

ARTICULATING CHRISTIAN MEANING AND DISCERNING HERESY

Patristic Theology

HERETICAL LITERATURE

GNOSTIC LITERATURE

Pre-Christian

- Simon Magus
- Dositheus and Menander

Christian

- Basilides
- Isidore
- Valentinus
- Ptolemy
- Heracleon
- Florinus
- Bardesanes
- Harmonius
- Theodotus
- Marcus
- Carpocrates
- Epiphanes
- Marcion
- Apelles
- The Encratites
- Julius Cassianus

Other Gnostics

ANTI-HERETICAL LITERATURE

"Papal" Writings

- Soter (166-174)
- Eleutherus (174-189)
- Victor I (189-198)
- Zephyrinus (198-217)

Episcopal Writings

- Dionysius of Corinth
- Pinytus of Gnosus
- Serapion of Antioch

Theologians

- Hegesippus
- Irenaeus of Lyons
- Tertullian of Carthage
- Clement of Alexandria
- Origen of Alexandria

IRENAEUS OF LYONS (C. 140 – C. 200)

Born around 140, died around 200

Bishop of Lyons

His Christian sources

New Testament, except Hebrews (which he rejects), and perhaps some of the later letters

1 Clement

Letters of Ignatius

Polycarp

Shepherd of Hermas

Justin Martyr

Theophilus

His Writings

On the Detection and Refutation of the Knowledge Falsely So Called (Against Heresies)

Two letters, one to Florinus, one to Victor, bishop of Rome, preserved in Eusebius's *Church History*

Proof of Apostolic Preaching

Major themes

- Rule of Faith
 - Criticism of the Gnostics
 - Criticism of the Ebionites
- Role of the Church
- Salvation
 - Redemption, recapitulation
 - Divinity and Humanity of Jesus
 - Trinity
- Human transformation
 - Becoming children of God
 - Image and likeness

BOOK 1 (1.1-1.3, 1.10-11, 1.21, 1.27)

THE ERRORS OF THE VALENTINIANS

- The Valentinians seduce people into error by dressing up falsehoods in attractive garb.
- He counters these with simple explanations.
- Truth does not need an alluring presentation to be convincing.

"You will not expect from me, who am resident among the Keltae, and am accustomed for the most part to use a barbarous dialect, any display of rhetoric, or any beauty and persuasiveness of style, to which I make no pretensions. But you will accept in a kindly spirit what I in a like spirit write to you simply, truthfully, and in my own homely way; while you yourself (as being more capable than I am) will expand these ideas of which I send you, as it were, only the seminal principles; and in the comprehensiveness of your understanding, will develop to their full extent the points on which I briefly touch, so as to set with power before your companions those things which I have uttered in weakness. In fine, as I (to gratify your long-cherished desire for information regarding the tenets of these persons) have spared no pains, not only to make these doctrines known to you, but also to furnish the means of showing their falsity; so will you, according to the grace given to you by the Lord, prove an earnest and efficient minister to others, that men may no longer be drawn away by the plausible system of these heretics, which I now proceed to describe." (1.0.3)

- Chapters 1 & 2 describe the Gnostic system, with the various levels of divinity (aeons) produced by emanation and copulation: Highest, Depths, Mind/Only-begotten/Father, Word, Life, Truth, Church, Human, Wisdom and many others, who then produced Christ and Holy Spirit (a conjugal pair). The various aeons are male, female, or both. The whole is called the Fullness.
- Chapter 3 shows how they use Scripture to justify their system.
- Chapters 4 & 5 show how they conceive that the world was created from the anguish of Achamoth who was deserted by Christ, which produced the Creator who developed the world.
- Chapters 6 & 7 show how different kinds of men are conceived: only the spiritual/perfect ones can ascend to the Pleroma; morals have no role.
- Chapter 8 shows how they use Scriptures to support their teaching.

SALVATION

- It cannot be—say the Gnostics—that Christ died for humanity
- The true Christ cannot suffer nor partake of any of the limitations of human life
- His message is a message of life, not death
- The message itself is salvific
- We are saved from attachment to the flesh and from the world itself.

TRUTH

- Chapter 9 raises the question of truth. The truth of the Gospel has a clear wisdom. The claims of the gnostics are confused and conflated.
- Their views do not admit of a savior.

“Learn then, you foolish men, **that Jesus who suffered for us, and who dwelt among us, is Himself the Word of God.** For if any other of the Aeons had become flesh for our salvation, it would have been probable that the apostle spoke of another. But if the Word of the Father who descended is the same also that ascended, **He, namely, the Only-begotten Son of the only God, who, according to the good pleasure of the Father, became flesh for the sake of men,** the apostle certainly does not speak regarding any other, or concerning any Ogdoad, but respecting our Lord Jesus Christ. For, according to them, the Word did not originally become flesh. For they maintain that the Saviour assumed an animal body, formed in accordance with a special dispensation by an unspeakable providence, so as to become visible and palpable. **But flesh is that which was of old formed for Adam by God out of the dust, and it is this that John has declared the Word of God became.** Thus is their primary and first-begotten Ogdoad brought to naught. For, since Logos, and Monogenes, and Zoe, and Phos, and Soror, and Christus, and the Son of God, and He who became incarnate for us, have been proved to be one and the same, the Ogdoad which they have built up at once falls to pieces. And when this is destroyed, their whole system sinks into ruin, a system which they falsely dream into existence, and thus inflict injury on the Scriptures, while they build up their own hypothesis.” (1.9.3)

Irenaeus is here affirming against the Gnostics:

- (1) That what took flesh in Jesus was the Word of God himself, nothing less than the Son of the Father
- (2) That the Son became fully human and did not merely take up a specially-designed body.

THE CHURCH

- Chapter 10 reflects on the fact that revelation is given to humanity for salvation. It is thus truly revealed, open, public.
- "As I have already observed, the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points [of doctrine] just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth. For, although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the import of the tradition is one and the same." (1.10.2)
- The truth is proclaimed; it is also catholic/universal. Different languages speak the same truth.
- There can be deeper explanations of the same truth, made by those gifted with intelligence, but these will always be in harmony with the one catholic truth. (1.10.3)
- The writings of the so-called gnostics are anything but reasonable. Complexity is invented only for the sake of making foolishness seem intelligent (1.11.1-3).
- Behind the arcane language is not truth, but fantasy. The names are merely made up and anyone can come up with fantastic names for imaginary realities:

"There is a certain Proarche, royal, surpassing all thought, a power existing before every other substance, and extended into space in every direction. But along with it there exists a power which I term a Gourd; and along with this Gourd there exists a power which again I term Utter-Emptiness. This Gourd and Emptiness, since they are one, produced (and yet did not simply produce, so as to be apart from themselves) a fruit, everywhere visible, eatable, and delicious, which fruit-language calls a Cucumber. Along with this Cucumber exists a power of the same essence, which again I call a Melon. These powers, the Gourd, Utter-Emptiness, the Cucumber, and the Melon, brought forth the remaining multitude of the delirious melons of Valentinus. For if it is fitting that that language which is used respecting the universe be transformed to the primary Tetrads, and if any one may assign names at his pleasure, who shall prevent us from adopting these names, as being much more credible [than the others], as well as in general use, and understood by all?" (1.11.4)

- The rest of the book (chapters 12-31) describe various "schools" of Gnosticism and other heresies to show their weaknesses.
- Each gnostic school has its own version of reality, all of which are contradictory.
- These are often combined with magic rituals to impress the weak-minded.
- Ch. 26: Cerinthus does not hold that Jesus was the Christ, but only bore the Christ during his public preaching.
- The Ebionites hold that the Father created, but hold to a Jewish form of life.
- The Nicolaitanes lead a hedonistic life.
- Ch. 27: Marcion developed the teaching of Cerdo and taught that the message of Christ was to discard the body.

BOOK 2 (2.1-5, 2.11)

FAITH

There is only one God, who is the creator.

All creatures, because they are created by God, have some knowledge of God.

BOOK 3

THE RULE OF FAITH

Tradition of the apostles (3.1)

APOSTOLIC TRADITION

Truth as communal truth; tradition (3.2)

There is no secret tradition of the apostles (3.2)

Importance of Rome (3.3.2)

Newness of error (3.4.3)

Continuity throughout time (3.5)

SALVATION

“Who else can reign in the house of Jacob uninterruptedly and forever except Jesus Christ, our lord, Son of the most high God, who promised through the law and the prophets to make his own salvation visible to all flesh, so that he would become a son of man in order that the human being might become a Son of God?” (3.10.2)

“There is, therefore, one God the Father, as we have shown, and one Christ Jesus our lord, who comes through a universal plan and recapitulates all things in himself. But in every way he is also a human, a creation of God; he, therefore, recapitulated humanity in himself. The invisible became visible, the unchangeable became subject to change, and the Word became human, recapitulating everything in himself.” (3.16.6)

- Christ was always with the Father (3.18.1)
- He entered history and became a human being (“summed up in himself the long history of the human race”) (3.18.1)
- Humanity was incapable of attaining salvation, being reconstituted, by itself (3.18.2)
- Humanity saved itself through Christ (3.18.2)
- Against Gnostics, Christ is a human being who was born and suffered (3.18.3)
- Christ and Jesus are not two different things, Christ did not come upon Jesus, Jesus is Christ (3.18.3)
- The Father has anointed, the sun has been anointed, the Spirit is the ointment (3.18.3)
- Christ did not abandon Jesus; Jesus in fact asks others to suffer like himself (3.18.5)
- Christ was talking about real suffering and real death (3.18.5)
- To face death, real death, with forgiveness shows the greatness of Christ (3.18.5)
- The suffering of Christ saves us; if there was no suffering, then there was no salvation. How can our suffering be meaningful if Christ did not suffer? (3.18.6)
- A truly human Christ gives meaning to our suffering (3.18.6)
- A truly human Christ truly unites humanity to God (3.18.7)
- “For if a human being had not conquered humanity’s foe, that foe would not have been conquered justly. Conversely, unless it was God who conferred salvation, we should not possess it securely, and unless humanity had been closely united to God, it could not have become a sharer in incorruptibility.” (3.18.7)
- To receive adoption by God we had to have participation in God through the Son (3.18.7)
- He went through every stage of life to unite it all to God (3.18.7)
- Sin ruled humanity and the law revealed that it was not justly part of humanity (3.18.7)
- To overcome sin, God had to become a human being (3.18.7)
- If Christ was merely a human being, then he cannot give participation in God (3.19.1)

"This is the reason why the Word of God was made flesh, and the Son of God became Son of man: so that we might enter into communion with the Word of God, and by receiving adoption might become Sons of God. Indeed we should not be able to share in immortality without a close union with the Immortal. How could we have united ourselves with immortality if immortality had not become what we are, in such a way that we should be absorbed by it, and thus we should be adopted as Sons of God?" (3.19.1, in Clément 38)

"The Lord has given us a sign 'as deep as Sheol and as high as heaven,' such as we should not have dared to hope for. How could we have expected to see a virgin with child, and to see in this Child a 'God with us' (Isaiah 7.11 & 14) who would descend into the depths of the earth to seek for the lost sheep, meaning the creature he had fashioned, and then ascent again to present to his Father this 'man' [humanity] thus regained?" (3.19.13, in Clément, 36)

"That is why God drove them out of paradise and carried them off far away from the tree of life. It was not because he refused them this tree of life out of jealousy, as some have had the audacity to maintain. No, it was because he acted out of compassion in order that human beings might not remain transgressors for ever, that the sin with which they found themselves burdened might not be immortal, that the evil should not be without end and therefore by interposing death ... by setting them a term through the dissolution of the flesh, which would take place in the earth, in order that human beings, by 'dying to sin' (Romans 6.2), should begin one day to 'live in God.'" (3.23.6, in Clément 87)

BOOK 4

"It is precisely in this that God differs from humanity: God creates; humanity is created. He who creates is always the same, while they who are created must acknowledge a beginning, an intermediate state and a maturity ... They receive knowledge and progress towards God. For in so far as God is always the same, to that extent human beings found in God will always be making progress towards God." (4.11.2, in Clément 87)

"As if God had no hands of his own! From all eternity he has with him the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit. It is by them and in them that he does all things." (4.20.1, in Clément 69)

"That is the order, the rhythm, the movement by which created humanity is fashioned after the image and likeness of the uncreated God. The Father makes the decisions and gives the commands, the Son carries them out and adapts them, the Spirit provides nourishment and growth, and humanity progresses little by little." (4.38.3, in Clément 76)

"The glory of God is a living person and the life of humanity is the vision of God. If the revelation of God through creation already gives life to all living beings on earth, how much more does the manifestation of the Father through the Son give life to those who see God." (4.20.7, quoted in Clément, 265)

"It was necessary in the first place for human beings to be created; and having been created, to grow; and having grown, to become adult; and having become adult, to multiply; and having multiplied, to become strong; and having become strong, to be glorified; and having been glorified, to see their Lord. Indeed ... the vision of God obtains deliverance from death, the incorruptibility which is the expression of our union with God." (4.38.3, quoted in Clément, 77)

"People who will not wait for maturity are utterly unreasonable ... In their ignorance of God and of themselves these insatiable and ungrateful wretches would like ... to see, even before becoming adult, the disappearance of every difference between the uncreated God and humanity which has only just been created ... First of all creation had to appear. Only later did the mortal have to be vanquished and swallowed up in immortality, and humanity be fully conformed to the image and likeness of God, having freely discovered good and evil. (4.38.4, in Clément 40-41)

BOOK 5

- Recapitulation (5.19)
- The earth will be restored
- Humanity will be given time to be reformed
- Death will be vanquished

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