Adam and Christ in the Theology of Irenaeus of Lyons; an examinination of the function

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present study is to examine the meaning attached to Adam and Christ in the Adversus Haereses of Irenaeus. Born probably about 140 in or near Smyrna, and presumably deceased around 202, Irenaeus of Lyons, as bishop of that city,


2 It may be that Irenaeus perished during a persecution in Lyons under Septimius Severus (193-211) in 202 (F. M. M. Sagnard, l.c. p. 64, note 2; J. Moreau, La persécution du christianisme dans l’Empire romain, Paris, 1956, p. 81; A. Kleinclauss, Histoire de Lyon, I, Lyon, 1939, p. 53). Not until Pseudo-Justin (Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos CXV, P.G., 6, col. 1364) and Gregorius of Tours (Hist. Franc.I.27, P.L., 71, col. 175 and De gloria martyrum L, P.L., 71, col. 752) is Ir. called a martyr. According to Gregorius of Tours he was killed on June 28 203 and afterwards buried in the crypt of the basilica of ‘beatus Johannes’ under the altar. In De vir. ill. 35 Hieronymus does not, in a later work, Comm. in Is. ad 64,4, he does name Irenaeus as a martyr (P.L., 24, col. 647).

shortly after the persecution of the Christians there in 177, wrote a book in five volumes, "Εν ολίγοις εκείνοις περιγράφοντα τῆς ἰατρούμου τῶν γνώσεων also called Adversus Haereses.¹

This work is directed against 'haereses', against adherents of a doctrine which Irenaeus names ἰατρούμου γνώσεις (cf. I Tim.6.20). This is a general name, for gnosticism comprised a great many doctrinal systems pertaining to different groups.² All are concerned with the salvation of the inner, spiritual man, the 'interior homo spiritualis' (Adv. Haer. I.21.4). Man's true self, the Ego, the soul, the νοσίς must be liberated from the darkness of this world that environs it. For man's true self derives from the world of light, up above, and is living as a prisoner in this world, chained to his body. By νοσίς, which is brought to man from above for his salvation, he can be freed. Through νοσίς man realises that he is lost, and how he came into this lost condition.³


³ R. Bultmann in Kittel ThWB, I, SS. 692 s.v. νοσίς; L. Goppelt, Christentum und Judentum im ersten und zweiten Jahrhundert, Göttingen, 1954, S. 130, Anm. 2; G. Quispel, Gnosis als Weltreligion, Zürich, 1951, S. 19 points out that the Valentinians proclaimed programmatically: 'der Geist selbst,
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Gnosticism was a very widespread movement in the first and
second century of our era. It has even been referred to as a
'Weltreligion'.

In Lyons, too, Irenaeus came into contact with adherents of
Gnostic groups: it was the seduction emanating from Marcus the
Magian and others which stimulated him to write his Adversus

In Adversus Haereses Irenaeus combats gnostis as it was taught
by Valentinus and his school. Irenaeus also counts Marcion among
the Gnostics, briefly epitomising his doctrine (Adv. Haer. I.27.2-4)
and stating that he will write a separate refutation of it (Adv.
Haer. I.27.4). Of this writing against Marcion nothing is known.

Irenaeus has read the writings of the Gnostics (Adv. Haer. I.Praef.
1). He calls them 'interpretatores mali eorum, quae bene dicta
sunt' (Adv. Haer. I.Praef.1), and says that they speak like Chris­
tians, but think entirely differently from the Christians (Adv.
Haer. I.Praef.2).

In brief, Book I of Adversus Haereses gives a description of the
Gnostic doctrine of Valentinus and Valentinian teachers, Book

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programmatically: 'der Geist selbst,
II deals more fully with these ideas, exposing and refuting them ('detectio et eversio sententiae ipsorum', Adv. Haer. II, Praef. 2). Book III speaks again of 'eas, quae a Valentino sunt, sententias absconditas' (Adv. Haer. III, Praef.) and attempts to adduce proof to refute them from the Gospels, the Apostles and the words of Jesus himself, Book IV confirms the preceding expositions with the words of the Lord, and Book V combats the wrong interpretation of Paul's letters by the Gnostics.

The subtitle of the present study is: 'an examination of the function of the Adam-Christ typology in the Adversus Haereses of Irenaeus, against the background of the Gnosticism of his time'. The concept 'typology' was chosen, because Irenaeus describes Adam as 'typus futuri' (Adv. Haer. III.22.3) and because in Adversus Haereses Adam and Christ form a certain correlation, which may be termed a typology. Typology is 'die Feststellung des Entsprechungsverhältnisses von Personen, Geschehnissen, Einrichtungen und Gegenständen einer früheren Zeit mit bestimmten einer späteren Zeit: Adam-Christus, Moses-Christus'.

Typology means the describing of 'zwei geschichtlichen Grössen in ihrem Entsprechungsverhältnis', whereby it should be borne in mind that 'zur Denkweise der christlichen Typologie immer als Voraussetzung die Gottesherrschaft in der Geschichte gehört'.

Some questions that arise are: Why does Irenaeus often use the name of Adam? What is the meaning of the addition 'primus-

4 B. Reynders, Lexique comparé du texte grec et des versions latine, arménienne et syrienne de l'Adversus Haereses de Saint Irenée, 2 vols., Louvain, 1934 (abbreviated henceforth as: Lexique ...), names 56 instances.
deas, exposing and refuting them (ipsorum', Adv. Haer. II, Praef. 2), as a Valentinian sun, sententias (quae a Valentino sunt, sententias cf.) and attempts to adduce proof, the Apostles and the words of the preceding expositions with the mathematics the wrong interpretation of

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secundus'? Why is the second Adam called Son of Man? What significance has the Adam-Christ typology in the whole theology of Irenaeus as developed in Adversus Haereses?

Gnosticism also took an interest in typology. In Gnosticism also typological expositions were given of the O.T. and N.T. Wherever in the Bible a name or a number could be connected by the Gnostics with the aeons and the events in the Pleroma, a typological explanation was given. For instance, Jesus at twelve years old and the choice of the twelve apostles are both τώπος of the twelve aeons (Adv. Haer. I.3.2), but so are the twelve sons of Jacob, the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve stones in the breastplate of the Jewish high priest, the twelve stones that Joshua laid in the river Jordan, the twelve bearers of the Ark, the twelve stones with which Elijah built the altar for burnt-offerings, indeed, wherever the number twelve appears in the Bible the Gnostics regard it as τώπος of the twelve aeons (Adv. Haer. I.18.4).


Besides numbers, Gnosticism also used events and words from the Bible for typological explanations. The betrayal of Judas, for instance, was seen as τώπος of the suffering Sophia, since he was the twelfth disciple and she the twelfth aeon (Adv. Haer. I.3.3). The τώπος of the suffering Sophia was also seen in the story of the woman who had had an issue of blood for twelve years (Luke 8.43sqq.) and was healed by Jesus (Adv. Haer. I.3.3). Events described in the Bible could function in Gnosticism as bearing some reference (cf. Adv. Haer. I.1.3: ἐπιδεικνύω, Adv. Haer. I.3.2: φανεροθαι, Adv. Haer. I.3.3: δηλον, Adv. Haer. I.8.3: δηλον, manifestare).

In the Gnostic view the Bible is no more than an illustration of the true, 'deeper' or 'higher' action taking place in the Pleroma. Hence the Gnostics attach no value to history.

In Adversus Haereses the core of Irenaeus's argumentation is, that the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (cf. John 1.14). In none of the Gnostic systems was this taught (Adv. Haer. III.11.3: 'secundum autem nullam sententiam haereticorum Verbum Dei caro
factum est’). For Irenaeus, the flesh taken on by the Word was the flesh of Adam (Adv. Haer. I.9.3). Thus for Irenaeus also Adam is τός τοῦ Χριστοῦ of Christ (cf. Rom. 5.14).

The Adam-Christ typology is one of the threads leading to the centre of the theology of Irenaeus in Adversus Haereses. The part (Adam-Christ typology) and the whole (the theology of Adversus Haereses) belong together.

The period of research into the various literary sources from which Irenaeus drew his work may be regarded as closed. Instead, his work is considered as a whole, although this may be done from several different points of view.

In Adversus Haereses, it is chiefly the doctrine of Valentinus and the Valentinian School which Irenaeus describes. For a long time Adversus Haereses was one of the sources for the study of Gnosticism. The discovery by C. Schmidt in 1896 of a Gnostic source


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the study of the sources is still incomplete, although this may be done from
the time before Irenaeus, made it possible to compare the Gnostic
texts with the rendering in Adversus Haereses in order to see
whether Irenaeus gave a reliable account of his Gnostic opponents.

Such a comparison has also been instituted between the Letter to
Flora\(^1\) of Ptolemaeus, one of the leaders of the Italian school of
the Valentinian groups, and the rendering by Irenaeus of the
Irenaeus states that the Valentinians possess a Gospel of Truth
which does not agree with the canonical Gospels. H.-Ch. Puech and
G. Quispel are of opinion, that the Evangelium Veritatis\(^4\) contained
in the Codex Jung\(^6\) and the Evangelium Veritatis mentioned by
Irenaeus in Adv. Haer. III.2.9 are identical.\(^6\)

It is by no means out of the question, that new material for

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\(^2\) The text of this letter is also found in Epiphanius, Panarion, 33.1-7, c. A. Stieren, Sancti Irenaei Episcopi Lugdunensis quae supersunt omnia, I, Leipzig, 1853, Appendix, p. 922 seq. and G. Quispel, The original doctrine of Valentine, in: VC, I, 1947, p. 43-73, esp. p. 44.

\(^3\) The second of the Nag Hammadi writings contained in the Codex Jung, cf. H. Ch. Puech, Das Evangelium der Wahrheit, in: Hennecke-Schmeelcher, I, SS. 160.


\(^6\) A Coptic codex obtained on May 10th 1952 by G. Quispel for the Jung Institute in Zürich.

comparison may still be found, for: ‘die Probleme, welche die Gnosisforschung stellt – sind seit den Funden von Nag-Hammadi in eine ganz neue Phase gekommen. Alle Auffassungen und Theorien, welche vor 1950 aufgestellt sind, müssen als prinzipiell überholt und veraltet betrachtet werden, weil neue Tatsachen bekannt ge­worden sind und noch immer bekannt werden’.1

The remark of A. Bengsch: ‘Wo es um die Frage einer Heilsge­schichtlichen Theologie geht, kann man offenbar nicht an Irenäus vorbei’,2 may explain the fresh interest in the theology of Irenaeus of Lyons that has arisen of late years.3

The present study is composed as follows:

Chapter I enumerates the Adam-Christ texts in Adversus Haereses Book III, with a short summary, and also enumerates the Adam-Christ texts in Adversus Haereses Book V, again with a short summary.

Chapter 2 relates Irenaeus’s description of the Gnosticism of his time. Gnostic cosmogony and ‘anthropogony’, Gnostic soteriology and ethics are dealt with, and a short summary closes the chapter.

Chapter 3 deals with the manner in which Irenaeus has exposed and refuted the various Gnostic conceptions. What are – according to Irenaeus – the chief points of the Gnostic doctrine and how can they be combated? How does Irenaeus handle the ‘regula fidei’ and the ‘traditio’?

Chapter 4 discusses the function of the Adam-Christ typology in Adversus Haereses. Besides a negative purpose – unmasking and

2 A. Bengsch, a.a.O. S. XIV.
In Chapter 5, instances of the Adam-Christ typology in the first and second century are sought. Rom. 5.12-21 is discussed and also I Cor. 15.21-22 and 45-49. The problem to be answered here is: did Irenaeus take over the opinion of the Apostle Paul with regard to sin and the resurrection of the flesh, or did he alter it?

Chiliasm, as found in Adv. Haer. V.32-36 is also discussed in this connection.

An inquiry follows, whether the Apostolic Fathers provide elements, which might have influenced the Adam-Christ typology. Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, the Easter homily of Melito of Sardis, and the 'apocryphal correspondence between the Corinthians and the Apostle Paul' are similarly treated.

For the text of Adversus Haereses the edition was used of A. Stieren: Sancti Irenaei episcopi Lugdunensis quae supersunt omnia, 2 Bände, Leipzig, 1853. The quotations in the present work are taken from this edition (e.g. Adv. Haer. 1.2.3 = Book I, Chapter 2, paragraph 3).

For purposes of comparison W. W. Harvey: S. Irenaei Libros quinque Adversus Haereses, 2 vols., Cambridge, 1857 was used.¹

For the translation E. Klebba: Des heiligen Irenaus ausgewählte Schriften, BKV 3/4, Kempten und München, 1912 was consulted.


The need for a new, complete edition of Adversus Haereses has been felt for a long time.² The want is in part supplied by the new edition of A. Stieren, but many passages and notes are included which are not used in the present work.

¹ Like Stieren, Harvey used the text edition of R. Massuet, Paris 1710, but added the Greek text of passages taken from the Refutatio of Hippolytus.

Leeuwarden, October 1967.