessed 18.07.2021]; extant Latin witnesses available at *Library of Latin Texts* [Online], <http://www.brepolis.net/> [accessed 12.04.2021]. Citations of *Demonstration* are taken from the translation from the Armenian with introduction and notes by J. Armitage Robinson (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1920).

[7] 'Gnosticism' is first known to be have been used in the preface of Henry Moore's 1669 book, *An Antidote against Idolatry*, where he describes Catholics as "a spice of the old abhorred Gnosticism." See

"adapted the principles of the heresy called 'gnostic' to the peculiar character of his own school."[8] On account of this, the bishop notes that he has read some of the Valentinian *Commentaries* and had personal discourse with some of them.[9] Besides the Valentinians, the objects of Irenaeus' allegations are many, including those following teaching by Ptolemy, Simon Magus, Menander, Marcus, Saturninus, Basiledes, Carpocrates, Cerinthus, the Ebionites and Nicolaitanes, Cerdo, Marcion, Tatian, the Encratites, the Barbeloites, the Ophites, the Sethians, and the Cainites. These listed here are those which the bishop names as his targets in his first book issued out of the eventual five-book collection. Thus, Irenaeus does not write a very specific denunciation to a small group or influence; he wishes to expose and undermine all the heresies which he's aware of. Irenaeus' other extant work, *Demonstration*, is much less focused on in contemporary academia.[10] In it, Irenaeus elaborates his genealogy of truth – or his verification network – and the narrative of God's purpose, using scriptures from both the old and new covenants. It is indirectly about heretics in that it describes that which is true in very certain terms. Thus, anything which does not align with the treatise is definitively heretical and not 'Christian.'

As such the bishop's main concerns, as we can survey from his extant writings, concern the specific details of the real truth and the method of verifying real truth.

1.2: Irenaeus Studies So Far

There are countless articles which explore the context and theology of Irenaeus' writings,

<http://www.cambridge-platonism.divinity.cam.ac.uk/view/texts/diplomatic/More1669-excerpt001> [accessed 18.07.2021]. It has recently been subject to varying levels of criticism. See Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003); Elaine H. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980); Einar Thomassen, *The Coherence of 'Gnosticism'* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020); Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[8] *Haer.* 1.11.1.

[9] *Haer.* 1.Praef.2.

[10] Unfortunately, this project does not have the scope to address this small treatise comprehensively, but it elucidates much of Irenaeus' ideas of truth as it relates to apostolic testimony and scripture, thus is worthy of study alongside *Haereses*.

especially *Haereses*, and many books which feature these among other patristic sources.[11] However, this thesis will specifically address monographs intended to introduce and expound Irenaeus as a focus. Unfortunately, the limits of this project entail that not all monographs on Irenaeus can be surveyed;[12] however, the following constitute the most recent cohort of regularly-cited works positioning themselves as comprehensive introductions:

- Robert Grant's *Irenaeus of Lyons* (1997). A brief introduction to Irenaeus, including a translation of sections of *Against Heresies;*
- Eric Osborn's *Irenaeus of Lyons* (2001). An intricate – almost poetic – analysis of the bishop;
- Denis Minns' *Irenaeus: An Introduction* (2010). An elaborate and strikingly balanced consideration of the bishop and his legacy;
- John Behr's *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity* (2013). A dense reflection on the relevance of the bishop, including a commentary of *Haereses;*
- Anthony Briggman's *God and Christ in Irenaeus* (2018). Whilst this is a more thematic study of the bishop, it is the most recent publication in Irenaeus studies and his substantive introduction includes a defence pertinent to this thesis.

It is specifically the introducing of Irenaeus – which, by necessity, involves an understanding of the context of his writing – which this thesis will focus on and thus, these works will be placed under a spotlight and referred to throughout the thesis. As one reads through these keystone literatures, several themes materialise. Most notably, excepting Minns, there is considerable sympathy toward Irenaeus. Rarely are his ideas subject to critique or rigorous questioning; instead, the authors often join Irenaeus in his exasperation that such obvious truth is being countered by some thinkers, and in his mockery of those targeted. Therefore, when Irenaeus describes his targets as self-deceiving, intellectually-dishonest aberrant individuals hailing from one father of all heresy, this is assumed to be factual, not recognised as polemical strategy. As will be

[11] See, for instance, the comparative work, Adam J. Powell, *Irenaeus, Joseph Smith, and God-Making Heresy* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015); and the compilation approach in Sara Parvis and Paul Foster's *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy*.

[12] Especially older works on Irenaeus, such as John Lawson's 1948 book, André Benoît's 1960 book.

demonstrated later in our survey of Irenaeus' focuses, he regularly appeals to extreme claims and uses strong polemical rhetoric; yet, instead of using this as a prompt to critically assess Irenaeus' reaction, it appears to be taken *a priori* that these are historically accurate.

Robert Grant

Grant offers the shortest of the spotlighted introductions to Irenaeus here discussed, opting for the second half of his book to comprise a partial translation of *Haereses*. As a part of his work, Grant appears to assume Irenaeus as normative and fails to explore issues which arise. For example, Grant seems content to describe Irenaeus' own account of his targets using *Haer.* 1.23-31 as though it were a textbook.[13] Another particularly notable example is when Grant is discussing Valentinianism; he paraphrases and quotes *Haer.* 1.16.3 where the bishop writes that the healthier his targets appear, the more unwell they are in actuality. Grant interprets this to mean that Irenaeus is claiming his targets are "mentally ill."[14] Then, Grant appears to offer a paraphrase of *Haer.* 2.26.3:

> When they try to count grains of sand, pebbles on the ground, waves in the sea, and stars in the sky – and to determine the cause of the number! – they are insane and stupid, just as if they had been struck by lightning.[15]

Grant concludes that Irenaeus "is **driven** to irony."[16] He offers no critique and the wording of his paraphrase implies he might agree with the bishop. And yet, this passage and interpretation of *Haereses* offers much potential for critical engagement. Most prominently, if someone deemed another person as sick, why would they choose to mock them rather than help them? Perhaps Grant does not refer to mental illness as a sickness requiring medical aid and more of a denigrating smear. Either way, either he dismisses a cruel approach to sickness by Irenaeus, approves of it, or uses the stigma surrounding mental health to besmirch these Valentinian thinkers.

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[13] Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 12-20.

[14] Ibid., p. 26.

[15] Ibid., p. 26. Note that this is different to his translation of the same passage (p. 117).

[16] Ibid., p. 26 (my emphasis).

Irenaeus' mockery and language of urgent action against those who blaspheme God (which will be covered below) doesn't appear to alert Grant to investigate the background behind his writing.[17] Instead, Grant writes that Irenaeus took a stand for peace against "militancy."[18] This is peculiar considering the bishop's two extant works are militant and agitating, not anti-militant and peace-invoking.

Lastly of note is that Grant makes a habit of offering confident claims on, for instance, 'gnostic' origins, and the reason people became 'gnostic converts,' with little or no substantiation. His overfamiliarity with the word 'obviously' regularly reminds his readers of this habit.[19] Thus, Grant appears to use Irenaeus as a neutral informer, joins him in mockery, and uses language of total perspicuity, which – as will be shown – also continues Irenaeus' efforts.

Eric Osborn

Osborn models his work around the perception of Irenaeus as a complex and systematic theologian who elaborates key Christian themes which can be lifted and absorbed into theology today. As a result of this, Osborn writes about Irenaeus' targets as an end thought, not a (collection of) conversation partner(s). In his appendix on 'gnosticism,' Osborn offers brief details on Irenaeus' targets; he implies that newly discovered material which was likely authored by those representing Irenaeus' ideological targets only serves to show that they did not conform to a coherent ideology and that this is

> less important than Irenaeus' account of the stimulus to his thought. What forced Irenaeus to struggle towards a unified statement of Christian thought? Here there is no mystery. Irenaeus sets out what has stirred him to action in Book 1 and refutes it in Book 2.[20]

For Osborn, an account of Irenaeus' targets only matters insofar as what Irenaeus **thought** he was contending with, excluding the extent this agreed with other accounts of

[17] At least, it doesn't alert Grant to investigate possibilities where Irenaeus might not be the normative Christian of the second century.

[18] Ibid., p. 4.

[19] See ibid., pp. 11, 12, 25, and 50.

[20] Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 268.

the Christians Irenaeus was targeting. Moreover, Osborn assumes, like Grant, Irenaeus' account with all its polemic was a historical account of his targets which was an obvious stimulus of the bishop's writings.

The containment of thought on Irenaeus' targets to an appendix outside of the main argument in his book is representative of Osborn's attitude towards Irenaeus studies: critical study of Irenaeus' portrayal and understanding of his targets (and the resultant impact on his polemical literature) is superfluous and non-integral to an essential understanding of Irenaeus.

In another book, *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy*, Osborn summarises *Haereses:* "His longest writing, *Against Heresies*, sets out what he knows of gnostic doctrine, disproves and ridicules it, and then expounds the truth that he has received from the successors of the apostles."[21] Like Grant, Osborn seems to view Irenaeus' mockery and denigration as warranted and natural, despite a lack of critical engagement on behalf of Irenaeus' targets.

Osborn, however, appears to consider some of Irenaeus' shortfalls: his sometimes "slender arguments" and common appeal to *ad hominem* argument.[22] Nevertheless, he quickly returns to Irenaeus' defence, saying that his arguments "were entirely appropriate to his friends and foes" and that "the moral weakness of Gnosticism" perhaps did need highlighting as it was more harmful than the content of their ideas.[23] Overall, Osborn's critique of Irenaeus' targets is readily forthcoming, but his critique of the bishop is more superficial than substantive.

John Behr

Whilst Behr notes – along with this essay – that there is a stark split in patristics between scholars of Irenaeus' targets and scholars of Irenaeus, he does not appear to attempt to

[21] Eric Osborn, *The Beginning of Christian Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 20.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., pp. 20-21.

remedy this.[24] Instead, Behr writes of how scholars of Irenaeus' targets vilify the bishop according to terms from later centuries and calls for Irenaeus' theology to be understood "on its own terms."[25] This is similar to Osborn's approach above of consulting Irenaeus only in order to make sense of his writing. Moreover, he quotes two co-authors later analysed in this essay, Andreas Köstenberger and Michael Kruger in their book *The Heresy of Orthodoxy*. This is an interesting appropriation for an academic piece of research considering the book is a polemical argument seeking to establish an evangelical inerrantist conception of the Bible as dating back to Irenaeus and even further to Jesus' own theological convictions. Behr decides to lift the pair's phrase 'the gospel of diversity' to describe the theological research into the "newly discovered texts […of the] supposedly marginalized and excluded."[26] Of the texts he refers to here, many were discovered in the mid-twentieth century near Nag Hammadi in Egypt. Behr writes that the account of history that scholars of these texts present "is simply not historically accurate," but only uses sporadic references to one of these texts, *GTruth*, to construct his historical account. Even so, he claims his work is a "full, contextual study" of Irenaeus.[27]

Anthony Briggman

Briggman is concerned with (re)establishing Irenaeus' writing as authoritative with regards to the bishop's intelligence and logical adequacy. Therefore, he dedicates over a third of his book arguing for this before moving onto his titular focus.[28] In this extended introduction, he specifically addresses scholarship which concludes Irenaeus was not

[24] Paul Bradshaw refers to this bifurcation as the 'lumpers' and the 'splitters,' using terminology from comparative linguistics. The 'lumpers' seek to lump together many expressions of Christianity into very few categories and those who wish to inspect the lumps and highlight the complexities at risk of being erased by the process of lumping are the 'splitters.' See Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. ix-xi. See also David Brakke, 'Self-Differentiation Among Christian Groups: The Gnostics and Their Opponents', in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Origins to Constantine*, ed. by Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 245-260.

[25] John Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 2.

[26] Ibid.

[27] See the back-matter of Behr, *Irenaeus.*

[28] Briggman, *God and Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 9-70.

systematically coherent, which he contends began with Hans Wendt in 1882, and continued by Adolf Von Harnack, Friedrich Loofs, and Philip Hefner, who concluded that Irenaeus' ambiguity and "naïveté" meant that scholars should be "cautious in applying sharp distinctions and sophisticated schematisms to Irenaeus' theological work."[29] Briggman interprets this as a "low regard for [Irenaeus'] intellectual ability" and attributes it to a failure on the behalf of these scholars to recognise the "intellectual unity" of Irenaeus' argumentation.[30] Briggman even includes Denis Minns in this "tradition of interpretation,"[31] despite his work being both critical of and acquiescent to Irenaeus' arguments. In response, Briggman "challenges the narrative that Irenaeus was unintelligent or incompetent by demonstrating his knowledge of literary and rhetorical theory and, thus, arguing he enjoyed a thorough rhetorical education."[32] This is similar to Osborn's aim to demonstrate the bishop's intellectual prowess and – against thinkers like Hugo Koch who maintained Irenaeus' incoherence – emphasise Albert Houssiau's search for Irenaeus' aesthetic brand of harmony. Briggman makes this argument to establish Irenaeus as convincingly correct compared to his targets who are simply "errant" and twist that which is natural into something unnatural.[33]

Therefore, Briggman – like Behr – perceives an antagonism against Irenaeus, and wishes to moderate this.[34] Briggman seeks to do this by emphasising the indicators of the bishop's stringent education. This is perhaps less relevant than confronting the cases of logical inconsistency and unforgiving rhetoric which suggest Irenaeus is writing more to persuade by any means necessary than to offer a discussion on the level of ideas.

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[29] Philip Hefner, 'Theological Methodology and St. Irenaeus', in *The Journal of Religion*, No. 4, Vol. 44 (1964), pp. 294-309, p. 304.

[30] Briggman, *God and Christ*, p. 2.

[31] Ibid., p. 3.

[32] Ibid., p. 6.

[33] Ibid., p. 12.

[34] The accuracy of Briggman's perception of antagonism is likely skewed, though, if he maintains that Minns is one of perpetrators.

The Pattern

Though brief and awaiting further demonstration below, this exploration shows that these scholars take Irenaeus literally. If Irenaeus wrote that his targets had unsound minds, then Irenaeus' targets were mentally ill; if Irenaeus wrote to ridicule, then his targets deserved ridiculing. Therefore, they wish readers to trust that the bishop's writings are representative of the groups he wished to denigrate and that his treatment of these was reasonable and appropriate. They can also perceive a threat to this project in writings which analyse recently discovered texts, like those found at Nag Hammadi, which likely espouse Irenaeus' targets' thought. And, they consistently show reticence regarding the concerns and self-understandings of the targets Irenaeus defamed.

Moreover, in Irenaeus studies, there is a strand of scholars in the evangelical Protestant tradition (particularly in the USA) who relate this approach of seeing Irenaeus as a normative discusser of second-century Christianity with another approach of seeing Irenaeus as a normative Christian which, for them, is an American evangelical Protestant. Thus, there are those who claim that there exist Christians who believe what Irenaeus did, and – in so doing – can claim an adherence to 'historic Christianity.'[35] In fact, there are even those in academia who read Irenaeus and say that the bishop supports biblical inerrancy and infallibility.[36] This essay will interrogate the contemporary notions that modern biblical inerrancy is entirely without precedent in earlier centuries; but, it will also argue that inerrantism cannot be said to be the pure ideal held in the minds of

[35] For example, Alisa Childers is a popular evangelical apologist who commonly appeals to the differences between 'progressive Christianity' and 'historic Christianity.' She most often uses online articles/blogs and online video media to communicate. See Childers, 'What is Historic Christianity?' (13/07/2020) <https://www.alisachilders.com/blog/what-is-historic-christianity-video> [accessed 10.05.2021]; and her interview on an evangelical YouTube channel, see Capturing Christianity [Online], *The Important Difference Between Progressive and Historic Christianity* (02/07/2020), YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wlSmsoZpJM> [accessed 10.05.2021]. Moreover, she has recently published a book on this topic: Childers, *Another Gospel?: A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2020).

[36] See James G. Bushur, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Mosaic of Christ: Preaching Scripture in the Era of Martyrdom* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), p. 2.

Jesus-followers from the apostles through to Irenaeus and the modern day. Both of these positions are too simplistic. Plus, arguing that evangelicalism was Irenaeus' religion is fuelling foundationalist Christianity in the US and beyond to the detriment of many faithful Christians thusly driven from church communities on the basis of their 'heretical' thinking.[37]

What will become more and more evident throughout this section on Irenaeus is the reactive nature of his work. His literature was not written in some ancient equivalent of an armchair in an ivory tower with the facilities of a modern research university. The anachronism of this is important but so is the impression that Irenaeus wrote because his theology in itself inspired him to. This was no neutral activity for Irenaeus. He was not writing purely to contribute to human knowledge, and his writings were not assessed in the same way a modern-day PhD student is assessed. Irenaeus wrote specifically to restrict those who could call themselves 'Christian.' His explicit reason for writing, his denigrating rhetoric, and his common recourse to mockery has the context of persuading his readers to replace what he deems contaminated Christianity with true, real, pristine Christianity. Whilst reams of literature aim to persuade (that is, Irenaeus is not unique here), Irenaeus' work did not have the intention of presenting an argument including balance and understanding. He is not interested in attempting to present ideas as they are held by adherents. He does not want to afford his targets a semblance of respectability or legitimacy. However, the only scholar in our spotlighted Irenaean literature to recognise this is Denis Minns.

Denis Minns and the Middle-Ground

Overall, Minns concludes that Irenaeus' writings are a positive contribution to theology and that he led "a successful campaign against the gnostics and Marcion,"[38]

[37] Many books have been recently published by ex- or post-evangelicals, but there is also now a wealth of podcasts focusing on similar topics. See, for instance, 'You Have Permission' podcast by Dan Koch, 'The Bible For Normal People' podcast by Peter Enns, and 'The Liturgists' podcast. Studying the role of podcasts in the evolution of evangelicalism could be fascinating research to engage in.

[38] Denis Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction* (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), p. 152.

demonstrating that pointing out the bishop's flaws does not necessitate abandoning his insights. However, Minns remains the only author of this spotlighted Irenaean literature (by which I mean literature **about** Irenaeus, not what is written **by** Irenaeus) to engage in rigorous critique of the bishop, regularly assessing his logical faults when he chooses to pursue powerful rhetoric.[39] Minns also relates speculative reasons for why Irenaeus' targets thought the way they did.[40] Repeatedly, Minns refers to the latter as 'sympathy.' I will contend below that 'critical empathy' is a more suitable phrase for this facility, but it demonstrates Minns' commitment to a balanced, rigorous analysis nonetheless. This approach which Minns pioneers is one which could solve the split which Behr and Briggman identify. If this spotlighted section of Irenaean literature occupy the right of Minns, let us briefly explore those to his left.

Heresiology

Those who subject the bishop to scrutiny in light of the Nag Hammadi texts tend not to write their longest monographs purely within Irenaeus studies. Hence, none have appeared in our survey of Irenaean literature yet. Instead, these works analyse heresiology and the heresiologists' targets more broadly, of which Irenaeus is just one figure. A selection which this essay alludes to include:

» Walter Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (1934; Eng. trans. 1971). A seminal investigation contesting the presumed sequence of heretic-formation as "unbelief, right belief, wrong belief" by arguing that in some of the major centres of Christianity, heresy preceded orthodoxy.[41] Whilst aspects of his argument have been disproven,[42] several of his legacies remain today, including the theory (which this essay also adopts) that there wasn't a pristine collection of doctrines passed down in purity from Jesus to his followers to all of the (true) churches;

» Elaine Pagels' *The Gnostic Gospels* (1980). Pagels has written prolifically in articles focusing on aspects of Irenaeus' writings and how this relates to Nag

[39] See, for instance, p. 18, 27, and 35

[40] See, for instance, p. 25, 33, and 40.

[41] Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. by Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel, Eng. trans. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1971), p. xxiii.

[42] See Thomas A. Robinson, *The Bauer Thesis Examined: The Geography of Heresy in the Early Christian Church* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988).

Hammadi texts, however her longer monographs tend to focus either on 'gnosticism' more widely, or on individual non-canonical gospels;

» Michael Williams' *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'* (1996). This study describes and demonstrates the inaccuracy of each of the characteristics often appealed to when 'gnosticism' is cited as a historical entity;

» Bart Ehrman's *Lost Christianities* (2003). As we will see in Köstenberger and Kruger's book in section two, Ehrman is a well-known, influential heresiology scholar;

» Karen King's *What is Gnosticism?* (2003). King argues that historiography on 'gnosticism' has been distorted by polemical discourses of 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy.'

Because these monographs take as their focus the implications of heresiology, they examine themes wider than Irenaeus alone. Therefore, there does not exist scholarship like Minns, who focuses on Irenaeus **and** critiques his writings. Whilst Grant, Osborn, Behr, and Briggman are firmly in Irenaeus' defence, seeing him as plainly normative, and whilst those in Bauer's likeness rigorously challenge Irenaeus but only as an aspect of a more holistic critique, Minns holds his own between the two. The next step in writing with an approach like Minns is to incorporate study of the Nag Hammadi texts, like these heresiology scholars, alongside inquiry into the bishop's theology. In this way, a fuller contextual understanding of the bishop will be conveyed to students of Irenaeus studies.

1.3: Irenaeus' Account and Reaction Combined

Before we investigate Irenaeus' key themes, it must be emphasised how reactive his material is. Therefore, for the sake of brevity, we will first outline that which Irenaeus disparages (according to the bishop himself; sources external to Irenaeus will be elaborated later). Irenaeus promptly informs his audience that he has met with some people from his target group(s) and read the Valentinian *Commentaries*. From these encounters, Irenaeus finds many concerns and seeks to counter what he has found. This is the context in which Irenaeus' description of his targets' ideologies takes place; he is not disinterested and is not undertaking studies resembling modern critical research as his interest is in undermining his targets at every possibility, not in assessing their

ideologies as a part of a balanced argument. Therefore, as much as the following is, in a direct sense, one account of Irenaeus' targets' ideologies, it is also, indirectly, an account of Irenaeus' reaction to his targets. In fact, as will be elaborated below, it is perhaps more useful to understand the following account as the latter more than the former.

The Biblical Demiurgical Myth

In chapters one to seven of book one of *Haereses*, Irenaeus details the general system of his targets, with chapters eleven to thirty-one elucidating the specifics of each individual school's adaptation. As Irenaeus understands it, this general system centres on a cosmological mythology, or a creation narrative, involving masculo-feminine 'aeons' or 'emanations.' This has been called the "biblical demiurgical myth."[43] According to this cosmology, an incomprehensible and pre-existent aeon called Bythus existed alongside his female counterpart, called Ennoia (*Haer.* 1.1.1). Bythus then impregnated Ennoia who gave birth to Nous (masculine) and Aletheia (feminine). These four aeons were "the root of all things."[44] From the latter pairing emanated two more aeons (Logos and Zoe) which then brought forth another pair of aeons (Anthropos and Ecclesia), forming the "first-begotten Ogdoad."[45] Then, Logos and Zoe produced ten more aeons, whilst Anthropos and Ecclesia produced twelve (*Haer.* 1.1.2). The former constituted the Decad and the latter constituted the Duodecad. Hence, there were thirty aeons which constituted 'the Pleroma' with the first aeon – Bythus – as uncreated source. This was apparently supported using Luke 3:23 (that Jesus did no public work for thirty years) and a numerological reading of the parable of the labourers (*Haer.* 1.1.3).[46]

What follows is a narrative centring around the restriction of certain aeons from seeing and knowing Bythus. Yet, there is one aeon determined to find him. The final female counterpart of the Duodecad, Sophia, is agonised by the futility of her efforts to

[43] See Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*.
[44] *Haer.* 1.1.1.
[45] *Haer.* 1.1.1.
[46] Cf. the apparent verification of the first Ogdoad in John's gospel by Ptolemaeus in *Haer.* 1.8.5.

comprehend Bythus (*Haer.* 1.2.2). She is restrained by a power (called 'Horos'), but not before the results of her "impossible and impracticable attempt" come into effect;[47] she gives birth to a feminine substance called Achamoth. Sophia remains in the Pleroma (or the 'heavens') but Achamoth is expelled to an intermediate place, though the latter desires to enter the Pleroma and know Bythus, her source (*Haer.* 1.4.1).

It is through Achamoth that the world was made (*Haer.* 1.4.2). She creates according to three categories: matter, animal (sometimes also translated as 'psychic'), and spiritual (*Haer.* 1.5.1). As the first of the animal nature, she creates the Demiurge, who created everything which came into existence after him. He is thus the father of everything outside the pleroma (*Haer.* 1.5.2). This Demiurge overestimates his own importance by imagining he created everything by himself without the productive power of Achamoth because he does not know she exists (*Haer.* 1.5.3). Further, it is this Demiurge who speaks through the prophets, declaring, "I am God, and besides me there is none else."[48] The devil was also created by the Demiurge, but he knew more than his creator because he was of a spiritual essence, unlike the animal Demiurge. However, Achamoth – when creating the Demiurge – secretly deposited a form of spirituality in him that some humans he created might then carry in their animal soul a capacity to become fit for the "reception of perfect rationality."[49] These human souls have received inspiration from Sophia and have capacity for perfect knowledge (*gnōsis*) and once these have come into perfection, she will pass from the intermediate place into the Pleroma (*Haer.* 1.7.1). The humans capable of *gnōsis* are known as the 'spiritual seed,' and will also join Achamoth in entering the Pleroma whilst all matter will be destroyed, including the bodies of those carrying the spiritual seed. There exist different ultimate destinations – different soteriological trajectories – for Achamoth's other created categories, 'animal' and 'material;' the material "must perish" as it cannot receive any divine knowledge, and

[47] *Haer.* 1.2.3.
[48] *Haer.* 1.5.4.
[49] *Haer.* 1.5.6.

the animal "is a mean between the spiritual and the material, [so] it passes to the side to which inclination draws it."[50] And it is for the animal group for which the Saviour came to secure salvation. Moreover, for the animal, they are saved through works and "mere faith," and cannot receive "perfect knowledge" as their spiritual counterparts do.[51] They must "practise continence and good works" in order to reach "the intermediate habitation," however the spiritual seed retain their spiritual status regardless of their ethical conduct like gold retains its worth even when dirtied.[52] Thus, they reach the Pleroma on the merit of their born nature alone (*Haer.* 1.6.2.).

Conversely, the bishop writes that his targets claim that he and his community are in this 'animal' cohort (*Haer.* 1.6.2.), and Irenaeus resents this, writing, "they run us down […] as utterly contemptible and ignorant persons, while they highly exalt themselves, and claim to be perfect, and the elect seed."[53] In fact, Irenaeus suggests this is the aim of his targets: "to render men disbelievers in their own salvation" because of their envy. In this way, Irenaeus understands the issue as one to do with confidence in one's identity which is divided into those who do not have enough in their Christian identity (Irenaeus and his community) and those who have too much (misplaced) confidence in their Christian identity (his targets).[54]

In the same chapter, Irenaeus further resents his targets for the ethical leniency they allow themselves. Not only do these groups of arrogant believers disparage and mock Irenaeus and his community for being, by nature, lesser in their capacity for divine knowledge and in their ultimate destiny, they use this as reasoning to evade moral responsibility. Irenaeus writes that these groups "addict themselves without fear to all those kinds of forbidden deeds of which the Scriptures assure us that 'they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.' (Galatians 5:21)."[55] Irenaeus elaborates that

[50] *Haer.* 1.6.1.
[51] *Haer.* 1.6.2.
[52] *Haer.* 1.6.4.
[53] *Haer.* 1.6.4.
[54] *Haer.* 4.Praef.4.
[55] *Haer.* 1.6.3.

they eat meat sacrificed to idols, attend 'heathen' festivals, attend gladiator fights and 'defile' women who they converted.

According to Irenaeus, these believers defend their behaviour by compartmentalising their carnal and spiritual natures away from each other, claiming that "carnal things should be allowed to the carnal nature, while spiritual things are provided for the spiritual."[56] However, Irenaeus is convinced that these groups willingly deceive themselves and ignore biblical texts which – he thinks – plainly outlaw such activity in order that they may follow any passionate desire they may have with the posture of justification and legitimacy. Irenaeus claims he sees through their superficial attempt to live a life of libertinism behind the proclamation of a worldview of fixed identity.

We therefore have a complex account from Irenaeus involving (1) what these seemingly disreputable thinkers claim is their reasoning behind their ideology and practice, (2) what Irenaeus claims is the real reason, and (3) what Irenaeus claims is the real and true ideology and practice as revealed by God. In this way, Irenaeus is very interested in locating truth, determining (1) where truth is falsely proclaimed to be found, (2) where truth or meaning is falsely sought, and (3) where truth is actually found.

Whilst Irenaeus remains an important second-century source for scholars today, it is important to phrase this as **Irenaeus' reaction** as well as his account. This is, in part, a result of studying texts from 'the other side,' as will be done below, but also because Irenaeus' claims against these groups paint an overwhelmingly dire impression of them. Not only are they envious of those with truth (which they could have chosen to join if they wished), they wish to compete with it and destroy the faith of those who abide by the truth. Moreover, they seek to satisfy all manner of desires incongruent with Christian living. Irenaeus would have his readers think that there is nothing beneficial or good about those he is compelled to target. This should incite curiosity and research.

[56] Cf. a similar representation of the Simonians in *Haer.* 1.23.3-4; and claims of sexual license by those following from Basilides and Carpocrates in *Haer.* 1.28.2.

Therefore, this is the focus of this thesis.

A Note on Language

Irenaeus' 'targets' are not easy to identify in all of Irenaeus' various allegations. He weaves critique of a group he associates with '*gnōsis* falsely so-called' along with use of rhetoric established by Justin Martyr and mentions vast numbers of second-century individuals and their associated ideologies. Occasionally Irenaeus will recite anecdotes and general allegations of repugnant ideas or ethical practice, but not directly attribute it to certain individuals or groups. In these cases, we could look back in pages previous for the last group/individual he named and attribute the specifics to them. We can also summarise that Irenaeus precisely did not only entertain specific allegations against particular individuals or groups but wanted to persuade his readership of the commonality between his targets as 'other' to his own ideology. Thus, whilst the language of 'Irenaeus' targets' is used here, it is to reflect Irenaeus' own argument, not to suggest that there was one group of right-thinking Christians and one multifarious group of heretics.

Moreover, language of 'targets' might prevent subtle anachronism. Written discourse on Christian identity in the second century was no to-and-fro. It was no modern debate or exchange of letters, and yet common nomenclature of Irenaeus' 'opponents' can suggest that direct dialogue happened. Though – as will be discussed – there was likely literature written in response to Irenaeus' ideological community, we should be careful to avoid thinking and speaking as though Irenaeus was in a structured debate with the objects of his polemic.

CHAPTER TWO

• • •

Irenaeus' Fundamentals

There are three strong convictions in *Against Heresies* and *Demonstration* to which Irenaeus returns repeatedly. The first I will elucidate is Irenaeus' account of the purpose of the created universe, how it has been structured, and the end to which it is directed. Irenaeus' term for this vision is **'economy.'** The ancient Greek and early Christian meaning of the term was not restricted to monetary or material structures and resources as it now is most often understood. Instead, the Greek οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*) referred to "the arrangement of household goods and activities," and the early Christian adoption of this into the divine economy concept referred to God's actions and historical events relating to God's purpose.[57] Second is Irenaeus' account of why the economy vision is the vision one should accept as real. Irenaeus claims his economy vision is the true understanding of reality, as 'seen' by God, and thus this second conviction is about **the location of truth**; truth, for Irenaeus, resides in sub-sources which stem from the ultimate divine source of truth, and so his economy vision is verifiable and not merely an idea among others.

Irenaeus is led by his theory of the plain realness of the economy vision according

[57] See Michel R. Barnes, 'Oeconomia' in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. by Everett Ferguson, 2nd edn. (New York, NY: Garland, 1999), pp. 825-826.

the accessibility and multiplicity of the sub-source locations of truth to a strong conviction of **individual free will**. The bishop regularly refers to his stance of strong individual intellectual autonomy when explaining why there are other theories and schools of thought that others appear to adopt other than the one he thinks so obvious and evident. These three convictions shape much of Irenaeus' content of *Haereses* and *Demonstration*, but are framed and further reflected in his **rhetoric**. How he phrases his ideas, and even how he forms ideas, indicates he is not writing to discuss second-century Christianity as university academics often commit their study. The bishop writes to persuade a persecuted people in tumultuous times against an assortment of people who are doing a good job at blending in with other Christians. It is study of this aspect that highlights the problem of lifting theology like the economy vision, location of truth, and free will straight from the bishop's writing in a literal sense without critical engagement. However, we will explore this more in the next chapter on employing critical empathy. For now, let us cover the fundamentals Irenaeus holds dear.

2.1: Divine Economy

Time and time again, the bishop refers to the arrangement of all that was created by God and its proper order according to God's purpose. It appears Irenaeus draws influence several times from Ephesians 1:8b-10,[58] which reads: "With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as **a plan** for the fullness of time, **to gather up all things in him**, things in heaven and things on earth;" further clarification is attained by study of Eph. 1:10 in Greek: "εἰς **οἰκονομίαν** τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, **ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ**, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς." The root word here used for 'plan' is *oikonomia* and 'to gather up' is *anakephalaiōsasthai; oikonomia* is where we get the now-common word 'economy,' and *anakephalaiōsasthai* uses the prefix *ana* ('up' or 'over again') and *kephalē* ('head') which broadly matches the Latin composition of

[58] See *Haer.* 1.10.1, 3.16.6, and 5.20.2.

recapitulatio, from which we get 'recapitulation.'[59] However, with regard to *oikonomia*, Irenaeus drew upon more than this verse in his understanding and development of the concept.

The role *oikonomia* played in ancient Greek culture has been well documented. In his brief historical trace, Dotan Leshem details the first uses of *oikonomia* in Greek literature and how – with the increase of city-state (*polis*) affairs in the lives of the educated classes – the concept garnered more meaning. *Oikonomia* derives from οἶκος (*oikos* – 'household') and νόμος (*nomos* – 'law'), and is used in matters of the proper order of a household.[60] 'Household' came to mean a basic societal unit with a particular arrangement, and thus *oikonomia* was commonly used metaphorically to describe other units too.[61] John Henry Paul Reumann extrapolates the philology of *oikonomia* and finds three contexts employed in literature outside of the domestic sense: in a political, governmental sense (where 'household' is the *polis*); secondly, in a general sense of 'arrangement' as applied to various arts and sciences, including law, medicine, literature, rhetoric and ethics (where the 'household' is the content of study in these areas);[62] and, in an ultimate sense about nature, the cosmos, and the divine (where the 'household' was the created universe).[63]

Reumann traces the concept of *oikonomia* in the latter sense ("God's administration") to significantly before the second century CE and before Christian use,

[59] Recapitulation will be elucidated below with regards to Irenaeus' soteriology. For a lucid introduction to the concepts of economy and recapitulation, see John J. O'Keefe, and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2005). Note, though, that this book considers Irenaeus normative of second-century Christianity and dismisses his targets' scriptural interpretations without substantial discussion.

[60] See *Pol.* 1.3.

[61] For a brief history of Ancient Greek use of *oikonomia*, see Dotan Leshem, 'Retrospectives: What Did the Ancient Greeks Mean by *Oikonomia*?', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, No. 1, Vol. 30 (2016), pp. 225–231.

[62] Relatedly, Eric Osborn writes: "Fitness/appropriateness became a central value of classical culture. Beginning from what is appropriate to certain human groups, it moves to what is appropriate to personal identity, art and ethics." See Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, p. 20.

[63] John Henry Paul Reumann, 'The Use of *Oikonomia* and Related Terms in Greek Sources to about 100 A.D. as a Background for Patristic Applications' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1957).

defining it as "the arrangement, ordering, regulation, or direction, of the cosmos, the world, its parts, and the people in it, by nature or by God, especially with reference to providence."[64] It is this economy vision, including the nature of God and the events of God's salvific action according to God's overarching intention and providence, which Irenaeus makes rich use of.

As Minns notes, with only fragments of Greek manuscripts of *Haereses* and the only complete manuscripts of *Haereses* and *Demonstration* being in Latin and Armenian respectively, we often have to guess Irenaeus' original Greek in order to understand his specific meaning. However, even if Irenaeus did not, in his original writings, use *oikonomia* for all the times he writes of the proper arrangement and activities of creation according to God's purpose, he demonstrates significant familiarity with the importance of the principle of *oikonomia* as inherited from his Greek education to warrant contemporary scholars referring to Irenaeus' *oikonomia* or economy vision.

When Irenaeus refers to or elaborates his economy vision, it is not a regurgitated monolithic definition, but instead a dynamic and full scope or system of thinking, of which different aspects are expounded at any one time, hence my choice of 'economy vision' instead of 'economy concept.' In book two, chapter twenty-five, paragraphs one and two of *Against Heresies* (*Haer.* 2.25.1-2), Irenaeus writes:

> 1. If any one, however, say in reply to these things, What then? Is it a meaningless and accidental thing, that the positions of names, and the election of the apostles, and the working of the Lord, and **the arrangement of created things, are what they are?**— we answer them: Certainly not; but with great wisdom and diligence, all things have clearly been **made** by God, **fitted and prepared** [for their special purposes]; and His word formed both things ancient and those belonging to the latest times; and men ought not to connect those things with the number thirty, but to harmonize them with **what actually exists, or with right reason**. Nor should they seek to prosecute inquiries respecting God by means of numbers, syllables, and letters. For this is an uncertain mode of proceeding, on account of their varied and diverse systems, and **because every sort of hypothesis may at the present day be, in like manner, devised by any one**; so that they can derive arguments against the truth from these very theories, inasmuch as they may be turned in many different directions. But, on the contrary, they ought to adapt the numbers themselves, and

[64] Reumann, 'The Use of *Oikonomia* and Related Terms', p. 391.

> those things which have been formed, to **the true theory lying before them**. For **system does not spring out of numbers, but numbers from a system**; nor does God derive His being from things made, but things made from God. **For all things originate from one and the same God**.
>
> 2. But since created things are various and numerous, they are indeed well **fitted and adapted to the whole creation**; yet, **when viewed individually, are mutually opposite** and inharmonious, just as the **sound of the lyre**, which consists of many and opposite notes, gives rise to one unbroken melody, through means of the interval which separates each one from the others. The **lover of truth** therefore ought not to be deceived by the interval between each note, nor should he imagine that one was due to one artist and author, and another to another, nor that one person fitted the treble, another the bass, and yet another the tenor strings; but he should hold that **one and the same person [formed the whole]**, so as to prove the judgment, goodness, and skill exhibited in the whole work and [specimen of] wisdom. Those, too, who listen to the melody, ought to praise and extol **the artist**, to admire the tension of some notes, to attend to the softness of others, to catch the sound of others between both these extremes, and to consider the special character of others, so as to inquire **at what each one aims**, and what is the cause of their variety, never failing to apply our rule, **neither giving up the [one] artist, nor casting off faith in the one God who formed all things, nor blaspheming our Creator**.[65]

This section relatively succinctly encompasses Irenaeus' key aspects of the economy vision: one god, one purpose of God (a singular nature and narrative), and one harmony.

One God

Firstly, that there is one god. The analogy of the lyre is a typical Irenaean image and vividly illustrates that different aspects of creation should not be attributed to different gods or emanations (whereby 'emanations' denotes distinct personalities, abilities, aims and consciousnesses, etc), in the same way different notes of a melody should not be attributed to different artists; there is one artist, one creator who formed all creation from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*).

A particular target in Irenaeus' crosshairs is Marcion. Irenaeus writes that Marcion distinguished between "Him who is proclaimed as God by the law and the prophets" and Jesus' "father who is above the God that made the world;"[66] Jesus abolished the prophets

[65] My emphases.
[66] *Haer.* 1.27.2.

and the law of the lesser, creator god and removed parts of scripture which recorded Jesus "confessing that the Maker of this universe is His Father."[67] Against this, Irenaeus wants to emphasise the oneness of the god who created all that exists and begot Jesus as son. Though he concedes there was more than one covenant, they are part of the one economy of one god, not – in the instance of Marcionism – two purposes devised by two gods, one good and one evil (*Haer.* 3.12.12).[68] Specifically writing to refute Marcionism, Irenaeus writes that when Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like a household manager (*oikodespotēs*) who brings forth new and old out of their treasure-store, he was teaching that two covenants were established by "one and the same God": the old (the "giving of the law") and the new (the "manner of life required by the Gospel").[69] For Irenaeus, "one and the same householder produced both covenants, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who spoke with both Abraham and Moses."[70]

Irenaeus finds a parallel to Marcionism in other demiurgical myths, especially the attribution of different aspects of (what is to Irenaeus) the one divine economy to different divine emanations. Irenaeus notes a suspicious appearance of protest against authority in Marcion and the demiurgical parallels. He writes that they "object to tradition" and claim that they have "discovered the unadulterated truth" above that which the apostles of Jesus imparted.[71] Not only do they consider themselves above the apostles, but "even the Lord Himself" when they say that Jesus "spoke as at one time from the Demiurge, at another from the intermediate place, and yet again from the Pleroma."[72] These people who claim greater knowledge of things according to hidden mysteries who, in Irenaeus' eyes, seem to be protesting against the authority of the apostolic testimony

[67] *Haer.* 1.27.2.

[68] Covenantal theology in Irenaeus is not simple and it would be anachronistic to say he conceived only of two covenants the way many Christians do now. For more on the role of the different covenants (especially Irenaeus' four-fold covenant idea), see Minns, *Irenaeus*, pp. 97-117. For more on Irenaeus' idea of the two-fold covenant, see Everett Ferguson, 'Covenant' in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. by Everett Ferguson, 2nd edn. (New York, NY: Garland, 1999), pp. 297-299.

[69] *Haer.* 4.9.1.

[70] *Haer.* 4.9.1.

[71] *Haer.* 3.2.2.

[72] *Haer.* 3.2.2.

are a group made up of several schools of thought which Irenaeus tries to reify. One of their core common characteristics as the bishop tells it is "that these men do now consent neither to Scripture nor to tradition."[73]

As a part of their protest against (what, to Irenaeus, are) reliable sources of truth, these heretics attribute some teaching propagated as Christian to the animal Demiurge, and to the animal 'intermediate' place, and some to the Pleroma. In other words, some teaching is not binding on those with the 'spiritual' seed, and it is not the truth as the divine Pleroma know truth. To this, Irenaeus is outright: there is no collection of divine purposes and activities; there is one god with one economy. The bishop also writes that this group also seems to differentiate among the apostolic teaching that which is from 'the law' and that which is from 'the Saviour,' with the implication that the law is not relevant for Christians or those with the spiritual seed, and only the Saviour's teaching is true knowledge. He makes this point, it seems, to substantiate his claim that the group think themselves above the apostles and therefore consider themselves able to discern the truth from non-truth in apostolic teaching. However, if some scriptural texts (as we have them today) are taken at face-value, it appears the apostles themselves were discerning between relevant and irrelevant (or at least no-longer-relevant) teaching, and thus dialogue over which positions held by apostles were accurate was not unique to Irenaeus' targets.[74] In other words, Irenaeus appears to assume that any discourse about which particular apostolic teachings were authoritative is indicative of an arrogant protest characteristic, identifying the involved parties with his reified protest group of falsely-called Christians. He does not appear concerned with engaging in finer details of possible inconsistencies within his own ideology.

Nevertheless, Irenaeus insists upon God's simplicity, and claims that to think God has emanations with distinct and incongruent intentions is to admit God is composite. To admit composition is to admit God is not unoriginated, as something must have

[73] *Haer.* 3.2.2.

[74] See Acts 15, for instance.

caused the configuration if there were divine components. For Irenaeus, there is one god, one creator, one cause, one intention, one system of activity behind the created universe.[75] To ascribe to God a composite nature is to anthropomorphise God and not – as Irenaeus claims – what the scriptures inform us.[76]

One Purpose: Nature

Secondly, in *Haer.* 2.25.1-2 we can find the understanding that the universe has been created and arranged, "fitted and prepared" according to the one purpose of God. This follows on directly from Irenaeus' monotheism described above; because there is one god, there is only one purpose, not a variety of competing purposes. Therefore, the truth is singular: the truth is God's intended purpose and is what "actually exists" as opposed to fictitious and false hypotheses which could be "devised by any one." Moreover, God's purpose is free from human imposition, which is harmful and to be detected and avoided. As opposed to imposing (a humanly-conceived) numerology upon reality, one should align their understanding of creation "to the true theory lying before them." Because truth is singular and independent of any human and their individual ideological contaminations, one need only to love the truth in order to find it. If truth were partial (that is, a thing might be somewhat true in some senses, but false in others) or obscured, perhaps Irenaeus might have more patience for those who located truth differently to him; perhaps he would have committed space in his work toward reflecting upon the different positions of the 'heretics' in order to assess the extent of their truthfulness and the extent of their falsity, and employing empathy for the task of complex theological discernment. However, he does not because his conceptualisation of truth is one of simplicity and independence.

This confronts those of his targets who suppose that creation of the world happened as a part of the greater fall of Sophia. Creation was not an accident or a result of an emanation rebelling against the wider divine pleroma. God's intention to create the

[75] See *Haer.* 2.25.3, and 5.5.2.
[76] AH 2.13.3.

universe was singular and was deliberate. Thus, we can see the nature of God's purpose, for Irenaeus, is simplicity and oneness, reflecting God's own nature. But what about the theological narrative and content of this purpose? For that we must divert from *Haer.* 2.25.1-2 and consider Irenaeus' conceptualisation of divine salvation.

One Purpose: Narrative

In Irenaeus' understanding, the nature of God's purpose is one and is thus simple. However, the narrative content of this purpose is rich. For the bishop, the following soteriological narrative is the *telos* of the *oikonomia*. Central to the narrative are the following doctrines which can essentially be seen as events in one harmonious story:

1. *Creatio ex nihilo* and the nature of God: a theme already demonstrated as a priority for Irenaeus;
2. Theological anthropology: humans as made in the image of God;
3. Christology: Jesus' role in the economy in recapitulating all things by becoming the new Adam;
4. Free will and human reason: the resultant invitation to humans to accept or deny God and God's purpose.

As just aforementioned, we must diverge briefly from *Haer.* 2.25.1-2 to complement our study of the singular nature of God's purpose and to explore these four 'events' of the *oikonomia* story.

As elaborated above, the concepts of divine unity and simplicity (reflected also in the nature of God's purpose as one harmonious, non-conflicted purpose) are paramount for Irenaeus' worldview or, in other words, for his conceptualisation of the divine economy. God created everything out of nothing, all matter from no matter, and created everything with the *telos* of returning to the divine; for Irenaeus, God created humanity "to cleave to and to become, one with God," as an eternal partaker in incorruptibility.[77]

Salvation as return to divinity, particularly in patristics and Eastern Christian theology, is often denoted as 'deification' or 'theosis,' and has a rich history which owes

[77] *Haer.* 3.18.7. It must be stressed that though I speak of creation as an 'event,' this is more for simplicity of understanding; for Irenaeus, this was a divine act in ways unlike any of the events that happened afterwards. Events since have involved aspects of creation changing, but not creation from nothing.

much to Irenaeus' economy vision.[78] However, this soteriology also owes much to the Platonic differentiation between 'being' and 'becoming' which informed Irenaeus, his contemporaries and his predecessors.[79] This differentiation distinguished the ultimately transcendent God (that which **is** – i.e. 'being') from creation (that which is **'becoming'**). Only God 'is' (or 'has being') and creation passes in and out of being. Thus, creation participates in God and is only granted its being through God's conferral of existence.[80] The result of this understanding is that there is a tension between the difference between God and creation and God's concomitant "immediacy" – God is both different from and intimately close with that which is created.[81]

This immediacy is further reflected in Irenaeus' *imago dei* concept, which brings us to the next event in the *oikonomia* narrative. For the bishop, the relation humans have to God is not a variegated model; it is not the case that either one is born with 'the spiritual seed' or one is not, nor is it the case that some humans are in the image of one emanation (for instance, of the demiurge) but not another (for instance, one of the primary Ogdoad). There is one image of God and every human is made in it.

For Irenaeus, humans are made in the image of God through their having reason. At creation, God bestowed humanity with reason, making them like God who is "wholly reason".[82] Irenaeus understands reason as that which is used to harmonise and link things correctly to that which actually exists (*Haer.* 2.25.1). This means that when something is harmonised to that which (Irenaeus considers) does not actually exist, it is not reason that is being used. In fact, it demonstrates a destitution of reason. For instance, Irenaeus disparages the focus his opponents have on seeking numerological insight into material

[78] For more, see Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[79] Whilst absorbing some Platonic influences and sometimes praising some ideas, Irenaeus also credits his targets' ideas (namely of pre-existent matter and the relationship between things 'below' and things 'above') to Plato. Thus, his admiration for the philosopher has firm limits. See *Haer.* 2.14.3-4.

[80] See Gerhard May, *Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall, p. 165.

[81] See Minns, *Irenaeus*, pp. 43-45.

[82] *Haer.* 2.13.3; cf. *Haer.* 4.4.3

and spiritual phenomena. He thinks that to look at the numbers one sees in natural and scriptural data is not to use reason but to go against common sense and thus to consider themselves superior to God, exalting their own opinion above God (*Haer.* 2.26.3). Those who desire truth do not act as though they are destitute of reason because desiring truth is to harmonise things correctly to that which actually exists. Moreover, to abandon reason is to "desert what is certain, indubitable, and true," to trade the house built on solid rock for the one built on shifting sand (Matthew 7:24-27).[83] Therefore, Irenaeus' idea of reason given to humanity by way of being in the image of God is inextricably linked with the bishop's idea of 'what actually exists,' of what he considers normative, 'common sense' knowledge. Either one seeks truth and uses reason to do so, or one considers themselves above God and does not use reason.

Furthermore, much like how an item of clothing has an informational tag on an inseam, detailing the shop which the person purchased it from, humans have been implanted with reason which allows them to unearth certain theological principles. When God created, all creation was marked by their createdness and, therefore, humans can look within and find this innate informational tag which "reveals to them [the truth] that there is one God, the Lord of all" (*Haer.* 2.6.1).[84] For Irenaeus, humanity passively, by default, manifest clues of their divine origin. Therefore, one can look within to find those clues and using this can understand that they are created by one god. Yet, Irenaeus does clarify that this 'natural' knowledge is only partial and humans may only gain further knowledge of the Father through the Son.[85]

Even so, Irenaeus does not consider reason the only way in which humans are the likeness of God. The bishop sees humanity as made in the image of Jesus, for Jesus is the

[83] *Haer.* 2.27.3.

[84] *Haer.* 2.6.1. Although this section refers to the angels and creator of the world necessarily knowing the supreme god by way of God's dominion (a divine clothing tag), the logic Irenaeus uses includes the same argument to be made of humanity knowing their divine origin through God's dominion. See Briggman, *God and Christ*, pp. 54-58.

[85] *Haer.* 2.6.1.

invisible God made visible.[86] Therefore, the bodiliness of Jesus, necessary for the incarnation, is also what makes humans the image of God. Additionally, Irenaeus understands God's creation of human bodies to be theologically important, particularly as he claims to detect an anti-materiality in his targets. According to his account, emphasis on the seed of Achamoth being a spiritual reality which allows the mind to perceive divine knowledge leads to deprecation of the human body and materiality more widely. Irenaeus sees this as an affront to God's intended creation of humanity as bodily, corporeal beings and instead emphasises that God created humans as material. Irenaeus celebrates particularly Genesis 2:7, that God breathed life into earthly dust to create the first human.[87] Thomas Weinandy quips that the bishop was "in love with mud."[88] Moreover, Irenaeus asserts that righteous acts by believers occur in bodies and claims a physical resurrection will occur, rendering human bodies "incorruptible and immortal."[89] Thus, through bodiliness Irenaeus also finds humans are the image and likeness of God. But it is worth noting that although Irenaeus claims a higher view of the body than his targets, his idea of Christian identity revolves around believing and thinking precise things about divinity, much in a similar way to how he describes his targets. His view of the importance of the body does not seem to translate into an embodied Christian identity (for instance, an emphasis on prayer, worship and charity). Instead he holds to a dogmatic, mind-centred understanding of Christian identity.

However, the *imago dei*, the incarnation meant even more to Irenaeus. As noted above in the account of *creatio ex nihilo*, there is a tension between God's intimate closeness to creation and God's radical transcendence; the same exists in Irenaeus' *imago dei* concept. Humanity bears likeness to God through reason and bodiliness, but humans are not perfect as God is perfect. Therefore, the incarnation was, for the bishop, a means

[86] *Dem.* 22; cf. *Haer.* 4.6.6.

[87] *Dem.* 11.

[88] Thomas G. Weinandy, 'St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei: The Importance of Being Human' in *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, No. 4, Vol. 6 (2003), pp. 15-34 (pp. 17-19).

[89] *Haer.* 2.29.2.

of God teaching people how to become more like God. Humans need a visible model to follow in their journey back to the divine and the incarnation of the Son provided this visible image of the invisible God.[90] For Irenaeus, the incarnation is integral to deification, but not just with regards to Jesus demonstrating what it is to be in God's image. In order to understand another part of the role of Jesus in the *oikonomia*, we need to return to the concept of *anakephalaiōsasthai* from Ephesians 1:10: recapitulation.

As a result of Adam eating the forbidden fruit in Genesis, Irenaeus considers that humanity lost its image and likeness to God through disobedience.[91] The bishop goes as far as to write that the "man was a child, not yet having his understanding perfected" and therefore "he was easily led astray by the deceiver" (*Dem.* 12).[92] In other words, Adam was young in his journey back to his divine origin and his youth made him susceptible to disobedience. Nevertheless, this disobedience required that Christ reverse the damage done and restore the *imago dei*.

This is the third event in the *oikonomia* story: Jesus' role in bringing about the purposes of God through recapitulation and in so doing, reuniting humans to God. Through God the Word assuming humanity in Jesus, all was summed up (or recapitulated) in Godself so that "He might draw all things to Himself at the proper time."[93] In *Demonstration* 30-40, Irenaeus narrates his recapitulation aspect of the economy vision. He writes,

> it was necessary that Adam should be summed up in Christ, that mortality might be swallowed up and overwhelmed by immortality; and Eve summed up in Mary, that a virgin should be a virgin's intercessor, and by a virgin's obedience undo and put away the disobedience of a virgin.[94]

Christ transforms the dire trajectory of humans' ultimate destiny by "waging war against our enemy, and crushing him who had at the beginning led us away captives in Adam,

[90] *Haer.* 5.16.2.
[91] *Haer.* 3.18.1.
[92] Cf. *Haer.* 2.13.3.
[93] *Haer.* 3.16.6.
[94] *Dem.* 33; cf. the roles of Mary and Eve in *Haer.* 5.21.1.

and trampled upon his head," in reference to the serpent of Genesis 3.

Finally, what this enables is deification. Jesus' salvific action allow humans to obey God and Jesus' example provides humans with guidance on what that obedience looks like. Given this, it is a matter of free will whether any given human will choose to obey God. For Irenaeus, this begins with choosing to accept God as God really is, versus choosing to reject God for another foreign ideology. Therefore, free will is the fourth 'event' in the narrative of God's purpose.

Above, *Haer.* 4.4.3 was cited as an example of Irenaeus' conception that the bestowal of reason to humanity is part of being made in God's image. In this passage, the bishop is appealing to scripture where John the Baptist describes the judgement which awaits all people: "His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."[95] Irenaeus interprets this with Malachi 4:1 so that the wheat represents the saved and the chaff represents "all the arrogant and all evildoers" who will be burned up at the time of divine judgement.

Irenaeus elaborates on this allegory to distinguish to what extent the metaphor relates to theological truth. He writes that whilst wheat and chaff are "inanimate and irrational," what they represent are not.[96] Humans have been given reason and are "in this respect like to God."[97] With this reason, humans have been made free in their will and have power over themselves. Therefore, some **choose** to become the wheat which is saved and stored in the barn, and some **choose** to become chaff which is burned as useless refuse. This is Irenaeus' explanation for why Christian diversity of belief exists, why not all self-professing Christians believe in one god as the creator of the world who created humanity and begot the Son, etc; because this belief faces every person, "but all do not in the same way believe."[98] For Irenaeus, diversity in belief does not show that truth is

[95] Matthew 3:12.
[96] *Haer.* 4.4.3.
[97] *Haer.* 4.4.3.
[98] *Haer.* 4.6.6.

elusive, but that some people use their free will to live as though what they know to be true is not true. Thus, when Irenaeus refers to his targets, he refers to them as those who have chosen to diverge from the truth.

Through this narrative of the divine purpose, then, Irenaeus develops his key ideas of monotheism, humans in divine likeness, Christ as the reverser of human disobedience and humans as rational and free to respond to a divine invitation of participation. Finally, in returning to our elucidation of *Haer.* 2.25.1-2, we will explore how, for Irenaeus, this economy vision involves an all-encompassing sense of harmony and unity within creation.

One Harmony

In the image of the lyre, there are many individual notes which "when viewed individually, are mutually opposite and inharmonious," Irenaeus writes;[99] they do not 'make sense.' However, they are part of "one unbroken melody," performed by one artist and when considered as part of one melody by one artist, these separate notes and their difference do make sense for they are "fitted and adapted" to this overarching melody. Because God is singular and unified – being one and having one purpose – one can find clarification on the purpose of individual aspects by appealing to the larger whole. Irenaeus says that his targets see these individual notes and, because they fail to contextualise them within the divine economy vision, they look for alternative explanations, other ultimate visions, outside of God's own intention. This is how he explains the demiurgical myth and its scriptural explanations: his targets start first with the wealth of 'data' within the economy, pick the aspects that make sense to them, and build an economy vision from there; therefore, Irenaeus' targets fixate on the number thirty and seek to account for the seeming prominence of this number. But to do this, the bishop claims, is to blaspheme the true artist. This is indeed in tension with Irenaeus' contention of his targets' intellectual dishonesty, but Irenaeus often repeats this

[99] *Haer.* 2.25.2.

understanding of his targets' logic nonetheless.

Instead, Irenaeus calls for Christians to begin with the divine, true and sure economy vision and then to examine the 'data' within the economy, including scriptural data. This is because, as Minns describes, the bishop sees all creation "in all their extravagant diversity and all their exuberant beauty" as originating in the one will of God.[100] Therefore, it is the will of God that is the common denominator and what all data should be understood in reference to. In another image, early in his first book of *Haereses*, Irenaeus describes this 'top-down' process: one should consult the holistic (and apparently unified) picture given by the scriptures in order to understand the individual details, events, people, etc. In particular he describes the scriptural image as a mosaic of a king whereby each tile has its proper place and its 'purpose' is recognised once seen as a part of the whole, but not necessarily when viewed by itself.[101]

Irenaeus understands the method of his targets as the picking of discrete data pieces from scripture and aligning them to another economy vision which is distinct from the teaching of the Hebrew prophets, Jesus' teaching or apostolic teaching. In so doing, they "dismember and destroy the truth" by "violently drawing away from their proper connection, words, expressions, and parables whenever found, to adapt the oracles of God to their baseless fictions."[102] Irenaeus regularly describes this aberrant economy vision as one which they themselves have created. Therefore, the bishop appears to accuse his targets of a more 'bottom-up' system, of assessing individual data and drawing ultimate conclusions from them (according to their particular methodology). This is his explanation (or one of his explanations) for why both his targets and he look at the same data of the created universe, including scriptural data, but understand the meaning of that data differently.

This harmony of the economy vision that is achieved by considering the purpose

[100] Minns, Irenaeus, p. 50.
[101] *Haer.* 1.8.1.
[102] *Haer.* 1.8.1.

of parts ultimately in relation to the purpose of the whole is labelled by Eric Osborn 'the aesthetic criterion.' Using this concept, Osborn links ancient aesthetic theory (which demanded "form, proportion and appropriateness between reality and appearance, between presentation and content, between parts and whole")[103] with reasoning behind Irenaeus' use of imaginative mockery.[104] The bishop's targets had a "chameleon quality" that "no rational discussion (as with Jews and philosophers) was adequate, and any attempt at common ground would dissolve the substance of Jewish-Christian belief in a sea of fantasy."[105] Thus, the bishop resorts to humour. In another book on Tertullian, Osborn writes:

> …humour was the only way to keep others from sloppiness and sentiment. Since their orientation was aesthetic, humour could challenge their position.[106]

It makes *Against Heresies* an engaging and vivid read, however when the images reach limits – as all metaphors do – without acknowledgement, extended prose becomes susceptible to messy confusion. It is for this reason that Irenaeus' prose is sometimes described as an intellectual jungle.[107] Throughout this essay, we will journey through Irenaeus' jungle of thought, looking out for his beneficial contributions to theological thought, but also his discrepancies and their significance.

Conclusion

Overall, then, from understanding Irenaeus' *oikonomia*, we can see some key themes. In insisting that all creation was made by one transcendent god according to a divine purpose, there is a simplicity to much of Irenaeus' theology: the simplicity of God (God is not composite), the simplicity of truth (there is only one divine intention by which the universe operates), the simplicity of faith (accepting one's knowledge that God is God). By claiming such simplicity, Irenaeus establishes a stark, highly-defined notion of

[103] Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, p. 19.
[104] For instance, see *Haer.* 1.11.4.
[105] Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, pp. 22-23.
[106] Eric Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 205-206.
[107] Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, pp. 9-10.

absolute truth along with the imperative that all human influence and imposition distort 'what actually exists' into something incongruent with the divine intention upon comparison. Further, this means it can only be a matter of free will (not speculation and discernment) as to whether any human will come to live a Christian life of obedience to God. This establishes a foundation for Irenaeus from which spring multiple locations which make truth accessible to humans in multiple ways. This is how Irenaeus functions as a foundationalist; he assesses the truth of any given knowledge by tracing it genealogically from the source which it came to the ultimate source of truth: God, the author of the one true divine purpose for all things. It is to the network of this genealogy which we now turn.

2.2: Location of Truth

As mentioned in the introduction, Irenaeus presents his audience with three accounts of the location of truth: (1) what his targets claim their source is, (2) what Irenaeus claims is the real source of their ideology and practice, and (3) what Irenaeus says is the true account of reality revealed by God; it is these questions which Irenaeus elaborates to demonstrate how one comes to know his economy vision and trust its veracity. In doing this he establishes for his readers a foundation which they can be certain will hold as strong as a house built on rock, unlike his targets whose houses are built on shifting sand (*Haer.* 2.27.3).

As demonstrated above, Irenaeus can explain Christian diversity through differing moral standards: his targets do not value honesty regarding real truth. However, when he approaches his targets as somewhat earnest thinkers, he understands that the reason his targets do not express his understanding of the divine economy is because they locate truth from 'incorrect' sources. Often when academics arrive at this aspect of Irenaeus' literature, they explain terms such as 'apostolic succession' and the 'rule of faith';[108]

[108] See, for example, Henry Chadwick, *The Penguin History of the Church Vol. 1: The Early Church*, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Group, 1993), pp. 41-45.

helpful though these terms are – they are after all lifted from the extant texts we have of Irenaeus – the implicit connections drawn between Irenaeus' various epistemological sub-sources and from where they attain divine authority (the divine source) are rarely explained. So firstly, I shall delineate how truth is found for Irenaeus: where truth is located and why it is that it can be located in the following sources. Moreover, I have included this information diagrammatically in *Fig. 1* below which is designed to be read alongside the explanation for maximum clarity.

The Source

Ultimately, Irenaeus is seeking the account of events as God knows them to be. Irenaeus very much sees God as an actor who created and is able to offer an account of that creation in language understandable through human thought. Further, God has made this account accessible through various sub-sources and as such, human understandings may be compared with the divine account of the economy, then aligned to it. Irenaeus sees this as static truth, eternal and unchanging, not temporal.[109] Moreover, he denounces any 'truth' which is creative or fresh, as he associates it with individual constructions of truth. Because he is after 'what is really there,' any construction or innovation is a false substitute for the real truth.[110] This is why tracing the journey of theological assertions to specific sub-sources to the ultimate truth source is pertinent for Irenaeus and thus why it is helpful to delineate clearly these connections.

Minns recognises too that Irenaeus didn't want to contribute original thinking, he wanted merely to collate and repeat "the original, universal, unchanging and uncontaminated teaching handed down from the Apostles."[111] The truth that the apostles taught is singular because, like with the economy vision, God is singular as is God's purpose. Therefore, sameness of church teaching is essential. In fact, Irenaeus concludes that the divergences in his targets' systems which he details in book one of *Haereses*

[109] *Haer.* 2.7.1-7. See also *Haer.* 1.9.4, 1.10.3, 2.26.3, and 4.6.2.

[110] *Haer.* 2.26.3; cf. *Haer.* 2.10.2.

[111] Minns, *Irenaeus*, p. xi.

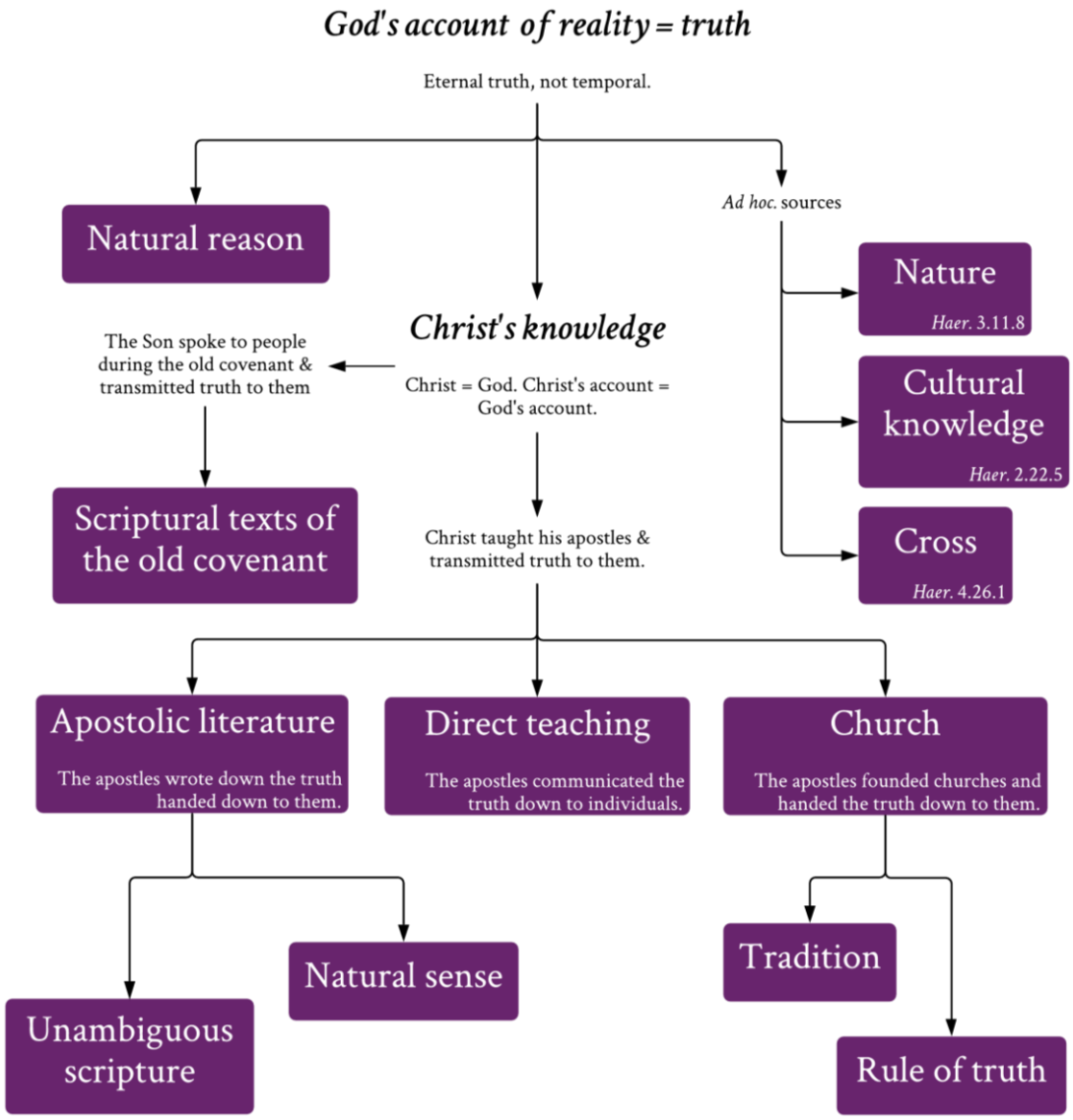

Figure 1: A flowchart showing the network of Irenaeus' verification routes through which theological information is accessed; the sub-sources (boxed) function as a vehicle to the ultimate divine source.

are proof of their falsity, and the unity he perceives among those he includes in "the church" is proof of their alignment with unchanging truth.[112] This reveals several characteristics of the nature of truth as Irenaeus understands it: truth is (in itself) pure, thus is unchanging, and can be preserved, and in fact, it should be preserved. God's truth is one for Irenaeus, but it has been made accessible in a variety of sub-sources which have been made available by God.

[112] *Haer.* 1.9.5.

Christ's Communication: Old Covenant

For Irenaeus, the Word, Jesus Christ, is the image of the invisible God. This was explored above as far as it concerns soteriology, however it also has dramatic ramifications for Irenaeus' epistemology. As Minns notes, Irenaeus takes "quite literally" Jesus' statement that "whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9),[113] and therefore, whomever came into contact with Christ, came into contact with truth from its source; hence, Christ's communication provided unfiltered truth to humanity. The most obvious group of people this applies to are Jesus' most committed followers, the apostles, but Irenaeus also believed that individuals before the new covenant (that is, during the time of the old covenant) came into contact with truth. Repeatedly, Irenaeus explains that he interprets key Hebrew scripture as Christ the Son of God communicating God's truth to characters such as Moses, Noah and Jacob.[114] In this way, Christ again is the invisible Father made visible and so Irenaeus maintains that truth is located in God and is communicated directly through Christ.

Minns links this to Irenaeus' conviction that there is fundamental unity between the teachings of Christ and the God of the Old Testament, of the previous covenant: "there is no discontinuity between what he said then and what he says in the flesh."[115] So although the bishop distinguishes between the covenants,[116] they are under the one economy vision and one purpose of God, and thus it is the one God through Christ who communicates to humankind in both covenants. Thus, Irenaeus can argue against those proclaiming a lesser Creator god to the superior almighty God: the God of the covenants is one.

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[113] Denis Minns, 'Truth and Tradition: Irenaeus', in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Origins to Constantine*, ed. by Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 261-273 (p. 267).

[114] See *Haer.* 3.5.1, 4.5.2, 4.9.1, 4.10.1, 4.20.9-11, and *Dem.* 44-46.

[115] Minns, 'Truth and Tradition', p. 267

[116] See *Haer.* 1.27.2, 2.27.2, and 4.9.1. However, Irenaeus does also refer to the four covenants "given to the human race" and sees this as evidence of the quadriform gospel; see *Haer.* 3.11.8. This appears to demonstrate Irenaeus' propensity to find verification for his claims (like that there exist only four true gospels) which later undermine his other claims (that there are two covenants).

Christ's Communication: The Apostles

As for those Jesus spoke to and taught during his life, Irenaeus specifies the apostles as the people of importance when tracing Jesus' teaching. The teaching received by this select group was, for Irenaeus, substantial enough for the communication of truth to the masses. It is this epistemological sub-source (apostolic testimony) to which Irenaeus most often demonstrates a logical journey when verifying his theology. Apostolic understandings of Christian teaching and identity (including interpretations of the Hebrew scriptures) are, for Irenaeus, the foundation of Christian teaching and identity.

As noted above, Irenaeus takes it quite literally when he reads in John 14:9 that Jesus told his apostles whoever sees the Son also sees the Father. He thus concludes that the apostles saw and knew the Father, who "is truth."[117] For Irenaeus, then, Christ's communication to his apostles renews a chain of the handing-down of truth which began amongst the Hebrew people which thereby allows for genealogical verification of Christian teaching. This is the basis of the idea 'apostolic succession:' truth is handed down from Jesus to apostles to their successors.[118] Previous communication of Christ in the old covenant to humanity – as mentioned just above – remains authoritative in some senses, however Irenaeus returns specifically to the idea of apostolic succession because it is more limiting than appealing to Hebrew scriptures for verification, and Irenaeus' purpose in writing is to limit those able to identify as 'Christians' and to limit what people perceive to be Christian (or true) teaching. Therefore, the apostolic chain continues from the teaching of the Hebrew prophets, but also serves to further restrict.

In *Demonstration,* Irenaeus also writes that the truth was proclaimed by the prophets, established by Christ and delivered by the apostles to the Church and beyond, establishing continuity from the old covenant to the new. He asserts, "this must we keep with all certainty," emphasising again the absolute and unchanging nature of truth.[119]

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[117] *Haer.* 3.13.2.
[118] *Haer.* 4.26.2.
[119] *Dem.* 98; cf. *Dem.* 41, 46, and 86.

Furthermore, the bishop clarifies some details about locating truth in the testimony of the apostles in that he centres the "twelve fountains, that is, the teaching of the twelve apostles."[120] Simple though this sounds, the bishop is making quite a few unacknowledged assumptions regarding which twelve individuals had full apostolic identities and why this was so different from others who accompanied Jesus from his baptism to ascension. We know Irenaeus read Acts, and thus will have some awareness of Judas' apostolic role being replaced by Matthias, but that the latter was one of several prospective apostles. There was at least one prospective apostle who met the criteria Peter established but who did not receive the twelfth position: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus).[121] Thus there appear to be more than twelve individuals who have apostolic credentials (the Eleven, plus maybe Judas, maybe Matthias, and maybe Barsabbas).[122] Plus, Irenaeus writes that after Jesus' resurrection, the apostles "were invested with power from on high when the Holy Spirit came down [upon them], were filled from all [His gifts], and had perfect knowledge."[123] Thus, Irenaeus appears to leave open the possibility that more than twelve received perfect knowledge and that the only requirement was that God's spirit came upon them. This, however, would move Irenaeus' account of the location of truth a little closer to what he claims his targets say. The implantation of the gift of perfect knowledge, rather than a simple witnessing of events and teaching by Jesus during his life makes it more complicated to distinguish the differences the bishop claims are manifestly obvious between his idea of Christian identity and that of his targets.

Even more, Irenaeus refers to Paul as an apostle, even though he did not witness Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection, yet does not mention the female disciples accompanying Jesus who did witness his ministry, death and resurrection.[124] Therefore,

[120] *Dem.* 46.

[121] See Acts 1:23.

[122] *Haer.* 1.31.1 casts doubt on whether Irenaeus would accept the testimony of Judas.

[123] *Haer.* 3.1.1.

[124] See *Dem.* 5 and 87. Paul did meet the resurrected Christ after his ascension according to Acts 9. Therefore, Paul would not have met Peter's criteria in Acts 1 for finding a replacement apostle. For the

it is not clear who, for the bishop, are the twelve fountains and why these twelve are significantly different to the wider group of witnesses and receivers of Christ's teaching, or whether it really is only twelve. One persuasive inference would be that, informed by Irenaeus' very clear purpose to limit the number of sub-sources which may be consulted to access the ultimate divine source, Irenaeus refers to the apostles as twelve for simplicity. In other words, this is an example of the bishop's recourse to rhetoric of certainty, but upon prolonged inspection is found incomplete.

Nevertheless, there are three avenues Irenaeus connects back to the sub-source of apostolic testimony: their teaching, their literature, and their founding of churches. Teaching found through these sub-sources are verified by their origin in apostolic testimony and ultimately by their origin in the visible Son of the invisible Father.

Direct Apostolic Teaching

Firstly, perhaps the simplest transmission of truth from the apostles is through their direct teaching. This was clearly limited to when the apostles were alive, but Irenaeus, merely a generation away from the longest-surviving apostles saw this as a very accessible resource. From Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, it appears Irenaeus considered himself in the line of apostolic succession, having received direct teaching from Polycarp, follower of apostle John.[125] This is reflected also in *Haer.* 3.3.4, where Irenaeus describes how Polycarp was instructed by the Apostles and thus taught what they handed down to him, and how Polycarp carried the same truth as all the Asiatic churches and that the successors of Polycarp also carried the precise, unchanging truth handed down to them. Irenaeus then goes on to tell a story about John (Jesus' disciple) which was witnessed by Polycarp, demonstrating how it was witness to events as well as receiving instruction from apostles that constituted the knowledge of divine truth.

Thus, quite simply, Christ preached the truth to the twelve apostles and the twelve

importance of eyewitness testimony to Irenaeus' idea of apostolic authority, see Eusebius' copy of Irenaeus' letter to Florinus in *Hist. eccl.* 5.20.

[125] *Hist. eccl.* 5.20.

apostles went on to preach this truth. Irenaeus writes this is so simple that, again, anyone who says otherwise is committing intellectual dishonesty and false witness.[126] However, he also writes that to assert the twelve apostles were not in possession of the truth was to demonstrate being "alienated from the doctrine of Christ."[127] Thus, maybe the bishop is acknowledging that some Christians think differently to him through persuasion of ideas, not lack of integrity.

Apostolic Literature

Irenaeus doesn't have a strict New Testament canon, but refers to a collection of writings written in light of the new covenant written by apostles and their followers: the four canonical gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation.[128] Irenaeus perceives the (New Testament) scriptures to be a plain and simple transmission of apostolic testimony. In *Haer.* 3.1.1, he writes,

> We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.

Specifically in this section of *Haereses*, Irenaeus lists the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew and John he accepts as apostles of Jesus, whilst Mark and Luke accompanied and wrote the teachings and accounts of their peers, Peter and Paul respectively. In *Haer.* 3.11.8, Irenaeus defends the necessary quadriformity of the Christian gospel. He describes that there are "four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds" and thus "it is fitting" that the Word provided humanity with "the Gospel under four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit." Therefore, whilst above we see Irenaeus verifying the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

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[126] *Haer.* 3.13.2.

[127] *Haer.* 3.13.2.

[128] Paul Parvis, 'Who Was Irenaeus? An Introduction to the Man and His Work' in *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy*, ed. by Sara Parvis and Paul Foster (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), pp. 13-24 (p. 20). Irenaeus also refers to other ancient non-canonical works such as *Shepherd of Hermas* as scripture; see *Haer.* 4.20.2.

according to their apostolic genealogy, here we see Irenaeus verifying the four-ness of the Christian gospel accounts by way of particular understandings of the created world and the abovementioned moral value Irenaeus places on harmony in the divinely intended construction of creation.

The bishop then follows with another reason for the necessary four-ness of the gospel; melding together Psalm 80:1, Ezekiel 10:14 and Revelation 4:7, Irenaeus visualises an image of Jesus sitting on a throne surrounded by cherubim with four faces, with the first creature resembling a lion and associated qualities, the second a calf, the third a man, and the fourth a flying eagle. For Irenaeus, "the Gospels are in accord with these things," inasmuch as John reflects the lion's qualities, Luke the calf's, Matthew the man's, and Mark the eagles' winged-ness.[129] Because these living creatures are fourfold, so too are the gospels. In this way, Irenaeus can exclude from his community those who read gospels additional to his collection, like the *Gospel of Judas* (*Haer.* 1.31.1) and the *Gospel of Truth* (*Haer.* 3.11.9), and those who concentrate on fewer than four gospels, like Marcion, who deems only a concentrated edition of Luke's gospel authoritative (*Haer.* 3.11.7).[130]

In an article on the fourfold gospel, Francis Watson describes that against Irenaeus' claims, "the fourfoldness of the church's canonical gospel is not a natural phenomenon."[131] It was not something the gospel writers themselves thought inevitable or particularly 'Christian.' The quadriform gospel is instead "a second century artefact with a first-century prehistory."[132] In fact, Watson writes that it was writers like Irenaeus who established the tradition of a quadriform gospel in order to exclude particular gospels as claims to authentic Christian teaching, which would prevent theological chaos. In other words, the exclusion of certain texts from acceptable Christian teaching was

[129] *Haer.* 3.11.8.

[130] See also Francis Watson, 'The Fourfold Gospel' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*, ed. by Stephen C. Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 34-52 (pp. 37-44).

[131] Ibid., p. 35.

[132] Ibid.

Irenaeus' motivation, not his conclusion. According to Watson, Irenaeus is writing theologically for a sociological end, in order that a limited Christian identity be firmly recognised, not to discuss various ideas available to Christian thinkers in the second century. Again, we find ourselves asking whether we can take Irenaeus' stark account as accurate and normative, or as a heavily polemical perspective which is only a part of a wider discourse.

Another important question to ask is what is Irenaeus looking for in these 'apostolic' texts he calls scripture? How is he reading them? According to the bishop, he is looking for the reading which the apostles themselves would identify as their own conscious meaning (or their 'original intention').[133] This aligns with his conceptualisation of scripture as one of the products of apostles who possessed truth, rather than a separate agency which is itself revealed truth.[134] For the bishop, it needs no defence to assume that Christians should be absorbing the apostles' own meaning when receiving their teaching through tradition or literature. Hence, Irenaeus writes against his targets that if John intended to write about the Ogdoad in his gospel, he would have explicitly done so.[135] This should not be equated with the modern historical-critical method as Irenaeus does not employ methods to isolate the individual apostle's intention 'behind' the literature attributed to them. Moreover, Irenaeus places much more emphasis on the divine intention and God's formation and composition of creation. Therefore, the apostolic authorial intention 'behind' the text is not as important as the divine intention as set out in the economy vision which Irenaeus perceives from a variety of sources, of which apostolic literature is one.

Irenaeus deems this approach a 'common sense' approach and the 'natural sense' of scripture.[136] Again, this is for Irenaeus, directly linked with the divine economy: creation

[133] See, for instance, Irenaeus' extended argument for Paul's own understanding of his meaning in 1 Corinthians 15:50 against other understandings in *Haer.* 5.13.2-5; cf. *Haer.* 3.3.1.

[134] This becomes important in the later comparison with evangelical (mis)appropriations of Irenaeus.

[135] *Haer.* 1.9.1-2.

[136] Haer. 1.9.4. Irenaeus sees himself as thinking with (common) sense: *Haer.* 2.10.1, 2.14.2, 2.26.3; with a sound mind: *Haer.* 2.27.1; and that his targets are devoid of sense: *Haer.* 1.13.1, 1.13.3, 4.28.1, 5.26.2.

has been sculpted by God to reveal the divine plan of salvation and thus it has been created so that the default approach for humans to approach scripture, the passive and unforced, natural way any one human reads the scriptures is its intended interpretation. Nothing has been created accidentally, everything is suitable and fitting in its God-given place.[137] In other words, God has not made it difficult for humans to find and understand the *oikonomia*.

Then again, this idea of a natural and plain reading of scripture according to the economy sometimes runs against what we would accept today as the author's meaning. For instance, in *Haer.* 5.8.1-4, Irenaeus reinterprets Hebrew law on clean and unclean animals for eating in terms of "spiritual" and "carnal" people.[138] For Irenaeus, the clean animals (ruminants with a double hoof) represent spiritual people who "possess the earnest of the Spirit, and who are not enslaved by the lusts of the flesh, but are subject to the Spirit, and who in all things walk according to the light of reason."[139] Conversely, the unclean animals (those which chew the cud or without double hooves) represent carnal people "because they have no thought of anything else except carnal things."[140] For Irenaeus, the animals which chew the cud but are without double hooves figuratively describe the Jews who have the word of God in their mouths but are not stable owing to the increased slipperiness of a non-double-hoof.[141] Even more, the animals which don't chew the cud but have a double hoof are "plainly an indication of all heretics, and of those who do not meditate on the words of God, neither are adorned with works of righteousness."[142] This text provides an interesting case study for the resemblances

[137] *Haer.* 2.26.3.

[138] *Haer.* 5.8.2.

[139] *Haer.* 5.8.2.

[140] *Haer.* 5.8.2.

[141] Irenaeus' regular claim to Jewish belief as moral deficiency and ignorance is likely to stands out to readers today given broader awareness and denunciation of antisemitism. Minns, again, uniquely among the spotlighted cohort of Irenaean literature, notes this in detail in one of his chapters on Irenaeus' salvation history. See Minns, *Irenaeus*, pp. 119-129. In the same way we do not understand Irenaeus' account of Judaism as normative, Irenaeus studies should debate whether Irenaeus is the normative voice on second-century 'heresy' and 'heretics.'

[142] *Haer.* 5.8.4.

Irenaeus has with his 'gnostic' targets, in particular, the division of some people as spiritually enlightened and others who are more materially-focused and unenlightened. However, here it serves to show that Irenaeus – at least in practice – does not limit himself to readings of scripture as the authors themselves understood their writing.

It could be defended that since the above example is from the old covenant, it does not demonstrate that Irenaeus dismissed apostolic authors' self-understandings of their own literature in favour of his own allegory, however Irenaeus makes similar hermeneutical moves with (what is now called) New Testament literature. For instance in *Haer.* 5.15.2-4, the bishop reads the healing of the blind man in John 9 and contends that Jesus making mud to spread on the man's eyes was to indicate that God made Adam out of the earth's dust. Minns notes that "the blind man becomes for Irenaeus a symbol of Adam who, after his disobedience, was not able to see God,"[143] but that "the curing of the man born blind is symbolic of the restoration of Adam's vision."[144]

These interpretations are despite Irenaeus' stark conviction that earthly, corporeal, transient things cannot reflect the spiritual, eternal things because for something to be an image of another thing is to possess all of the same characteristics:

> In like manner, neither can those things which are corruptible and earthly, and of a compound nature, and transitory, be the images of those which, according to these men, are spiritual; unless these very things themselves be allowed to be compound, limited in space, and of a definite shape, and thus no longer spiritual, and diffused, and spreading into vast extent, and incomprehensible.[145]

According to this logic, all symbolism – including allegory and even basic metaphor – is false. Things cannot be said metaphorically to be something else unless they consist of the same characteristics; material allegories of spiritual realities cannot be merely partially true if they are to be deemed an 'image' of the spiritual realm. Already above, we noted Irenaeus' assessment of the truthfulness and limits of the metaphor of the wheat and chaff in Matthew 3:12 (*Haer.* 4.4.3.), but this and his other appeals to allegorical

[143] Minns, *Irenaeus*, p. 116.
[144] Ibid., p. 117.
[145] *Haer.* 2.7.6.

reading contrasts fundamentally to his explicit approach to metaphor. Given the blatant incoherence and contradiction of these two Irenaean principles (the practical use of allegory versus the theoretical condemnation of the same), and Irenaeus' recourse to mockery, it appears he does actually agree that allegory and metaphor is helpful in hermeneutics but is looking for a way to denigrate his targets for what seems to him to be a ridiculous ideology. As Minns reminds us: "Irenaeus, it has been said, is a polemicist who will pick up any stick to throw at his opponents, heedless of the possibility that it might turn out to be a boomerang."[146] And thus we see that the bishop was not against allegory; but, when it suited him, he vehemently argued against his targets' use of it.[147]

Nevertheless, it is helpful to return to Irenaeus' idea of apostolic literature as a source of truth on his own terms and briefly summarise a methodology he outlines. Irenaeus accuses his targets of verifying their ideology with scriptural evidence by appealing to ambiguous parables for their key understandings of God, rather than the more unambiguous, clear statements regarding the divine nature. He argues:

> For no question can be solved by means of another which itself awaits solution; nor, in the opinion of those possessed of sense, can an ambiguity be explained by means of another ambiguity, or enigmas by means of another greater enigma, but things of such character receive their solution from those which are manifest, and consistent and clear.[148]

Therefore, "expressions which are not clear or evident" should not be attempted to be clarified by comparing with "interpretations of the parables" because this will lead to a host of diverse interpretations guided not by divine truth but by arbitrary inclination.[149] A person who has interpreted the Christian faith from ambiguous scripture "has rejected the very method of discovery."[150] This hermeneutical method is so obvious to everyone

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[146] Minns, *Irenaeus*, p. 80, paraphrasing E. P. Meijering, 'Some Observations on Irenaeus' Polemics against the Gnostics', *Nederlands Theologisch Tidschrift*, Vol. 27 (1973), pp. 26-33.

[147] Cf. *Haer.* 5.35.1-2. On the theological necessity of metaphor against the claim that scripture can be read in a totally 'literal' sense, see Mark Schaefer, *The Certainty of Uncertainty* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), pp. 27-36.

[148] *Haer.* 2.10.1.

[149] *Haer.* 2.27.1.

[150] *Haer.* 2.27.2.

– in Irenaeus' mind – that the entirety of scripture, including the prophets and the gospels are understood by everyone as an unambiguous and harmonious, coherent whole. The question is whether one chooses to believe in this fact, or whether they decide to deviate from the obvious truth in order to achieve a selfish and morally corrupt goal. Such people "blind their eyes" and "put fetters upon themselves."[151]

However, Irenaeus also offers two clues which may help our understanding of second-century Christian writings: firstly, that his targets believe Jesus only taught particular individuals the truth through parables only they could understand;[152] and secondly, that when debated (presumably by those Irenaeus considers 'true Christians'), Valentinians will answer back that the scriptures "are ambiguous, and that the truth cannot be extracted from them by those who are ignorant of tradition."[153] In other words, one needs to receive the ability to receive truth, it is not innate to (all) humans, and therefore they contend that "truth was not delivered by means of written documents, but *vivâ voce*."[154] Considering Irenaeus does not deem scripture essential to accessing the truth of Christian faith (see directly below), his point of disagreement must be with the idea of a secret oral tradition – the 'living voice.'[155] It appears that Irenaeus is so bewildered that the Valentinians have an issue with his economy vision at the level of ideas that he deduces that their problem is not at the level of ideas but the level of motivation. He cannot construe that other people would find ambiguous what he finds unambiguous, and this leads him to conclude they are blinding themselves to (what they must surely know is) manifest truth.

Again, therefore, we can see a development of Irenaeus' theme of harmony. All

[151] *Haer.* 2.27.2. This is another puzzling incoherence in the bishop's work: the immorality and corruption of the true Christian faith by his targets is both obvious to all and subtle enough to be accepted by considerable numbers of well-meaning Christians and thus needs to be pointed out.

[152] *Haer.* 2.27.2.

[153] *Haer.* 3.2.1.

[154] *Haer.* 3.2.1.

[155] Cf. Watson, 'The Fourfold Gospel', pp. 35-37, regarding second-century bishop Papias' potential influence on Irenaeus regarding the 'living voice.'

scriptural parts constitute a coherent whole; this is the methodology behind Irenaeus' famous image of the king made up of many mosaic tiles (*Haer.* 1.8.1). All parts of scripture have been made suited and fitting for their part to play in the whole, in the purpose of informing prospective believers of the apostolic tradition, so much so that he writes "the Scriptures are indeed perfect."[156] This reflects the idea so key in Irenaeus' understanding of the divine economy vision that God has moulded everything so that human senses can discover the truth easily. Again, we can see how significant the idea of diversity of belief as aberrancy – the use of free will against God – is to Irenaeus. Diversity of belief (in at least what Irenaeus deems the foundations of Christianity) cannot arise from an earnest pursuit of God, because God has made it manifestly clear what the truth is. Therefore, it must be an active decision to turn one's back on God. The implications of this upon Irenaeus' understanding of autonomy will be elucidated below. However, firstly, continuing in our identification of Irenaeus' genealogy of truth, this also has implications for the Church, specifically its necessary homogeneity.

Church

Irenaeus perceives the transmission of truth through the apostolic founding of churches (and concomitant directive to transmit this truth to more people) as another journey which truth takes between God (and Jesus) to humanity. It is another possible outworking of the apostolic succession, a way in which lay people may access the genealogy of faith connected with Jesus' apostles, and thus a verified connection to truth.[157]

An important term and concept for Irenaeus, very related to the church and the genealogy of truth is 'tradition.' This term is not merely a general term for the passing down of cultural thoughts and practices through history for the bishop, but directly relates to the unchanging truth as handed down from the apostles. So, when Irenaeus writes about the arrogance of his targets in dismissing what he sees as the genealogy of

[156] *Haer.* 2.28.2.
[157] See, for instance, *Haer.* 3.4.1, and *Haer.* 5.20.2.

truth, he writes it in these terms:

> But, again, when we refer them to that tradition which originates from the apostles, [and] which is preserved by means of the succession of presbyters in the Churches, they object to tradition, saying that they themselves are wiser not merely than the presbyters, but even than the apostles, because they have discovered the unadulterated truth.[158]

In fact, Irenaeus writes that every (true) ecclesial community should be able to trace its lineage from their presbyters to the apostles' followers to the apostles.[159] Moreover, Irenaeus lists the bishops of the Church of Rome, from Linus (who was handed over the "the office of the episcopate" by the apostles) to the current bishop at Irenaeus' time of writing, Eleutherius.[160] About this Rome-focused genealogy, Irenaeus says it encompasses the apostolic tradition since it was founded "by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul,"[161] and thus "it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its preeminent authority."[162] Homogeneity is thus integral to the structure of Irenaeus' locating of truth in his verification network, or genealogy.[163]

The reverse of this is that creativity is fundamentally incongruent with Christian truth. This sentiment, too, is evident repeatedly in Irenaeus' writings.[164] Throughout his writing, Irenaeus disparages anything which he perceives as threatening the conservation of tradition and inherited truth, and introducing newness of any kind is exactly that. This is also one of his strongest condemnations of his targets. To further alienate them, he contrasts the ecclesial unity and 'common sense' orientation of his own ideology with the individual and arbitrary dynamism of his targets. His targets devise and imagine according to their personal inclinations and feelings, seeking that which no one

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[158] *Haer.* 3.2.2; cf. *Dem.* 41.

[159] *Haer.* 3.3.1.

[160] *Haer.* 3.3.3.

[161] Note how Irenaeus here counts Paul as one of the (presumably twelve) apostles.

[162] *Haer.* 3.3.2.

[163] Cf. *Haer.* 1.10.2-3, and 2.9.1.

[164] Note also that the translators are keen to repeat the language of "inventors" and "inventions" when referring to the bishop's targets. See *Haer.* 1.28.1, 1.21.5, 2.28.8, 3.4.2-3, 4.6.4.

has before thought and prioritising this above **'the'** scriptural narrative.[165]

However, he also writes that his targets have not invented anything but merely reworked material from poets and philosophers.[166] Thus, Irenaeus appears to cohere his thought with layers: firstly that his targets present a new idea of Christianity, but the second, deeper layer is that these ideas are not **truly** new but are ancient, yet dissociated from apostolic tradition. Therefore, it does appear that Irenaeus makes an attempt at nuance and detail. However, this is limited. Majoritively, the bishop prefers simple and unembellished theological assertions.

Thus, through study of Irenaeus' idea of 'the Church' (and its tradition), he attempts to concretise and bolster his claim that he and his community house the truth, that his economy vision is more than his personal 'inclination' or 'fancy.' The Church is part of the genealogy of truth, having been instituted by the apostles and maintained by those who received teaching from the apostles (and their apostles, like Irenaeus was taught by Polycarp). Through this apostolic succession, the Church – for Irenaeus – is the community that accepts what Irenaeus identifies as true Christianity. Irenaeus resents those of his targets who class him and his ideological community in the 'animal' category,[167] thus, Irenaeus sees 'the Church' as a community patronised by his targets as inherently lesser, but who are, in reality, more united in belief and superior in their orientation to truth. His targets envy the Church and thus want to "render men disbelievers in their own salvation, and blasphemous against God the Creator," but Irenaeus wants the truth to be disseminated and for God to be venerated.[168] Thus, for Irenaeus, 'the Church' is used in his argument to separate true Christians from pseudo-Christians and people worthy of denigration for their immorality, anti-truth ideologies and mock-worthy thinking.

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[165] See *Haer.* 1.8.1, 1.9.1, 1.9.4, 1.21.1, 1.21.5, 2.13.8, 2.26.1, 2.27.1, 2.28.8, 4.19.2. In *Demonstration*, he speaks of the 'canon of faith' and formulates it using the baptismal formula of Father, Son and Spirit, but otherwise it is very similar to the rule of truth in *Haereses*. See *Dem.* 3, and 6.

[166] *Haer.* 2.14.1-3.

[167] *Haer.* 1.6.2.

[168] *Haer.* 4.Praef.4.

Other Sub-Sources

Irenaeus is known in patristics for his onus on apostolic tradition and the quadriform gospel, however, in practice the bishop had a variety of theological sources he drew upon besides scriptures, direct apostolic teaching and their legacy of teaching in the Church. As already noted in his defence of the quadriform gospel, Irenaeus drew upon sources he thinks are common sense, including nature and a very focused scriptural interpretation of a handful of short verses. Additionally, he refers to a peculiar common-sense source of knowledge in *Haer.* 2.22.5-6 to defend his conviction that Jesus was in his forties when he ministered and died. The bishop contends that his targets think that Jesus preached for a year and then died, using Luke 4:19 as scriptural evidence. However, Irenaeus asserts that Jesus must have reached an older age, "the age of a Master," in order to have taught and had disciples.[169] Irenaeus claims that in one's forties and fifties "a man begins to decline towards old age, which our Lord possessed while He still fulfilled the office of a Teacher."[170] Irenaeus contends also that John conveyed this to his disciples and so it is – for Irenaeus – a part of the apostolic testimony. Moreover, Irenaeus appeals to John 8:57 where Jesus is questioned over his claim to have conversed with Abraham. The Jews respond saying that he is not yet fifty years old so could not have done so.[171] Irenaeus deems it logical that one would say, 'But you're not even fifty!' only when someone is close to being that age and thus counts this as further evidence that Jesus was in his forties when he preached, living beyond his targets' claims.

Whilst this may come across as a rather arbitrary argument to hold over his targets, it holds pertinence for the bishop because whether Jesus died relatively early compared to his peers is a theological issue. If Irenaeus is right, then Jesus lived through all the stages of human life according to the model to which Irenaeus refers. He therefore did not evade "any condition of humanity" but sanctified every age before taking on death

[169] *Haer.* 2.22.5.
[170] *Haer.* 2.22.5.
[171] *Haer.* 2.22.6.

itself.[172] This reference to a piece of cultural 'common sense' knowledge is not a strong source for Irenaeus, especially since he combines it with direct apostolic teaching and apostolic literature. However, he refers to it just as confidently and assumes it as a blatant binding authority.

Lastly, Irenaeus appeals to another kind of epistemological source, except this one is perhaps more specific. In a section about scriptural interpretation, Irenaeus writes about the revelation of Jesus as Christ in scripture as the treasure hidden in the field (Matthew 13:44).[173] Moreover, he attempts to justify both the accessibility of this revelation alongside the seeming dismissal by some (in this case, Jewish believers) by stating that though anyone can find Christ in the scripture of the law and prophets if they read "with attention," to the Jews the scriptures are a fable,

> for they do not possess the explanation of all things pertaining to the advent of the Son of God, which took place in human nature; but when it is read by the Christians, it is a treasure, hid indeed in a field, but brought to light by the cross of Christ, and explained.[174]

Thus we see a similar epistemological tension repeated: the truth is both readily accessible and obvious, but also hidden and in need of a hermeneutical key, in this case 'the cross of Christ.' Irenaeus does not have a substantial theology of the cross, but it serves here to differentiate his community from the Jewish community by explaining – however crudely – that they are different to 'the Church' for they have a lack. This is the only time Irenaeus speaks of the cross serving an epistemological role so it is difficult to evaluate the significance for the bishop. Yet, it appears the bishop again is using epistemology and foundationalism to a sociological end.

Irenaeus claims to draw his theology from so many sources because he is so firmly convicted that God created everything so that it would reflect its maker. It is axiomatic for Irenaeus that God made it easy for humans to discover and find out more about their

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[172] *Haer.* 2.22.4.

[173] This is an interesting interpretation given the parable is about the kingdom of heaven, not regarding scriptural interpretation.

[174] *Haer.* 4.26.1.

creator. Yet, this lends itself to a habit of making *ad hoc* arguments for sub-sources, even using similar logic to the kind he denounces in his targets, like finding various numerological phenomena as evidence of some theological truth.

Limiting Natural Reason and Negative Theology

As already discussed above, Irenaeus believes humans have an innate link to the source of truth by way of their createdness. God created humanity and in so doing, gave them a kind of 'informational tag' which could be consulted. It was also discussed that God created people in the *imago dei* such that humans are able to reason, that is, harmonise things to that which really exists. The former is naturally limited and one must learn more about the Father by way of the Son; however, the latter is open to abuse in Irenaeus' eyes and thus must be disciplined.

The bishop writes that the scriptures are perfect, yet a person might still have questions about the causes of things which scripture does not address. Irenaeus resounds, "We should leave things of that nature to God who created us."[175] He warns that such speculation can lead to questions which result in seeking a god besides the one which exists. These gods will be formed "from no other than a mere human experience," and such a personal experience will not reflect the *oikonomia*, the true reality of created things.[176] One must therefore accept that there are many mysteries which will escape our knowledge. The bishop lists some examples in *Haer.* 2.28.2, including why the ocean ebbs and flows, how rain, lightning, thunder, snow and hail form, and why the visibility of the moon varies.

"On all these points," writes Irenaeus, "we may indeed say a great deal while we search into their causes, but God alone who made them can declare the truth regarding them."[177] Perfect knowledge belongs only to the Father and therefore we should not ask questions which lead us to doubt the oneness of God which is made clear and accessible

[175] *Haer.* 2.28.2.
[176] *Haer.* 2.28.4.
[177] *Haer.* 2.28.2.

through the sub-sources Irenaeus locates in his verification network.[178] In particular, Irenaeus focuses on those who proclaim the biblical demiurgical myth.[179] Despite his strong assertions that his targets willingly blind themselves and believe what they do in order to be anti-truth, he implies in this section of *Haereses* that his targets suffer a case of (overly) enthusiastic truth-seeking. For whilst the scriptures tell of creation and the beginning of time, there is nothing which accounts for "what God was employed about before this event," and it appears Irenaeus' targets engaged in speculation on this.[180] But, Irenaeus condemns the use of reason to ask questions which are not already answered in the apostolic tradition. Humans should not infer such questions and contend that they have found definitive answers for these will merely be "foolish, rash, and blasphemous suppositions."[181] Irenaeus writes that these enthusiastic individuals have run "after numerous and diverse answers to questions," but in their excitement have "cast away the firm and true knowledge of God."[182] He describes Valentinus, Ptolemaeus and Basilides as claiming total and perfect knowledge, however this should not be sought in case one dangerously begins to question "whether there is another God above God."[183]

In contrast to this submission to mystery, our findings before this have shown Irenaeus to be singularly certain on theological truths regarding, for example, the oneness of God, creation of humans in the *imago dei*, and the salvific purpose of the Father through the Son. This shows a stark difference in the bishop between theological claims he supports and those he finds mysterious. If we were to construct a bar graph illustrating distinct theological claims along the x-axis and the level of certainty Irenaeus held regarding those claims on the y-axis, his thought would look something like *Fig. 2*.

[178] This doesn't align with Irenaeus' claim that apostles received perfect knowledge from God's spirit, but perhaps the bishop meant that the apostles received perfect knowledge about 'necessary' theological information, not knowledge of the causes of all natural things.

[179] *Haer.* 2.28.4.

[180] *Haer.* 2.28.3.

[181] *Haer.* 2.28.3.

[182] *Haer.* 2.28.1.

[183] *Haer.* 2.28.8.

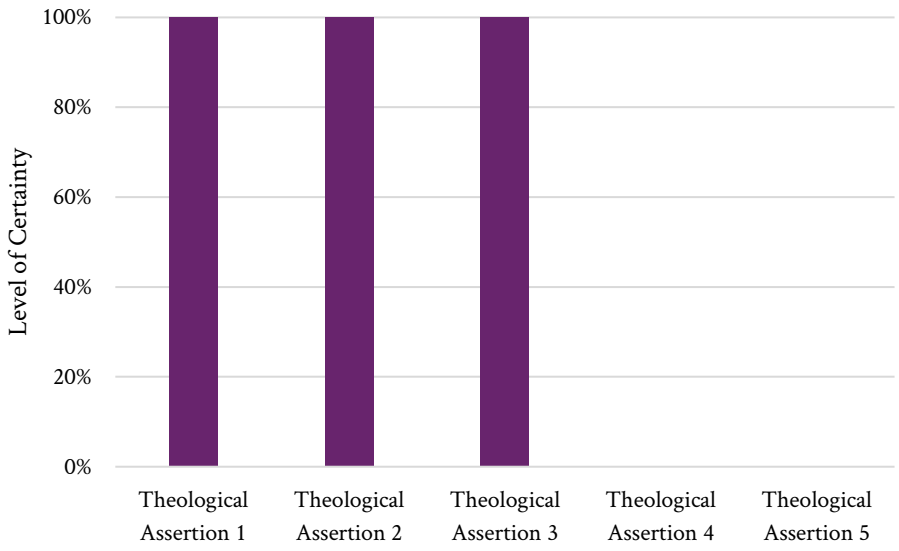

Figure 2: Irenaeus' approach to theological speculation; Irenaeus' 'depth' of certainty (y-axis) illustrated against the 'breadth' of theological topics he is willing to claim knowledge on (x-axis).

We could use geometric language to describe Irenaeus as having great 'depth' in his theological thinking, but a reserved 'breadth' of knowledge. Irenaeus has great certainty in that which he knows to be true, but prohibits speculation on many topics, especially regarding causation and so is content to leave the topic a mystery, having no certainty on the truth of those matters.[184] He compares himself to Valentinus, Ptolemaeus and Basilides who, he says, claim they have total depth of knowledge on a total breadth of knowledge: they know with complete certainty about all of reality.

This runs parallel to Irenaeus' stance on theological metaphor, which he condemns in *Haer.* 2.7.6. Any theological statement must be either wholly true or wholly false; it cannot be true in some senses and false in others, thus there is not any theological assertion which is between 0% and 100% certainty. Thus, Irenaeus is a thinker who makes stark distinctions between what is known and cannot be known, what is true and what is false.

In his final publication as a Yale professor, Dale Martin writes against the

[184] *Fig. 2* is a sketch. It should not be taken literally that Irenaeus abides by three theological assertions and entertains mystery for two.

foundationalism which is common in New Testament studies.[185] He writes that attempts by Christians to find "secure ground" on which we can build firm theologies and knowledge of the divine are misinformed.[186] In other words, there are no pure, pristine, neutral facts which can serve as "a dependable 'basis' of firm, secure, incontrovertible 'knowledge' on which we can then build systems of secondary values, beliefs, systems of thought or belief."[187] This is for two reasons, the first being "the eschatological reservation of Christian epistemology;"[188] the end has not come yet and so we don't know all as God does. The second is an empirical observation that knowledge is "precarious and our experience not completely reliable," thus epistemological humility and treating any Christian 'answers' as provisional is crucial.[189]

Thus, no theological assertion is always totally true. It may be true 'in a sense' and false 'in a sense.'[190] For instance, Martin lists well-known accounts in the Bible which he accepts as 'Christianly true' but false as a piece of historiography, including the myth of Adam and Eve, the origin of the rainbow, and Jesus' exorcism of Legion.[191] There are also accounts in the Bible which Martin controversially would conclude are false historically **and** theologically, such as "the existence of hell as a place of eternal suffering and punishment engineered and operated by God."[192] Therefore, if we were to construct a bar chart denoting Martin's approach to theological speculation, it might look something like *Fig. 3*.

This means Martin is able to accept theological metaphor, since it may be false in some senses and true in others. This is especially helpful for parables, which do not exist to explain events that happened in history but demonstrate a theological truth through

[185] Martin offers another argument against foundationalism in Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press), pp. 1-5.
[186] Dale Martin, *Biblical Truths: The Meaning of Scripture in the Twenty-First Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 33.
[187] Ibid., p. 33.
[188] Ibid., p. 69.
[189] Ibid.; see Martin, *Biblical Truths*, pp. 38-70 for Martin's fuller argument.
[190] Ibid., p. 34.
[191] Ibid., pp. 60-61.
[192] Ibid., p. 61.

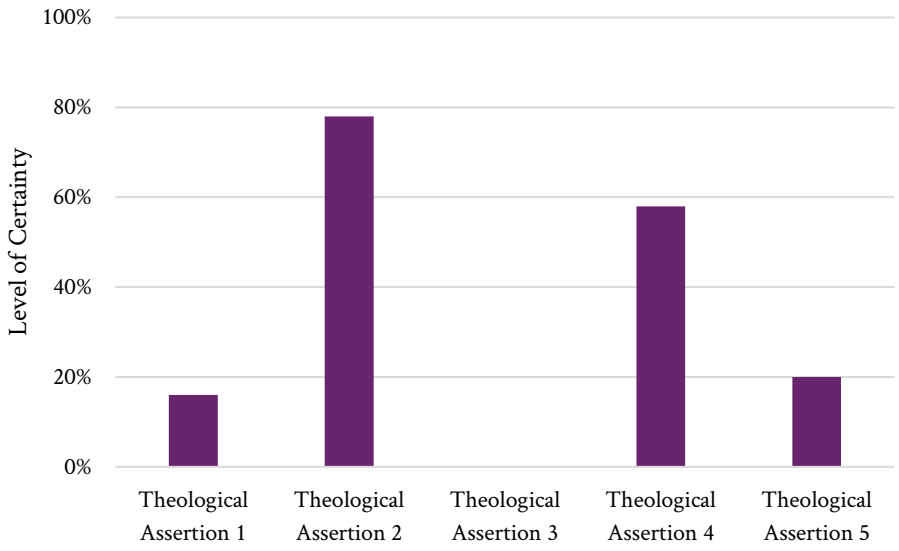

Figure 3: Dale Martin's approach to theological speculation; Martin's depth' of certainty (y-axis) illustrated against the 'breadth' of theological topics he is willing to claim knowledge on (x-axis).

anecdote and story.

Martin acknowledges foundationalist epistemologies which would produce graphs similar to Irenaeus', but he implies that these arose with modernism.[193] This excludes Irenaeus, though. Even more, he venerates "those church fathers we label orthodox" like Origen (pre-Nicene) as also upholding his 'true in a sense but false in a sense' framework.[194] A study of Irenaeus seems to challenge the notion that strict foundationalism was a product of the Enlightenment period. By comparing the bar graphs, we can see vividly that Martin does not align with Irenaeus' understanding of theological speculation. Compared to Irenaeus, Martin appeals for more reticence in depth but permits a wider breadth. Whereas for Irenaeus, one must be careful not to allow theological speculation to lead to a deeper questioning of their beliefs of God, for Martin no particular theological assertion is above questioning or provisionality. Moreover, its truthfulness may fade or decrease with time or increase and strengthen with time. Irenaeus could not agree to something which denied his unchanging Christian knowledge. He writes resolutely that one can know a theological assertion with total

[193] Ibid., pp. 29-30.
[194] Ibid., p. 113.

certainty – for instance, that eternal fire is prepared for sinners – but not another – for instance, the final cause of the existence of sinners.[195] The bishop writes that it is better for a person to know nothing of the causes of any part of creation but to believe in God and seek only knowledge about Christ the Son in case subtle questions lead them "into impiety."[196]

Conclusion

It is important to remember in Irenaeus studies an image like *Fig. 1.* It represents, for the bishop, the variety of journeys along the genealogy of truth which one can take to verify whether one's idea aligns with real, divine truth. For Irenaeus, this is a "powerfully simple" process;[197] truth is singular and consistent, plus it is available readily from numerous sources, including the church spread throughout the world. Thus, all that is required to use the genealogy correctly, to verify truth, is a sound mind and a love for truth which are granted universally.[198] This means no earnest Christian has to worry about possible salvific knowledge that they might not have yet. However, it also involves an extreme approach to human autonomy which is the next theme we shall elaborate.

2.3: Free Will (& Determinism)

As already alluded, Irenaeus had quite a simple theology in some respects: God made the universe with an in-built divine fingerprint that any created thing might know whence it came. Therefore, to claim to not know God or to not know God in the way our natural knowledge tells us is to actively go against the grain using one's free will to deviate. For Irenaeus, to be a Christian is to be as a leaf travelling downstream: to accept that you are floating on a rivers surface, accepting the force which compels you downstream. To rebel against God is to act as though one were a leaf travelling downstream but to try to travel upstream, against the compelling force. It would take great effort and resoluteness in

[195] See *Haer.* 2.28.7.
[196] *Haer.* 2.26.1.
[197] Brakke, 'Self-Differentiation', p. 245
[198] *Haer* 2.27.1, and 2.27.3.

one's aim to stay on task because the natural and easy way is to accept one's fate to journey towards sea-level. The leaf must really want to go against the river's power in order to maintain an upstream movement. It is a ridiculous example but similarly, Irenaeus thinks it extraordinary and blasphemous that one would attempt to act outside of the created order one finds their self in.

The bishop arrives at such a simple understanding of human free will as a result of his convictions above, especially his understandings of the nature of the divine purpose, the narrative of the one purpose, and his harmony principle. The nature of God's purpose is that it is absolute; something aligns with the truth or it doesn't. Therefore, truth is not complex, requiring discernment, but is clear and stands out. In the narrative of God's purpose – for Irenaeus, at least – God's creation of humanity in the *imago dei* and as the one and only god who created from nothing means humans were created in the image of the creator, including their capacity to reason. Their ability to reason gave humans choice over whether to obey or disobey God and when humanity in Adam chose disobedience, Jesus needed to be born in the flesh on earth to recapitulate and re-enact obedience on behalf of humanity, all the while showing them the path of obedience. Thus, again, free will is a necessary part of Irenaeus' economy vision. Lastly, Irenaeus' harmony principle – that everything has been created by the same god and has been created specifically fit for purpose to make known God's salvific purpose – means there is nothing which runs counter to God's purpose that could convince humans that reality is something different to the economy vision as Irenaeus perceives it.

In addition to the above, it is important to understand how Irenaeus' understanding of his *oikonomia* as truth attained passively shapes the idea of 'heretic,' both for the bishop and for the following centuries after him to the present day. 'Heretic' and 'heresy' are not significantly employed terms by the bishop, but he was nonetheless influenced by the rhetoric and associated ideas of 'heresy' which were established before his writing. Therefore, firstly we shall explore the origins of the term as it is understood today.

Hairesis *to 'Heresy'*

In ancient literature, we see the Greek term *hairesis* (αἵρεσις) used in ways different to the contemporary English notion of 'heresy.' Heinrich Von Staden says of Alexandrian medical literature that, whilst recognising the paucity of literature available,

> the evidence suggests that a group with fairly coherent and distinctive theories, with an acknowledged founder (*hairesi-arches*), and with publicly identifiable leaders who articulate (a) their rejection of rival theories through theoretically founded polemics, as well as (b) their own systematic alternatives, would qualify as a *hairesis*.[199]

This ancient Hellenistic use of the word was therefore not pejorative, and we might even ask if Irenaeus himself fits into the *hairesis* category outlined by Von Staden. However, between the late first century CE and the middle of the second century, the word's meaning changed.

In the early second century, Justin of Flavia Neapolis (Justin Martyr) found himself in a turbulent situation, with Christianity emerging as a new religion, linked in some ways to the historically-established Judaism, but with different practices providing fodder for outlandish rumour.[200] The belief of the Roman establishment that Christianity was a new superstition threatening social order meant Christians were being terrorised and martyred. Justin knew these allegations were false and that Christians were not a threat to Roman power, so penned two *Apologies* to the Roman Emperor appealing to his reason and asking that Christians be given a fair hearing.

However, Justin did not defend all Christians. He wanted to prevent true believers from being persecuted merely for the name 'Christian,' but remarked that there existed those who called themselves Christian but were not 'right-thinking' Christians. Justin wanted to distance him and his community from these others and does not include them

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[199] Von Staden, Heinrich, 'Hairesis and Heresy: The Case of the Haireseis Iatrikai', in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition: Vol. Three, Self-Definition in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. by Ben F. Meyer and E. P. Sanders (London: SCM Press, 1982), pp. 76–100 (pp. 79-80).

[200] For example, claims against the Christians of ritualistic cannibalism and incest. See W. H. C. Frend, 'Persecutions: Genesis and Legacy', in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Origins to Constantine*, ed. by Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 503-523 (p. 507); Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, pp. 299-300, n. 54.

in his apologetic defence, but instead he attacks them and even offers his addressees his "treatise against all the heresies that have existed" should they wish to read it.[201] Justin continues this attack on falsely-called Christians in his *Dialogue*, where he writes about the cause of this diversity of practice by 'Christians' being false teachers guided by "spirits of error."[202] Justin's goal in writing is to prevent the undermining of the Christian identity as perceived by the Roman establishment by those he sees as doctrinal deviants, for these are wolves in sheep's clothing.

There have been many books dedicated to understanding this momentous shift in the meaning of *hairesis*, and many credit Alain de Boulluec's work who wrote that with Justin "the notion of 'heresy' is born."[203] The ancient *hairesis* went from a meaning of 'choice' or 'sect' or 'school (of thought)' to a political identity used in the face of ultimate stakes; Justin was fighting for the lives of his community and the ideology that inspired them.[204] In this case, we see an urgent reason for a simplicity of theology which now – in times where most Christians do not face a death penalty for their religion – seem extreme, particularly when we read Irenaeus' inheritance of Justin's heresiological rhetoric combined with his own convictions on apostolic succession.[205] The bishop

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[201] *1 Apol.* 26. Justin denounces Simon, Menander, Marcion, and their followers as those who claim to be Christian but are, in fact, heretics. Justin further accuses Marcionites of propagating "atheistical doctrines," knowing that the primary charge against Christian martyrs was atheism. See *1 Apol.* 58.

[202] *Dial.* 35.

[203] Alain Le Boulluec, *La notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque IIe–IIIe siècles: De Justin à Irénée* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1985), p 37. See also: Karen King, *What Is Gnosticism?*, pp. 23-24; Elaine H. Pagels, 'Irenaeus, the "Canon of Truth," and the "Gospel of John": "Making a Difference" through Hermeneutics and Ritual', *Vigiliae Christianae*, No. 4, Vol. 56 (2002), pp. 339-371 (p. 340); Robert Royalty, Jr., *The Origin of Heresy: A History Discourse in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), pp. 5-8; Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 3-4; Powell, *Irenaeus, Joseph Smith, and God-Making Heresy*, p. 5. All but Powell credit Alain Le Boulluec's aforementioned work.

[204] In contrast to Le Boulluec's theory that Justin invented 'heresy,' Robert Royalty proposes that Justin's heresiology was the fruit of thinking and speaking by Christians from the first century whose tradition eventually became the orthodox tradition in the fourth century onwards. In this way, Justin didn't invent heresy but inherited the undeveloped parts of rhetoric and ideology which he gathered into the heresy language and concept. See Royalty, *The Origin of Heresy.*

[205] This is of course where this essay gives away its Western focus; there are countries where Christians face relentless persecution, and current Euro-American scholars of early Christianity would perhaps

ended up focusing on heresiology (not apologetics to the Romans, as was Justin's focus) "to define the political and theological boundaries of orthodoxy."[206] And thus, from the late second century onwards, the concept of 'heresy' and the genre of heresiology taken up by Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Epiphanius and Augustine became "foundational to the master story of Christian origins"[207] which came to dominate the Roman Empire in the fourth century CE.

Therefore, we see the ancient *hairesis* undergo a change to the pejorative 'heresy' concept which remained largely unchallenged until Bauer's 1934 work, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*. Let us now return to Irenaeus' particular development of the heresy concept and rhetoric, and the role of free will.

A Divergent Genealogy

One of the direct inheritances Irenaeus absorbed from Justin is an account of a heretic called Simon Magus, which we can find in *1 Apol.* 26. In it, Justin writes about a Samaritan called Simon who was worshiped as a god and even honoured by a statue gifted by the Emperor with the following inscription: *Simoni Deo Sancto*, "To Simon the holy God."[208] He took with him a former prostitute, Helena, and who was "the first idea generated by him."[209] Irenaeus adds to this what he sees as information provided by Luke, companion of Paul, in Acts 8:4-25. In the account we have now in Acts, Philip went to preach in Samaria and baptised many, including a man who practised magic and who claimed to be great and was called "the power of God." This individual was Simon. However, when Peter and John went to the same place after hearing news of this to pray for the converts to receive the Holy Spirit, Simon offered them money to be given the

do well to commit to research through the lens of Christians in North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, and more, in addition to their lens as Western academics. See <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/> [last accessed 03.06.2021].

[206] Royalty, *The Origin of Heresy*, p. 8.

[207] King, *What Is Gnosticism?*, p. 36.

[208] However, in 1574, the statue which Justin likely referred to was found and it bore an inscription to 'Semoni Sanco Deo' ('To the God **Semo** Sancus'), a Sabine god, not a magician from Samaria.

[209] *1 Apol.* 26.

same power. Peter admonished Simon that his heart was not right before God and that he must repent for he was in the "gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness."[210] Simon replied, seemingly repentant, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me."[211]

However, Irenaeus adds to this account that Simon led the people of Samaria astray and feigned faith upon Philip's visit. After Peter's admonishment, Simon,

> not putting faith in God a whit the more, set himself eagerly **to contend against the apostles**, in order that he himself **might seem** to be a wonderful being, and applied himself with still greater zeal to the study of the whole magic art, **that he might the better bewilder and overpower** multitudes of men."[212]

On account of his magical abilities, the Emperor honoured him with a statue and he was glorified as if he were a god, teaching that he was the Son and the Father and that he welcomed lofty titles from those addressing him, Irenaeus writes. Simon was "the author of these most impious doctrines" and his followers – the "Simonians" – first propagated knowledge falsely so called. Simon, for Irenaeus, is the "father of all heretics,"[213] and from these followers has sprung "a multitude of gnostics."[214]

In this way, Irenaeus constructs a genealogy which reflects his genealogy of truth rooted in the apostles. Conversely, all heresy is connected to a genealogy of falsity rooted in the intellectually-dishonest Simon Magus who was "instigated by Satan."[215] Thus, the bishop compares two genealogies: one pure, traceable handing-down of truth versus one dishonourable, distorted family of falsity claiming truth for itself but knowing its falsity, hence Irenaeus' common refrain of 'blinding oneself.' Both reflected a kind of absolutist, essentialist transmission; one of truth and one of falsity; there was no mixing of the two, only claims by the heretical family that they possessed what the Church had. Irenaeus thus uses two genealogical models to communicate with utmost clarity that the Church

[210] Acts 8:23.
[211] Acts 8:24.
[212] *Haer.* 1.23.1 (my emphases).
[213] *Haer.* 3.Praef.
[214] *Haer.* 1.29.1; cf. *Haer.* 1.27.4, 2.9.2, 3.Praef, 3.4.3, 3.12.12.
[215] *Haer.* 1.21.1.

is the vehicle of pure truth, but the 'family of falsity'[216] was rooted in the invention by a first century CE magician, their recency making their teaching "less respectable than ancient teachings."[217]

Moreover, from Irenaeus' origin story of heresy we can gain more insight into why Irenaeus thought the heretics thought what they thought: selfish benefit and corrupt gratification from the knowledge that they were deceiving others. Thus, we see a change from Justin who implicitly suggests the heretics **might** be involved in morally decrepit practises to Irenaeus who characterises heretics by their libertinism and self-aggrandisation. Even more, by using a genealogical model, Irenaeus turns on its head his targets' claim that they pass down the secret teachings of Jesus through chosen individuals.[218] It is not salvific knowledge they pass down, but recently-concocted myth derived by someone who sought to compete with God's power and Spirit spreading among the apostles' followers.

It might seem odd that for the majority of a section on free will I have at length described a deterministic model evident in Irenaeus: that heresy only breeds heresy. This serves to highlight another tension, or perhaps self-contradiction, in Irenaeus' approach. In the sections of his writing where he wants to communicate what he knows to be Christian truth as obvious and natural, he writes of his targets knowing this and choosing yet to deviate from it.[219] However, by connecting heretics to a common root of new, immoral fiction, Irenaeus furthers his agenda of displaying heresiology as an easy, common sense task: all he has to do is reveal Simon's story and the entire house of cards

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[216] King notes using Denise Buell's work how using a rhetoric of genealogy and inheritance, Irenaeus naturalises the categories of 'orthodox' and 'heresy' which subtly convey that heretics only breed heretics. See King, *What Is Gnosticism?*, p. 32. See also Denise Kimber Buell, *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton university Press, 1999), pp. 50-106.

[217] Gérard Vallée, 'Theological and Non-Theological Motives in Irenaeus's Refutation of the Gnostics', in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition: Vol. One, The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries*, ed. by E. P. Sanders (London: SCM Press, 1980), pp. 174–85 (p. 177).

[218] See *Haer.* 1.3.1, 1.31.1, 1.31.4.

[219] See *Haer.* 1.10.2, 2.27.2, 3.3.1, 3.25.1; *Dem.* 11.

will fall.[220] Hence, having overthrown one school of heretics – the Valentinians – Irenaeus boldly claims, "Those, then, who are of the school of Valentinus being overthrown, the whole multitude of heretics are, in fact, also subverted."[221]

Revisiting Free Will

In spite of the above recourse, Irenaeus remained firm in his conviction that heretics used their free will to deviate from what they knew to be truth. It pervades his imagery,[222] his language,[223] his scriptural interpretations,[224] as well as direct address on the topic of autonomy in decision-making, especially in his elaboration of the *imago dei*. Even if we accept Robert Royalty's proposal that the origins of the heresy concept existed in Christian writings from the first century, not birthed with Justin's apologetics,[225] it remains that Irenaeus' development of the concept and rhetoric (even if not the precise language) of *hairesis* helped to normalise speaking of Christian identity, and speaking of that identity by way of denigrating target groups who were similar to the 'true Christians,' but claiming an identical identity.

Despite his characterisation that heretics chose aberration from the Church, Irenaeus also capitalised upon the genealogical model even with its deterministic bent as it established a powerfully aesthetic opposite to his portrayal of a Church housing the pure truth. This genealogy further served Irenaeus' aim to illustrate his targets as wrong on a very simple level. They did not offer a richly complex theology but a basic, easily refuted, imagined myth. Yet, the bishop continues to write five lengthy books, claiming before the complete set is written that he has sufficiently refuted his targets.[226] Plus, he also requests of his readership that they not think him long-winded.[227] It appears that for

[220] *Haer.* 1.31.4.
[221] *Haer.* 2.31.1; cf. 4.Praef.2.
[222] *Haer.* 1.8.1.
[223] Especially of heretics 'blinding' themselves.
[224] *Haer.* 4.4.3.
[225] See Royalty, *The Origin of Heresy.*
[226] *Haer.* 3.Praef.
[227] *Haer.* 3.12.9.

an issue apparently simple in essence, Irenaeus had many complex reactions and responses. Overall, it does not seem like Irenaeus' account of the simplicity of the problem – that his targets chose falsity of their own free will forming a distinct, competitive tradition – sounds all that plausible and objective. If we begin to question the normativity of Irenaeus' account, we might ask whether his targets saw their ideologies as a protest competition versus the truth for their own "lucre and vainglory."[228]

Michael Williams does just this and begins to question the legitimacy of an aspect within heresiology now called 'gnosticism.'[229] By associating those with knowledge falsely so-called with a stark idea of free will, Irenaeus links these *gnōstikoi* to a self-willed protest and revolt against what is naturally true. Thus, by framing his targets as bringing "a depraved mind to bear upon" the scriptures, the bishop leaves no room for earnest truth-seeking in his targets. As widely discussed now in patristics, this initiated an approach to these styled *gnōstikoi* which assumed their scriptural interpretation "could have little to do with genuine or 'normal' struggles to make sense of the text" and instead began with "a conscious and systematic perversion of the text's plain meaning, as an instrument for polemical anarchism."[230]

Free will, for Irenaeus, is therefore a very significant topic. His targets apparently believe in vehement determinism which he contrasts with his free will ideology. For the bishop, one has to **actively** impose their ideological priorities to interrupt the natural journey of deification. Simultaneously, there are essential characteristics which Irenaeus labels and identifies as originating with one individual, Simon Magus. This dual process serves to distinguish his Christian community depending on the question being asked. If the question is, 'why is there diversity in Christian belief and practice?' Irenaeus can formulate an answer using his free will argument. If he is asked, 'when and how did this

[228] *Haer.* 4.26.2.

[229] Regarding the idea of 'protest exegesis' as a characteristic of 'gnostics,' see Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, pp. 54-79.

[230] Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, p. 263.

diversity begin?' Irenaeus can reassure that heresy is only recent and does not threaten the clarity and simplicity of Christian identity. Yet, this means that the two questions cannot be asked together. If this happened, a more complex, refined approach would be required.

This brings us to a study of Irenaeus' rhetoric: why did the bishop use such urgent and absolute language about his economy vision and his targets' counterpart cosmogony? This is the final topic of this chapter.

2.4: Rhetoric

In his writing, Irenaeus uses a variety of rhetorical strategies to frame and position his theology. His decisions regarding how he communicates his ideas and arguments and refutations to his readers reflect his deep certainty in his rightness and his targets' wrongness. The distance he sees between him and his targets leads him to use notably urgent language and starkly polarised distinctions between self and other, making Irenaeus' an example of acute polemical rhetoric. Whilst this can alert, for some, the potential for amplified hyperbole and bias which could be present in Irenaeus' writing, for others, Irenaeus is yet still a trusted source of objective information regarding second-century Christianity. Unfortunately, as already mentioned, the works employing the latter – including the Irenaean literature under spotlight in this thesis – rarely consider the other side of the story: accounts from the heretics themselves.

Whilst Justin was not actively empathetic towards those he wanted to distance his Christian identity from, his focus on apologetics to the Romans meant that he wrote with balance and steadiness so as to argue with reason to the Emperor who was highly interested in philosophy. In contrast, Irenaeus liberally employs language of urgency and danger and maintains a one-sided, partisan approach.

As we have already seen, Irenaeus is exceptionally concerned with preserving Christian truth and handing it down in its exactitude so that all people may connect with truth which is ultimately found in the apostolic testimony of Jesus, the Father's Son.

Therefore, we have also seen the bishop is exceptionally concerned with threats to the purity of the ideology he identifies as Christianity and the risk of it being tainted with ideas he judges as foreign and new. Irenaeus spends most of his literature focusing on the **ideas** his targets have and the **ideas** he has. Unlike Justin, Irenaeus is not attempting to persuade for an end to be met in material terms; Irenaeus is not explicitly writing to prevent the very immediate persecution and state killing of his community, like Justin was. The bishop instead claims to write to persuade people for **eschatological** and **soteriological** aims. Irenaeus' economy vision includes, as we explored earlier, a vision of eternal life of union with Godself if one holds to 'correct' dogma. However, heretics and those not believing 'correct' dogma are susceptible to divine judgement and eternal fire:

> they stand self-condemned when they are tried by their own doctrine. For, since they are destitute of all those [virtues] which have been mentioned, they will [of necessity] pass into the destruction of fire.[231]

Having 'correct' notions about God holds ultimate, salvific significance for it demonstrates one's obedience and submission to God. Therefore, it is necessary for the bishop that people who call themselves Christian believe in his dogma of the oneness of God, the unity and coherence of the scripture and the primacy of the apostolic testimony and all the theology this entails.

This is made urgent though by Irenaeus' eschatological anxiety. During his introduction to the 'heretics' he is targeting in *Haereses*, Irenaeus characterises one such teacher – Marcus – as "the precursor of Antichrist."[232] Moreover, he reminds his readers of the imminence of the end times that are marked by God sending the Son,[233] and the emergence of heresies.[234] In this way, there is haste for Irenaeus to disseminate these warnings in his writing so that people are not led astray to the eternal fire. The hyperbole, self-contradiction, false dichotomy, and theological simplicity that the bishop habitualises could be explained by this haste. Presenting the situation bluntly and with

[231] *Haer.* 2.32.2.
[232] *Haer.* 1.13.1.
[233] See *Haer.* 4.35.4.
[234] *Haer.* 4.Praef.4.

vivid (but exaggerative) imagery – like that of the king and the fox in *Haer.* 1.8.1– simplifies the choice for his readers. To strengthen this, the bishop often offers stark theological dilemma as another strategic rhetorical tool. For instance, in a section of *Haereses* we've already discussed, Irenaeus says that either his targets need to reject their theory that Jesus taught for one year after being baptised at thirty years old, or they need to reject the gospel.[235] Of course, many Christians would disagree that one needs to assent to the 'correct' length of Jesus life and ministry in order to be a Christian. These tactics, whilst rhetorically powerful, are hyperbolic false dichotomies and again indicate the emphasis on rhetoric in engaging a readership that is very close to his own ideology.[236] These unrepresentative descriptions would likely alienate, not meaningfully engage, the bishop's targets. Among the spotlighted Irenaean literature in the introduction, only Minns notes this tactic of pushing targets to decide between two unacceptable choices and its misleading nature given that other theology may be accepted other than the two options the bishop offers.[237] However, it is evident why the bishop employed such approaches given they offer a higher chance of persuading people, especially those facing similar levels of theological haste and anxiety.

We could, therefore, compare Irenaeus to Jewish/Christian apocalyptic literature. Through studying both canonical apocalyptic literature and other early Christian apocalypses, it becomes apparent that Irenaeus mirrors and even employs sections of the literature which he relates to. Daniel and Revelation, the two canonical apocalypses, along with *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, and the *Ascension of Isaiah* bear significant resemblances with Irenaeus' writing in their apocalyptic capacity.[238] In particular, the following emphases indicate a possible connection between the bishop

[235] *Haer.* 2.22.3.

[236] Cf. *Haer.* 5.13.5.

[237] Minns, *Irenaeus*, p. 35.

[238] For more on Jewish apocalypses, see John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 3rd edn. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016). For more on early Christian apocalypses, see Greg Carey, 'Early Christian Apocalyptic Rhetoric' in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. by John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 218-234.

and literature in the apocalyptic genre:

» Urgency;
» Ideological purity and lack of compromise;
» Millenarism/chiliasm;[239]
» Judgement and vengeance for opponents;
» Context of persecution.

Authors in the genre seek to respond to a perceived imminent threat to their valued way of life and thus we see in their writing invocations to those in their community to remain faithful and to not compromise in response to the threat. Divine judgement is promised for those tyrannising them and this is also promised to be imminent, hence the urgency to remain faithful. As a result, then, literature in this category is not written with sustainability in mind. It is not written to encourage consecutive generations of believers in their journey of a lifelong faith journey but to arouse an interim burst of faithfulness despite overwhelming friction as one waits for God to intervene and judge the persecutors. Irenaeus' stark theology of extreme ideas on free will, pervasive perspicuity of truth, inherent corruption of those who disagree with his ideas, absolute and uncompromising truth, and a very particular scriptural interpretation also are not sustainable long-term. As much as Irenaeus would have despised it, theology in the Christian tradition has changed vastly over the centuries, in part because those who inherited his ideology found theological items that could not be sustained in their extreme Irenaean form. Hence, in Origen – for instance – we do not see the Irenaean binary of having to accept particular beliefs as entirely true, in particular regarding scriptural interpretation. For Irenaeus, something is either true or false, there is no degree to which a metaphor is true and a degree to which it is false.[240] But in his *Commentary on John*, where Origen elaborates his hermeneutical theory, we read that Origen sees there is not one historical, plain reading throughout scripture, in particular

[239] But note that Irenaeus' association with millenarism is unique and he "cannot be styled a 'millennialist' or 'chiliast' in the strict (literal) sense." See Christopher R. Smith, 'Chiliasm and Recapitulation in the Theology of Irenaeus', *Vigiliae Christianae,* No. 4, Vol. 48 (1994), pp. 313-331 (p. 315).
[240] *Haer* 2.7.1-7.

in the gospel narratives. He writes that a student of the gospels would find the historical discrepancies and either have to accept only one gospel as true or accept that the gospels are not true merely in one sense (the literal, plain, historical sense).[241] Origen's approach to locating truth is thus more nuanced and intricate than Irenaeus' assertion that truth is plainly available to anyone who reads the scriptures or the other theological sources specified; truth-seeking involves discernment and the limited efficacy of epistemological methods. This means no one approach secures a perfect genealogy to truth. And yet, more balanced theological contemplation of ideas is much more available to those whose community is not experiencing fatal persecution. Irenaeus aimed for immediate results, not a discussion of ideas.[242] Comparing Irenaeus to Origen thus shows a slight adaption of thought from stark to nuanced.[243]

However, despite the affinity of Irenaeus with apocalyptic literature, he does not fit the genre's technical definition of apocalyptic literature as laid out by John J. Collins in 1979:

> 'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.[244]

Irenaeus' work does not centre around an otherworldly being disclosing divine truths from God; instead, he is quite adamant that a number of widely-available sources may be consulted for knowledge of God. Moreover, his emphasis is not on a temporal, spatial eschatological vision, but on correct doctrine, how one locates truth, and denigration (or refutation) of his targets. So, according to the central characteristics, *Haereses* and

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[241] *Comm. Jo.* 10.2. See also Watson, 'The Fourfold Gospel', p. 47.

[242] A discussion of ideas would have given his targets a legitimacy Irenaeus was unwilling to offer. See *Haer.* 1.31.4.

[243] David Brakke notes that the "striking differences" between the two early theologians complicates any effort to place both theologians on one side of the proto-orthodox/heterodox binary against those called commonly called 'heretics.' See David Brakke, 'Self-Differentiation', p. 260.

[244] John J. Collins, 'Towards the Morphology of a Genre: Introduction', *Semeia*, Vol. 14 (1979), pp. 1-20 (p. 9).

Demonstration are not in the apocalyptic genre, but regarding some of the associated, secondary characteristics, there is much overlap with the bishop. This is not especially surprising considering the influence the *Shepherd of Hermas* had on the bishop.[245]

Irenaeus also quotes from Daniel 12:4 and 12:7, which describe a heavenly figure telling Daniel to "keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end" when "all these things would be accomplished." His quotation is positioned in a section where Irenaeus is defending why there were believing Jews who did not become Christians. For the bishop, Christ is hidden in the scriptures (both of the old and new covenants) as the treasure in a field and was indicated through parables but the revelation of the Son could not have happened any earlier than it did, and this is why Daniel was told to "shut up the words, and seal the book even to the time of consummation" when "they shall know all these things."[246] Therefore, Irenaeus does reflect a major theme in the apocalyptic genre alongside some of the other secondary characteristics of the genre.[247]

The apocalyptic genre is characterised by a context of ideological and socio-political anxiety and this would explain well the various mechanisms the bishop used to persuade his readership.[248] Yet, what we might be witnessing is a conferral of anxiety regarding state persecution onto the issue of Christian diversity. As noted, Justin's pursuit in writing was to separate Christian identity from dishonour and Roman suspicion in order that his community be respected philosophically and not unfairly punished. It is not too implausible to imagine that Irenaeus and his community still feared persecution over ideas of Christian definition they did not assent to, but lay the

[245] In *Haer.* 4.20.2, Irenaeus introduces a quotation from Book 2, First Commandment, of *Shepherd of Hermas* as scripture.

[246] *Haer.* 4.26.1.

[247] This idea of closed revelation is explored much in 'gnostic' studies and even the relationship of writings considered 'gnostic' to the apocalyptic genre. See Dylan M. Burns, 'Apocalypses Among Gnostics and Manichaeans' in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. by John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 358-372. Conversely, apocalyptic influence upon Irenaeus' theology is rarely explored.

[248] See Carey, 'Early Christian Apocalyptic Rhetoric', p. 228.

blame for this not at the feet of the Romans, but at the feet of those they perceived as maligning Christian identity, whether in a move to not further rile the Roman establishment or in a mode of accepting that Roman rule would not change and it was the Christian identity which had to adapt around Roman acceptability. Thus, we might be witnessing in Irenaeus' work a conferral of blame of their theological anxiety on 'heresy,' not the Roman persecutors.[249] Combined with the implied patronising assertion that Irenaeus' community had a lesser 'animal' status, Irenaeus may have felt moved to write polemically on these bases.

This can be thrown into question when doubt arises regarding whether there was a systematic persecution of Christians. After all, impassioned writing would likely have more traction in the readership if there was proof of the risks the writer faced like, for example, martyrdom. Therefore, there are questions about the scale of persecution Christians faced, including during the time of Marcus Aurelius' reign (when Irenaeus likely wrote).[250] Nevertheless, it is likely there was a localised persecution of the Christians at Lyons in 177, when the governor arrested the slaves of Christians and forced them to accuse the Christians of eating their children and marrying their mothers.[251] It is unsure precisely when Irenaeus wrote in relation to these events, however it is most likely that, at the least, persecution connected to their identity as Christians was prevalent in Irenaeus' and his community's mind.

Moreover, as Elaine Pagels writes in a particularly insightful article:

> … we need to remember that Irenaeus was not a philosophically inclined theoretician debating theology with academic and ecclesiastical colleagues so much as a young man thrust into leadership over the survivors of a group of Christians in Gaul after

[249] In fact, Irenaeus writes of his gratitude to the Romans; see *Haer.* 4.30.3. Minns also notes this relaxed stance; see Minns, 'Truth and Tradition', p. 265. Perhaps Irenaeus truly was grateful for 'peace' guaranteed by the Romans, or perhaps it was a submissive move knowing that the 'peace' guaranteed by the Romans was highly conditional and not often in their favour as Christians.

[250] See C. R. Haines (ed. and trans.), *Marcus Aurelius*, Loeb Classical Library, rev. edn. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), pp. 386-387.

[251] See *Hist. eccl.* 5.1; and *GM.* 48.

a violent and bloody persecution.[252]

Not only is the bishop influenced by apocalyptic literature and themes, haunted by past persecution and conscious of the potential for a violent future, apparently patronised by those also claiming to be Christian, he is a young man in leadership whose predecessor was killed for his Christian identity, challenged with responding to the chaos and violence around him. In his responses which we witness in *Haereses* and *Demonstration*, we see Irenaeus rushing to prevent any further chaos brought about by Christian ideological diversity.[253] So, again, it may well be that Irenaeus was conferring an anxiety and concern for the safety of his Christian community instigated by state-sanctioned violence onto the issue of differing Christian ideas.

From study of the bishop's rhetoric of urgency, therefore, we can ascertain the various influences bearing upon the bishop and his literature. It draws us to the possibility that Irenaeus' theology was conceived within a period of intense anxiety and imminence of state persecution, causing the scope of Irenaeus' theology to be limited to a very impactful, short-term theology, rather than a more sustainable, complex and nuanced theology of which we see more in those like Origen. The apocalyptic influence from reading Daniel, Revelation and *Shepherd of Hermas*, inheriting Justin's anxiety regarding Christian identity, and experiencing his own current socio-political anxiety as a young Christian leader likely heightened his resentment of implied patronisation from those claiming to be more spiritual Christians than he and his community. His solution, therefore, to the thought of theological chaos is a simple, clear-cut definition of Christian identity, without nuance. As a result, he wrote five books worth of rich elaboration of the divine economy, but not with centuries of sustainability in mind.

Furthermore, from Irenaeus' rhetoric, we can infer that the audience he is writing for is people familiar with his ideas but who have less certainty than he of their truth, or

[252] Elaine Pagels, 'Making a Difference', p. 348. For more on the persecution of the church in the first two centuries CE, see Frend, 'Persecutions: Genesis and Legacy', pp. 503-510.

[253] See Watson, 'The Fourfold Gospel', p. 35.

those who too find his targets' ideas laughable and enjoy theological affirmation of this. Broadly, if one intends to persuade their ideological opponents on the level of ideas, this would require a balanced account of the other's ideology so that they were well-represented, ensuring the power and credibility of ideas are being discussed; this way, the persuader could then introduce by comparison how the faults of the opponent's ideology were fulfilled and bettered by adoption of the superior ideology being put forward. A balanced, steady, and critically empathetic account is necessary in order to engage one's opponents' ideas. However, to affirm the ideas of one's own ideological community, an accurate portrayal of the opponents is not as necessary. A logical journey from opponents' ideas to the persuader's ideas is not the task at hand. In fact, caricaturing one's opponents carries comedic value, strengthening one's confidence in their correctness, and even strengthening community ties between individuals. A communicator will not necessarily stay within the remit of just one of these approaches; they might journey, at times, closer to one and then journey closer to the other, but these two sets of characteristics as presented in *Fig. 4* can be said to broadly represent the two approaches.

Since he is not writing to persuade his targets and is instead looking to affirm the identity of those with the same ideology as his own, he turns to comedy to reinforce their unity against his targets. This lends Irenaeus' style to mockery. For instance, he is so astounded by his targets' naming of the different aeons that he makes his own

Persuading the ideological 'other'	Affirming the ideology of the self
• Accurate account of both ideologies • Reflects the other's self-understanding • Highlights benefits of one's own ideology • Highlights drawbacks of current ideology of the other	• Accurate account of one's own ideology • Doesn't need to reflect the other's self-understanding accurately • Highlights benefits of one's own ideology • Highlights drawbacks of current ideology of the other

Figure 4: A table showing the similarities and differences in requirements when writing to persuade the other against writing to affirm the self.

cosmogonic myth but with names of vegetables and fruits.[254]

The use of mockery also implies that the ideology of Irenaeus' targets is not legitimate and, thus, not the subject of debate at the level of ideas.[255] In fact, this is the reason Osborn defends very similar use of humiliation tactics by heresiologist Tertullian.[256] But he seems to retract this sentiment when he writes, "At the same time, Valentinians could not be ignored, because they were partly right" concerning putting the divine economy into God's being, which Tertullian also did.[257] This is perhaps an attempt by Osborn to moderate the extreme claim that Valentinians were completely in error. However this is not lifted from Irenaeus' own writings as the bishop makes clear there could be nothing of benefit for Christians in studying heresy. Nevertheless, Osborn's apparent inclination to moderate Irenaeus' theology here is not acknowledged and contemplated. If it were, he might be guided to a comprehensive critique of the bishop's claim to normativity.

Despite his rhetoric, Irenaeus writes that he will discuss on a level of ideas "that I may not only expose the wild beast to view, but may inflict wounds upon it from every side."[258] Here we find another Irenaean tension: discussion of his targets is not possible on the level of ideas and yet Irenaeus claims to discuss and refute their ideas. Perhaps this was not received well by his readers, or maybe it was; we don't have the witnesses to ascertain this. But it is used still today. This rhetoric still grasps minds and combined with a lack of curiosity for the other side of the story (the account of the 'heretics') means Irenaean literature can be vastly one-sided, referencing only the bishop and assuming a literal interpretation of his hyperbole of the moral corruption of those who thought differently to the bishop in Christian dogma. Minns is the only scholar in the spotlighted

[254] *Haer.* 1.11.4. See also 1.21.5, where Irenaeus retorts that his targets "make it their effort daily to invent some new opinion," making it difficult to describe every one of their ideas.
[255] See *Haer.* 1.31.4.
[256] See Eric Osborn, *Tertullian*, p. 192; cf. Behr, *Irenaeus*, p. 104.
[257] Osborn, *Tertullian*, p. 193.
[258] *Haer.* 1.31.4.

Irenaean literature to critique Irenaeus' lack of "imaginative sympathy" for his targets.[259] Maybe Grant, Osborn, Behr, and Briggman are also reading and considering the legitimacy of Irenaeus' targets, but they have yet to write on such things. Until then, it appears they are accepting Irenaeus at his word that the heretics operate far below logic and so cannot offer their ideas a legitimate hearing.

Whilst there is benefit and utility to rhetorical and persuasive skill, to engage in critical analysis of second-century Christianity, it would not be thorough to uncritically accept the whole of Irenaeus' works as a neutral or historical discussion of Christianity on the level of ideas. For that, a curiosity and intellectual empathy are required for those whom Irenaeus was debating. This is the topic of our next chapter.

2.5: Conclusion

Not only are the divine economy, location of truth, free will and determinism, and rhetoric core themes in Irenaeus' work, there is an internal set of relationships between them. For Irenaeus, the foundations are established by locating where truth lies. These sub-sources reveal to observers (so Irenaeus asserts) that the *oikonomia* – the economy vision – is the way the universe was created to function. A part of the economy vision is the role of human free will; how we are positioned in the divine economy depends on what we choose. Do we decide to accept, like a leaf flowing down a stream, that we are created and that we have one Creator – also called Father – who is revealed by the Son? Or, do we contend to work actively against this using our autonomy, establishing our final destination in the place of eternal fire? Irenaeus became worried that Christians were somehow being persuaded to join groups he thought used free will for corruption and self-deception. Instead of allowing this phenomenon to incite reflection on the truthfulness of the worldview he thought so plain, he chose to identify these groups as 'other' in certain ways and sought to undermine them. This, he hoped, would affirm the ideology he held so that members of his ideological community remained faithful. This

[259] Minns, *Irenaeus*, p. 155.

is the role of Irenaeus' rhetoric: to persuade members of his own community that their current ideology is worth upholding. However, this has repercussions for how we think about the bishop's theology and the extent to which we align ourselves in agreement with the bishop. This discussion, I contend, is not just a task for those studying general heresiology in patristics; it is also incumbent upon those engaging in Irenaeus studies. Therefore, let us move to an argument for the necessity of critical empathy in Irenaean literature.

CHAPTER THREE

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Critical Empathy

3.1: A Responsibility

How Irenaeus interprets his targets in his work is important. Indeed, we do not have records from Irenaeus or anyone else describing his thought processes as he learned of the existence of his targets and came to understand their ideologies. However, we have some clues in *Haereses* and *Demonstration*. As posited earlier, it appears Irenaeus thought and wrote with haste as a result of several causes of anxiety. Moreover, given the stark, absolutist nature of his theology, bleak portrayal of his targets and tendency to contradict his own ideas, the question is posed to what extent did the bishop critically engage and empathise with those he was detecting and refuting. And yet, as noted in the introduction, there has been an eruption of literature condemning Irenaeus for a reactive intolerance to Christian diversity without much in the way of critical empathy **for** the bishop. Holding Irenaeus to account is a vastly complex task and pervaded with risk of anachronism, however holding to account those writing in Irenaeus studies and patristics more recently is much more likely to be accurate and relevant given the increased information we have.

That said, what comprises 'critical empathy?' The answer is likely not a surprise. Attempting to understand the logic behind someone's conclusions is a basic step in being able to comment on, assess and critique those conclusions. If a person posits their theory and a listener only notes their conclusion, not their preceding logic, then proceeds to disagree and set forth their logic without referencing the former argument, it can hardly count as an engaged response. It is a response in that it comes after the first proposal and is somewhat related, but it fails to recognise that the former used logical strategies and methods to conclude what they did. Moreover, in order for a person to conclude that their counterpart came to a different conclusion because they didn't respect the real truth, substantial reasons would have to be evinced if it is to be a comment on the level of ideas. If it is intended as a persuasion technique, a sophisticated engagement might not be utilised. But it should not be the default position of academics to label swathes of thinkers as anti-truth *a priori*.

This engagement with the intellectual background of given theories or proposals is not sympathy, however. Minns' preference for this word when describing Irenaeus' resistance to entertain the logic behind his targets' theories is somewhat misleading.[260] 'Sympathy' connotes a kind of pity or an emotive solidarity, but neither of these are fundamentally required in order to understand why a person might think why they do. Putting oneself in someone else's shoes **is** what this approach entails. Moreover, empathy does not require that someone agree with what they're empathising with, whereas 'sympathy' does imply this. It is understandable why 'sympathy' might be used, especially since we use 'sympathisers' to denote those who find legitimacy in someone's cause. For the sake of clarity, though, 'empathy' more accurately describes the 'putting on' of another person's ideology in order to understand why it is they conclude what they do.

Despite the familiarity academic scholars might have with critical empathy, Irenaeus' acute lack of it goes often unnoticed in works written about him. In fact, out of the spotlighted scholars identified in the introduction, only Minns shows awareness of

[260] See Minns, *Irenaeus*, p. 33, 35, 155. As noted below, Rowan Greer uses the same word.

it. Grant, Osborn, Behr, and Briggman in their respective books treat Irenaeus' writing as though it is a normative, critical account of second-century Christianity and thus can be relied upon today as a source for accurate knowledge of history and theology. This is what Irenaeus wanted after all, to be seen as a mere vehicle of truth, unaffecting the truth he carried with any personal qualities or any injections of his own thinking and feeling. Our study so far has demonstrated that even upon analysis of Irenaeus only, his writings imply a lack of neutrality and objectivity. Plus, the discovery of a library of controversial texts in Upper Egypt in 1945 further suggests that Irenaeus was not a normative representation of second-century Christianity, and that his voice alone should not be uncritically accepted without any critical empathy offered towards those he targeted.

It should be noted, nevertheless, that it is a well-used strategy to reinterpret someone's literature or idea with regard to something which is not the focus of the author if it uncovers a blind spot or undesirable consequence. However, and this really must be emphasised, this cannot be the only mode of interpretation. If we fail to attempt to hear the speaker using their logic (or as close to their logic as we can attempt), we end up entirely isolated from other humans; communication will break down. Therefore, it is important that during discussions of ideology we still try to get close to the original intent of peoples' communication otherwise our responses become reactions which cannot claim to be a critical and meaningful engagement.

Bearing this in mind, it will be beneficial to explore both an empathy for Irenaeus' ideas and his approach, and an empathy for his targets. As noted above, Irenaeus appears to write for those close to his own ideologies given that he mocks and denigrates his targets as he describes them which they would surely protest if it was addressed to them. Yet, there are moments when we see how Irenaeus would engage with his targets and encourage his readers to engage with them. This is as close to critical empathy that Irenaeus gets, so before we consider empathising with the bishop's position and his targets, let us analyse how Irenaeus interprets his targets.

3.2: Engaging with the Opposition

Throughout his writing, Irenaeus advocates several different modes of engaging with his target groups. By majority, the bishop denigrates and mocks these believers, but here we will investigate the times he acknowledges that his community might confront these target groups where outright mockery is not appropriate.

In the middle of his first book of *Haereses*, Irenaeus encourages his readers to connect with believers in the target groups in order to challenge them: "For it is now in your power, […] to familiarize yourselves with what has been said, to overthrow their wicked and undigested doctrines, and to set forth doctrines agreeable to the truth."[261] Therefore, the bishop understands that mockery and blunt denigration is not always appropriate communication, however this more conciliatory approach does not quite reach the level of critical empathy as his concern is limited to knowing only enough so as to be able to rebut and set forth one's own doctrines.

Even more, at the beginning of Book 4, Irenaeus appears to show more of a concern for engaging with his targets' ideology in a constructive sense. He writes that his readers can use his material to confute their targets to turn them to "the haven of the truth" and "cause them to attain their salvation."[262] Irenaeus therefore appears to call for Christians to proselytise these target groups. We are beginning to see that the bishop has a clear *a priori* commitment to continuing with his fixed ideology; he is assuming that he has absolute truth already and that he will not receive anything more from engaging with his targets. He is therefore required only to teach. They, however, need to abandon their ideology because it is wrong in absolute. So whilst Irenaeus appears to be more humble by his willingness to connect with his targets, not just denigrate them from a distance, his critical empathy remains minimal.

To compound this further, Irenaeus insists that he and his community should pray for the targets that they do not remain in "the pit which they themselves have dug" on

[261] *Haer.* 1.31.4; cf. *Haer.* 1.Praef.2.
[262] *Haer.* 4.Praef.1-2.

account of "loving them better than they seem to love themselves."[263] Irenaeus means this with kindness it appears as he says it's like removing dead flesh from a wound: painful but the best option for the long-term future. Whilst the bishop may mean well, it demonstrates his absolute certainty that his targets have nothing to offer him, that his knowledge is sufficiently perfect, and that they desperately need him and his community to save them from their ideologies.

Then again, Irenaeus also instructs his readers not to directly engage with these target groups. He writes that they should "hold in suspicion" those who do not hold to the dogma Irenaeus identifies as apostolic as they are heretics and hypocrites who act "for the sake of lucre and vainglory."[264] True Christians should flee 'heretics' and their teaching.[265] Even more, "those who, in the absence of written documents, have believed this faith" would know inherently to "stop their ears, and flee as far off as possible, not enduring even to listen to the blasphemous address."[266]

Thus far, Irenaeus does not demonstrate or advocate much critical engagement with his targets. In fact, the only time the bishop appears to admit agreement with his targets is when he recognises that humans have differing degrees of intelligence.[267] From here, he disagrees with what this means for theology. Therefore, Irenaeus doesn't only aim to shame and marginalise his targets; he looks to connect with them too. But we also see the result of the bishop believing in absolute truth and his rejection of limited truth (or a scale of truthfulness): Irenaeus does not think any fruit can be found in studying the literature and tradition of his targets.

Let us now consider the real and legitimate reasons for Irenaeus' conclusions.

3.3: Empathising with Irenaeus

From the perspective of Irenaeus, hearing reports of groups of self-proclaimed

[263] *Haer.* 3.25.7.
[264] *Haer.* 4.26.2.
[265] See *Haer.* 1.16.3, 4.26.4, and 5.20.2.
[266] *Haer.* 3.4.2.
[267] *Haer.* 1.10.3.

Christians upsetting Christian unity and solidarity by elitist initiation rituals and patronising rhetoric of 'spiritual' Christians versus 'animal' Christians would understandably evoke a strong reaction and a written response would hardly be surprising. Especially in the context of state persecution against Christians, where questions of ultimate destinations and divine judgement are heightened and all the more significant and emotional. These questions are likely even more prevalent in the mind of the bishop given the apocalyptic literature which shaped him and the testimony of both Justin and Polycarp, both victims of intense persecution. The desire to pursue some kind of justice against the elitists in this situation would again be very understandable.

Against harmful teaching, using mockery is very strategic. By reducing the offenders' ideology to fruit and vegetables, for instance, Irenaeus takes the sting out of the accusation against faithful Christians and raises their esteem and confidence. It is not they that are inferior but instead it is the divisive Christians who are ridiculous and fantastical inventors rooted outside of reality. More so, mockery takes the focus away from intensity of serious theological thinking and unifies those who identify with Irenaeus' account of Christianity also on the level of humour; both on the profound plane and the playful.

This concern would've been all the more sharpened should there have been reasonable evidence to think that these divisive elitists actually agreed with the ideology of the Christians they patronised as true but facetiously chose to live by another ideology in order to justify sexual abuse and self-idolisation (*Haer.* 1.6.3). It wouldn't be unreasonable to denounce contempt for the truth on an ideological level. In tandem, if a group facetiously claimed something was ambiguous in order to introduce a foreign lens which – when applied – benefited the interpreter more than the unambiguous meaning offered, this would be intellectually dishonest and manipulative. Irenaeus' insight that parts of scripture should be read in light of the whole thus carries significant weight. Obstinately claiming the mosaic tiles of scripture need to be rearranged completely according to an imagined plot in order to ensure coherence, when it is known that there

is a clear arrangement would be arbitrarily disruptive and frustrating to witness. It would be ridiculous, as Irenaeus says, to consult one of Homer's poems which involves one sentence following another and to claim there was no such connection and that another metanarrative must be formed using the discrete, de-contextualised Homeric verses. Therefore, again, in this circumstance, writing to quickly refute this unnecessary issue would likely be very beneficial to many.

Similarly, a group claiming their individuals have received a secret teaching handed down in private which originated with a direct source of truth would easily appear to be a threat to earnest believers. Concern over whether one would receive enlightenment could add significant theological anxiety to the whole community, which would be particularly harmful if there was already anxiety over physical threats of extreme violence by the Roman state. A secret teaching has very few (if any) avenues to verify the teaching as actually true, and is thus open to being abused by those acting spontaneously or perhaps more malevolently and selfishly. Secret teaching also lends itself to rumour if not confronted, a sensitivity Irenaeus would surely have inherited from Justin's concern for the consequences of false, anti-Christian rumour.

Then, we also have attestations of Irenaeus' character. Firstly, as Paul Parvis notes Irenaeus has been remembered as one who worked for the peace of the churches. Eusebius recounts a crisis where the bishop of Rome, Victor, was excommunicating Asiatic bishops for heterodoxy regarding the date which they finished the fast with the "feast of the Saviour's Passover."[268] Irenaeus was one of several who took issue with this and wrote to Victor, asking him to "consider […] peace and unity and love towards his neighbours."[269] Irenaeus maintained that there was diversity of practice beyond the matter of the end day of the fast and did not begin recently but is from "the days of our predecessors" who were less strict and allowed for "personal preference."[270] However,

[268] *Hist. eccl.* 5.23.
[269] Ibid. 5.24.
[270] Ibid.

those with different practices still lived in peace with one another; previous bishops of Rome, even, did not take issue though they faced the same situation as Victor. In fact, it seems Irenaeus deems that disagreement proves unity when he writes, "the disagreement in the fast confirms our agreement in the faith."[271] The bishop doesn't elaborate how he concludes this, but perhaps he meant that finding diversity in some things (and finding that which stood unified) proved that there was a core faith which all accepted. This, though, is unlikely given Irenaeus' vehement and extensive response to diversity in Christian belief in *Haereses* and *Demonstration*.[272] Even so, he includes an anecdote of disagreement between Polycarp and Anicetus (bishop of Rome); despite not being able to convince the other – resulting in their disagreement – "they immediately made peace."[273] It is difficult to reconcile this with *Haereses*, *Demonstration*, and *Hist. eccl.* 5.20, especially with so few extant sources. However, several Irenaean scholars use *Hist. eccl.* 5.24 to agree with Eusebius that Irenaeus' legacy was as a peacemaker, fighting against militancy for the good of Christian religion.[274]

Therefore, there is perhaps evidence that Irenaeus had a nuanced idea regarding diversity within Christianity. However, unless one posits that Irenaeus changed his mind after writing his *Haereses* and maybe even his *Demonstration*, it remains that the bishop was more strict with his anti-creative, anti-metaphor, conservation of original apostolic testimony – in other words, his strong foundationalism – than he was understanding and welcoming of differences in belief and practice by those who called themselves Christian. Viewing Irenaeus as a peacemaker is thus limited in how much it can incite sympathy for the bishop's unforgiving posture.

Secondly, Sara Parvis notes that where Irenaeus could have mocked his targets misogynistically, he did not.[275] Instead, the bishop treated women "simply as full human

[271] Ibid.

[272] Eusebius also records Irenaeus' inclination to correct faulty doctrine; see *Hist. eccl.* 5.20.

[273] *Hist. eccl.* 5.24

[274] See Parvis, 'Who Was Irenaeus?', pp. 22-23; Grant, *Irenaeus*, p. 4; Behr, *Irenaeus*, p. 3.

[275] See Sara Parvis, 'Irenaeus, Women, and Tradition' in *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy*, ed. by Sara Parvis and Paul Foster (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), pp. 159-164 (p. 161).

beings," supporting the perception of Irenaeus as tackling an "aristocratic divine elite."[276] Irenaeus calls **all** Christians to take responsibility because we are all made in the same image. Parvis then boldly concludes that if theologians had followed Irenaeus' practice even only to the extent of allowing women prophets "for the last eighteen hundred years, the feminists of the 1970s and 1980s would not have had quite so much work to do."[277]

Whilst these two supports of moral character for Irenaeus should prevent us from viewing him as only a "ruthless heresy hunter and jackbooted authoritarian that he has sometimes been represented as,"[278] there still remains his deeply restrictive definition of 'Christian' and harsh diagnosis of moral corruption and anti-truth bias in his targets. Perhaps *Haereses* was not a prolonged approach held by the bishop for a substantial time, perhaps it was very reactive and was in response to a kind of emergency; extreme danger might warrant an extreme response. Therefore, the dating of the five separate tomes of *Haereses* is important. It also elevates the importance of other extant texts by the bishop, like *Demonstration*. In this treatise, Irenaeus uses a similar tone and, again, does not demonstrate critical empathy with the ideologies he is writing against. Even more, Eusebius writes that Irenaeus wrote another polemic against the Greeks entitled *Concerning Knowledge*.[279] This suggests that polemic comprises a large amount of the bishop's theology and is not reserved for acute crises only. It is possible, therefore, that Irenaeus was a very harsh critic and rarely balanced this with reflective intellectual empathy.

This consideration of Irenaeus' legitimate ideological insights has affirmed – to an extent – what Irenaean literature often concludes: the bishop helpfully rules out cruel and harmful theological ideas and practice. Blatant self-deception is not compatible with truth-seeking, especially when the knowingly-false ideology is used as a means to a selfish end such as sexual abuse and self-aggrandisement. Therefore, if one knows the scriptures

[276] Ibid., p. 164.
[277] Ibid., p. 164.
[278] Paul Parvis, 'Who Was Irenaeus?', p. 23.
[279] *Hist. eccl.* 5.26.

to be unambiguous and perspicuous in their meaning but continues to claim they are ambiguous in order that they seem warranted in introducing a clarifying lens of interpretation which achieves an ulterior motive of theirs, they are to be known as such and not as intellectual and spiritual superiors. Moreover, Irenaeus is insightful to warn of the potential for abuse in claims for a secret teaching handed down in private which is truer than the teaching of the same people in public. The probability for false conspiracy theories to perpetuate through a community using this tactic increases substantially and would prove very divisive among the community. Finally, Irenaeus scorns another divisive strategy of one group calling themselves innately superior to the rest of the group's immoveable inferior status. Rigidly concretising a hierarchy of identity according to spiritual status would be very unhelpful in attempts to strengthen and unify Christians, especially in the context of an anxious community being persecuted for unfounded suspicion by the Roman government. Therefore, although Irenaeus offers very extreme accounts of his targets as a stimulus to his writing, he does write against beliefs and practice which could really harm a persecuted minority religious group.

However, our next question is not whether the above insights are good and helpful insights for theology, because they are. Our next question is whether Irenaeus' targets were guilty as charged.

3.4: Empathising with Irenaeus' Targets

We've explored how Irenaeus stylises his targets as disloyal to the truth, apathetic to the manifest dominion of God, and selfishly immoral. We've also explored how Irenaeus' targets of 'refutation' are not his target readership. Afterall, *Haereses* is about detecting and refuting those with falsely-called *gnōsis*, and *Demonstration* indirectly condemns heretics through its definitive certainty on the true and real purpose of God through particular (canonical) scriptures. For Irenaeus, those who claim a higher knowledge than Irenaeus' community of Christians, including those who claim more or different sources of knowledge (like those abiding by the biblical demiurgical myth) and those who claim

a reduced or clarified knowledge from the same sources of knowledge (like Marcionites), possess knowledge falsely so-called. He claims to have had access to the thought of these 'gnostics' by reading the Valentinian *Commentaries* and through "personal intercourse with some of them."[280] We read that the bishop knows of the *Gospel of Judas*,[281] the *Gospel of Truth*,[282] and perhaps the *Secret Book of John*.[283] But we've also seen that Irenaeus' rhetoric is often not with the intention of arguing on the level of ideas, but instead through mockery and vivid, but simple, imagery, clearly with the intention of persuading those abiding by the same (or very near) beliefs that they are above reproach, garnering a unified sense of righteousness in Irenaeus' chosen Christian community.

This approach, as effective as it might have been, does not perceive the targets' ideology as a collection of ideas worth assessing for **both** helpful guidance and insight via critique. This served Irenaeus' sociological need to define a Christian identity, but it was harsh, simple, and unsustainable. Thus, for scholars wishing to understand the full complexity of Christianity in the second century, Irenaeus offers a necessary angle, but not the full picture. And therefore, diverging from the current norm in Irenaeus studies is important. When contextualising the bishop, even if his is deemed to be the most truthful account of second-century Christianity, it is only one of many on the level of ideas, and to phrase an introduction to the bishop's account as an introduction to true Christianity is to continue his polemical tone, not to comment on the level of ideas. In other words, there may be a place for Irenaeus' passionate rhetoric, as outlined earlier in the chapter, however it is unacademic for modern scholars to dismiss non-Irenaean witnesses without critical analysis.

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[280] *Haer.* 1.Praef.2.

[281] *Haer.* 1.31.1. Irenaeus might be referring to the text we have in *GJudas*, found in the Codex Tchacos and translated into English in 2006, but this is not certain. Instead, Irenaeus might not have had access to a text. He might have only known of a text by the name which was in circulation somewhere in the far reaches of the Roman Empire.

[282] *Haer.* 3.11.9.

[283] *Haer.* 1.29.1-4, although Irenaeus' account doesn't exactly resemble *ApJohn* so the bishop might have had another version of the text. See Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1995), p. 24.

Therefore, the following can be considered an attempt to comment on Irenaeus as a second-century Christian, involved in significant dialogue regarding Christian identity on the level of ideas. This necessarily involves looking at his critics. And thus, this piece of Irenaean literature will now explore, albeit briefly, the voices of Irenaeus' targets.

An Ancient Discovery

After a highly dramatic series of events, fifty-two texts discovered by a farmer near the town Nag Hammadi reached scholars of religion in the latter half of the twentieth century.[284] Among them were texts identified by Irenaeus, including *ApJohn* and *GTruth*.[285] Also found were the *Gospel of Philip* and *Gospel of the Egyptians*. These were copies found to date back to 350-400 CE, and probably had original dates between the second and third century. Thus, with Irenaeus claiming there were more gospels than should exist at the time of his writing, he could have been responding to these latter two gospels.

We know in 367 CE Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, wrote his thirty-ninth *Festal Letter*, listing which writings were considered part of the Canon, "accredited as Divine,"[286] as part of either the 'old testament' or 'new testament.' "These," Athanasius wrote, "are fountains of salvation […]. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these…"[287] Athanasius added that there are books outside the official canon which are for instruction, including Esther and the *Shepherd of Hermas*, but even these books do not contain any "apocryphal writings" for these are "an invention of heretics."[288] This letter, like Irenaeus' writing, was polemical in its purpose. The Alexandrian bishop wanted to "curb the promiscuous reading habits," especially of

[284] For a full and interesting read about the finding of the Nag Hammadi library, see Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, pp. xiii-xxvii; see also James Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi* Story, 2 Vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

[285] There is some doubt whether the Nag Hammadi text *GTruth* is the same *Gospel of Truth* referred to by Irenaeus, but the likelihood of them being entirely distinct is "very slim indeed." Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the 'Valentinians'* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. 147.

[286] *FLett.* 39.3.

[287] *FLett.* 39.6.

[288] *FLett.* 39.7.

those who read books which claimed to have teaching which was hidden from the majority and available only to an elect few.[289] With increasing condemnation from outspoken Christian leaders like Athanasius who were part of a growing "political unity," their opponents were increasingly treated as an "*opposite* political unity," possibly leading to Egyptian monks burying the contested writings of their devotional library only to be found 1,600 years later.[290]

These apocryphal texts which Athanasius opposed include those like *ApJohn* and *GThom*. Both claim legitimacy through apostolic origin (and proximity to Jesus' true teaching) but also claim an access to teaching from Jesus not granted to the other apostles;[291] hence, 'apocrypha,' from ἀπόκρυφος (meaning hidden, concealed, or secret). Athanasius wanted to turn the apocryphal claim of superior knowledge on its head and thus "to consign apocryphal texts to oblivion."[292] Irenaeus too, as seen throughout this section, was heavily critical of the idea of some Christians lording their superior knowledge over other Christians. However, now, in the words of Pagels, "the heretics can speak for themselves."[293]

Irenaeus as Polemical Target

So, what was the account of Christianity by the communities who authored and read Irenaeus' targets' material? It has been the focus of a lot of literature in recent decades that this question assumes too much unity among Irenaeus' targets. When one reads those books which were spotlighted at the beginning of this essay, one could easily

[289] Francis Watson and Sarah Parkhouse (eds.), 'Introduction' in *Telling the Christian Story Differently: Counter-Narratives from Nag Hammadi and Beyond*, ebook (London: T&T Clark, 2020), pp. 21-32 (p. 23). For more on this letter, including his probable targets, like his Spanish contemporary Bishop Priscillian of Avila who advocated for use of apocryphal books as helpful instruction which complemented the canon, see Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), p. 146-152.

[290] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, pp. 120-121 (emphasis original). See also Lundhaug and Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*.

[291] See *ApJohn* 1.1, 31.32-32.6; and *GThom* 32.10-13, 34.30-35.12.

[292] Watson and Parkhouse, 'Introduction', p. 4.

[293] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, p. xxxv.

conclude (if one's reading were confined to these books) that Irenaeus confronted those who falsely claimed they had *gnōsis* and thus called themselves the *gnōstikoi*: the 'gnostics.' However, in recent decades the typologies of 'gnostics' and their associated system of ideas, 'gnosticism,' have been under some long-due scrutiny. Whilst it is too rich a dialogue for it to be discussed here at substantial length, there is a particular emphasis which will benefit us.

One of Walter Bauer's leading legacies is his geographical structure. He sought to establish the dynamics of 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' in given locations, rather than speaking of 'the' Christians against 'the' heretics. Even more so now, critical scholars of Nag Hammadi texts insist on understanding the texts individually before attempting to blend aspects of them into this fashioned category, 'gnostic.' In fact, many of these have abandoned this attempt given that the term eschews more than it illuminates the texts it apparently encompasses.[294] As such it functions more as "a laborsaving device conducive to anachronism, caricature, and eisegesis."[295] Therefore, whilst referring to Irenaeus' targets as a group benefitted us when elaborating on the bishop's own arguments, it will serve us better to refer to individual texts referred to in *Haereses* and those found at Nag Hammadi.

What immediately stands out is how the Nag Hammadi texts mirror Irenaeus' polemic tones to an extent. There is no direct counterpart mirroring *Haereses*, but the texts show a kind of response or counterattack to the kind of homogeneity Irenaeus prescribed. In *ApocPet*, for instance, Christ tells Peter that some "will blaspheme the truth and proclaim evil teaching" and some of those "who do not understand mystery [will] speak of things which they do not understand, [… and] will boast that the mystery of the truth is theirs alone." Christ continues, saying,

> there shall be others of those who are outside our number who name themselves bishop and also deacons, as if they have received their authority from God. They bend themselves under the judgment of the leaders. Those people are dry canals.

[294] See Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, pp. 29-53.
[295] Ibid., p. 51.

Then, perhaps most insightfully, *ApocPet* mentions a theological focus of the target of their denigration: "others, who oppose the truth and are the messengers of error, will set up their error and their law against these pure thoughts of mine, as looking out from one (perspective) **thinking that good and evil are from one (source)**."[296] Irenaeus often writes against the notion of one emanation of God being responsible for the creation of matter and evil (the demiurge) but the pre-existent god Bythus being a somewhat separate entity from which all things (directly or indirectly) came. Irenaeus' primary emphasis is on the oneness of God. However, it appears that the author of *ApocPet* is troubled by the ramifications this has on the pervasiveness of evil. If God made all and is simply one, then God made good and evil which the author takes issue with.

In his presentation at Yale in 1978, Rowan Greer noticed something similar, particularly regarding *ApJohn* and Irenaeus' own account of the Valentinians. He noted that the two appear to be "talking at cross purposes;"[297] *ApJohn* is concerned with salvation – "the rescue of lost sheep" – not the doctrine of God, and this is evident even from Irenaeus' account of Valentinians.[298] Whilst Irenaeus is correct inasmuch as the biblical demiurgical myth uses ideas outside of strict monotheism, he "virtually ignores" the different emphases, the different questions his targets are asking;[299] he "simply selected from the Apocryphon the theological section" that suited his interests and laid the groundwork for *Haereses*.[300] Greer then suggests that if we read *Haereses* as Irenaeus confronting Christian diversity, it might be evidence of the first dilemma characteristic of Christian theology: "how can an insistence upon salvation be reconciled with an insistence on monotheism?"[301] This approach to Irenaeus demonstrates something about

[296] My emphasis.

[297] Rowan A. Greer, 'The Dog and the Mushrooms: Irenaeus' View of the Valentinians Assessed', in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: The School of Valentinus*, ed. by Bentley Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1980), pp. 146–75 (p. 171). Cf. Denis Minns' note that Irenaeus is "oblivious" to his targets' legitimate concerns; see Minns, *Irenaeus*, p. 33.

[298] Greer, 'The Dog and the Mushrooms', pp. 170-171.

[299] Ibid., p. 169. Note that Greer uses language of Irenaeus' lack of "sympathy" as well as Minns.

[300] Ibid., p. 170.

[301] Ibid., p. 171.

the bishop's interpretation of his targets which has been illuminated with the discovery at Nag Hammadi; namely, that Irenaeus does not assess the arguments of his targets as they phrase and idealise them but constructs his own slanted précis from which he begins his critique. Thus, this might be what the writer of *ApocPet* demonstrates when he writes that strict monotheists (like Irenaeus) do not answer their questions about the origin of evil and how one is saved.

In another instance, Pagels writes of a similar resistance to mainstream 'orthodoxy' in the *Gospel of Mary* and *Gospel of Philip*.[302] She writes that the authors of these texts "recognized that their theory, like the orthodox one, bore political implications;"[303] specifically that whoever experienced Christ's continuing presence could claim authority equal to the twelve apostles. Whilst we see Irenaeus (and the wider orthodox tradition) accept this when argued for Paul's writings and apostolic status, we do not for the gospel bearing Mary's name. In spite of this, the orthodox tradition prefers to look to past events as the location of truth, condemning those who experience the continuing presence of Christ.

Whilst we may witness that Irenaeus and his targets were talking at cross purposes in the bishop's own texts, as Greer and Pagels do, it is not explicitly acknowledged by the bishop and therefore without acknowledgement of this – or, in other words, without critical empathy towards Irenaeus' targets – in (secondary) Irenaean literature, his targets will continue to be portrayed as a polytheist, excessively creative caricature.

This has been a very brief introduction to some of the Nag Hammadi literature and how they can be seen in dialogue with Irenaeus' account of early Christianity. Important to understand is Irenaeus' interpretation of his targets away from their self-understanding. He does not appear to have critically assessed their ideas as they understand them, and he does not communicate their ideas as they understand them. Perhaps most significantly, these texts show no attempt at trying to change that-which-

[302] See Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, pp. 11-14, pp. 121-122.
[303] Ibid., p. 13.

they-know-to-be-truth into something that serves an ulterior motive. They are seeking the truth earnestly, but seem to be answering different questions to the bishop.[304] It is thus peculiar why much literature in Irenaeus studies fails to critique or even notice Irenaeus' heavy-handed, maligning condemnation. Given this initial insight into the side of the story from the 'heretics" side, let us now address some of Irenaeus' allegations.

Confronting Irenaeus' Accusations

A full comparison of Irenaeus' claims against his targets and the material attributed to the communities he targeted will not be possible in this essay. However, we will briefly explore a few of the charges aforementioned. In our exploring of empathy towards Irenaeus, we uncovered accusations against his targets including, (a) the divisive sociological aggravation through elitist rituals which separated (superior) 'spiritual' Christians from (inferior) 'animal' Christians; and (b) widespread aberrant deception by way of agreeing with the truth proclaimed by the Christians they patronised but facetiously claiming they abided by another ideology. Regarding the latter, (b), we saw above how the legitimate concerns of Irenaeus' targets were not acknowledged by the bishop and that it appears he used the aspects of texts like *ApJohn* which were of interest to him, but he did not consider the whole of their writing, including their purpose. Ironically, it appears the bishop prescribed a scriptural hermeneutic of interpreting parts according to the whole but did not follow this same advice when interpreting his targets. Moreover, such a case of willing cognitive dissonance would be hard to account for. An individual maintaining an ideology which one **knew** to be false is not easily sustainable, let alone a community of people willing to blind themselves to truth. Defending this accusation would thus require evidence, or else it appears a simple attempt to explain diversity in a way that 'others' or marginalises one's opponents and establishes one's own

[304] Cf. Ismo Dunderberg's study which contends that Valentinians "used the cosmogonic myth […] to explain the world they were living in;" see Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 6.

community as normative.[305]

Associated with the former – (a), the charge of elitist divisiveness – is that a superior status entails no moral conduct is required of the spiritual Christians, only of the animal Christians, leading to the spiritual Christians engaging in sexual exploitation, self-idolisation, and giving into fleshly lusts (*Haer* 1.6.2-3). In his comprehensive book, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, Michael Williams challenges both claims of elitism and libertinism within communities targeted by Irenaeus. Quoting Michel Desjardins, he writes,

> Only the *Tripartite Tractate* clearly contains the classic threefold division of humanity, while for the rest "a bipartite rather than a tripartite division does more justice to these works on the whole," with the psychicals and pneumatics treated as virtually one group in contrast to material or fleshly people.[306]

Regarding Irenaeus' claims about Simonians, Basiledeans, Carpocratians, and Marcosians, Williams also focuses a section on critically assessing *Haer.* 1.6.3-4, which is where Irenaeus writes of the libertinism of his targets which they apparently justify with their imperishable 'spiritual' status. He notices that the bishop "couches his accusation of licentiousness in suspicious generalities,"[307] and finds other clues within Irenaeus' own account that he employs much "polemical 'spin.'"[308] Irenaeus, for instance presents an anecdote of those claiming to live as spiritual brothers and sisters through spiritual marriage, which Williams demonstrates as a common attempt in antiquity that could often ignite rumour and suspicion. Irenaeus, though, portrays this attempt as a deliberate façade for sexual license by his targets and "obviously delights" in the reports of such spiritual marriages leading to physical pregnancy.[309] However, given the lack of details

[305] This argument breaks down once one consults members of the diversity that was subject to marginalisation; see Elaine H. Pagels, 'Conflicting Versions of Valentinian Eschatology: Irenaeus' Treatise vs. the Excerpts from Theodotus', *Harvard Theological Review*, No. 1, Vol. 67 (1974), pp. 35-53.

[306] Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, p. 192, quoting Michel R. Desjardins, *Sin in Valentinianism*, SBL Dissertation Series, 108 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), p. 119.

[307] Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, pp. 165-166.

[308] Ibid. p. 176.

[309] Ibid.

provided by the bishop, this aligns with the kind of polemical spin an "unsympathetic outsider" would employ upon hearing of "what was most probably a failure in self-control."[310] In other words, Irenaeus again does not (or cannot) produce evidence of intentional hypocrisy. Moreover, after a comparison between the Latin text of *Haer.* 1.6.4 and the Greek text of Epiphanius' copy of Irenaeus in *Panarion*,[311] Williams notes a copyist error (either in the Latin or the Greek version) and suggests, using *GPhil*, that what may strike Irenaeus as an elitist argument for necessary sexual practice for the spiritual seed and necessary sexual encratism for the animal Christians was a misinterpretation.[312] Moreover, claims of licentiousness directly contradicts Irenaeus' statement paragraphs later that the spiritual seed are perfected by way of discipline during their life on earth.[313]

Williams concludes that since we almost never read Nag Hammadi texts which advocate sexual licentiousness as a result of their inherent spiritual status, and since the accusers do not offer first-hand witness, there is reason to suspect that heresiologists like Irenaeus misinterpreted and distorted their targets. Thus, "perhaps 'gnosticism' sometimes produced libertines, but most of the patristic charges are slander."[314] In fact, Williams notes similarly to Pagels that the accusers like Irenaeus "were not disinterested reporters but defenders of the faith, who certainly did not understand it to be their responsibility to give error the benefit of the doubt."[315]

3.5: Conclusion

Therefore, Irenaeus offers valid critiques which remain valuable of any analysis of an ideology. Plus, it can be helpful to interpret others in lights their authors had not considered. This can expose assumptions and unwanted implications which warrant

[310] Ibid.
[311] *Pan.* 31.21.9.
[312] Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, pp. 176-178.
[313] *Haer.* 1.7.5.
[314] Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism'*, p. 163.
[315] Ibid., p. 165.

consideration and changes to be made to one's approach. Yet, we must recognise that claims of willing self-deception according to ulterior motives are significant claims. Claims of a general protest against truth, posturing themselves as superior, and engaging in sexual license are certainly examples of powerful rhetoric which may have had great influence over those who read and heard of Irenaeus' ideas in *Haereses*. Shrouding his targets in scandal might have helped Irenaeus' cause, but much caution should be exercised in (secondary) Irenaean literature over whether one wants to reproduce Irenaeus' arguments, especially in literature which claims to argue on the level of ideas. In order to discuss ideas, it is not sufficient to account only one side of a dialogue, especially in a dialogue so impassioned and heated. It is also not sufficient to only offer a literal interpretation of impassioned, rhetorical texts. And thus, as soon as we recognise that those Irenaeus targeted were not anti-truth libertines, but earnest seekers of truth, we see that it would be a fault to read Irenaeus' extant writings as a factual account of second-century Christianity. It is paramount to Irenaeus studies that the bishop be shown in his context. This involves understanding the context he self-narrates, but entertaining it alongside the Nag Hammadi texts with critical empathy for both parties.

Thus, we can see that the mode which one uses to interpret Irenaeus is highly important. This essay posits that the spotlighted Irenaean literature (excepting Minns) interprets Irenaeus literally in places where critical empathy would be more suited to discussing Christian ideas circulating in the second century. In our next section, we will explore how three evangelical sources interpret and approach the bishop. Whilst some of the critique of this section perhaps still applies, there is the added slant that as part of a fundamentalist mentality, these evangelicals seek to use the foundationalism in Irenaeus' thought for their own foundationalist theological epistemology. These appropriations reveal much about how Irenaeus is significant today and sheds light on the nature of evangelical Christianity.

However, for this section, I will end with a question for Irenaeus studies: we don't study Athanasius without Arius; we don't study Cyril without Nestorius; so, why are we

studying Irenaeus without the Nag Hammadi library, or even a speculative voice of his targets using critical empathy?

SECTION II

Evangelical Adoptions & (Mis)Appropriations of Irenaeus

CHAPTER FOUR

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Evangelicals & the Fundamentalist Mentality

Evangelicalism is a notoriously difficult phenomenon to define and specify, and much literature has been spent asking what and who is an evangelical?; are they different from fundamentalists?; what are their origins?[316] This thesis unfortunately doesn't have the scope to ask such questions, however there is significant literature on the **fundamentalist mentality** which remains in the evangelical tradition, especially the US evangelical tradition. This chapter, therefore, will briefly expand on what it means for the evangelical tradition to have a fundamentalist mentality, critically assessing whether its origins manifested in modernity (as is often implied), using Irenaeus' writings to inform us. Moreover, do evangelical claims that they embody the precise Christianity taught by Jesus to his apostles align with Irenaeus' account of Christianity?

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[316] For more, see David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); George M. Marsden, 'Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon, A Comparison with English Evangelicalism' in *Church History*, No. 2, Vol. 46 (1977), pp. 215-232; Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George M. Marsden, *Evangelicals: Who They Have Been, Are Now, and Could Be* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019).

After introducing the fundamentalist mentality, this study will look at a piece of literature which positions itself as a kind of public semi-academic theology, with the intention of reaching those in non-academic settings; it will also look at two online articles. Analysing online blog-style articles is not a norm in evangelicalism studies, but this choice has been quite intentional. More and more, evangelical Christians are informed by social media regarding current affairs and theological debates. Whether on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok, evangelicals of various ages are engaging with content from evangelical figures, institutions and organisations often on a daily basis. On these platforms, book releases are announced, but more common are the articles like Simonetta Carr's 'Irenaeus of Lyon: Passionate Apologist to the Gnostics' in *Christianity Today* and Norman Geisler's 'Irenaeus on Scripture and Tradition' on his website, *normangeisler.com*.[317] Moreover, if evangelicals use search engines to learn more about aspects of their faith and recognise search results from evangelical authors, institutions and organisations that are known to them, they are more likely to trust their conclusions. In addition to the three sources analysed – from Köstenberger & Kruger, Carr, and Geisler – the website *GotQuestions.com* will be mentioned for its content and because it can be popular on search engine results when a person writes a direct Christian or theological topic into their internet browser. Therefore, studying online blog-style articles maintains high relevance and is worth investigating as part of this project.

But first of all, what is the fundamentalist mentality and where did it come from?

4.1: Christianity in 1920s USA

> We here and now move that a new word be adopted to describe the men among us who insist that the landmarks shall not be removed. 'Conservatives' is too closely allied with reactionary forces in all walks of life […]. We suggest that those who still cling to the great fundamentals and who mean to do battle royal for the fundamentals

[317] Both these sources have ties to fundamentalist institutions. *Christianity Today* was founded by Billy Graham in the attempt to form a post-fundamentalist neo-evangelicalism, and Norman Geisler was an instrumental force in the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. Both *Christianity Today* and the Chicago Statement have been susceptible to claims of fundamentalist bias. See Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, pp. 39-41, 70-71, 300-302.

> shall be called 'Fundamentalists.'[318]

Declared in 1920 at a rally in Buffalo, New York, these words from Curtis Lee Laws coined the term 'fundamentalists.' He used the term to speak of an identity of people who sought to resist theological modernism, which he saw as the compromise of essential tenets of Christian ideology, and subsequently Christian identity. The term quickly increased in use to denote various American Protestants wanting "to wage ecclesiastical and theological war against modernism."[319]

Laws was not the first to phrase this resistance with language of 'the fundamentals of the faith;' the term had been growing in use in the decades before Laws' invocation. Notably, between 1909-1915, twelve volumes of essays titled *The Fundamentals* were published and distributed free of charge. These essays too emphasised the threat of theological liberalism jeopardising the essential core of the Christian worldview. Carrying in one's mind true Christianity was deemed essential for the confidence with which one could interact with the world and the confidence of eternal salvation.[320] However, whilst we can trace the language of 'fundamentalism' to these two above sources, their contribution to the phenomenon is not a simple representation, not least because what constitutes 'fundamentalism' is continually elusive to scholars and members alike.

The fight against liberalism was phrased as an effort to keep pure truth pure. Princeton professor J. Gresham Machen wrote in his 1923 book, *Christianity and Liberalism*, to condemn what he saw as a religion "totally diverse" to Christianity yet one which made "use of traditional Christian terminology."[321] Already, we can draw a parallel

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[318] Curtis Lee Laws, 'Convention Side Lights', *Watchman-Examiner* (1920), p. 834; quoted in Harriet A. Harris, 'Fundamentalism(s)' in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, online edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 810-840 (p. 811).

[319] George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 57.

[320] This 'neuromanic' approach to Christianity relies on very particular anthropological understandings which should perhaps be subject to critique and deconstruction. See John Swinton, *Becoming Friends of Time: Disability, Timefullness, and Gentle Discipleship*, UK edn. (London: SCM Press, 2017).

[321] J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1923), p. 2.

with Irenaeus' locating of truth in past events accessed by pure transmission. Moreover, Machen describes his affliction of addressing liberalism given that "the movement is so various in its manifestations that we may almost despair of finding any common name which will apply to all its forms."[322] Nevertheless, Machen asserts there is one root of the movement: "the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God."[323] Whilst Machen had reservations about the term 'fundamentalist,' the professor was resolute that there was a "common foe" which must be defeated and thus he became credited as "the greatest intellectual spokesman for fundamentalism."[324] Therefore, a movement tackling the impure encroachment upon true Christian religion was underway.

As phrased by Machen, this movement was against the imposition of one's own ideas on truth; since "humans do not create meaning, they find it,"[325] the pursuit of Christian belief was the pursuit of factual reality as God knew it to be. To confer onto Christian belief one's own selfish priorities and desires, thereby adapting doctrine and ethical conduct to one's preferences, was to attempt to re-write God's truth, dismissing God's purpose for creation. To engage, then, in a mollified version of Christianity was a case of disrespect and apathy towards truth and an elevation of the self which amounted to idolatrous arrogance. Therefore, like Irenaeus, Machen had a simple idea of interpretation: the handing down of ideas could proceed without bias. The process of humans coming into possession of knowledge could be as simple as witnessing a fact or event and retaining in one's mind the specifics of that fact or event. No interpretive lens was inherent or required (see *Fig. 5* below). In fact, Machen asserted the idea of 'interpretation' was a fascination of the day which had been added to the epistemological process.[326]

Machen emphasised that events had a singular and fixed meaning. There were no

[322] Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, p. 2.
[323] Ibid.
[324] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, p. 20.
[325] Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, p. 191.
[326] Ibid., p. 192.

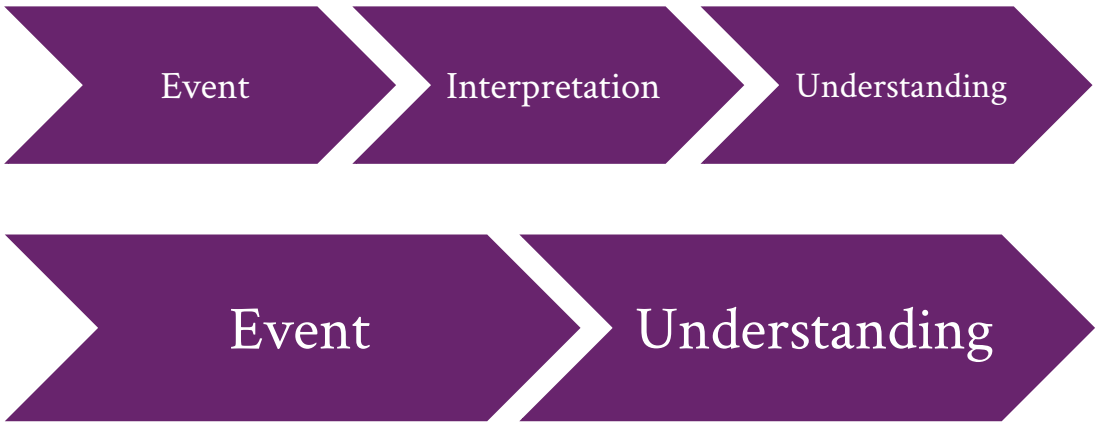

Figure 5: Two diagrams representing two approaches to understanding the epistemological process; the upper diagram was rejected by J. Gresham Machen. The lower diagram was what he proposed instead.

authorities beside God which could affect meaning, thus the idea of 'interpretation' was unnecessary. Many scholars have noticed the parallels this bears with a school in Scotland which developed over the eighteenth century in response to idealism: Common Sense Realism (CSR).[327]

After being brought to the USA physically through two Scottish presidents of Princeton College – John Witherspoon (1723-94) and James McCosh (1811-94) – the principles of CSR "dominated American academic thought."[328] Moreover, Witherspoon signed the US Declaration of Independence in 1776 and helped to draft the first US constitution (The Articles of Confederation, 1777).[329] The proponents of this philosophy fought against the legacy of Locke's theory of ideas. Locke distinguished human perceptions of objects from the objects themselves, claiming that our perceptions are not external realities but exist only in the mind as a representation of those objects. In place of this, Thomas Reid (1710-1796) argued for a strict realism on the basis that 'common

[327] For a comprehensive account of CSR and its influence on fundamentalism and evangelicals, see Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, pp. 96-130.

[328] Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, p. 192. Cf. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, p. 14.

[329] Note that Harris credits Witherspoon with co-writing *The Federalist Papers* (published 1787-88) which were written as a corrective to The Articles. See Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, pp. 126-127. This appears to be an error as the three recorded authors of the *Papers* are Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. Instead, see an online article exploring Princeton's ties to enslavement, <https://slavery.princeton.edu/stories/john-witherspoon#2297> [accessed 01.07.2021].

sense' informs us that we think about direct objects, not ideas of objects. Moreover, he described memory as a direct account of the event as it happened, not an idea of what happened. Thus, our perception and memory are reliable sources of information from which we can make confident conclusions regarding reality. Furthermore, common sense was innate to every person, meaning everyone could use their perception and memory in understanding ideas. The Scottish philosophers hoped this would stop in its tracks the scepticism propagated by Locke, Hume and more, which sought to differentiate internal conceptualisation from external reality.

Evangelicals saw this philosophy as offering credit to the argument for the perspicuity of scripture and thus borrowed terminology and argumentation from CSR. However, it would be a mistake to attribute too much of fundamentalist origins to CSR.[330] By the end of the American Civil War (1865), CSR was no longer the dominant philosophical force; it had been replaced by a move towards materialism or idealism. Nonetheless, conservatives in the evangelical tradition resisted this change. They continued to find in Reid a "disapproval of sophistry and fanciful reasoning" which they could use against 'modernist' biblical interpretations coming from Germany.[331] Specifically, they defended accounts of events in the Bible as factual information on those events, not authorial ideas of them. In other words, it was possible to access true understanding of the events of Jesus' life and God's wider direct communication to humanity through the biblical accounts.

At Princeton in particular, this developed into a statement made on the inerrancy of the Bible. Thus, in 1881, B. B. Warfield and A. A. Hodge wrote an article asserting "the Scriptures not only contain, but ARE THE WORD OF GOD, and hence that all their elements and all their affirmations are absolutely errorless."[332] This doctrine continued

[330] Harris describes the influence of CSR on Christian religion as "neither specific nor comprehensive." See Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, pp. 13-14.

[331] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, p. 100.

[332] A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, 'Inspiration', *The Presbyterian Review*, No. 6, Vol. 2 (1881), pp. 225-260 (p. 237).

to thrive into the twentieth century, even beyond the USA.[333] More and more, the Bible was described as objective, its truth available to anyone who didn't obscure this truth with their subjectivity. Therefore, in the 1920s, Machen writes about the Bible as a record of facts, and biblical inerrancy becomes the bedrock of fundamentalist apologetics from which all other doctrines are derived. This came to a head in the notorious Scopes Trial in 1925, where the State of Tennessee prosecuted teacher John Scopes for teaching evolution. However, it is this bedrock, this contention of a Bible immune from error, and reliable in the foundationalist conceptualisation of a Christian worldview which "has dominated the evangelical understanding of scripture ever since."[334]

4.2: The Fundamentalist Mentality

Despite what the above brevity might suggest, fundamentalism was not a simple, linear progression from Common Sense Realism to Princetonian inerrantism to the explosive 1920s. Nor is there a simple progression from the self-styled fundamentalists to the evangelicals of today. However, it has been widely noted that something of the mentality of the fundamentalists has remained in the evangelical conception of the Bible. Harriet Harris attributes to James Barr's seminal work the argument "that many evangelicals reflect a **fundamentalist mentality** regarding scripture."[335]

Kathleen Boone also writes that her focus is not on 'fundamentalism' as much as 'fundamentalist,' which is not used to denote individuals so much as a participation in a "a unified body of discourse […] arising from belief in the sole authority of an inerrant bible."[336] Therefore, in this mode of thinking, to call someone a fundamentalist is shorthand for claiming they have a "*tendency toward fundamentalism*,"[337] not an attempt to pigeonhole the individual for simple census-like purposes. This tendency can be seen

[333] Unfortunately there is not the capacity to cover non-US fundamentalisms, however for the effect on Christianity in Britain, see Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, pp. 45-56, pp. 56-93.
[334] Ibid., p. 14.
[335] Ibid., p. 56 (my emphasis).
[336] Kathleen Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1990), p. 10.
[337] Ibid., p. 10 (emphasis original).

in the "peculiar anxiety" among evangelical moderates to defend their non-fundamentalist position.[338] This is mirrored in Barr's 'maximal conservatism' theory.[339] Barr notices – along with Harris – that conservative evangelical literature changed after the old fundamentalist arguments. He offered the following example. Barr wrote that instead of, for instance, taking 'the Bible's own account of itself' and asserting that Psalm 110 was written by David on account of Jesus' attestation (as would be standard fare in fundamentalist discourse), more recent conservative scholars appeared to be using the historical-critical method to prove the Psalm must be 'very late' and thus more likely to be written by David. Yet, as Barr writes, the dogmatism of the fundamentalists remains because "there is no substantial reason for the conservative to press for an early date for the Psalm except for the quotation by Jesus."[340] Thus, there remains in evangelical thinking a tendency and bias towards the most conservative conclusion. The approach prioritises an inerrantist foundation and is deterministic: "the maximal conservative approach demands conservative interpretations."[341]

Harris writes about "the tenacity of fundamentalism" and its doctrine of scripture, even in the UK.[342] In her essay 'Fundamentalism(s),' she analyses fundamentalism as a kind of foundationalism:

> Fundamentalism treats Scripture as foundational. Hence a fundamentalist theology invariably begins with the doctrine of Scripture, because of the conviction that the Bible must be secured before we can go on to build a theology (from it).[343]

Fundamentalist theologies therefore treat the Bible as a textbook, a source of facts.[344]

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[338] Ibid., p. 11.

[339] See Barr, *Fundamentalism*, pp. 85-89.

[340] Ibid., p. 88.

[341] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, p. 67. This has led to charges of anti-intellectualism. See Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

[342] See Harris, 'Fundamentalism(s)', pp. 821-824.

[343] Ibid., p. 816. For another account of fundamentalism as a textual phenomenon, see Hood et al. who study the phenomenon through psychology; Ralph W. Hood Jr., Peter C. Hill, W. Paul Williamson, *The Psychology of Religious Fundamentalism* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2005).

[344] See, for instance, *Bible Promises for Teens*, ed. by Barbara Farmer (Racine, WI: Broadstreet Publishing, 2014); this book compiles Bible verses under various themes such as 'abandonment,' 'friendship,' and 'prayer,' but specifies no editor, the implication being the Bible itself offers promises to readers from which they can build a comprehensive Christian worldview.

Harris also notes four particular properties of scripture which those of a fundamentalist mentality assert:

1. Scripture is unmediated. Transmission is pure and untainted by biblical authors;
2. Scripture is perspicuous. Truth in scripture is accessible to everyone according to a common-sense reading;
3. Scripture is self-authenticating. Scripture makes claims about itself which we should trust;
4. Scripture is inerrant or infallible. This ensures a fixed foundation because it holds correct information on all it covers.

This produces an idea of scripture as an agent able to defend itself, a direct entity which speaks to us in plain terms using arguments to defend its authority which is entirely informed and thus never disseminates false information.[345] As much as the fundamentalist mentality maintains itself as a conserver of pure truth, this is not the attitude we saw in Irenaeus. In the bishop's writing, it was noted that he showed a foundationalism involving the first two properties – pure transmission and perspicuity – however the latter two properties are alien to Irenaeus and the early church more broadly. Scripture was not trusted because 'it told us' to trust it. Scripture was not seen as an agent in this way. Instead, scripture was trusted by way of its authors who were witnesses to the life of Jesus, the visible image of the invisible Father and received his pure teaching of the truth. Scripture was not seen as perfectly informed, containing 'textbook' answers to our questions. Irenaeus specifically writes that we should not seek to find solutions to copious questions (*Haer.* 2.28.1-9).

Nevertheless, given their commitment to truth located in past events and necessary as foundations for one's Christianity, many evangelicals study early Christian theologians, making claims that they continue in the ideology they also knew. Therefore, in view of our study of Irenaeus above, next we will consider three evangelical pieces of

[345] For a more extensive critique of the "myth of textual agency," see, Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press), pp. 1-16. See also see William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1-23.

literature which focus on Irenaeus in order to analyse their approach and any claims made. My conclusion, after these brief source analyses will be simple: Christianity has changed in some senses, but remained the same in others. It has changed in such ways which make simple claims to an original pristine Christianity impossible, but has threads which cannot be solely attributed to modernity.

CHAPTER FIVE

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Three US Evangelical Appropriations

5.1: Andreas Köstenberger & Michael Kruger

Andreas Köstenberger and Michael Kruger in 2010 collaborated to bring about a response to what they saw as a threat to the true Christian religion and identity. Both are professors in the USA, however Köstenberger grew up in Austria, moving to the US after completing his first doctorate. Both believe in biblical inerrancy, and Kruger is also president at the Reformed Theological Seminary "which is explicitly and institutionally committed to 'The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.'"[346] Both have been affiliated with the Gospel Coalition, an international evangelical organisation in the Reformed tradition founded by D. A. Carson (who wrote a review of *The Heresy of Orthodoxy* featured on the back cover of the paperback version), and Tim Keller, with notable council members including John Piper, David Platt, and Albert Mohler.[347] These names are notable figures in conservative evangelicalism and can be subject to claims of

[346] Noel B. Reynolds, 'Review of The Heresy of Orthodoxy', *BYU Studies Quarterly*, pp. 168-173 (p. 168). Compare to their interview with Darrell Bock entitled 'Encountering Challenges to Biblical Inerrancy' in 2015 (transcript also included) <https://voice.dts.edu/tablepodcast/encountering-challenges-to-biblical-inerrancy/> [accessed 24.06.2021].

[347] See <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/staff/> [accessed 15.02.2021] and <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/council/> [accessed 15.02.2021].

fundamentalistic thinking. This speaks to the wide and extensive links between those in the evangelical tradition, even if they don't explicitly express intellectual solidarity on every topic. Moreover, Kruger especially intends to bridge any divide between academic literature and the wider public realm through his prolific blog with condensed versions of his academic work.[348] Additionally, Köstenberger has founded 'Biblical Foundations', "an organization devoted to encouraging a return to the biblical foundations in the home, the church, and society."[349] Thus, these two authors are very much seated in their identity as conservative evangelicals who look to an inerrant Bible as the foundation of their Christian knowledge.

In their book, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy*, the two protest and criticise what they see as a substitution of a cultural fascination with diversity in place of true, historical Christianity. They identify the latter as 'orthodoxy' and claim it is being outlawed in the same way heresy used to be; hence the (now) 'heretical' nature of (what has been accepted historically as) 'orthodoxy.' In the pair's crosshairs in particular are Walter Bauer and Bart Ehrman who propagate the legitimisation of Christian diversity, what they call the 'the Bauer-Ehrman thesis' or "the gospel of diversity."[350] Moreover, they pronounce Bauer's and Ehrman's goal is to return to the "more pristine notion of diversity that prevailed in the first century before ecclesiastical and political power squelched and brutally extinguished the fragile notion that diversity – previously known as 'heresy' – is the only orthodoxy there is."[351]

From the beginning of their book, we can witness their dramatic rhetoric used to clarify the essence of their problem. The authors pose the idea of 'the heresy of orthodoxy' as an invention of Bauer which is continued by contemporary academics. Already their work sounds much like how Irenaeus stylised heresy as a totally malignant product of the

[348] See <https://www.michaeljkruger.com/> [last accessed 24.06.2021].

[349] See <https://www.mbts.edu/about/faculty/andreas-kostenberger/> [accessed 15.02.2021].

[350] Andreas J. Köstenberger, and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), p. 16.

[351] Ibid., p. 16.

individual Simon Magus, bereft of any potential theological benefit. In their first three paragraphs, the pair begin with a mocking tone that those scholars deconstructing traditional terms of 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' proclaim, "All is fluid, doctrine is dead, and diversity reigns," and pride themselves on

> independence, rejection of authority, and embrace of pluralism. Truth is dead; long live diversity![352]

These idioms are alongside slightly more detailed descriptions that the "new orthodoxy" reverses the claim "that Jesus and the early Christians taught a unified message that they thought was absolutely true and its denials absolutely false."[353] They expand that the 'Bauer-Ehrman' thesis contends orthodox Christianity came to be the supposed traditional version because it was held by the church in Rome "which emerged as the ecclesiastical victor in the power struggles waged during the second through fourth centuries."[354] Given that they are able to explain the details of the issue in clear terms, the repetition of provocative idioms seems superfluous, yet this interspersal of academic discussion and forceful rhetoric establishes their approach. As such, like Irenaeus, this approach does not seek to first understand King, Pagels, Ehrman, and Bauer as they understand themselves with critical empathy before critique is made. Therefore, it seems instead that they are writing to affirm their own ideology. Moreover, they mention King only twice in their book, both in footnotes. In the second footnote, they imply her work need not be read, nor Michael Williams', because B.A. Pearson rejected their dismantling of the category 'Gnosticism' in a chapter of his book.[355] Such a dismissal of academic research is most likely in order to focus the reader on Bart Ehrman's work specifically because he "promotes the Bauer thesis in the mainstream media in an unprecedented way."[356] Ehrman's rhetoric tends to be more provocative than King, Pagels, Williams and others in patristics which might be another reason why Köstenberger and Kruger

[352] Ibid., pp. 15-16.
[353] Ibid., p. 16.
[354] Ibid.
[355] Ibid., p. 168, n. 42.
[356] Ibid., p. 31.

focus on him.[357] This is perhaps, then, a subtle insight into the anti-intellectualism which pervades evangelicalism. This could explain why they are unafraid to quote Bauer and Ehrman, but rarely quote the like of Pagels and do not show that they have read Williams or King.

Furthermore, in a contextual description of Bauer's seminal book, the pair offer a short history of how Bauer came to think the way he did. In this paragraph, they write that the Enlightenment weakened the confidence people had in "the supernatural origins of the Christian message," and the history-of-religions school normalised comparing religions, and F. C. Baur postulated a conflict between the traditions of Peter and Paul.[358] Yet, they don't offer consideration of why these influences might have been persuasive to Bauer and why he therefore "differed radically from his scholarly predecessors."[359] In fact, they attribute his theory to a simple fault: "Bauer found early Christianity to be diverse and orthodoxy late [because] he failed to consult the New Testament regarding Jesus and his apostles."[360] The pair are convinced – like Irenaeus – that if one reads the scriptures and studies them without bias, one will agree there is a true account of Christian ideology and identity, handed down from Jesus to apostles to church fathers and onwards.

Similarly, again in their beginning paragraphs, the authors write that the "world of pluralism and postmodernity" which informs 'the gospel of diversity' is one "where reason has been replaced as the arbiter of truth by perspectivalism and the unfettered and untouchable authority of personal experience."[361] They protest postmodernism specifically which, they claim, "contends that the only absolute is diversity," in a

[357] Perhaps also because of Ehrman's 'insider' background, journeying from evangelicalism to agnosticism. See Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2005), pp. 1-15.

[358] Köstenberger and Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy*, p. 25.

[359] Ibid.

[360] Ibid., p. 69.

[361] Ibid., p. 16. They go on to define postmodernism simply as a belief in truth being "inherently subjective and a function of power" (p. 39); they defend this with a string of references to only conservative evangelical publications.

manoeuvre seemingly to set up 'postmodernism' against 'the Bible' as though they are directly comparable as rival authorities.[362] Moreover, they are apparently suggesting that vast swathes of academic thought are not informed by reason but an axiomatic, *a priori* commitment to personal experiences of pluralism. The authors' inability to find common ground with their counterparts, or to understand the counterpart theories as their proponents do suggest they intend their work to connect with those with their same ideology and share their common exasperation at what – to them – is ridiculous and obviously defective. Like Irenaeus, their piece is written about ideas, but a substantial amount of the persuasion is attempted through rhetoric. This unempathetic approach to one's counterparts can be common in evangelical contexts.

The pair claim their work exemplifies the Bauer-Ehrman thesis as "a case study for how an idea is born, how and why it is appropriated by some and rejected by others."[363] They add that they write "as scholars."[364] Their conclusion from this investigation is that scholars who reject the traditional orthodoxy-heresy categorisation are informed less by historical evidence and research, and instead by "modern-day truisms."[365] They further delegitimise their targets by accusing them of having an "ax [sic] to grind" and wanting "to impose their agenda" on academic disciplines.[366] They claim the approaches they write against are anti-intellectualist, that they "[transcend] factual arguments" and wish not to be "bothered by the pesky, obstreperous details of patient, painstaking research."[367]

They attempt to demonstrate this using Ehrman as an example. In his book *Lost Christianities*, Ehrman writes that "you can never rely on an enemy's reports for a fair and disinterested position."[368] The pair argue that it is an "unreasonable requirement" to

[362] Ibid., p. 39.
[363] Ibid., p. 18.
[364] Ibid.
[365] Ibid., p. 154.
[366] Ibid., p. 17.
[367] Ibid., p. 18.
[368] Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 104.

ask for neutrality.[369] Yet, just a few pages earlier they claim they participate "in an effort to move beyond **Bauer's biased** account to a **proper** understanding of the **actual** first-century condition of *earliest* Christianity."[370] They appear to be both defending scripture from the need to be neutral, whilst claiming their account will be neutral, which suggests they do see neutrality as a requirement of truth. However, to return to their claim that neutrality is an unfair requirement, they appeal to "postmodernity" which "has aptly revealed the irrationality of this view."[371] To dismiss postmodernity and then to appeal to it as a source for information is to operate in bad faith.[372] Therefore, the authors appear to employ Irenaeus' boomerang technique, concentrating on critiquing aspects of their targets, only to rely on the same aspects when denigrating their targets regarding another matter.

Köstenberger and Kruger's highly rhetorical approach makes their claim to academic status somewhat generous. In the first section of this thesis, I discussed various literature in patristic studies and beyond. Whilst some scholars undermine the intellectual integrity of Irenaeus' targets in the second century, they do not accuse their contemporary colleagues of refusing to concern themselves with critical research. It appears Köstenberger and Kruger – established and connected within their conservative evangelical circles as they are – are less in touch with university-based research, which – at its best – deems critical engagement necessary. However, because it appears the pair write to those within and close to their ideology, they do not need to show a logical journey from 'the gospel of diversity' to their own argument in order to connect with their audience. Their claim to write 'as scholars' does seem somewhat misleading, therefore, and could lead members of their ideological community to suspect that

[369] Köstenberger and Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy*, p. 73.

[370] Ibid., pp. 69-70. Bold emphases are mine; italics are original.

[371] Ibid., p. 73.

[372] It is not possible to simply dismiss an entire phenomenon like postmodernity from one's intellectual space, most especially because – like any philosophy or movement or time period – it is not a discrete entity capable of neat, simple removal. The idea of dismissing postmodernity, however, is common in evangelical discourses.

academic institutions are rigged against truth and rightly accused of attempting to 'transcend reason' unless they conform to conservative evangelical ideology. Thus whilst writing that their work – in contrast to their peers – is rigorous and clear, due to the neglect of engaging argumentation from those who are intellectually persuaded by 'the gospel of diversity,' Köstenberger and Kruger achieve a narrow sense of rigour and clarity.

However, besides the rhetoric of the pair, what use do they make of the bishop's ideas? As we witnessed above, Irenaeus was convinced truth was located in the past, whereas his targets likely saw truth more located in the continuing presence of Christ, necessitating fresher, deeper interpretations of scripture and tradition. Likewise, Köstenberger and Kruger place emphasis on preserving the "unified message" of "Jesus and the early Christians."[373] Even more, they describe themselves as fighting the "battle" against "forces that seek to discredit the biblical message about Jesus, the Lord and Messiah and Son of God, and the absolute truth claims of Christianity."[374] In this way, they align with Irenaeus' impassioned search for reliable foundations, claiming, "the stakes in this battle are high indeed."[375]

Location of Truth

The pair work according to a similar model as Irenaeus, attempting to locate truth as an original teaching which can be discovered through historical research. Truth in its pure form was handed down from person to person, generation to generation, and so is discoverable if we trace history correctly without bias. They write that "the essential theological convictions of Jesus" were passed down to "the New Testament writers" which were "continued into the second-century writings of the church fathers."[376] We

[373] Köstenberger and Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy*, p. 16.

[374] Ibid., p. 18.

[375] Ibid.

[376] Ibid., p. 54. Again, it is uncertain what this means for the apostolic status of Paul, who did not receive Jesus' essential theological convictions, but experienced something closer to Jesus continued presence among humanity.

therefore have a furtherance of Irenaeus' idea of truth as apostolic witness. Irenaeus' account can imply that it is Jesus' theological convictions which were passed down to the apostles and constitute the apostolic tradition which he so often traces truth back to, but he doesn't make a habit of explicitly tracing doctrine to the person of Christ. Perhaps Köstenberger and Kruger reflect an intensification of Irenaeus' foundationalism whereby the modern writers wish to 'fill in the cracks' so that one's certainty can feel more airtight.

Moreover, they assert that when Peter replies to Jesus' question, 'Who do you say I am?' with, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Matthew 16:13-20), Jesus' commendation that this knowledge was revealed by God is – to the authors – evidence that "Jesus accepted only *one* belief as accurate: the confession that Jesus had come in fulfillment of Old Testament messianic prediction."[377] The pair, then, see plurality not as an acceptable end, but the beginning of a process of finding the one absolute truth within the diversity.

Transmission of Truth

Conceptualising truth as 'Jesus' theological convictions' would not be much benefit to evangelical Christians without a secure idea of the nature of truth-transmission. Jesus' theology is the truth and therefore it is the evangelical task to locate that truth through historical tracing. To this end, evangelicals often appeal to the Common Sense Realism notion that memory and testimony are able to be accessed. In other words, it is possible to achieve pure transmission of truth so that truth can be handed down from generation to generation uncontaminated. In a section on the preservation of orthodoxy, the pair note the nomenclature of 'handing down' truth which Irenaeus often uses. They echo Irenaeus' conviction that he was a conduit of truth, one of the "guardians of the message," and definitely not an innovator.[378] Thus, again, Köstenberger and Kruger have a foundationalist model of the nature of Christian knowledge and appropriate Irenaeus' idea of apostolic succession and pure transmission of truth into their narrative of the

[377] Ibid., p. 74.
[378] Ibid., p. 55.

transmission of truth.

They do note, however, that there was a level of change over time. Köstenberger and Kruger write that the New Testament writers might not have "conceived of their theology in the same exact constructs as those of the creeds" but the creeds were an "organic continuation of what the New Testament authors began without any transmutation of the DNA of the New Testament gospel message, which, in turn, is rooted in the Old Testament."[379] They therefore attempt to account for the changes from New Testament didactics to metaphysics in the fourth century councils and creeds, but maintain these changes did not affect the core DNA of Christianity. This DNA, the authors contend, is unchanging and easily accessible. In this way, similar to Irenaeus, they view fresh, imaginative approaches to truth, especially biblical interpretation as non-truth and thus anti-truth.

The pair consider the transmission of truth to be so pure that they seek to de-contextualise the term 'orthodoxy.' Whilst not uncontroversial, 'orthodoxy' is widely associated with the early church's increasing ecclesiastical organisation and its liaison with the Roman state. In the fourth century, the Emperor Constantine involved himself in the internal affairs of the Christians – specifically the controversy between Alexander and Arius – and wished to unite "all the provinces […] in one consistent view."[380] The first council of bishops from all over the empire at Nicaea in 325 exiled Arius and his supporters, and a creed was written detailing the correct doctrine.[381] This understanding of 'orthodoxy' involves factors which are very different to Irenaeus' experience of discerning true Christianity from falsely so-called Christianity. Defining orthodoxy, therefore, necessarily involves reference to this context, however Köstenberger and Kruger also wish to add that 'orthodoxy' could be defined by the theology it purported,

[379] Ibid., pp. 56-57.

[380] *Vita Const.* 2.64-73.

[381] Leo Donald Davis offers a particularly accessible account of the council held at Nicaea; see Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), pp. 56-69.

not just its socio-political context: "Christian orthodoxy for our present purposes can be defined as 'correct teaching regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ, including the way of salvation, in contrast to teaching regarding Jesus that deviates from standard norms of Christian doctrine.'"[382] Therefore, the pair have no qualms about referring to a "unified doctrinal core" in the New Testament as 'orthodox.'[383]

Moreover, in a similar fashion to Irenaeus' genealogy of the bishops of Rome, the authors offer a genealogy of orthodoxy as a timeline from Jesus' death in 33 CE to the solidification of orthodoxy in creeds in 200s-300s CE.[384] They also describe that "orthodox Christians founded thriving churches as early as the AD 50s, which is attested by Paul's many letters."[385] In this way, the authors wish to distance 'orthodoxy' from the politics of early Christian identity. This also adds rhetorical weight to their argument that the DNA of Christianity was handed down from Jesus to the disciples to writers like Irenaeus to the formulated and enforced creeds in the fourth and fifth centuries onwards.

Irenaeus' understandings of the location of truth in the past, specifically in the testimony of the apostles, and the accessibility of pure transmission between individuals and even generations are drawn upon in Köstenberger and Kruger's work. Although they make use of and further Irenaeus' foundationalism, they limit themselves to scripture as a source of knowledge and verify it through a model similar to apostolic succession. They do not, like the bishop, appeal to nature or natural reason. This points to the divergences the modern pair have with Irenaeus' ancient economy vision. For Irenaeus, creation is inherently good and points to its creator through its createdness. However, Köstenberger and Kruger – as evangelical Protestants – place their epistemological focus on revelation through scripture and it is scripture which is their foundation. For Irenaeus, scripture is one aspect of the foundation of (Christian) knowledge. In addition to theological epistemology, the pair also seem to adopt Irenaeus'

[382] Köstenberger and Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy*, pp. 70-71.
[383] Ibid., p. 81.
[384] Ibid., p. 66.
[385] Ibid., p. 59.

rhetoric of employing higher levels of critical engagement with one's targets than seems to be the case. Whilst we cannot critique Irenaeus in a simple sense of not adhering to modern academic norms, Köstenberger and Kruger claim their scholarly status and yet fail to engage in critical empathy. Instead of engaging on the level of ideas, they assert those who disagree with them are swept in a culture according to the modern-day truism of tolerance of pluralism. They do not see this as a positive insight into study of knowledge, except when it allows them to critique Ehrman. Therefore, whilst this may be a persuasive book to some, with its dramatic rhetoric used to highlight the details and urgency of the problem they face, this focus sacrifices detailed, academic argument and fosters rigidity which, similar to Irenaeus' model, is unsustainable.

5.2: Norman Geisler

Next in our three evangelical sources which explicitly appeal to Irenaeus' theology is an article by Norman Geisler. Described as "the grandfather of classical, evangelical Christian apologetics" who covered "foundational matters like knowing truth about reality, […] to Jesus's view of the Bible as without error," Geisler was a prolific writer up until his death in 2019.[386] He is one of the noted proponents of the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy and holds to a fundamentalistic notion of scripture. Like many Protestant evangelical figures, Geisler created a website through which he released blog-style articles on a wide range of topics. Of particular interest to this thesis is his article entitled 'Irenaeus on Scripture and Tradition.' Whilst it may be noted that Geisler does not claim his blogs to be contributions to academia in the same way as more formal literature he produced, they are extensions of his thinking, plus his allusions to Irenaeus in the following article are replicated in his defences of the Chicago Statement and biblical inerrancy more widely.

After a very short introduction, Geisler confidently states Irenaeus' view of scripture, writing that the bishop believed in "the verbal inspiration of Scripture," and

[386] See <http://normangeisler.com/about/> [accessed 28.06.2021].

that he "held to its inerrancy."[387] By using terms not native to early Christianity without explanation, Geisler establishes that he is chiefly interested in Irenaeus insofar as he supports his main theological thrusts, as opposed to a more holistic understanding of the bishop. He attempts to shape Irenaeus as a biblical foundationalist through appropriating various quotations, such as *Haer.* 3.1.1: "The Bible is called 'the ground and pillar of our faith.'"[388] Yet, the sentence Geisler quotes from in its fullness translates as follows:

> We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.[389]

Irenaeus is speaking of the economy, the plan of salvation as the pillar of the faith, not 'the Bible' as Geisler writes. Geisler also co-opts Irenaeus' exposition of his idea of the unity of scripture, specifically that ambiguous parables are clarified by unambiguous parts of scripture (*Haer.* 2.28.3). This is central to the bishop's argument that the god of the biblical patriarchs is the same god as the one whom Jesus calls 'Father.' Whilst Geisler would agree with this emphasis, he uses this section of *Haereses* to claim that Irenaeus agrees with his idea of inerrant scriptural authority. It is Geisler's conviction that "the Bible is wholly true on whatever topic it addresses, whether redemptive, historical, or scientific" yet we find no such claim in Irenaeus, not least because 'the Bible' was not conceived as an agency in the second century.[390] Nevertheless, Geisler summarises Irenaeus' argument on the coherence of scripture with the overgenerous claim that the bishop believed "the Bible speaks best and most clearly for itself."[391] Like many evangelicals, Geisler believes we can ask questions to the set of scriptural literature Protestants call 'the Bible' and that we will be offered an answer. Whilst Irenaeus does

[387] Norman Geisler, 'Irenaeus on Scripture and Tradition' (2014) <https://normangeisler.com/irenaeus-tradition-scripture/> [accessed 14.01.2021].

[388] Geisler, 'Irenaeus on Scripture and Tradition', quoting *AH* 3.1.1.

[389] *Haer.* 3.1.1.

[390] Geisler, 'Defining Biblical Inerrancy' (2016) <https://defendinginerrancy.com/define-biblical-inerrancy/> [accessed 28.06.2021].

[391] Geisler, 'Irenaeus on Scripture and Tradition'.

make known he thinks the scriptures have a coherence and unity owing to there being one god of both testaments, he consults the scriptural texts as texts of, for instance, the apostles, not as an agent revealing God's truth. We can see this in *Fig. 1:* apostolic literature is one way of accessing the truth of the apostolic teaching.

One of the consequences of this is that Geisler has confidence in the Bible addressing topics such as history and science and a vast number of specific issues,[392] but Irenaeus is succinct when discussing theological speculation. He advocates that we can know a few things with high certainty but there are many things which we can have no certainty on. However, for fundamentalists like Geisler, they claim they can achieve clear certainty on many topics. For instance, there exists the website *GotQuestions.com* which serves as a kind of 'frequently asked questions' database for those who pursue answers on theological topics on a search engine. They identify themselves as conservative evangelicals and offer answers they claim will "point you to what the Bible says concerning your question."[393] In the previous section, we saw Irenaeus write about examples of topics where we should not seek knowledge of causation, and the bishop included the example of weather patterns. Trivial as it may seem, *GotQuestions.com* offers 'biblical' insight regarding a list of various aspects of the weather which God controls along with a Bible verse they claim supports each statement.[394] Thus, an evangelical belief in inerrancy encourages believers to ask many questions 'to' the biblical text, seeking firm answers. If we constructed a bar graph like the above ones for Irenaeus and Dale Martin but this time for various evangelical inerrantists, they would likely show very high levels of certainty on many theological questions.[395] Conversely, Irenaeus writes that to entertain copious questions is to abuse the reason given to us by God, and could lead us to gods which do not truly exist. From this, we can see that evangelical

[392] A brief scroll through his website's homepage will suffice in demonstrating the multiplicity of categories his articles are collated into.

[393] 'About GotQuestions.org' <https://www.gotquestions.org/about.html> [accessed 02.07.2021].

[394] 'Does Satan Have the Power to Control the Weather?' <https://www.gotquestions.org/weather-Satan.html> [accessed 02.07.2021].

[395] In other words, a great depth and wide breadth.

inerrantists have a different notion of the 'perfection' of scripture to Irenaeus.

Yet, regarding scriptural interpretation, Geisler also finds much in Irenaeus which elevates his confidence. Irenaeus' language of total confidence in his knowledge of God, a plain interpretation of scripture, and prohibition of allegorical interpretation leads to Geisler's implication that Irenaeus believed "in a literal historical-grammatical hermeneutic."[396] This is a reductive statement, though. Geisler is using language familiar to his readership without much concern for the native readership. It appears that because modern-day evangelicals call for a 'plain' reading of the scriptural texts and our translations of *Haereses* use 'plain' and 'natural sense' that Geisler equates the two. However, it would unlikely be considered a plain reading according to evangelicals today that the Hebrew laws concerning clean and unclean animals actually refer to spiritual and carnal people, let alone that some of the unclean animals represent all Jews and other unclean animals are "plainly an indication of all heretics."[397]

Throughout his work, Geisler does not attempt to address the fact that he is applying his twentieth- and twenty-first-century conceptualisations of Christianity and truth to ancient conceptualisations. He does not recognise either the translation difficulties that can arise, most notably that we do not have Irenaeus' exact wordings, meaning study of the bishop cannot be claimed to be certain. This is an extension of flippancy in use of terms which goes further than the use of 'orthodoxy' by the previous co-authors in describing pre-Nicene Christianity. Even inerrantists who propagate that their ideology is characteristic of Christ and the apostles (i.e., not a recent innovation) often assert that particular and specific language regarding inerrancy has changed over the centuries.[398] The question is whether the meaning which the language points to has

[396] Geisler, 'Irenaeus on Scripture and Tradition'.

[397] *Haer.* 5.8.4.

[398] For instance, Michael Kruger mentions in an interview that Augustine "makes a number of statements that are very clearly consistent with what we could call inerrancy even though he leaves the word out." See the transcript of this interview at <https://voice.dts.edu/tablepodcast/encountering-challenges-to-biblical-inerrancy/> [accessed 15.02.2021]. Note that the transcript mistakenly attributes the quotation to Andreas Köstenberger.

changed, or whether the different words have been indicative of the same ideology. I contend that since Irenaeus is so absolute on limiting theological speculation, he would not commend the inerrantists' proclivity to ask scripture all manner of doctrinal and ethical questions as though it were a Christian textbook. Moreover, he does not logically require that the original manuscripts of apostolic literature are error-free according to theology, history, science, etc in order to establish his foundationalism. Inerrantists require that the Bible is a coherent agent which offers absolute, static truths according to the different disciplines of knowledge it speaks of. Irenaeus' foundationalism, instead, is based upon a common innate human knowledge of God and the purity of transmission from Jesus to apostles to the wider population, including direct teaching, the church's tradition, and apostolic writings (scripture). He is explicit that scripture is not required in order to find Christian knowledge, nor are they "a *sine qua non* of Christian self-definition."[399] Irenaeus and inerrantists do not mean the same thing, therefore, even though they use similar language and both use foundationalist epistemologies. Irenaeus' 'scripture' is not the 'Bible' of evangelicalism; the scriptures, for him, are simply not a divinely inspired agent and disseminator of truth, and include authoritative texts such as *Shepherd of Hermas* which are now labelled non-canonical.[400] They are a witness to the apostolic testimony and other divine communications, which hold the truth. It is anachronistic to think Irenaeus' economy vision and verification process can be summarised as identical to modern-day inerrantism. It might be an interesting question to ask the extent which Irenaeus offers a proto-inerrantism, but that is not what inerrantists like Geisler, Köstenberger and Kruger are claiming. They are claiming the inerrantism that is claimed now is essentially identical to the position which Jesus held and handed down to his apostles.

However, one of Irenaeus' concepts which Geisler lifts for his own argument in a truer representation to Irenaeus' meaning is the theme of free will. Irenaeus' bold

[399] *Haer.* 3.4.2. See Minns, 'Truth and Tradition', p. 268.
[400] *Haer.* 4.20.2.

statement that there is ready availability of Christian knowledge to all who desire it nourishes Geisler's very similar principle that "as clear as the Scriptures are there are depraved minds which will not accept it."[401]

Conclusion

Overall, Geisler does not appear to embrace the task of an Irenaeus scholar but of an evangelical apologist. He is keen to apply aspects of *Haereses* to a defence of his ideas of scripture and truth. However, he does not show as much enthusiasm for his ideas being critiqued by the bishop's writing. What he claims Irenaeus meant is often not confirmed by Irenaean literature, yet Geisler continues to attribute modern ideas of inerrantism to Irenaeus' ancient ideas of foundationalism in a bid to position his ideology as original to earliest Christianity. Given the scholarship of fundamentalism and evangelicalism, such as Barr's theory of maximal conservativism, and given the lack of critical engagement with Irenaeus, let alone with his second-century targets, it appears Geisler has read Irenaeus' *Haereses* with the motive of affirming his pre-held convictions.

5.3: Simonetta Carr in *Christianity Today*

There are several articles in *Christianity Today* which mention Irenaeus and focus on his theological ideas, however the article chosen is one which aims to give an introduction to Irenaeus and thus aims to be holistic, not theme-specific.[402] The author, Simonetta Carr, is a practised writer in Irenaeus studies. Her published work on Irenaeus as part of her series *Christian Biographies for Young Readers* was aimed at a pre-teenage audience with the intention of informing young children of the lived reality of early Christians and how "Irenaeus taught Christians to discern truth from error by listening to the Bible."[403] Already, therefore, we can observe distinctly evangelical language of the Bible

[401] Geisler, 'Irenaeus on Scripture and Tradition'.

[402] Further research addressing more *Christianity Today* articles on Irenaeus and perhaps other early theologians would make for fascinating research in understanding evangelical appropriations of Irenaeus and the early church.

[403] Whilst study of the epistemological significance of evangelical appropriations of Irenaeus in children's' literature would be another area open to much pioneering study, it is past the remit of this

as an agent with a message to communicate to people.

Carr adopts a similar style of writing in her *Christianity Today* article, though it is clearly tailored for an older age-group than her 2017 book. She begins her homage to Irenaeus with an emotive story of the persecuted Christians of Gaul and a man abruptly forced to lead them after the traumatic death of their bishop in prison after a wrongly and biased conviction by the Romans. The main task before him was to "promote unity."[404]

After providing this backdrop, Carr moves to describing Irenaeus' targets, which she gathers under the category 'gnosticism.' She characterises the "various tendencies" of 'gnosticism' as all having in common "a desire for higher knowledge."[405] She neglects to define 'higher,' which could either denote 'more divine' or 'loftier'/'more elite.' The former would leave Irenaeus open to critique as a gnostic so the author probably intends something closer to the latter, playing into the trope Irenaeus established for his targets as obtuse and overly-imaginative thinkers. She describes later in the article that 'gnosticism' searched "for higher knowledge and a more sophisticated understanding of Christian belief than what the apostles and the local churches could offer;"[406] it isn't certain but she might be defining the former ('higher knowledge') with the latter ('a more sophisticated understanding'), but then again she could also be listing separate characteristics. Again, later she describes gnostics as searching for "a higher, secret knowledge;" the same problem applies as the previous quotation: the author may be defining 'higher' or supplementing it. What we can say with some certainty is she at least associates the ideas of higher knowledge and a desire for further sophistication and secret

thesis, and therefore I shall focus on her *Christianity Today* article. The quotation is taken from publicity material released to promote her book in 2017; see <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/36533205-irenaeus-of-lyon> [accessed 16.02.2021].

[404] Simonetta Carr, 'Irenaeus of Lyon: Passionate Apologist to the Gnostics', *Christianity Today* (2019) <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/evangelistsandapologists/irenaeus-gnosticism-gaul-erasmus-persecution.html> [accessed 29.06.2021].

[405] Ibid. Though, she does note that 'gnosticism' is a later label imposed on understandings of the second century.

[406] Ibid.

knowledge.

After her description of 'gnosticism,' Carr returns to her compelling narrative style and describes Irenaeus' return from a visit to Rome as marked by urgency: his Christian community were weary and taunted. Even more, on the increase was an internal threat of heresy that many already-weakened Christians were tempted by. The heresy is implied as a menacing and pernicious force, not a secondary issue in the face of violence and death but at least equal in significance.

Throughout Carr's treatise, she focuses only on *Haereses*, like Geisler and Köstenberger and Kruger. Thus, her knowledge of Irenaeus' targets – like many in Irenaeus studies and in evangelical adoptions of the bishop – is formulated from Irenaeus' own account of them. Carr writes that Irenaeus "was particularly acquainted" with the Valentinians and "took time to study Gnostic writings and to talk to Gnostics in person," formulating "firm and unequivocal" conclusions.[407] However, without contextual knowledge of ancient polemics and second-century Christianity, this could give the impression to readers that Irenaeus was like a modern researcher, consulting various sources and understanding the account of 'the gnostics' as they self-identify. This risks sanitising what was a very contested and sensitive issue for Irenaeus and his targets and Pagels' advice would be well heeded here that Irenaeus was not debating academic colleagues on the level of ideas in *Haereses*.[408]

Admirably, however, Carr does make a small effort to critically empathise with the bishop's targets. She claims – against Irenaeus, but without acknowledging so – that "most Gnostics were sincerely convinced of possessing the truth," and not all intentionally 'believing' lies. Carr also hints at critical empathy when she writes, "Gnosticism provided a plausible explanation of the problem of evil as the result of the impulsive and vindictive whims of an inferior god, and this struggle between two deities

[407] Ibid.
[408] Pagels, 'Making a Difference', p. 348.

made sense."[409]

The former, however, might just be a caveat to make her next statement sound less hyperbolic; instead of expanding upon her initial attempts at critical empathy, she writes of Irenaeus' targets using a gnostic ideology for the exploitation of others. She gives the example of Marcus seducing women in *Haer.* 1.13.1-7. Moreover, she implies they believed what they did because it meant they escaped the persecution facing more pious Christians, and because "obtaining a higher, secret knowledge is always tempting."[410] This is the rhetorical equivalent to someone suggesting Irenaeus wrote *Haereses* because the feelings of satisfaction through denigrating a perceived opponent is always tempting, especially when one believes they are remaining pious in spite of opportunities to compromise. In other words, it is biased speculation which smears more than illuminates. Carr compounds her judgement on Irenaeus' targets when she writes, "the biblical narrative was not important to them," thus employing the Irenaean model of the obviousness of truth and totality of human free will to either obey the truth or actively resist.[411] Carr also accuses Irenaeus' targets of "picking and choosing Scriptures," a well-known deprecative phrase used by evangelicals.

In another move away from critical empathy, Carr takes up Irenaeus' patronising assertion that he and his community "[love] them better than they seem to love themselves."[412] Carr appears to take Irenaeus' words here as meaning Irenaeus "hoped to help not only those who were attracted by their message but the Gnostics themselves."[413] This is a peculiar statement and perhaps also represents Carr's very limited engagement with critical empathy. Irenaeus' rhetoric against his targets, including mockery, moral condemnation, and allegations of intellectual dishonesty was not intended to help 'the gnostics themselves.' Irenaeus does sometimes appeal his readership to engage with his

[409] Carr, 'Irenaeus of Lyon'.
[410] Ibid.
[411] Ibid.
[412] See *Haer.* 3.25.7.
[413] Carr, 'Irenaeus of Lyon'.

targets, not just **against** them, but these are the exception and still carry an air of moral superiority. That is, Irenaeus does not take back his previous vilification. Perhaps, Carr perceives denigrating polemical rhetoric as a kind of 'love' for one's enemies.[414] This would explain why Carr could read *Haereses* and conclude that Irenaeus wanted to help and love his targets. Moreover, there is a high likelihood that this would have been in Carr's thoughts because evangelical recourse to the phrase 'speaking the truth in love' when referring to communicating harsh but 'necessary' sentiments is common.[415]

Finally, Carr reflects upon Irenaeus' legacy. She deems that according to a "purely historical point of view," *Haereses* is "the best analysis of Gnosticism from an eyewitness."[416] The question of Irenaeus' accuracy as a source of knowledge on his targets is highly contested, as noted in the previous section of this thesis. On the one hand, the bishop's extant writings may be some of the few remaining attestations of second-century Christianity, however, on the other, they are distorted by his intent to persuade his readers. Carr's reflection here is perhaps hasty and lacking in critical rigour, not least critical empathy.

Conclusion

The author follows in the steps of many in the field of Irenaeus by basing her understanding on Irenaeus' targets only through reading Irenaeus' polemic. Moreover – again, correspondingly to Irenaeus studies – she does not note this limitation. She also follows traditional Irenaeus studies by upholding ambivalence towards his mockery, and implying he wrote objectively, according to "logic and Scriptures."[417] The latter downplays the reactive and polemical nature of Irenaeus' writing and attempts to portray him as a neutral, impartial commentator on universally-accepted facts.

She diagnoses Irenaeus' main problem with his targets being that theirs was not

[414] Carr also positively supports Irenaeus' polemical tone as an enthusiastic and passionate "excitement for the beauty of God's person, truth, and works."
[415] This is often supported by an appeal to Ephesians 4:15.
[416] Carr, 'Irenaeus of Lyon'.
[417] Ibid.

"historical Christianity" and that they did not prioritise what she calls "the biblical narrative."[418] This reflects Pagels' argument that those in the orthodox tradition prioritise an understanding of truth as located in past events over truth as located in Christ's continuing presence. Carr, therefore, appears to assume the former understanding of truth without acknowledging the latter as a legitimate possibility.

In this way, Carr blends the archetypal patronisation of Irenaeus' targets common to Irenaeus studies with a partial attempt to escape the narrative of a harsh binary between 'the orthodox' and 'the heretics.' However, this is a relatively superficial attempt to establish a non-polemical tone to her writing, as she directly advocates the polemics of Irenaeus. The lack of critical empathy with Irenaeus' targets and uncritical assumption of the bishop's position demonstrates the normalisation of patronising rhetoric towards Irenaeus' targets; it is not intended in a humorous and urgent way by Carr – as often was the case when used by Irenaeus – it appears to be the accepted tone for Irenaean literature.

Carr finishes with the Eusebian affirmation that Irenaeus deserved his name and echoes Erasmus' prayer for more Irenaei to be sent by God "to bring peace to [our] troubled times."[419] Overall, it is implied, therefore, that Carr admires Irenaeus' *Haereses* and does not find objections to his theology, methodology or rhetoric. Rather, she encourages it and prays for more people to imitate Irenaeus' project.

5.4: Conclusion

These three evangelical sources provide an interesting comparison to the above account of Irenaeus' writings and (secondary) Irenaean literature. There is a casualness which perhaps signifies that their audience is primarily non-scholarly, but this 'looser' approach makes the authors more susceptible to interpreting Irenaeus in ways which affirm their committed evangelicalism.

[418] Ibid.
[419] Ibid.

Köstenberger and Kruger see in Irenaeus' prioritisation of the apostles the implication that Jesus 'had' the truth which he disseminated to these closest followers. They take this a step further and claim that truth, therefore, must be the theological convictions of Jesus. This, perhaps, places a greater emphasis on propositional knowledge than Irenaeus intended; the bishop's emphasis on apostolic testimony – whilst narrow – does offer room for theological truth in things which Jesus **did**, not just what he **knew**.

Norman Geisler sees in the English translation of Irenaeus phrases which match his phrases and proceeds to equate them, essentially calling Irenaeus a biblical inerrantist. Whilst Geisler correctly detects in the bishop similar notions of truth as absolute, located in the past, and accessible by tracing pure transmission through a genealogy, this does not indicate that Irenaeus' multi-source foundationalism was the same as Geisler's fundamentalistic foundationalism.

Simonetta Carr uses her narrative skills to paint a vivid portrait of the early church for her readers, helping them connect with the faith of early Christians. Yet, she doesn't use her imagination to speculate whether Irenaeus' claims of wilful self-deception were an accurate and full account of the issue at hand. Instead, it appears her evangelical background – which can normalise foundationalist apologetics – aligns with Irenaeus' persuasion technique, causing her to accept the bishop at face-value without an assessment of his context and reasons for writing.

Therefore, the three sources continue the approach of the spotlighted Irenaeus scholars Grant, Osborn, Behr, and Briggman. They take the bishop literally when he vilifies his targets and do not engage in critical empathy. Carr remains the only exception, but even then she does not concede much. Her beginnings of critical empathy are quickly countered with allegations of exploitation and what sounds more like a patronising empathy than a critical empathy; Irenaeus' targets fell into the temptation of desiring higher knowledge and simply didn't care enough about 'the' biblical narrative.

The rhetoric of knowing the truth or knowing 'the' biblical narrative and deciding

to go one's own (different) way can be common in evangelical accounts of diversity. The website *GotQuestions.com* was mentioned above; its article entitled 'Why are there so many atheists?' reads:

> The most likely explanation for the continuing rise of atheism has not changed since the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6; Romans 3:23). The very essence of all sin is self-determination. **By denying the existence of a Creator, atheists can do whatever they please without concern for future judgment or eternal consequences** (Matthew 12:36; Romans 14:12; 1 Peter 4:5; Hebrews 4:13). In the twenty-first century, self-worship has become culturally acceptable. Atheism appeals to a generation raised on evolutionary theory and moral relativism. John 3:19 says, "Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." If human beings are self-created, self-determined, and self-centered, then there is no moral law or lawgiver to whom they must submit. There are no absolutes and no one to whom they are ultimately accountable. **By adopting such a mindset, atheists can focus on seeking pleasure in this life alone.**[420]

As abovementioned, criticism for deliberate mishandling or distortion of material for selfish benefit or gain can be very insightful and necessary. However, when it is a stock answer for why 'obvious' truth is not obvious to some people, it is more an indication of the rigidity and unsustainability of that worldview. In fact, it is indicative of extreme foundationalism. If someone holds that certain 'foundations' are always true, they must have a fundamental answer for why diversity of foundational tenets exists. In order to keep to their foundations as truth, they must find fault with the diverse 'others.' A catch-all answer to this is that all 'others' know the true foundations but use their free will to live by foundations which they think suit their preferences better, despite knowledge of their dishonesty. Whilst this is somewhat sophisticated in that it reduces the issue from the level of complex ideas to the level of (simplified) moral integrity, it does not hold up to scrutiny, especially when analysed by those it dismisses. This is perhaps why we see scholars like Pagels and Ehrman – who have similar personal stories – studying the topic of heresiology but positioning themselves against heresiologists like Irenaeus. It probably explains my own fascination to a large extent also.

[420] 'Why are there so many atheists?' <https://www.gotquestions.org/so-many-atheists.html> [accessed 20.07.2021] (my emphases).

Therefore we witness a complex relationship between Irenaeus' ideology and evangelical ideology; there are similarities in how they locate truth foundationalistically, but Irenaeus was no inerrantist. This permits a comment on evangelicalism that – at least in Irenaeus – we see resemblances which prevent us from saying that fundamentalism and the resultant fundamentalist mentality was entirely a modern phenomenon, but also key differences which prevent us from equating the two ideologies. In this way, study of Irenaeus continues to be a highly relevant project, not least for evangelicals themselves and academic evangelicalism studies.

Conclusion

An Argument to Integrate Irenaeus' Contextualisation

This thesis has explored Irenaeus' second-century thought, including his fundamental concepts which structure his theology in *Haereses* and *Demonstration* and how they relate to each other. I have emphasised that Irenaeus' ideology of the created universe in relation to its divine creator – the *oikonomia* – is where he situates his focus on monotheism, the *imago dei* and recapitulation. Where he perceives his targets to explain their ideology through categorising and differentiating, Irenaeus seeks to establish singularity. The singularity of God; the singularity of God's purpose throughout the covenants especially established by the recapitulation of all things by the Son; the singularity of the image scripture offers us through its harmony of the unambiguous clarifying ambiguity; the singularity of human likeness to God; the singular, non-variegated model of salvation which centres around human autonomy. He contrasts this with the groups he establishes as his targets, including Marcionites and biblical demiurgicalists who contend against the singularity of God. In Marcion's case this was to make sense of the diverging characters of God he perceived in the old covenant and the new covenant; in the case of biblical demiurgicalists it seems this was to make sense of an imperfect world with a perfect god. Moreover, Irenaeus contends against the biblical demiurgicalists who use their cosmogonic myth to make sense of ambiguous

scripture. The bishop also contrasts his economy vision with those who have a three-tiered model of salvation with only some inherently elite Christians entering the Pleroma.

However, the bishop is not merely presenting his ideas against his targets' ideas. Irenaeus uses neither the language nor concepts of a moderate. There may be difficulties defining what truly moderate (or 'objective' or 'neutral') literature looks like, but Irenaeus is a clear example of what it is not. He does not offer holism, but instead, a skewed account of second-century Christianity. He does not aim to offer an academic discussion according to current understandings but is a polemicist intent on persuading using whatever artillery he can locate in his arsenal. He builds upon the notion of *hairesis* which Justin Martyr had begun to redefine just a few decades before his own work. In the divine *oikonomia*, Irenaeus highlights the role of free will and the ability in every person to obey God according to God's purpose. Conversely, the bishop highlights the role of free will in his group of targets, specifically their decision to 'blind themselves.' Irenaeus describes them as vandals of God's image, tearing apart the mosaic and reorganising its pieces to resemble an imagined figure. He is thus desperate to persuade his close ideologues to remain in their faith.

Those who have written introductions to Irenaeus' theology in recent decades have commonly recognised that the bishop's denunciations benefit contemporary Christian theology. His warnings against those using ideologies – especially those which appeal to selective and enigmatic truth-sources – to conceal iniquitous ulterior motives such as sexual abuse and self-idolisation are insightful. One such relevance this holds could include the relatively recent unveilings of sexual abuse by Christian leaders. These figures who hold positions of trust and go on to manipulate, exploit and harm others under the guise of spiritual benefit should not be identified as good, Christian leaders. Irenaeus' warning reminds us in a basic sense that faith can be usurped. Moreover, his apparent concern for the internal health and unity of a Christian community facing substantial external threats is also prudent. In a context of state persecution, it could be deeply

damaging to individuals if their faith (for which they are being targeted) was also ridiculed as a lesser kind of faith. Plus, in a more intellectual critique, Irenaeus reminds us that claiming to believe in an ideology simply to compete with the truth, what we might call a particularly spiteful 'devil's advocate', is not necessarily a critical dialogue partner. As such it would be appropriate to take the discussion to a rhetorical or moral plane through, perhaps, mockery and humour.

However, there is a pattern in these Irenaean introductions: the insinuation that the bishop doesn't just **benefit** but can normatively **instruct** contemporary Christian theology. In the literature spotlighted at the beginning of this thesis, we saw that in four out of five, Irenaeus' writings were not consulted as some sources out of many and consequently exposed to critique and questioning; instead, they were used as a normative account of true Christianity and the struggles 'it' faced in the second century. This literature fails to detect the signs of strain in Irenaeus' writings, like – for example – Irenaeus' denunciation of theological metaphor, yet his common appeal to allegory; or his emphasis on the free will of his targets in deciding to aberrate, yet the inheritance of heretical doctrine and ethics from Simon Magus; or his repeated motif of the obviousness of his theology and yet the fact he writes five long tomes expanding on intricacies; or his contention that scriptural truth is readily accessible and obvious, but also hidden and in need of a hermeneutical key. These Irenaean 'boomerangs' inform us that we cannot take the bishop literally without concluding his theology is a jungle of incongruent ideas.

From Irenaeus' account alone, we can perceive that we are reading one side of a potentially complex story. Therefore, critical empathy is required. We can begin by speculating reasons for Irenaeus' multiplicitous approach; however, we are also able to access writings authored by people who may represent the groups Irenaeus denigrated. The Nag Hammadi library and their translations are now widely accessible, but introductions to Irenaeus rarely demonstrate reading or critical engagement with these texts. As we saw, Denis Minns is closest with his innovative commentary on the bishop's lack of 'imaginative sympathy.' However, even then, this is a speculative criticism and he

doesn't refer to texts in the Nag Hammadi library. Contemporary literature which offers critical analysis of Irenaeus' writings **and** the Nag Hammadi texts include many articles and sometimes chapters of books on more general early Christian heresiology, but they do not abide in introductions to Irenaeus.

One of Irenaeus' greatest legacies regards the locating of truth. His rhetoric aims to persuade his readers that his *oikonomia* vision is verified because it comes from the apostles who learned it from Jesus, the visible Son of the invisible Father, the ultimate divine source. By contrast, he smears his targets with accusations about where they **really** get their ideology. This location is not found through earnest thinking and searching, but through the desire to manipulate, exploit and to compete against real truth. Irenaeus appears to convince those who write his contemporary introductions but we are left wanting for an account of **how** they were convinced.

This essay instead posits along with many contemporary heresiology scholars that a substantial amount of the bishop's writing is written to persuade through use of polemical caricature and, thus, is not to be read as a factual, textbook account of second-century Christianity. Engaging in critical empathy and integrating Nag Hammadi studies into the contextual knowledge of the bishop will help in mitigating this.

An Argument to Integrate Interdisciplinary Study

Furthermore, this thesis argued that there is scope for interdisciplinary study between Irenaeus studies and evangelicalism studies. Incorporating study of the early church when investigating evangelicalism can highlight particular areas about the evangelical propensity for inerrantist understandings of truth and the Bible. In the evangelical sources on Irenaeus analysed above, the bishop was consistently used as part of the authors' claim that their model of Christianity is pristine and original to Christ's communicated teaching of the faith to his apostles two thousand years ago. Comparing their (mis)appropriations of Irenaeus to academic scholarship can highlight the particular methods used by evangelical scholars to support such a claim. It also highlights

– like in Irenaeus studies – the uncritical adoption of Irenaean rhetoric as factual. Without recognising the polemical basis of Irenaeus' rhetoric, the evangelical authors seemed to be emboldened to use similar rhetoric, implying it still has relevance today. Irenaeus' extant writings are perhaps not where the habit originates for evangelicals, but the reality remains that, like in the *GotQuestions.com* article regarding why atheism exists, there is a common recourse in evangelical literature to claim that there exists diversity and pluralism at least in part because there are those who just don't like the truth and wish to abide by their personal preference despite knowing truth.

However, as well as highlighting the similarities, comparative analysis assesses the evangelical claim to a pristine religion founded by the communication by Jesus to his apostles. Especially in the analysis of Norman Geisler's article, typical claims to inerrancy are found to be incongruent with Irenaean understandings of the location of truth. Irenaeus' 'plain' reading of scripture would not be plain to evangelicals; the bishop's 'scripture' is not the 'Bible' of evangelicals; his mandate against theological speculation would not align with the inerrantist 'textbook' approach; and – perhaps most fundamentally – Irenaeus does not see scripture as the supreme authority over matters of doctrine and ethics. Scripture, for the bishop, is one of many sub-sources which witness the truth made manifest in Jesus' communication to the apostles. Therefore, it is significantly anachronistic to claim that Irenaeus held to inerrantism. In many ways, evangelical inerrantism is a modern Christian epistemology.

Therefore, comparative analysis demonstrates that the threads which make up the fundamentalist mentality so prevalent in evangelicalism are in part relatively novel and have influences from particular ways of thinking which were characteristic of the time we call the Enlightenment period; however, there are also threads which align with Irenaeus' writing, both in rhetoric and concepts. It would, though, take further study to comment on whether this similarity is due to the nature of Christianity, or maybe even the nature of human thinking more generally.

The similarity we detect can be called foundationalism: locating truth in a source

or sources which has/have been divinely revealed and from which all other Christian knowledge flows. This source (like the Bible for evangelicals) or sources (like the various sub-sources connected to the ultimate divine source for Irenaeus) is/are unmediated and perspicuous. Consulting their truth does not unavoidably involve contamination from the vehicle carrying them; anyone can access their information. It claims the 'other' bases their knowledge on 'shifting sand' which cannot permit a person certainty in their ideas, but certainty in ultimate ideas is essential for foundationalists. Hence, they seek to locate exact truth and establish methods of purely accessing that truth.

However, holding to foundationalist epistemologies in this way has forced Irenaeus and evangelicals to explain diversity of ideas as wilful aberration and thus a moral apathy towards the real truth. This is a misrepresentation of the situations most non-adherents find themselves in and it is thus incumbent upon evangelical leaders and academic scholars to avoid use of this trope. Regarding Irenaeus' writings, his circumstances might incur a sympathy in his modern-day readers and this may lead to an investigation of historical accounts of those circumstances involving a discussion of ideas. Nevertheless, this sympathy cannot be confused with the consistence of that investigation. It is not the role of academic scholars to rush into accepting sources of religion in history as factually representative of diverse geographical communities over decades. This method can hold rhetorical power for those who wish to guide their readers to a high level of conviction in specific ideas, like in evangelical apologetics, but it isn't a critical discussion involving as many relevant parties as can be located. The latter will often reveal that 'the other' does not wilfully aberrate from a universally-known system of truth, but earnestly searches for what really exists. Therefore, despite a lack in intellectual sustainability when involved in critical discussion, strict foundationalism still holds pervasive reach in at least (secondary) Irenaean literature and evangelicalism. Thus, there continues to be much opportunity for research into the ideas and sociological effects it generates.

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