

I. The issue of false doctrine

- A. Even from the NT, we know that the gospel as preached by the apostles always had opponents, people who would twist it for various reasons (e.g. Galatian Judaizing, The Collosian heresy/ies, nascent docetism in 1 John)
 - 1. This remained the case throughout the history of the church
- B. In the first few centuries, a good many heresies rose up from different corners with different emphases/doctrines
 - 1. While there were too many to count (an over-zealous 8th century list names 100 heresies), there were some that were particularly damaging in the second century church, and against which the church wrote and preached
 - a) Docetism
 - b) Gnosticism (of many varieties, but particularly the branch started by Valentinus)
 - c) Marcionism

II. How did the church respond?

- A. Sermons
- B. Church discipline (e.g the expulsion of Marcion from the church in Rome and the return of his enormous donations)
- C. Anti-heretical tracts and books
- D. Refining (and defining) what the orthodox faith was
 - 1. Often heresies forced the orthodox church back to Scripture to see more carefully what they say
 - a) E.g. Marcion's claims made the church seriously consider the notion of canon, as well as the relationship between the two testaments
 - b) Every clash with a heresy resulted ultimately in greater precision in the church's beliefs
 - (1) Irenaeus' depiction of the faith and exegesis of scripture is a good example of this, as his explanations in *Against Heresies* in many ways became normative for the faith.
 - (2) Similarly, in the 4th c., the clashes with Arius (who denied the full divinity/equality with the Father of the Son) led the church to nuanced and clear statements of the trinitarian faith that was already held, an example of which is the Nicene Creed

III. Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*

- A. Introductory matters
 - 1. Who was Irenaeus
 - a) From Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), likely Smyrna (where Polycarp was bishop)
 - (1) But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom,⁷ departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. (III.iii.4)
 - b) Bishop of Lyons (Lugdunum) in modern day France

- (1) Previous bishop had been martyred
 - c) Last half of second century
 - d) Sometimes called “the first theologian” in church history
 - e) Saw himself as participating in a worldwide orthodoxy, and was confident that all churches across the world was teaching the things that he himself taught (see the similarity to Ignatius’ of Antioch’s view of the global church in his letters)
- (1) The Church, though dispersed through our the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: [She believes] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father “to gather all things in one,” and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, “every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess” to Him, and that He should execute just judgment towards all; that He may send “spiritual wickednesses,” and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly, and unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men, into everlasting fire; but may, in the exercise of His grace, confer immortality on the righteous, and holy, and those who have kept His commandments, and have persevered in His love, some from the beginning [of their Christian course], and others from [the date of] their repentance, and may surround them with everlasting glory. (I.x.1.)
- (2) For, although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the import of the tradition is one and the same. For the Churches which have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different, nor do those in Spain, nor those in Gaul, nor those in the East, nor those in Egypt, nor those in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions¹⁷¹ of the world. (I.x.2)
- (3) But the path of those belonging to the Church circumscribes the whole world, as possessing the sure tradition from the apostles, and gives unto us to see that the faith of all is one and the same, since all receive one and the same God the Father, and believe in the same dispensation regarding the incarnation of the Son of God, and are cognizant of the same gift of the Spirit, and are conversant with the same commandments, and preserve the same form of ecclesiastical constitution,¹⁷¹ and expect the same advent of the Lord, and await the same salvation of the complete man, that is, of the soul and body. And undoubtedly the preaching of the Church is true and stedfast, in which one and the same way of salvation is shown throughout the whole world. (V.xx.1)

- (4) Contra the popular view today that it was a complete free for all of different doctrinal groups from which the proto-orthodox eventually won
- 2. What was this book
 - a) Diagnosis and refutation of certain heresies (Original title: The Detection and Refutation of False Knowledge)
 - (1) Particularly gnosticism and Marcionism, but with others addressed as well
 - (2) Focused on trying to accurately understand and reproduce the claims of heretical groups, then refuting them either with biblical explanation or by pointing out internal inconsistencies in the various heretical systems
 - b) At best I'll be providing a *very cursory* summary of the argument of this book, even more so than for the other texts we've covered so far. *Against Heresies* is hundreds of pages long (five books, in the original) and features detailed reproductions of gnostic cosmologies and specific refutations of those doctrines. I'll be focusing more on his declarative statements of doctrine, but it's worth knowing that these all occur within larger arguments either trying to show the logical insufficiency of heretical beliefs or the consistency and reasonability of orthodox doctrine.

IV. Key Issues in Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*

A. Who made the world? What is our relationship to that being?

- 1. Why was this an issue?
 - a) In Gnosticism: the world was made by some lesser emanations of the supreme being, usually in error and ignorance. Because of this, matter as such was bad, and the one who made the world was either foolish or wicked. While humanity was made by him, one of the higher beings put something into mankind as well that enables humans to, at least in theory, ascend out of the physical world and beyond the creator being (Demiurge).
 - b) In Marcionism: There are two gods, the Just/punishing god and the good god. The Just god made the world and humanity. He, however, has no kindness, and will invariably punish all the humans he made with no pity.
- 2. How did Irenaeus address it?
- 3. Key point: The one and only God made the world. He also made humanity to know him. He is good and just, and calls people to know him through his Son.
 - a) By showing the unity of the assertion of the whole of scripture. NT texts which the heretical groups accepted placed Jesus as creator along with the Father, which thus refuted all of their systems.
 - (1) Such, then, are the first principles of the Gospel: that there is one God, the Maker of this universe; He who was also announced by the prophets, and who by Moses set forth the dispensation of the law, — [principles] which proclaim the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and ignore any other God or Father except Him. So firm is the ground upon which these Gospels rest, that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them, and, starting from these [documents], each one of them endeavours to establish his own peculiar doctrine. For the Ebionites, who use Matthew's Gospel only, are confuted out of this very same, making false suppositions with regard to the Lord. But Marcion, mutilating that according to

Luke, is proved to be a blasphemer of the only existing God, from those [passages] which he still retains. Those, again, who separate Jesus from Christ, alleging that Christ remained impassible, but that it was Jesus who suffered, preferring the Gospel by Mark, if they read it with a love of truth, may have their errors rectified. Those, moreover, who follow Valentinus, making copious use of that according to John, to illustrate their conjunctions, shall be proved to be totally in error by means of this very Gospel, as I have shown in the first book. Since, then, our opponents do bear testimony to us, and make use of these [documents], our proof derived from them is firm and true. (III.xi.7)

- b) Also by arguing that it is logically inconsistent to think that a good deity (either in the pleroma or the good god) couldn't stop the creation of a bad world if he wanted to do so.
 - (1) It is not seemly, however, to say of Him who is God over all, since He is free and independent, that He was a slave to necessity, or that anything takes place with His permission, yet against His desire; otherwise they will make necessity greater and more kingly than God, since that which has the most power is superior to all [others]. (II.v.4)
- c) **The rule of truth which we hold**, is, that there is one God Almighty, who made all things by His Word, and fashioned and formed, out of that which had no existence, all things which exist. Thus saith the Scripture, to that effect "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens established, and all the might of them, by the spirit of His mouth." And again, "All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made." There is no exception or deduction stated; but the Father made all things by Him, whether visible or invisible, objects of sense or of intelligence, temporal, on account of a certain character given them, or eternal; and these eternal things He did not make by angels, or by any powers separated from His Ennoea. **For God needs none of all these things, but is He who, by His Word and Spirit, makes, and disposes, and governs all things, and commands all things into existence, — He who formed the world (for the world is of all), — He who fashioned man, — He [who] is the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, above whom there is no other God, nor initial principle, nor power, nor pleroma, — He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we shall prove.** (I.xxii.1)
- d) He is the Former, He the Builder, He the Discoverer, He the Creator, He the Lord of all; and there is no one besides Him, or above Him, neither has He any mother, as they falsely ascribe to Him; nor is there a second God, as Marcion has imagined; nor is there a Pleroma of thirty Aeons, which has been shown a vain supposition; nor is there any such being as Bythus or Proarche; nor are there a series of heavens; nor is there a virginal light, nor an unnameable Aeon, nor, in fact, any one of those things which are madly dreamt of by these, and by all the heretics. But there is one only God, the Creator — He who is above every Principality, and Power, and Dominion, and Virtue: He is Father, He is God, He the Founder, He the Maker, He the Creator, who made those things by Himself, that is, through His Word and His Wisdom-heaven and earth, and the seas, and all things that are in them: He is just; He is good; He it is who formed

man, who planted paradise, who made the world, who gave rise to the flood, who saved Noah; He is the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of the living: He it is whom the law proclaims, whom the prophets preach, whom Christ reveals, whom the apostles make known to us, and in whom the Church believes. He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: through His Word, who is His Son, through Him He is revealed and manifested to all to whom He is revealed; for those [only] know Him to whom the Son has revealed Him. But the Son, eternally co-existing with the Father, from of old, yea, from the beginning, always reveals the Father to Angels, Archangels, Powers, Virtues, and all to whom He wills that God should be revealed. (II.xxx.9)

- e) Now God shall be glorified in His handiwork, fitting it so as to be conformable to, and modelled after, His own Son. For by the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit, man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the likeness of God. Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a part of the man, but certainly not the man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God. (V.vi.1)
- B. What is redemption? How was it accomplished? Related to this, was Jesus really human? Was he really God?
1. Why was this an issue?
 - a) In gnosticism: This is ascending beyond the physical world back up to the *pleroma* by means of a secret knowledge.
 - (1) These hold that the knowledge of the unspeakable Greatness is itself perfect redemption. For since both defect and passion flowed from ignorance, the whole substance of what was thus formed is destroyed by knowledge; and therefore knowledge is the redemption of the inner man (I.xxi.4)
 - b) In Marcionism: This is the god stealing the people of the just god through a kind of ransom/trick in the death of Jesus.
 - c) In docetism: Christ was never really a human, but only seemed (Greek: *dokeō*, hence docetist) to have a human body. Instead, that was just an apparition, and he never had a real physical body.
 - d) According to the Ebionites: Jesus was *only* a man and was not divine in any real sense.
 - (1) Those who are called Ebionites agree that the world was made by God; but their opinions with respect to the Lord are similar to those of Cerinthus and Carpocrates [adoptionist christology]. They use the Gospel according to Matthew only, and repudiate the Apostle Paul, maintaining that he was an apostate from the law. (I.xxvi.2)
 2. How did Irenaeus address it?
 3. Key point: Redemption is accomplished by the same God who created the universe, and it is accomplished uniquely through the death of the God-man. Further, salvation is a fulfilment of the purpose for which humans were made: the glory of God, not an alien imposition by a god other than the creator.

- a) Summary: Since the Lord thus has redeemed us through His own blood, giving His soul for our souls, and His flesh for our flesh, and has also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and, on the other hand, attaching man to God by His own incarnation, and bestowing upon us at His coming immortality durably and truly, by means of communion with God, — all the doctrines of the heretics fall to ruin. (V.i.1)
- b) It is therefore better and more profitable to belong to the simple and unlettered class, and by means of love to attain to nearness to God, than, by imagining ourselves learned and skilful, to be found [among those who are] blasphemous against their own God, inasmuch as they conjure up another God as the Father. And for this reason Paul exclaimed, “Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth: ... It is therefore better, as I have said, that one should have no knowledge whatever of any one reason why a single thing in creation has been made, but should believe in God, and continue in His love, than that, puffed up through knowledge of this kind, he should fall away from that love which is the life of man; and that he should search after no other knowledge except [the knowledge of] Jesus Christ the Son of God, who was crucified for us, than that by subtle questions and hair-splitting expressions he should fall into impiety (II.xxvi.1)
- c) The importance of the humanity and divinity of Jesus in Irenaeus is difficult to overemphasise. It is central to the mechanics of redemption. In redemption, to Irenaeus, the enemy of man (sin, the devil, evil) is defeated, justice is paid, and man is united to God to share in his blessedness. These things would not be possible unless the redeemer were both God and man, because only in a man can man's sin and enemies be justly dealt with, but only God can give the blessedness of God.
 - (1) But in every respect, too, He is man, the formation of God; and thus He took up man into Himself, the invisible becoming visible, the incomprehensible being made comprehensible, the impossible becoming capable of suffering, and the Word being made man, thus summing up all things in Himself: so that as in super-celestial, spiritual, and invisible things, the Word of God is supreme, so also in things visible and corporeal He might possess the supremacy, and, taking to Himself the pre-eminence, as well as constituting Himself Head of the Church, He might draw all things to Himself at the proper time (III.xvi.6)
 - (2) Therefore, as I have already said, He caused man (human nature) to cleave to and to become, one with God. For unless man had overcome the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been legitimately vanquished. And again: unless it had been God who had freely given salvation, we could never have possessed it securely. And unless man had been joined to God, he could never have become a partaker of incorruptibility. (III.xviii.7)
 - (3) For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God. For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had

been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that might receive the adoption of sons? (III.xix.1)

- (4) Moreover, he shall also examine the doctrine of Marcion, [inquiring] how he holds that there are two gods, separated from each other by an infinite distance. Or how can he be good who draws away men that do not belong to him from him who made them, and calls them into his own kingdom? And why is his goodness, which does not save all [thus], defective? Also, why does he, indeed, seem to be good as respects men, but most unjust with regard to him who made men, inasmuch as he deprives him of his possessions? Moreover, how could the Lord, with any justice, if He belonged to another father, have acknowledged the bread to be His body, while He took it from that creation to which we belong, and affirmed the mixed cup to be His blood? And why did He acknowledge Himself to be the Son of man, if He had not gone through that birth which belongs to a human being? How, too, could He forgive us those sins for which we are answerable to our Maker and God? And how, again, supposing that He was not flesh, but was a man merely in appearance, could He have been crucified, and could blood and water have issued from His pierced side? What body, moreover, was it that those who buried Him consigned to the tomb? And what was that which rose again from the dead? (IV.xxxiii.2)
- (5) He [The spiritual man] will judge also the Ebionites; [for] how can they be saved unless it was God who wrought out their salvation upon earth? Or how shall man pass into God, unless God has [first] passed into man (IV.xxxiii.4)
- (6) He shall also judge those who describe Christ as [having become man[only in [human] opinion....how can these men really partake of salvation, if He in whom they profess to believe manifested himself as a merely imaginary being? (IV.xxx.iii.5)

C. What is relationship between the two testaments?

1. Why was this an issue?
 - a) In gnosticism: Various parts are from different divine entities with conflicting purposes, knowledge, and wisdom. The NT is normative, but understood in line with specific gnostic texts/readings.
 - b) In Marcionism: The Old Testament is entirely from the just god, and as such is false. A reduced New Testament (an edited version of Luke (called "The Gospel") and an edited version of 10 letters of Paul (called "The Apostle")) is the only revelation of the good god.
2. How did Irenaeus address it?
3. Key point: To Irenaeus, the whole bible is united in its testimony of one God, the coming of Christ, and the redemption to come through him.
 - a) Then again Matthew, when speaking of the angel, says, "The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in sleep." Of what Lord he does himself interpret: "That it may be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, Out of Egypt have I called my

son." "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us." David likewise speaks of Him who, from the virgin, is Emmanuel: "Turn not away the face of Thine anointed. The Lord hath sworn a truth to David, and will not turn from him. Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy seat." And again: "In Judea is God known; His place has been made in peace, and His dwelling in Zion." Therefore there is one and the same God, who was proclaimed by the prophets and announced by the Gospel; and His Son, who was of the fruit of David's body, (III.ix.2)

- b) But since the writings (*literae*) of Moses are the words of Christ, He does Himself declare to the Jews, as John has recorded in the Gospel: "If ye had believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, neither will ye believe My words."¹⁷ He thus indicates in the clearest manner that the writings of Moses are His words. If, then, [this be the case with regard] to Moses, so also, beyond a doubt, the words of the other prophets are His [words], as I have pointed out. And again, the Lord Himself exhibits Abraham as having said to the rich man, with reference to all those who were still alive: "If they do not obey Moses and the prophets, neither, if any one were to rise from the dead and go to them, will they believe him." (IV.ii.3)
- c) And Paul likewise declares, "And so all Israel shall be saved," but he has also said, that the law was our pedagogue [to bring us] to Christ Jesus. Let them not therefore ascribe to the law the unbelief of certain [among them]. For the law never hindered them from believing in the Son of God; nay, but it even exhorted them so to do, saying that men can be saved in no other way from the old wound of the serpent than by believing in Him who, in the likeness of sinful flesh, is lifted up from the earth upon the tree of martyrdom, and draws all things to Himself, and vivifies the dead. (IV.ii.7)
- d) Wherefore also John does appropriately relate that the Lord said to the Jews: "Ye search the Scriptures, in which ye think ye have eternal life; these are they which testify of me. And ye are not willing to come unto Me, that ye may have life."¹⁹ How therefore did the Scriptures testify of Him, unless they were from one and the same Father, instructing men beforehand as to the advent of His Son, and foretelling the salvation brought in by Him?" For if ye had believed Moses, ye would also have believed Me; for he wrote of Me;" [saying this,] no doubt, because the Son of God is implanted everywhere throughout his writings: at one time, indeed, speaking with Abraham, when about to eat with him; at another time with Noah, giving to him the dimensions [of the ark]; at another; inquiring after Adam; at another, bringing down judgment upon the Sodomites; and again, when He becomes visible, and directs Jacob on his journey, and speaks with Moses from the bush. And it would be endless to recount [the occasions] upon which the Son of God is shown forth by Moses. Of the day of His passion, too, he was not ignorant; but foretold Him, after a figurative manner, by the name given to the passover; and at that very festival, which had been proclaimed such a long time previously by Moses, did our Lord suffer, thus fulfilling the passover. And he did not describe the day only, but the place also, and the time of day at which the sufferings ceased, and the sign of the setting of the sun, saying: "Thou

mayest not sacrifice the passover within any other of thy cities which the Lord God gives thee; but in the place which the Lord thy God shall choose that His name be called on there, thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, towards the setting of the sun. (IV.x.1)

V. What benefit do we derive from Irenaeus?

A. Doctrinal

1. Again, an emphasis on the humanity of Christ, and one of the first explorations of the *mechanisms* of salvation. How, exactly, does the God man's death and resurrection affect humans?
2. All of Scripture as oriented around Jesus
3. While the cosmological speculations of gnosticism aren't attractive outside of the most occult circles, one of the attitudes of gnosticism, that salvation (or even spiritual standing) comes through knowledge as such *does* rise, especially sometimes among groups just like this who gather to learn theology eagerly.
 - a) It's worth remember that faith and faithfulness, our love for God and neighbour, not *mere* knowledge, are the measure of our standing in Christ

B. Apologetic

1. While gnosticism and docetism aren't *really* issues today, every so often watered down variants of Marcionism do pop up