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# **The Catholic Paul: Allegory and Perspicuity in Irenaeus’s Reading of Scripture**

**James G. Bushur**

## **I. Introduction: Correlative Theology**

My gratitude to Dr. William Weinrich has only grown and deepened since my first class with him in the fall of 1989. Our Lord likens words to seeds, and so Dr. Weinrich’s words—at least some of them—have taken root and continue to bear fruit in my life. Of course, today I am bound to give him thanks for something more—for the great privilege of occupying this chair in honor of his parents. Indeed, thanks to this chair, I now have a title that will not fit on a business card or within the temporal confines of an answering machine.

However, beyond its prolixity, there is an aspect of this title that is a genuine hallmark of Dr. Weinrich, namely, the combination of New Testament and Early Church Studies. The conjunction “*and*” joining these two nouns is, I believe, more than merely a conjunction of addition; it is a conjunction of correlativity. Dr. Weinrich’s theological work has taken place in a time when theological discourse has been marked by fragmentation. In the so-called battle for the Bible, neither side found much value in the study of the early church fathers as exemplary or authentic readers of Scripture. One side found them too primitive and biased to bear any authority regarding biblical interpretation, and the other side likewise neglected them in order to seek an epistemological ground for their exposition of Scripture that would please the modern academic community. Thus, the battle for the Bible took place in the arena of the academy, relegating the church to the status of spectator.

Dr. Weinrich ostensibly followed a different path, one that assumed the interconnection between New Testament studies and the concrete life and history of the early church. For Weinrich, the Bible is not merely an archaeological artifact to be investigated by the academy, but the inspired word of God. To speak of the Scriptures as inspired is to say that they subsist in the Spirit as God’s direct address

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to his people. Thus, the church already subsists within the Scriptures as the divinely intended audience, whose life and identity are generated within God's direct address. If this is true, then theology is not simply a monergistic lecture that sounded forth in the distant past with no regard for the hearer; rather, theology is an ongoing, reciprocal dialogue, that is, a dialogue between the Father and the Son. This divine dialogue has been opened up to humanity through the incarnation and continues to be heard even today in fellowship of the Holy Spirit by those with the ears to hear.

Thus, this chair in New Testament and Early Church Studies is a single chair intended to promote the correlativity of these two theological disciplines. Perhaps there is a christological metaphor to be employed here. Cyril of Alexandria spoke of one Christ out of two natures. This confession meant more than merely the addition of the human to the divine as Nestorius taught; rather, it meant the reciprocal correlativity of the divine and human natures so that the two become one in the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God. This correlativity means that the Son of God cannot be engaged or known except in and through his flesh. In the same way, the New Testament cannot be engaged except as it addresses the church and is heard and preached within the community of the faithful. Thus, while exegetes seek to study the word of God as preached by prophets and apostles, patristic studies provide a glimpse of how the divine word has been heard by the faithful and has given form to the church's life. It is this intimate correlation between Christ and his body, the church, that was, is, and will ever remain the hallmark of the church's catholicity, and, in my humble opinion, this correlative catholicity has found its greatest witness within our community in Dr. William Weinrich, for whom we must give thanks to God.

## II. The Perspicuity of Paul: An Ancient Debate

To assert this correlativity is one thing; to maintain it is another. Every preacher knows that what he intends to proclaim is not necessarily what his audience hears. Jesus chastises his disciples for their dull hearing more than once. Paul claims that he cannot address the Corinthians "as spiritual men" but only "as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ" (1 Cor 3:1).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Paul is confounded by the Galatians, calling them "mindless" and wondering if they have been "bewitched" (Gal 3:1). Indeed, the misunderstanding of St. Paul seems to have been an ongoing feature of early Christianity. The author of 2 Peter testifies both to Paul's wisdom as a preacher and to the difficulty of understanding him. "The ignorant and unstable twist [his

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture translations are my own.

words] to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures” (2 Pet 3:16, ESV<sup>2</sup>). This disconnect between the preaching and hearing of the word invites an engagement with the question of the Scripture’s perspicuity. While the word at its origin in the Father may have a consistent, harmonious, and unchanging intent, its movement from human mouths into human ears is living and dynamic, operating within the human mode of existence subject to temporal and spatial conditions. Thus, the question—Is Scripture clear?—requires a more complex answer than is at times suggested. Yes, the word of God is clear according to its eternal origin in the Father, its manifestation in the Son, and its perfection in the Spirit. Yet this theological clarity does not mean that in the present moment, subject to the limitations of our creaturely mode of existence, the word of God is not often misunderstood since now we know only in part and see through a mirror dimly (1 Cor 13:12).

The question of scriptural perspicuity lay at the heart of the second-century debate between Irenaeus (the bishop of Lyons) and his Gnostic opponents, the followers of Valentinus. For both Irenaeus and the Valentinians, the debate revolves around the way Paul’s letters are heard and appropriated in the church. Irenaeus recognizes that all three of his primary opponents have their point of departure in the way they read Paul’s letters.<sup>3</sup> The Ebionites repudiate Paul and accept nothing but Matthew’s Gospel. The Marcionites portray a negative image of the Ebionites, accepting Paul’s testimony above all else. The Valentinians, however, represent a more insidious approach. They do not take their stand on their own peculiar reading of Paul’s letters; rather, they claim to be the heirs of a secret tradition that proceeds from the mouth of Paul himself. According to Theodotus, Paul handed over his secret knowledge to his disciple Theudas, who in turn traditioned it to Valentinus. This secret genealogical connection to Paul gave Valentinus and his followers—Ptolemy, Theodotus, and Heracleon—the right to pen gospels and epistles of their own, making clear and transparent what was merely hidden in the apostle’s public

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<sup>2</sup> Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III.13–15. The translations are my own, but certainly based on A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), hereafter ANF. My translations of *Adversus Haereses*, books 1–3, are based on the Latin and Greek texts gathered by W. W. Harvey, *Sancti Irenaei episcopi Lugdunensis libros quinque Adversus haereses*, vols. 1 and 2 (Cambridge: Typis academicis, 1857), hereafter Harvey. My translations of *Adversus Haereses*, books 4–5, are based on A. Rousseau, B. Hemmerdinger, L. Doutreleau, and C. Mercier, *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les Hérésies, Livre IV*, Sources Chrétiennes 100, 153 (Paris: Cerf, 1965, 1969), hereafter SC. Hereafter, Irenaeus’s work will be referenced in the following format: AH III.13–15 (ANF 1:436–439; Harvey 2:72–73).

epistles. The writings and fragments we have from these teachers betray their loyalty to a secret Pauline tradition. Ptolemy references Paul by name<sup>4</sup> and asserts that his instruction to Flora comes from “apostolic tradition,” which was “received by succession.”<sup>5</sup> Another Valentinian epistle written to Rheginus, called the *Treatise on Resurrection*, simply refers to Paul as “the apostle.”<sup>6</sup>

So whose interpretation of Paul is correct? Why has Paul’s preaching been subjected to such a fragmented hearing? For Irenaeus, these questions revolve around a central issue—the perspicuity of Scripture. After spending most of the second book of *Adversus Haereses* exposing and ridiculing Valentinian allegories, Irenaeus articulates what is perhaps the first Christian form of the perspicuity principle. He writes,

He who has a healthy mind and does not seek peril, but is pious and loves the truth will zealously contemplate what God has placed within the power of humanity (τῆ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐξουσίᾳ) and has submitted to our knowledge; and in these things, he will progress, the learning taking place quickly within himself on account of daily discipline (ἀσκήσεως). Yet, these things are those that fall within our sight (ὕπ’ ὄψιν), things that have been dictated manifestly (φανερώς) and without ambiguity in the very words of the divine Scriptures. Therefore, parables ought not be adapted to ambiguous things. For, if this procedure is avoided, he will avoid danger and the parabolic sayings will receive a similar explanation from all; and from the truth, the body persists as whole, and its members properly connected and without contradiction.<sup>7</sup>

This principle of perspicuity—that ambiguous and parabolic passages should be conformed to what is clear and manifest—seems logical enough. Irenaeus asserts this principal without much argument as a rational presupposition that all would accept. Indeed, Anthony Briggman has written a two-part study concerning Irenaeus’s use of ancient literary and rhetorical conventions.<sup>8</sup> Among them is the perspicuity principle, which has ancient roots in Aristotle, Quintilian, Cicero, Plutarch, and others. However, the ancient origins of the perspicuity principle do not settle the argument for Irenaeus against his opponents. While Briggman’s articles admirably demonstrate the ancient roots of the perspicuity principle, they lead to a much more important and central question: What precisely are the clear

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<sup>4</sup> Ptolemy, *Epistle to Flora* 6.6. Cf. Bentley Layton, trans., *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 313.

<sup>5</sup> Ptolemy, *Epistle to Flora* 7.9 (Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 314).

<sup>6</sup> *Treatise on the Resurrection* 45.23 (Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 321).

<sup>7</sup> *AH* II.27, 1 (*ANF* 1:398; Harvey 1:347).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Anthony Briggman, “Literary and Rhetorical Theory in Irenaeus, Part 1,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 69, no. 5 (2015): 500–527; “Literary and Rhetorical Theory in Irenaeus, Part 2,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 70, no. 1 (2016): 31–50.

things to which we adapt the ambiguous sayings? What does Irenaeus mean by truth that is manifest? Indeed, Irenaeus is well aware that his Valentinian opponents have their own set of clear texts that shape their reading of Scripture. The distinctive way Valentinians read Scripture is brought out in an interesting little book by Elaine Pagels, entitled *The Gnostic Paul*. Her study does not seek to establish the original intent of Paul's letters; rather, she focuses on the way Paul's preaching was heard in the church and specifically within Gnostic communities. Pagels clearly wants to claim legitimacy for the Gnostic reading of Paul; she even makes the subtle and deceptive assertion that some read Paul "gnostically" and others like Irenaeus read Paul "antignostically."<sup>9</sup> Hidden in this assertion is the idea that orthodox readings were a later reaction to Gnostic readings, which, being earlier, were perhaps more authentic.

While her understanding of Irenaeus is inadequate at best, the strength of Pagels's book is her understanding of how Gnostics read Paul. She begins with the general observation that spiritual Gnostics read the Scriptures allegorically, while most Christians were obsessed with the literal text. However, as she summarizes the Gnostic reading of specific Pauline texts, this basic distinction between allegorical and literal readings becomes shallow and increasingly untenable. Indeed, Pagels's study indicates that allegorical readings require literal texts that support and even demand the use of allegory. Gnostic allegory is like an airplane that can only soar into the heavenly realm if it has earthly runways from which to take off. Their allegories are like skipping rocks on a pond, where certain points on the surface of the water allow rocks to bounce up and make progress through the air. Thus, Gnostic readers tended to take certain Pauline texts in an extremely literal way. One such passage is Romans 2:28–29, which Gnostics understand to be a clear statement from Paul that his teaching about Jew and Gentile is not to be understood literally in terms of race but spiritually in terms of different factions in the church—namely, the relation between pneumatics (elite Christians, people endowed with spirit) and psychics (common Christians, people endowed merely with soul). Other passages include: 1 Corinthians 2:6–7, which speaks of "hidden wisdom"; 1 Corinthians 2:13–16, which claims that spiritual things can only be understood by the spiritual; and, perhaps most fundamentally, 1 Corinthians 15:50, which boldly asserts that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (ESV). Such texts are taken in a literal way to support and even propel the allegorical flight from the fleshly mode of existence toward the spiritual

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<sup>9</sup> Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1975), 5.

realm. Thus, Ptolemy cites Paul as the teacher who established the Gnostic example of reading the law symbolically and allegorically.

### III. Irenaeus's Critique: Images of an Invisible Archetype

For Irenaeus, the allegorical reading of Scripture by Valentinian teachers violates the perspicuity principle. Yet, their violation is not merely methodological or the way they engage sacred texts, as Pagels suggests. Their challenge to the perspicuity principle is not their grammatical, rhetorical, literary, or rational engagement with scriptural texts. Irenaeus does not oppose the Valentinian allegorical method with his own literal method; he does not combat their emphasis on Paul with an alternative emphasis on John or Peter; he does not simply oppose their favorite texts with his own favorites. Indeed, contrary to Pagels's assertion, Irenaeus does not read Paul "antignostically." Rather, against the Gnostic Paul, Irenaeus places the catholic Paul.

Yet, those who declare that Paul alone understood the truth, the mystery being made manifest to him by revelation, let Paul himself convince them, saying that one and the same God worked through Peter as the apostle among the circumcised and through himself among the Gentiles (Gal 2:8). Therefore, Peter was an apostle of the same God from whom likewise Paul came; and that God, whom Peter announced among the circumcised, even the Son of God, this one Paul also announced among the Gentiles. For, our Lord did not come to save Paul alone; nor is God so poor that he has one apostle alone who understands the economy of his Son.<sup>10</sup>

For Irenaeus, Paul must be read as one member of the whole apostolic body. Thus, Paul is to be heard in communion with Peter, Luke, and the rest of the apostles. "The doctrine of the apostles is clear and firm," asserts the bishop of Lyons, "lacking nothing, nor teaching some things secretly and other things manifestly."<sup>11</sup> Thus, Irenaeus's perspicuity principle entails a conciliar hermeneutic that connects Paul to the whole company of the apostolic preaching. "We hold it necessary," Irenaeus writes, "to adhere to the universal mind of the apostles who come from our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>12</sup>

Irenaeus's emphasis on the "universal mind of the apostles" suggests that the perspicuity of Scripture is more profound than mere grammatical clarity or textual cherry-picking. Indeed, for Irenaeus, it is his opponent's limitation of scriptural perspicuity to a single apostle, a few texts, or a private knowledge that has led to the

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<sup>10</sup> *AH* III.13, 1 (*ANF* 1:436; Harvey 2:72).

<sup>11</sup> *AH* III.15, 1 (*ANF* 1:439; Harvey 2:79).

<sup>12</sup> *AH* III.16, 1 (*ANF* 1:440; Harvey 2:82).



loss of catholicity, that is, the fragmentation of the Scriptures, the partiality for Paul or another apostle, and the exaltation of some scriptural texts over others. In short, for Irenaeus, the problem at the heart of his opponent's allegory is not methodological but theological. Scriptural perspicuity is not a matter of human process or technique but has its ground in the divine origin of the text. Here, the ancient world is quite different from our contemporary context.

Academic discussions of the last few centuries concerning hermeneutical method presuppose the secular anthropology characteristic of the Enlightenment and its aftermath.<sup>13</sup> Enlightenment interpreters assumed that clarity of meaning could be sought in the psychological exchange between human authors and their readers. Due to the obvious corruption of the medieval church, Enlightenment scholars challenged her place as a privileged reader of Scripture. Rejecting the validity of the church's subjective and biased reading, the Enlightenment hermeneutical approach optimistically sought a universal and objective meaning for the Scriptures hidden in the minds of ancient authors and extracted by the social sciences. However, following the skepticism of David Hume and Immanuel Kant, our postmodern age is marked by a fundamental despair of attaining such an objective perspicuous meaning. No reader can escape the filters of his own perception and, therefore, cannot help but impose his own meaning on sacred texts. This Copernican revolution from a text revolving around human authors to one revolving around human readers has resulted in hopeless fragmentation. The meaning of a text is no longer limited to the psycho-social setting of its author; rather, countless legitimate meanings are generated for a text out of the innumerable psycho-social settings of its readers. Our contemporary age certainly welcomes the Scriptures as a plastic text, that is, a text that radically autonomous readers can use according to their own personal needs and impulses.

Neither Irenaeus nor his Valentinian opponents understand textual meaning within this modern psychological paradigm. For Irenaeus and the Valentinian teachers, meaning is not sought in the psychological exchange between human authors and readers; rather, textual meaning is understood *genealogically* and, therefore, is to be sought in the true generative source of the text.<sup>14</sup> From beginning to end of *Adversus Haereses*, book 1, Irenaeus understands himself as exposing the genealogy of his Gnostic opponents. He begins with the Gnostic genealogy of the spiritual realm (*Pleroma*) that is generated by Bythus and seven other spiritual

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<sup>13</sup> For sources comparing and contrasting patristic readings of scripture to post-Enlightenment perspectives, see the following: John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) and Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Wichita, KS: Eighth Day Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *AH* I.1, 1; I.22, 2 (*ANF* 1:316, 347; Harvey 1:8–9, 189).

beings that make up the Ogdoad.<sup>15</sup> Irenaeus refers to this Ogdoad as the “root and underlying subsistence of all things (ρίζαν καὶ ὑπόστασιν τῶν πάντων)” according to the Gnostics. Then, after exposing the succession of heretical teachers, Irenaeus writes, “We consider it necessary in the first place to refer to their fountain and root [*fontem et radicem*] so that understanding their most sublime Bythus, you may understand the tree from which such fruit was produced.”<sup>16</sup> While in the modern world such a genealogical presentation is considered unfair and utterly biased, in the ancient world, tracing a teaching’s genealogical origins would have been considered absolutely necessary.

For ancient readers, the Scriptures do not revolve around just human authors or their readers; rather, they revolve around a theological core. There is a divine reality that pre-exists both human authors and their readers. On the one hand, this divine reality is the source of inspiration for authors. “No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man,” says the author of 2 Peter (1:21). Yet, on the other hand, this divine reality also generates meaning for the hearer. “He who is of God,” Jesus says, “hears the words of God” (John 8:47).

For Irenaeus, genealogical meaning is embodied in the relationship of a type or image to its archetype. The archetype pre-exists its image as the permanent pattern that is eternal, stable, and unchanging. When this archetypal pattern is stamped into malleable material such as ink or clay, it produces an image or type of itself. Thus, the question of perspicuity for both Irenaeus and his opponents is not a question about which texts are clearer than other texts; nor is it a question simply about the psychological process by which images are produced and interpreted by human authors and readers. Ultimately, the question of perspicuity must consider the archetype itself, that is, the generative source of sacred texts and images.

Thus, Irenaeus’s difficulty with Valentinian teachers is not their use of allegory as a method of reading texts. The problem is the archetype that Valentinian teachers assert is the generative source of sacred texts and the unchanging center guiding their allegorical reading. For these Gnostic teachers, true revelation proceeds from the community of spiritual beings that dwell in a transcendent realm far removed from the corruptible world of creation. Thus, Valentinian teachers admit that their archetype is invisible, transcendent, secret, and, therefore, not subject to the human sphere of knowledge. Yet, as Irenaeus will assert, archetypes that are unknowable will always produce images that are ambiguous. It is like trying to assemble the pieces of a puzzle without knowing the archetypal picture the pieces

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<sup>15</sup> *AH* I.1, 1 (*ANF* 1:316; Harvey 1:8–9).

<sup>16</sup> *AH* I.22, 2 (*ANF* 1:347; Harvey 1:189).

are intending to represent.<sup>17</sup> The problem does not lie with the individual pieces themselves nor with the inherent clarity of each fragment; rather, the confusion arises due to the inaccessibility of the archetype readers need in order to assemble the pieces into a unified whole.

For Irenaeus, the fatal flaw in his opponent's archetype consists precisely in its invisibility. The Gnostic archetype is unavailable to the human senses—hearing, seeing, touching, and so on—and, therefore, inaccessible to human knowledge. This point is of fundamental importance to the bishop of Lyons. In his articulation of the perspicuity principle, Irenaeus emphasizes the limitations of our human way of knowing. The pious reader, Irenaeus says, “will zealously contemplate what God has placed within the power of humanity (τῆ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐξουσίᾳ) and has submitted to our knowledge.” Irenaeus defines what is accessible to human knowledge as those things that “fall within our sight (ὕπ’ ὄψιν).”<sup>18</sup> The Gnostic reading of Scripture, however, assumes a spatial dualism; they draw an absolute boundary between textual images that are seen and their transcendent archetype, which is unseen. This spatial dualism drives the Gnostic use of allegory as a way to cross the barrier and change the setting for the text and its reader. Arguing for his own version of the Mosaic law's threefold use, Ptolemy writes,

And the third subdivision of god's law is the symbolic part, which is after the image of the superior, spiritual realm: I mean, what is ordained about offerings, circumcision, the Sabbath, fasting, Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the like. Now, once the truth had been manifested, the referent of all these ordinances was changed, inasmuch as they are images and allegories. As to their meaning in the visible realm and their physical accomplishment they were abolished; but as to their spiritual meaning they were elevated, with the words remaining the same but the subject matter being altered.<sup>19</sup>

Like the skipping rock that lightly skims the surface of the pond in order to bounce into the air above, so Gnostic allegory promises an ascent from creation and the limitations of the fleshly mode of existence into the communion of spiritual things.

However, for Irenaeus, an archetype that is invisible and inaccessible to the fleshly mode of existence is disastrous for the reading of Scripture. For, once two spatial settings or habitats are established for the reading of Scripture, what is to prevent the establishment of three, four, five, or even more. To have an invisible and inaccessible archetype is the same as having no archetype at all. Thus, Irenaeus

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. *AH* I.8, 1–I.9, 5 (*ANF* 1:326–330; Harvey 1:66–89). For my own more extensive exposition of this text, cf. James G. Bushur, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Mosaic of Christ: Preaching Scripture in the Era of Martyrdom* (London: Routledge, 2017): 81–82.

<sup>18</sup> *AH* II.27, 1 (*ANF* 1:398; Harvey 1:347).

<sup>19</sup> Ptolemy, *Epistle to Flora* 5.9 (Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 312).

writes, “For, if the Creator did not construct the form of creation from himself, but formed them according to transcendent things, then from whom did their Bythus, who in the same way gave form to the Pleroma, receive the form of those things . . . ?”<sup>20</sup> Irenaeus’s question is more than clever rhetoric; it intends to demonstrate that the Gnostic reading is really an agnostic reading. Irenaeus concludes, “Therefore, if creation is an image of other things, what prevents the assertion that those things are images of things above them and those of things above them again and to continue to move within innumerable images of images?”<sup>21</sup> Without a perspicuous archetype, Valentinian teachers find themselves caught in an endless cycle of allegories upon allegories; or, as Irenaeus puts it more vividly, the Gnostics “never rest in the one God” and so “are ever swimming in a limitless abyss.”<sup>22</sup>

#### IV. Irenaeus’s Reading of Scripture: The Perspicuous Archetype

For Irenaeus, the perspicuity principle is more profound than is often considered. While it has implications for the use of grammatical, rhetorical, literary, and rational analysis in the reading of sacred texts, the perspicuity principle cannot be reduced to any of them. The Valentinians destroy the clarity of the Scriptures not because they simply disobey proper grammatical standards; nor is it due to their preference for images and parables over more literal, paraenetic genres; nor do they undermine scriptural clarity by their predilection for the allegorical method. To be sure, Irenaeus is willing to engage his opponents in all of these areas; but his articulation of the perspicuity principle extends far beyond them, reaching into the very being of God himself. Because Valentinian teachers claim that the Creator himself is merely an image of a transcendent, spiritual, and inaccessible god, their use of grammar, rhetoric, reason, and literary analysis must necessarily serve a theological agnosticism.

To say . . . that God subsists as an image (*εἰκόνα*) of another father is to stumble with regard to the truth and become completely foolish and senseless. For, such people will count it necessary, as we have demonstrated many times, to ever discover types of types and images of images, never able to fix (*πῆξαι*) the mind upon the one, true God. For, their reasoning is exalted above God and their hearts ascend beyond the teacher, supposing themselves to be lofty and exalted

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<sup>20</sup> *AH* II.16, 1 (*ANF* 1:380; Harvey 1:305).

<sup>21</sup> *AH* II.16, 1 (*ANF* 1:380; Harvey 1:305). For similar texts in which Irenaeus uses the language of image and type to connect theology and cosmology to the reading of Scripture, see *AH* IV.9, 3; IV.14, 3; IV.19, 1; IV.30, 4.

<sup>22</sup> *AH* IV.9, 3 (*ANF* 1:473; SC 100:488–489).

but in reality moving away from the God who actually exists (*ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος Θεοῦ*).<sup>23</sup>

An unknowable and inaccessible archetype produces unknowable and inaccessible images. For Irenaeus, the Scriptures are like a wheel turning around an axle; if there is no sure connection to the axle, the wheel will become unstable, and its revolutions will tend toward fragmentation according to the laws of centrifugal force.<sup>24</sup> As long as the Scriptures are rooted in the one God, they have stability and are united in a single narrative moving in one harmonious orbit. Each text can be read in relation to all others as a clear image of the one, true God, who is its fundamental source. Gnostic teachers compromise this connection by introducing a second god who transcends the Creator. “By obscure interpretation of parables,” Irenaeus says, “each imagines to find a god of his own.”<sup>25</sup> This Gnostic assertion disrupts the movement of the scriptural narrative and leads to an inevitable instability and fragmentation.<sup>26</sup> “Deserting what is certain, without doubt, and true,” Gnostic teachers forsake the “firm rock” and “build on shifting sand.”<sup>27</sup> Severed from the one God, each text becomes an image employed by Gnostic teachers to promote a variety of false archetypes.

For Irenaeus, the perspicuity of Scripture extends beyond grammatical, rhetorical, literary, or rational clarity; rather, perspicuity is rooted in God himself, who created all things openly, whose word formed the flesh from the dust of paradise and perfected it by his incarnation, death, and resurrection. Irenaeus agrees with his opponents that the Scriptures are full of images, yet these images are clear because the archetype that has generated them is clear. The Creator of heaven and earth is the archetype who produces images in order to approach his human creatures, to make himself available to human senses, and to subject himself to human knowledge. Divine revelation always takes place within the single setting of creation. According to Irenaeus’s critique, the flaw in Valentinian exegesis is their compulsion to change the setting in which sacred authors, texts, and readers interact. They use allegory to elevate the mind out of the fleshly mode of existence into the spiritual gnosis of a transcendent world. However, for Irenaeus, humanity’s

<sup>23</sup> AH IV.19, 1 (ANF 1:487; SC 100:616–617).

<sup>24</sup> For my use of the image of centrifugal and centripetal forces to explain Irenaeus’s reading of Scripture, cf. Bushur, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Mosaic of Christ*, 82–83.

<sup>25</sup> AH II.27, 2 (ANF 1:398; Harvey 1:348).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. AH I.8, 1 (ANF 1:326; Harvey 1:67), where Irenaeus describes Gnostic teachers as those who “disregard the order and sequence of the Scriptures and as they are able, loose the members of the truth.” Cf. also AH I.9, 4 (ANF 1:330; Harvey 1:88–89), where Irenaeus describes his own task as “restoring the individual expressions (of Scripture) to their own order, even fitting them to the body of the truth (τῶ τῆς ἀληθείας σωματίῳ).”

<sup>27</sup> AH II.27, 3 (ANF 1:399; Harvey 1:349).

relation to God does not merely begin in the flesh; it is constituted in the flesh from beginning to end.

Thus, Irenaeus and his Gnostic opponents do not disagree merely about the rational content of divine revelation; they disagree about the very medium in which divine revelation is displayed. While they may begin with sacred texts, Gnostic teachers are finally compelled to assert the “living voice (*vivam vocem*)”<sup>28</sup> of a secret tradition. Divine revelation is limited to the verbal medium; even Christ himself comes, most fundamentally, for the purpose of speaking. “He became a guide,” says the *Gospel of Truth*, “at peace and occupied with classrooms. He came forward and uttered the word as a teacher.”<sup>29</sup> Yet, as we have argued, words that are not rooted in a substantive and accessible archetype become weightless, free-floating sounds easily carried away according to individual impulses. In contrast, Irenaeus argues that the most fundamental medium of divine revelation is not mere words or texts but human flesh and blood. From the beginning, it is human flesh that bears the intimate “impressions of God’s fingers.”<sup>30</sup> The moistened dirt of Eden is the malleable material in which the Son of God directly and immediately imprints the form and pattern of his own being and life.

Therefore, it was not angels who made or formed (*plasmaverunt*) us; for, angels do not have the power to make an image of God (*imaginem Dei*), nor does any other—certainly not a power far removed from the Father of all—no one, except the true God. For, God did not need such things in order to make what he previously determined with himself (*ipse apud se*) should be done, as if he did not have his own hands (*suas manus*). For, with him, the Word and Wisdom were always present, that is, the Son and the Spirit, through whom and in whom he made all things freely and spontaneously (*libere et sponte*); it is to them that he speaks, saying, “Let us make man after our image and likeness” (Gen 1:26). Thus, he acquired from himself the substance of creatures (*substantiam creaturarum*), and the pattern of things made (*exemplum factorum*), and the form (*figuram*) of all the adornments in the world.<sup>31</sup>

Irenaeus’s emphasis is clearly on the immediate interaction between God and his human formation. Just as a typewriter makes an ink image of a letter on paper through the imprint of an archetype, so the malleable flesh of humanity is intended from the beginning to be the medium of God’s manifestation in the world. “For, the

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<sup>28</sup> AH III.2, 1 (ANF 1:415; Harvey 2:7).

<sup>29</sup> *Gospel of Truth* 19.19 (Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 254).

<sup>30</sup> AH IV.39, 2 (ANF 1:523; SC 100:966–967).

<sup>31</sup> AH IV.20, 1 (ANF 1:487–488; SC 100:624–627).

glory of God is a living man,” says the bishop of Lyons, “but the life of man is the vision of God.”<sup>32</sup>

For Irenaeus, the formation of humanity in the image and likeness of God is the overarching plot that spans the whole of human history from the dirt of Eden to the eschatological fulfillment of the resurrection. “At no time,” Irenaeus is fond of saying, “does Adam ever escape the hands of God.”<sup>33</sup> At the heart of this plot is the incarnation. The very “hand of God” that formed the flesh of Adam in the beginning “was truly displayed when the Word of God became man, assimilating (ἐξομοιώσας) himself to man and man to himself, so that, on account of likeness to the Son, man might become precious to the Father.” Irenaeus then continues with his most important statement concerning the image of God. He writes,

For, in former times, it was said that man was made according to God’s image, but it was not displayed; for, the Word was still invisible according to whose image man was made; but, on account of this also the likeness was easily cast aside. However, when the Word of God became flesh, he confirmed both; for, he displayed the image truly, becoming himself what his image was, and established the likeness with stability (τὴν ὁμοίωσιν βεβαίως), conforming (συνεξομοιώσας) man to the invisible Father through the Word, who is seen.<sup>34</sup>

Irenaeus uses the language of “image” in reference both to humanity and, as we saw earlier, to the Scriptures. This connection between the narrative of Scripture and the formation of humanity is grounded in the Word, who is the perfect image manifesting the Father. The Son as the image manifesting the Father is an important theme that permeates the fourth book of *Adversus Haereses*. Irenaeus writes,

Therefore, the Father has revealed himself to all by making his Word visible (ὄρατόν) to all. . . . For through creation, the Word reveals God the Creator; through the world, the Lord who has adorned the world (τὸν κεκοσμηκότα); through the formation, the Artist who has formed him (τὸν πεπλακότα Τεχνίτην); and through the Son, the Father who has begotten him. And while these things address all alike, they do not all alike believe. Yet, through the law and the prophets, the Word preached (ἐκήρυσσε) both himself and the Father alike; and while all the people heard alike, they did not all alike believe. Through the same Word having become visible and palpable (ὄρατοῦ καὶ ψηλαφητοῦ), the Father was displayed, even if all did not alike believe him; but

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<sup>32</sup> *AH* IV.19, 7 (*ANF* 1:490; *SC* 100:648–649). Cf. also *AH* IV.11, 2 (*ANF* 1:474; *SC* 100:500–501), where Irenaeus speaks of “the man in eucharistic thanksgiving to the One who made him” as “the receptacle of his goodness and the instrument (ὄργανον) of his glorification.”

<sup>33</sup> *AH* V.1, 3 (*ANF* 1:527; *SC* 153:26–29).

<sup>34</sup> *AH* V.16, 2 (*ANF* 1:544; *SC* 153:216–217).

all saw the Father in the Son. For, the Father is the invisible (*ἀόρατον*) of the Son, and the Son is the visible (*όρατόν*) of the Father.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, just as the divine Word is the hand that forms humanity, so he is the author of all Scripture. “The Son, administering (*διακονῶν*) all things for the Father, works from the beginning to the end, and without him no one can know God.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, as Irenaeus concludes, the Son’s manifestation does not begin with his birth from Mary “but applies indifferently throughout all time. . . . For the Son, being present with his own formation (*τῷ ἰδίῳ πλάσματι*) from the beginning, reveals the Father to all.”<sup>37</sup>

In this way, Irenaeus argues that the Son of God is the perfect image of the Father and the eternal archetype by which humanity is formed. He is the “Hand of the Father” who sculpted man from the dust of Eden, generated the ancient narrative of Israel, and finally became flesh, making himself available to sensory experience and accessible to the sphere of human knowledge. Thus, Irenaeus finds it significant that Moses can only glimpse God’s glory from the depth of the rock (Ex 33:20–21). This encounter prophesies that “through the wisdom of God, man shall see him in the end, in the depth of a rock, that is, in his presence as man (*ἐν τῇ κατ’ ἀνθρώπων αὐτοῦ παρουσίᾳ*).”<sup>38</sup> In other words, the Son of God is the only true exegete of the Father (John 1:18), and his flesh—taken from the Virgin, crucified on the cross, raised from the dead, and present in the church’s Eucharist—is the tissue of divine revelation and the firm rock on which his perspicuity principle rests.

#### V. The Catholic Paul: Irenaeus’s Reading of 1 Corinthians 15:50

This emphasis on human flesh as the medium or tissue of God’s self-revelation is not intended by Irenaeus to displace sacred words or texts. Instead of displacing them, the flesh of Jesus anchors the Scriptures in what is real and true. By grounding scriptural texts in the Word’s becoming visible in the flesh, Irenaeus is able to argue in two ways. First, human flesh establishes the creaturely mode of existence as the fundamental setting within which all knowledge of God and all interpretation of Scripture must take place. Any allegorical exposition that presumes to transcend the human body and elevate itself beyond the created realm must be censured. Second, the meaning of sacred texts is not to be sought in a transcendent, spiritual gnosis but is generated out of the flesh of Jesus. The flesh of Christ is the source

<sup>35</sup> *AH* IV.6, 5–6 (*ANF* 1:468–469; *SC* 100:448–451).

<sup>36</sup> *AH* IV.6, 7 (*ANF* 1:469; *SC* 100:452–453).

<sup>37</sup> *AH* IV.6, 7 (*ANF* 1:469; *SC* 100:454–455).

<sup>38</sup> *AH* IV.20, 9 (*ANF* 1:490; *SC* 100:655).



of inspiration for prophets and apostles<sup>39</sup> and the accessible archetype that guides the church's hearing of the word.<sup>40</sup> It is for this reason that the Eucharist (the substantive presence of Jesus' flesh) and the "fourfold Gospel" (the narrative of Jesus' flesh) form the heart of Irenaeus's hermeneutical vision.

In *Adversus Haereses* V.9, Irenaeus takes up his opponent's favorite proof text: "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 15:50, ESV). Irenaeus claims that this text "is brought forward by all the heretics in their mindlessness in order to show that the formation of God (*τὸ πλάσμα τοῦ Θεοῦ*) is not saved."<sup>41</sup> According to Irenaeus, his opponent's reading is too literal. They "do not perceive the sense of the apostle . . . but passionately grasp only the expressions themselves."<sup>42</sup> For the Valentinians, this Pauline verse represents a signal to the Gnostic elite to change the setting for the text. True salvation takes place in the *spiritual* realm, not the material realm of flesh and blood.

In response, Irenaeus offers an extended exposition of 1 Corinthians 15:50. He begins his argument with certain grammatical and contextual arguments designed to undermine the Gnostic reading of Paul's letters. His first argument is that flesh and blood *by themselves*, that is, flesh and blood that "[lack] the Spirit of God,"<sup>43</sup> cannot inherit the kingdom of God. His second argument consists in a grammatical technicality concerning the active voice of the verb *inherit*. "If it is necessary to speak precisely," Irenaeus claims, "the flesh does not inherit but is inherited."<sup>44</sup> His third argument invokes the broader context of Paul's letters. Irenaeus claims that Paul's use of "flesh" does not always refer to the substance of the human body itself but to the sinful life that brings condemnation.

All of these arguments for textual clarity involve the kind of grammatical and rational exposition that we might expect. However, Irenaeus's exposition does not end with such a textual analysis of Paul's letters. Irenaeus moves beyond a strictly textual analysis in three ways. First, he moves his argument about the meaning of "flesh and blood" into the person of Paul himself. Paul bears the very same flesh and blood both before and after his conversion.

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. AH IV.33, 10 (ANF 1:509; SC 100:822–825), where Irenaeus speaks of the OT prophets as "members" of Christ's body.

<sup>40</sup> Irenaeus uses the phrase "the body of the truth" as synonymous with the "rule of truth" that guides the church's reading of Scripture. I think this phrase refers not merely to creedal summaries but also to the actual flesh of Jesus himself present in the Eucharist and narrated in the Gospels. Cf. especially AH I.9, 4 (ANF 1:330; Harvey 1:88–89).

<sup>41</sup> AH V.9, 1 (ANF 1:534; SC 153:106–107).

<sup>42</sup> AH V.13, 2 (ANF 1:540; SC 153:168–169).

<sup>43</sup> AH V.9, 3 (ANF 1:535; SC 153:112–113).

<sup>44</sup> AH V.9, 4 (ANF 1:535; SC 153:116–117).

The apostle who was born from the womb, that is, from the ancient subsistence of the flesh, is the same one who says to the Galatians, “But when it was pleasing, God separated me from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles” (Gal 1:15–16). It was not one who was born from the womb . . . and another who preached the Son of God; but the same one who formerly was ignorant and persecuted the church preached the Son of God, Jesus Christ, when he received his revelation from heaven, the Lord conversing with him.<sup>45</sup>

For Irenaeus, if Paul is excluding the substances of flesh and blood from the kingdom of God, then he is speaking against his own person and his own ministry to the Gentiles. God does not repudiate Paul’s flesh and blood, the very flesh and blood he himself “set apart from the womb” and called to administer the Son’s revelation to the Gentiles.

Second, this interpretive move into the very person of Paul leads Irenaeus to corroborate his reading of Paul with the Gospels. What is true of Paul—that he bears the same flesh and blood both before and after his conversion—is also true of Jesus’ miracles narrated in the Gospels. The blind received the sense of sight in the very same eyes that formerly were incapable of seeing.

For the Craftsman (Τεχνίτης) of all things, the Word of God, who formed man from the beginning, finding his own formation (τὸ ἴδιον πλάσμα) afflicted by evil, performed every kind of healing. He healed, on the one hand, each individual member even as he formed them in the beginning; on the other hand, in a single moment of time, he restored the man sound and whole, rendering him perfect (τέλειον) for himself unto the resurrection. For, what reason did he have to heal the members of the flesh and restore them to their original form, if those things healed by him were incapable of salvation? . . . How can they say that the flesh cannot receive life from him when it received healing from him? For life comes through healing, and incorruption is effected through life. The one, then, who gives healing also gives life; and the one who is life also surrounds his formation with incorruption.<sup>46</sup>

This text reveals Irenaeus’s hermeneutical vision in concrete practice. The catholic reading of Paul means that Paul’s letters are read in agreement with the Gospels. For Irenaeus, Paul must be read as one member of the whole apostolic body. “We hold it necessary,” Irenaeus writes, “to adhere to the universal mind of the apostles who come from our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, Irenaeus’s perspicuity principle entails a

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<sup>45</sup> *AH* V.12, 5 (*ANF* 1:538–539; *SC* 153:156–159).

<sup>46</sup> *AH* V.12, 6 (*ANF* 1:539; *SC* 153:160–163).

<sup>47</sup> *AH* III.16, 1 (*ANF* 1:440; *Harvey* 2:82).

conciliar<sup>48</sup> hermeneutic that connects Paul to the whole company of the apostolic preaching.

Yet, within this catholicity of the apostolic witness, Irenaeus gives priority to the four Gospels. This priority is not due to any personal or official superiority ascribed to the evangelists; rather, the Gospels' priority is rooted in the way they relate to Jesus. Indeed, Irenaeus does not speak of four Gospels but of a single Gospel with a fourfold form. Like the four-faced cherubim of old, the Gospels consist of four different narratives manifesting one and the same flesh. For the bishop of Lyons, the gospel depends on the flesh and blood of Jesus. Thus, Irenaeus's argument concerning the meaning of "flesh and blood" in Paul's letters reaches its crescendo in Jesus himself. "For, if the flesh cannot be saved," Irenaeus claims, "then the Word of God would not have become flesh; and if the blood of the righteous is not to be sought, then the Lord would not make the blood his own possession."<sup>49</sup> In this text, Irenaeus refers to Matthew 23:35 and the "righteous blood" poured out since the time of Abel. Irenaeus preaches Christ as the one who "recapitulates" in his own person this shedding of blood from the beginning so that it might be rectified in the end. Irenaeus concludes, "The Lord would not have recapitulated (*ἀνεκεφαλαιώσατο*) these things in himself, unless he himself became flesh and blood according to the ancient formation, saving in himself at the end what perished in Adam at the beginning."<sup>50</sup>

Irenaeus's contemplation of 1 Corinthians 15:50 certainly takes up grammatical and contextual arguments to thwart the literal reading of his opponents. However, the bishop of Lyons is not content with literary arguments designed to undermine Gnostic readings. Rather, his exposition opens up to a positive proclamation of Christ that roots Christian identity in the flesh and blood of Jesus. Indeed, Irenaeus's contemplation of Christ's incarnation leads directly to the church's Eucharist. Irenaeus concludes his argument with an emphasis on Jesus' flesh and blood as the very currency of our salvation.

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<sup>48</sup> Conciliar is used here not as a reference to formal and authoritative church councils but according to its simple, original sense as a reciprocal, collaborative dialogue. For Irenaeus, dialogue resides at the heart of God's relationship to humanity. In AH V.1, 3 (ANF 1:527; SC 153:26–29), humanity's formation proceeds out of the conciliar conversation of the Holy Trinity. Throughout the narrative of Scripture, the Word comes to speak to humanity, bringing us into this divine conversation. Irenaeus reads the Scriptures as the direct discourse of God through his prophets and apostles. Thus, his reading is conciliar in the sense that the collaborative voices of all the prophets and apostles is to be heard in the church as "one harmonious melody" (AH II.28, 3; ANF 1:400; Harvey 1:352).

<sup>49</sup> AH IV.14, 1 (ANF 1:541; SC 153:182–183).

<sup>50</sup> AH V.14, 1 (ANF 1:541; SC 153:186–187).

In every epistle, the apostle testifies with clarity that we have been saved through the flesh of our Lord and through his blood. If, then, flesh and blood are the things that effect life among us,<sup>51</sup> it is not said of flesh and blood in the literal sense that they are unable to inherit the kingdom of God. . . . Remember, therefore, beloved, that you are redeemed by the flesh of the Lord and restored by his blood; and let us “hold the head from which the whole body of the church is being fit together and grows” (Col 2:19), that is, confessing God and the enfleshed presence of the Son of God and steadfastly expecting his humanity; let us make use of these proofs from the Scriptures, easily overturning, as I have demonstrated, all the opinions of the heretics.<sup>52</sup>

For Irenaeus, the flesh and blood of Jesus, present in the church’s Eucharist and narrated in the fourfold Gospel, form the axle around which apostolic epistles, prophetic Scriptures, and even the whole of creation revolve. As the axle, Jesus’ flesh is the fixed point that allows the whole of Scripture to turn in a centripetal harmony that ever moves into Christ and his eternal fellowship with the Father. The catholic reading of Paul places his epistles in conciliar fellowship with the whole prophetic and apostolic witness. This conciliar witness is anchored in the flesh of Jesus that is present in the Eucharist and narrated in the Gospels. Jesus’ flesh and blood is the generative source of the apostolic witness, the inspiration of the prophets and the perfect, perspicuous image of God’s own life. “He who has seen me,” Jesus says, “has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

## VI. Conclusion: Scripture and the Correlative Life of the Church

As with all other doctrines, the perspicuity of the Scriptures, as explicated by the bishop of Lyons, has a christological core. While the Valentinian teachers assert an invisible archetype that leaves scriptural texts and images subject to ambiguity and centrifugal fragmentation, Irenaeus confesses Jesus’ flesh as the true

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<sup>51</sup> Irenaeus uses the present tense in this text, which refers to the ongoing presence of Christ’s flesh and blood as the very currency by which his life is communicated to us. This text therefore acts as a crescendo for his argument that began at the beginning of AH V. Against the Gnostic rejection of the flesh, Irenaeus emphasizes in AH V.1, 1 (ANF 1:527; SC 153:20–21) that the Lord “has redeemed us through his own blood . . . by means of communion with God.” That this “communion with God” entails the Eucharist is clear from AH V.2, 2 (ANF 1:528; SC 153:31–33), where Irenaeus argues, “Vain in every way are those who hold in contempt the entire economy of God, and deny the salvation of the flesh, and spurn its regeneration, saying that it is not capable of incorruption. However, if it is not saved, then neither did the Lord redeem us with His blood, nor is the cup of the Eucharist the communion of his blood (*communicatio sanguinis ejus*), nor the bread that we break the communion of his body (*communicatio corporis ejus*). . . . He has acknowledged the cup . . . as his own blood, from which he gives increase to our blood; and the bread . . . he has confirmed as his own body, from which he gives increase to our bodies.”

<sup>52</sup> AH V.14, 3–4 (ANF 1:542; SC 153:192–195).

archetype that fixes and unites the Scriptures into a single, cohesive, and centripetal narrative. Yet, to say that the flesh of Jesus is the very tissue of God's self-revelation is to place the Scriptures into the most intimate association with the life of the church.

First, the flesh of Jesus is substantially present in the Eucharist, where it continues to be traditioned from generation to generation. With regard to the Scriptures, the eucharistic flesh of Jesus acts like a fixed point that supplies scriptural texts and images with stability. "Our mind is in harmony (*σύμφωνος*) with the Eucharist," Irenaeus says, "and the Eucharist makes firm (*βεβαιοῖ*) the mind; we offer to him his own things, proclaiming (*καταγγέλλοντες*) with diligence the fellowship and union of the flesh and the Spirit."<sup>53</sup> Here Irenaeus echoes Paul's traditioning of the Lord's Supper: "You proclaim (*καταγγέλλετε*) the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26, ESV). Yet, Irenaeus focuses this eucharistic proclamation in a way that combats his opponents' rejection of creation. While for Paul the eucharistic proclamation extends toward the eschaton, for Irenaeus, it also reaches back to the very beginning of creation. "We offer to him his own things," Irenaeus says. The bread and wine are the end of a long narrative that originates in the soil of creation, the sowing of the seed, and the life-giving will of the Creator. The Eucharist also proclaims "the fellowship and union of the flesh and the Spirit." This language recalls the creation of Adam, who becomes a living being when God fills his flesh with his own breath. This fellowship of flesh and Spirit, divided by sin and death, is restored by Jesus' death and resurrection and finally perfected for us in the eschatological resurrection to come. Thus, the Eucharist fixes and harmonizes the narrative of God's relationship to humanity from the creation of the body in the beginning to the resurrection of the body in the end.

Yet, second, the flesh of Jesus that is present in the Eucharist also has a narrative that is read from the church's lectern, confessed, and proclaimed from episcopal chairs. It is for this reason that the "fourfold Gospel,"<sup>54</sup> as Irenaeus puts it, resides at the center of the church's canon of Scripture. The four Gospels display the archetype that holds together the law, the prophetic discourses, and the apostolic epistles in one narrative and canon. Indeed, the flesh of Jesus—present in the Eucharist and displayed in narrative form by the evangelists—is the fixed archetype that gives the entirety of Scripture its perspicuity. Irenaeus's perspective is demonstrated by his reading of the parable of the treasure hidden in the field.

If one reads the Scriptures with careful attention, he will find in them the account of Christ and the prefiguring (*προτύπωσιν*) of the new calling. For, this

<sup>53</sup> *AH* IV.18, 5 (*ANF* 1:486; *SC* 100:610–611).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *AH* III.11, 8 (*ANF* 1:428; Harvey 2:46–50).

one is the treasure hidden in the field, that is, in the world, for “the field is the world” (Matt 13:38); yet, he is hidden in the Scriptures since he was signified through types and parables, his humanity not being intelligible before the consummation of prophecies had come, that is, the advent (*ἡ παρουσία*) of the Lord. . . . For every prophecy before its fulfillment remains full of enigmas and ambiguities for men; but, when the time comes and the prophecy is realized, then they attain an accurate exposition.<sup>55</sup>

Christ’s flesh transforms the Scriptures from enigmatic signs of a hidden future into clear images of the one who is present. After the advent of Christ, the Scriptures are no longer merely prophetic; they are descriptive. Thus, the flesh of Jesus gives the Christian reading of Scripture its distinctive character. Irenaeus continues,

On account of this, when the law is read by Jews in the present moment, it is like a myth; for, they do not possess the exposition of all things (*τὴν ἐξήγησιν τῶν πάντων*), which is the presence of the Son of God as man. Yet, when read by Christians, it is a treasure, hidden on the one hand in a field, but on the other hand illuminated by the cross of Christ.<sup>56</sup>

The correlative relationship between the presence of Christ’s flesh in the Eucharist and the narrative of his flesh in the Scriptures constitutes the life of the church. Indeed, this ecclesial correlation between the Eucharist and the “fourfold Gospel” gives the church a fundamental place in Irenaeus’s understanding of the perspicuity principle. On the one hand, perspicuity entails a vertical dimension rooted in the very being of God, extending through the flesh of Jesus and becoming accessible to the human mode of existence. Yet, on the other hand, the fact that God has condescended to human sensory perception means that the perspicuity principle also entails a horizontal dimension that consists in a living, open, and reciprocal conversation within the church. It is for this reason that Irenaeus gives a third level of interpretation to the treasure hidden in the field. Jesus’ flesh is not only the treasure hidden in the world and in the Scriptures, but it is also the treasure placed in the church. The church is the household from which “the householder brings forth out of his treasure both the new and the old” (Matt 13:52).<sup>57</sup> Irenaeus then concludes, “Paul teaches where one finds these things, saying ‘God has placed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers’ (1 Cor 12:28). Therefore, where the gifts of God have been placed, there it is necessary to learn the truth.”<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *AH IV.26, 1 (ANF 1:496; SC 100:712–715).*

<sup>56</sup> *AH IV.26, 1 (ANF 1:496; SC 100:714–715).*

<sup>57</sup> *AH IV.26, 1 (ANF 1:497; SC 100:716–717).*

<sup>58</sup> *AH IV.26, 5 (ANF 1:498; SC 100:728–729).*

For Irenaeus, the perspicuity of Scripture is firmly connected to the catholicity of the church. “Let us make man . . .” (Gen 1:26). The creation of humanity has its origin in the correspondence between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When the Word became flesh, the theological conversation of the Trinity became accessible to humanity and constitutive of the church’s life.

Irenaeus certainly appreciated that he gained access to this divine conversation through Polycarp, Ignatius of Antioch, and Clement of Rome, who in turn gained access through John, Paul, Peter, and the apostles.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, we are all bound to recognize that there are countless preachers, teachers, martyrs, and saints who are part of the theological tradition in which we participate. It is for this reason that it is good, right, and salutary that we give thanks to God for Dr. Weinrich; for all professors, pastors, and teachers; and for the whole catholic fellowship of the church. For, in their company, we receive our place in the divine conversation that continues unto eternity.

To Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.

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<sup>59</sup> See AH III.3, 3–4 (ANF 1:416; Harvey 2:10–15), where Irenaeus speaks of the “apostolic tradition” as transmitted from the apostles through bishops and teachers like Linus, Clement of Rome, and Polycarp. See also AH V.28, 4 (ANF 1:557; SC 153:360–363), where Irenaeus quotes Ignatius of Antioch and AH IV.6, 2 (ANF 1:468; SC 100:440–441), where he quotes Justin Martyr. Throughout his work, Irenaeus describes the church as diverse peoples united in a catholic harmony. Cf. AH I.10, 2 (ANF 1:331; Harvey 1:92), where Irenaeus writes that the church is “scattered in the whole world; yet as dwelling in but one house, she preserves [the faith]. She also believes . . . as having one soul, and the same heart; and she preaches, teaches, and traditions [the faith] with perfect harmony as having one mouth. For although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the power of the tradition is one and the same.”