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IRENAEUS AND UNITY

About the Book "Irénée de Lyon, théologien de l'unité"[1]

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ABSTRACT

This article is an in-depth study of a recently published book on the notion of unity by the church father Irenaeus of Lyon. The 26 articles that make up the book are reviewed, in a manner that is more synthetic than analytical. In this way, we try to discern the main lines of force, the deep tendencies that inhabit this collective publication. Is the "Irenaean community" united? We distinguish two main orientations within this group of researchers: a historical and a theological one. We show both the legitimate approaches of these two schools and their limitations. To what extent can these two trends be unified? The second part or our article considers the very notion of unity, both in this book and according to Irenaeus. For Irenaeus, unity sometimes seems to be a broader concept than that which emerges from this monograph. For Irenaeus, unity is not only organic, but also metaphysical. It is around this broader notion of unity that it would be desirable to build unity.

INTRODUCTION

One year after Irenaeus of Lyon was officially proclaimed "doctor of the church", under the title of "Doctor of Unity", the publication in January 2023 of a volume of essays entitled "Irénée de Lyon, Théologien de l'Unité" provides an exciting opportunity to delve into the most recent research on this Father of the Church. We offer here our reflections on this work. They are the fruit of twenty years' assiduous study of Irenaeus and a careful and sympathetic reading of all the articles in this collective book. The thrust of the following lines is a meditation on unity in the spirit of Saint Irenaeus. We will begin by discussing the unity of the scientific community that has produced this work. We will then consider the meaning that the authors of this work give to the notion of unity. And we will compare it with what we have understood

[1] Bady – Chaieb (eds.): Irénée de Lyon, théologien de l'unité. I would like to thank Gabriel de Colnet and Pierre Molinié for reviewing this study.

of unity in Irenaeus. Finally, we will open the debate on other themes of unity in the bishop of Lyon's teaching.

I. THE UNITY OF THE IRENAEAN SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

1. The Community's profile

The community of researchers who contributed to this book can be described as follows. Most of the authors are French-speaking (13 out of 22). 3 come from the English-speaking world (1 English, 1 Canadian, 1 American), 2 are Italian, 2 researchers are Armenian living in Europe (Louvain and Lyon), 1 is Greek from Thessaloniki, 1 is a French-speaker writing on Georgia. The denominations of the researchers are varied – Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, non-denominational – as G. Bady underlines in his introduction.[2] But on the whole, religious affiliation remains discreet and is never used as a label to make claims. It is scientific research that takes precedence among all these authors and constitutes the unifying element of this community. The community is also a living entity: not only do the authors mention the articles of their colleagues, but they also make frequent reference to fruitful written and oral exchanges. The meetings between these researchers have provided a valuable intellectual stimulus.

Among the university towns represented, Lyon (8 authors) and Rome (3 authors) alone account for more than half of the articles. This lively communication between Lyon and Rome recalls Gregory the Great's famous letter to Etherius, bishop of Lyon, in 601, concerning the manuscripts of Irenaeus.[3] By this time, the aura of the Doctor of Unity had already been overshadowed by the post-Nicene Fathers. Let us hope that this renewed exchange between Rome and Lyon about Irenaeus will bear much fruit and "recapitulate", to speak in an Irenaean way, the disappointing exchange of the seventh century.

Notable absentees from this community include German researchers, who are present only through their publications referenced at the bottom of the page. The overwhelming majority of European authors is also a call to open up the Irenaean community to other continents. The Chilean school of theology, for example, numbers good Irenaean scholars, such as R. Polanco (quoted in this book) and Cl. Pierantioni.

[2] Bady: Irénée "Docteur de l'unité" et "théologien de l'unité", 15.

[3] Gregory the Great: *Epist.* XI, 40 (CCSL 140A, 937): "As for the deeds and writings of Blessed Irenaeus, we have been searching carefully for a long time, but to date we have not managed to find anything". (The translation is ours).

Africa and Oceania, notably with Denis Minns in Australia, could also have been invited to contribute.

It should also be noted that some of the contributors to this volume (at least E. Ayroulet, as vice-postulator, A. Bastit and M.-L. Chaieb) were involved in drafting the *positio* sent to the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints in Rome in preparation to the official declaration of Irenaeus as a Doctor of the Church. From the outset, this shows just how official this publication is. It is, in a way, the "memorial book of Irenaeus' doctorate". It attempts to answer the question: In what way can we call Irenaeus *Doctor unitatis*, as Pope Francis announced on 21 January 2022? It is unlikely, therefore, that the most original aspects of the doctrine of the Bishop of Lyon will be found in this volume, since at least some of the data presented here has served as material for a plea to facilitate a magisterial decision: the Pope's proclamation of Irenaeus' doctorate. This book is therefore a call for the publication of its twin with all the new themes of research, which are not mentioned in the present work. We will come back to this.

This community is also united by the themes addressed in the articles. The Irenaean themes dealt with can be described as "classic". The main subjects of theological investigation are the *regula fidei*, the unity between faith and reason, the question of Roman primacy, recapitulation, the good pleasure of God (divine plan), the economic Trinity, the debate on bipartite or tripartite anthropology, and the *imago Dei*. These are indeed the major aspects of Irenaeus' theology. All Bachelor of Theology students should study at least one of these well-known aspects of Irenaeus. This recent book takes a fresh look at these themes, with a wealth of useful reflections and references for students. For experienced researchers, however, this volume may sometimes give the impression that certain Irenaean concepts have been treated to the point of exhaustion. In this respect, some of the articles are reminiscent of late scholasticism: an excess of erudition, an increasing technicality of language, but nothing theologically original always emerges from these works.

This unified and academic treatment of the great Irenaean themes does not erase all particularism. The concept of "unity in diversity", much emphasised in this book and to which we shall return, applies perfectly to the scientific community involved. There really are all styles of researchers. Some are more inclined towards theology, others towards philology, still others towards history, and so on. At the risk of being a little schematic, however, we can distinguish two major sensitivities within this community. The point is not to force all the authors into two boxes. Many of the articles are atypical and do not fit neatly into one or another category. But let us try to characterise these two "schools".

2. The two "schools" of thought

a) A historical trend

Thesis

The tendency of the first school is historical. The authors of this school are keen to place the Church of Irenaeus' time in its historical context. On this point, H. Pietras' article, the very first in the volume, seems quite emblematic. The aim of this article is, in a way, to demythologise the beginnings of the Church (that of Irenaeus' time) from a post-Nicene rereading. In fact, the "imperial Church" reinterpreted at her convenience the birth of Tradition, and this, according to Pietras, does not correspond to historical reality. And Irenaeus helps us to re-establish the truth on this point. According to Pietras, Irenaeus presents Tradition first and foremost as a content of faith, and therefore as knowledge. In the time of Irenaeus, the Church had more of a community dimension than a hierarchical one. It let the Holy Spirit do its work, and Christians, especially leaders, behaved morally in accordance with their faith. It was holiness, his fidelity to the Gospel, that made the leader, and not primarily his position. For Pietras, the imperial Church, on the other hand, later took on a much more juridical character. And apostolic succession was then understood as the continuity of the sacramental laying on of hands rather than as a simple transmission of knowledge of the faith, as was the case in the time of Irenaeus. Pietras says: "Irenaeus does not speak of a mythical apostolic succession that would have been realised through an uninterrupted transmission of the laying on of hands, because it is not men who appoint presbyters, but the Spirit".[4]

What are we to make of this thesis? It is true that Irenaeus, of the 37 officially declared Doctors of the Church, is the only pre-Nicene author. This particularity should therefore be emphasised. We are invited to contemplate a pre-Nicene theology which, until now, has received proportionately less attention than the later periods, since it had not yet "produced" a doctor.[5] Ante-Nicene times are still little explored theologically, and the appointment of Irenaeus as a doctor seems providential.

Moreover, the phenomenon of the imperial Church's rewriting of early theological history is now well known. We know that there are many false documents that rewrite early doctrinal history in a way that is perfectly consistent with what it became in the imperial and medieval periods. For example, the history of the sacrament of marriage mentions a false ninth-century decretal by Pseudo-Isidore on marriage, attributed to Pope Evaristus, the first successor of Saint Peter. According to this text, as early as the time of the second Pope in the history of the Church (1st century), there was already a notion of Christian marriage taking place in public before a

[4] Pietras: L'unité de l'Église, 40.

[5] Pasquier: Théologie du corps, 549–550.

priest.[6] This mythical approach is therefore a rewriting of the history of the early Church with the aim of erasing all the paradoxes of history. And Pietras' historical sensibility rightly objects.

However, this author does not entirely avoid the pitfall of reaching to the opposite excess. He sometimes seems to idealise the early Church to the point of making it a separate reality from the imperial Church. This gives the impression that the Church at the end of the second century was quite different from the imperial Church. The spectre of A. Loisy's famous expression "Jesus announced the kingdom, and it is the Church that has come"[7] appears in the background. Thus, the plan initially laid out by Jesus would have been profoundly modified by the imperial Church, but this plan would still be perceptible in Irenaeus' writings. Wouldn't Pietras be passing from one myth to another? Let us analyse the objections to this idea, first from a historical point of view, and then in relation to the thought of Irenaeus himself.

Objections

– On the historical point of view

The discontinuity between the early Church of Irenaeus' time and the imperial Church does not seem to have been as absolute as Pietras suggests. There are indeed elements of continuity. For example, the canonisation of New Testament writings was the work of the imperial Church, but it was largely initiated by Irenaeus.[8] The Bishop of Lyons set about defining a list of apostolic writings that would later become normative by decision of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The process of canonisation of the New Testament is therefore common to the two periods separated by Pietras.[9] Another point in common: the appointment of leaders in the spirit of a charism of function, and no longer only – as was the case in the first century – in relation to a charism of prophecy.[10] The community leader no longer needed to personally have prophetic charismatic revelations but had to demonstrate only human qualities and a good knowledge of the already established biblical Revelation. The Church of Irenaeus' time, though pre-imperial, was already no longer the ideal community described in the Acts of the Apostles (2,42–47). What is more, the reality of history does not fit the pattern according to which the fight against heresies after the Edict of Milan (313) would have exactly replaced the fight against the Roman Empire in Irenaeus' time, with the Church moving from state persecution to doctrinal "persecution" by certain deviant currents. The time of the Bishop of Lyon was a time of persecution by both the Roman Empire and the Gnostic heresy. The fight against heresy was

[6] Schillebeeckx: Marriage. Human Reality and, 269–272.

[7] Loisy: L'Évangile et l'Église, 111. (The translation is ours).

[8] Norelli: Les bases de la formation, 834.

[9] Bingham: Senses of Scripture in the Second Century, 54.

[10] Norelli: Les bases de la formation, 834.

therefore an element of continuity between the two periods. Heresy did not wait for the end of the imperial persecutions to see the light of day. Moreover, Irenaeus was not an "ultra-opponent" to the Roman Empire. In the spirit of Romans 13, he repeatedly calls for respect for the existing authorities.[11] His apocalyptic spirit is moderate, not exaggerated. He also defends the primacy of Rome, which was the capital of the Empire at the time. This emphasis on Rome in religious terms does not, at the very least, invite political denigration. It is Rome as a whole, as an eminently apostolic city and imperial capital, that is praised by Irenaeus.

We also know that the Church was already expanding rapidly in the second century.[12] Christianity did not wait to become a state religion before experiencing exponential growth. According to Norelli, the second century saw the gradual establishment of institutions for governing communities: a single bishop with control over an increasingly large group of Christians. For Norelli, this centralisation of power was certainly decisive for the survival of groups of believers in Jesus and for the stabilisation of Christianity as a religion.[13]

In terms of Irenaeus' theology itself

As for the very logic of Irenaean theology, here again the thesis of the sharp discontinuity between the second and fourth centuries poses a problem. Irenaeus does not actively support the theory of a "golden age" at the beginning of a historical period. His theology of progress and accustoming postulates that the perfection of history will come at the end. If there is an idealisation of history in Irenaeus, it is in the millennium, at the end rather than at the beginning. Pietras' strong insistence on the Spirit at work in the early Church – in tension with the ecclesial hierarchy – suggests a Joachimite influence on his thinking. But the Irenaean millennium is very different from the millennium of Joachim of Fiore.[14] Irenaeus' "kingdom of the just" is no more an "age of the Spirit" than an "age of the Son". In Irenaeus, the "two hands of the Father", Son and Spirit, always act together. In short, Irenaeus is clearly the apostle of historical continuity in growth. If history is one, why should the Church of Irenaeus' time and the imperial Church be two?

Moreover, Pietras clearly wants to avoid a materialistic and magical conception of sacramentality, in other words, the caricatured presentation of the sacraments in the Middle Ages. Hence his insistence on the principle of knowledge – faith – at the time of Irenaeus, rather than on a quasi-mechanical apostolic succession, independent of

[11] Pasquier: Saint Irénée de Lyon, 91.

[12] Blaudeau: Constructions géo-ecclésiologiques, 69.

[13] Norelli: Les bases de la formation, 846.

[14] Pasquier: Approches du millénium, 413–429.

holiness and charisms, through the laying on of hands.[15] But this emphasis on the principle of knowledge alone does not correspond to the spirit of Irenaeus himself. All his efforts were devoted to countering a category of Christians, the Gnostics, who based their system on knowledge alone, to the detriment of the more incarnational elements of religion.[16] Irenaeus, on the other hand, bases all his teaching not only on knowledge of the faith, but also on the intrinsic goodness of human physicality and the actions that flow from it. How can we think that the outline of the sacrament of Holy Orders through the laying on of hands was of no importance to Irenaeus, who insisted so much on the creation and re-creation of the world by "the two hands of the Father"? The Father in heaven would have hands while men here on earth would be with no arms? For Irenaeus, the whole divine plan is a laying on of hands by God the Father on the world, on his priestly people. Wouldn't it have an analogy among human beings?

Most of the articles in the first part of the book, entitled "The Church, a crystallisation of the problems of unity", reflect this historical trend. H. Pietras, Ph. Blaudeau, M. Dujarier,[17] M.-L. Chaieb and P. Mattei, for example, present the idea of a Church that is neither juridical nor hierarchical, but above all fraternal and centred on the acceptance of the Gospel, on plurality, diversity, decentralisation, synodality and so on. One cannot help but think of a certain ecclesiological a priori. The reference on two occasions to I. Marrou's "authorised" interpretation of the *propter potentiorem principalitatem* (primacy of Rome) – in the sense of an "ecclesiology of communion" – is significant of this sensitivity.[18] The Vatican I Council Fathers, who interpreted Irenaeus on this theme in a more centralising sense, are somewhat disqualified.[19]

Generally speaking, the vocation of theology is not simply to take up the current ideas of our time or themes already highlighted in the Church, even by the Supreme Pontiff himself. Theology must also continue to inspire new ideas drawn from Christian sources such as Irenaeus. Theology remains free, even if she is at the service of the Magisterium.

[15] Pietras is opposed not only to a medieval caricature of apostolic succession, but also to the "pipeline theory", very well described in Merkt: "Ministère de la tradition" et "charisme de la vérité", 27–42.

[16] Merkt: "Ministère de la tradition" et "charisme de la vérité", 29, about the Lutheran theologian Georg Major: "The true Catholic Church was not constituted by the *successio ordinaria*, the episcopal succession, but by the *successio doctrinae*, the doctrinal succession. He was probably unaware that he was following in the footsteps of Gnostic thinkers such as Ptolemy" (The translation is ours). Aren't there similarities between this approach and that of H. Pietras?

[17] Dujarier: L'Église, "caravane" de frères et de sœurs, 86–95.

[18] *Adversus Haereses* [*Ah*] III, 3, 2; Pietras: L'unité de l'Église, 85; Mattei: L'héritage ecclésiologique d'Irénée, 127.

[19] Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution "Pastor aeternus" (July 18, 1870); DS 3056.

b) A theological trend

A laudable principle of dogma development

Facing this first school, which is mainly historical, a second very different sensibility is represented in this book. From the outset, it is more theological than historical. It consists in presenting Irenaeus in a manner consistent with subsequent theological developments. This intellectual approach is based on the laudable principle of a homogeneous development of dogma throughout the history of the Church. The teaching of Irenaeus, an early Catholic theologian, must necessarily be linked to the expressions of Catholic faith that came after him. To support this idea, the principle of Saint Vincent of Lérins can be recalled: "Let the understanding, the knowledge, and wisdom of individuals as of all, of one man as of the whole Church, grow and progress strongly with the passage of the ages and the centuries; but let it be solely in its own genus, namely in the same dogma, with the same sense and the same understanding".[20] The theological authority of Irenaeus is thus only strengthened if we can show that the "growth" in the interpretation of Christian revelation over the centuries has been in "the same sense" as the impetus he originally gave in the second century.

Irenaeus, largely absent from the history of theology

However, it is important to know what actually happened in the case of Irenaeus. On the whole, the authors of this volume rightly emphasise the weak influence of Irenaeus on later theologians, especially in the heart of the Christian West, but also in the East. A survey carried out in this volume on the repercussions of Irenaeus in Tertullian, Cyprian and Maximus the Confessor reveals the weak influence of the Bishop of Lyon on the later Fathers.[21] Only one periphery, Armenia (and Georgia), can claim to have been influenced by Irenaeus at a time when he had less influence in the major centres of Christianity.[22] In fact, Irenaeus fell into oblivion fairly quickly in the late patristic period, and he was little known in the Middle Ages, at the time of

[20] Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium primum* 23 (PL 50, c. 668); DS 3020. Vincent of Lérins could also have been influenced by Irenaeus on this theological point, because of the links between Lérins and the Irenaean Ireland of his time. See Pasquier: Approches du millénium, 366–367.

[21] Mattei: L'héritage ecclésiologique, 115–129 (Tertullien et Cyprien); Ayroulet: Entre Irénée et Maxime le Confesseur, 462–469 (Maxime). Bady: Le bon plaisir de Dieu (*eudokia*) chez Irénée et d'autres Pères grecs, 201, does not conclude that Irenaeus had a clear and explicit influence on the later Greek Fathers. Filiotis-Vlachavas: Saint Irénée dans la théologie hellénophone, 299, also points to a lesser influence of Irenaeus in the Eastern tradition, in comparison with many other Greek Fathers.

[22] Kepeklian: Que savons-nous de la version arménienne, 213–241; Yevadian: Lire Irénée de Lyon, 242–272; Outtier: Irénée inattendu, 273–279.

the great theological syntheses.[23] Saint Thomas Aquinas does not mention Irenaeus once. The traces of Irenaeus in Christian antiquity and in the Middle Ages are, on the whole, very few, especially in comparison with those left by the post-Nicene Fathers. There has never been an "Irenaeanism" in the same way as there is an Augustinianism. Nor has Irenaean literature been plagued by the phenomenon of pseudepigraphy. History has not recorded the existence of a "Pseudo-Irenaeus" who plagiarised and distorted the thought of the master, so well-known and widespread was this thought. On the other hand, there is a pseudepigraphy of almost all the main post-Nicene Church Fathers, both Western and Eastern. Irenaeus, on the other hand, experienced the opposite phenomenon: "desepigraphy", or censorship.

That Irenaeus left his mark on the collective theological unconscious and the spiritual tradition of the fourth to the sixteenth centuries is certain. Let's take a comparison with the history of marriage. "Marriage for love" is an almost non-existent concept in all patristic writings. Does this mean that there was no conjugal love in the daily lives of Christians of that time? Certainly not. Love, a mysterious and ineffable reality, was experienced more than it was expressed in writing.[24] Analogously Irenaeus' teaching – even if the Greek version of *Adversus Haereses* seems to have disappeared very early on – may have left living traces in the Western and Eastern theological tradition in the Middle Ages, notably through the monasteries that seem to have kept some of his manuscripts, unlike the cathedral schools and the libraries of the conventual orders. But trying to identify these traces at all costs is a matter of guesswork that adds little to theological understanding. Certain comparisons with medieval, modern and contemporary theology quickly prove to be ineffective, or even hazardous. Written evidence of Irenaeus' concrete influence on later epochs is often lacking. What's the point of fiction?

We can therefore conclude that if Irenaeus participated in the maturing of Christian theology, it was implicitly for over a thousand years, and then more explicitly from the sixteenth century onwards, when his work reappeared. In a way, Irenaeus was absent from 19 ecumenical councils. He did not participate directly in the colossal theological development of most ecumenical councils in the history of the Church. Indeed, the Council of Trent, the 19th ecumenical council, did not yet quote Irenaeus, whereas his famous *Catechism* did.[25] Trent was therefore a pivotal period for the theological revival of Irenaeus. Theological history before Trent took place, so to speak, without Irenaeus.

[23] Pasquier: Approches du millénium, 393–400.

[24] Schillebeeckx: Marriage. Human Reality and Saving Mystery, xxiv: "The unspeaking love and the silent loyalty of so many marriages".

[25] Pasquier: Approches du millénium, 486.

Theological comparisons that are sometimes a little forced

All this implies the need to treat the doctrinal posterity of Irenaeus with extreme caution. Concretely, in the present studies, a certain number of comparisons with later theology seem to us to be a little forced. In order of appearance of the articles, let us cite Lees's Augustinian-Thomistic presentation of the three forms of faith.[26] For *credere Deum* and *credere Deo*, the comparison with Irenaeus is still acceptable, but for *credere in Deum*, the explanation is less convincing.[27] In the same way, for the Aristotelian-Thomistic definition of truth – *adaequatio rei et intellectus*[28] – the comparison with Irenaeus is a little quick, because we need to be more precise about the status of reality in Irenaeus,[29] which is undoubtedly not the same as in Aristotle or St Thomas.

The article by A. Bastit is a special case, but in the end, it is in the same spirit as the previous ones[30]. Here, the relationship is established upstream of Irenaeus, rather than downstream. The aim is to show that on an anthropological question – the relationship between "animal soul" and "intellective soul" – in other words the debate between bipartite and tripartite anthropology – Irenaeus' thinking is close to that of Aristotle. This would prove that Irenaeus is, at least indirectly, close to Aristotelian Thomism. The demonstration does not seem convincing to us, because the author does not begin by quoting the two times when Irenaeus mentions the name of Aristotle. They are both negative. On both occasions it is the Gnostics, and not Irenaeus, who are disciples of Aristotle. The Gnostics thus have the nerve to put the image of Christ and that of Aristotle on the same level. And their subtleties attempt to set themselves up against the faith, in the manner of Aristotle.[31] So, if Irenaeus is an Aristotelian, it is really on the sly.[32]

It is true that the bishop of Lyon had such a sense of reality, linked to his very concrete theology of creation, the Incarnation, and the resurrection, that it may be tempting to establish a filiation with Aristotle. But this is far from obvious from Irenaeus' writings. Irenaeus' reason is that of a theologian enlightened by faith. He was not subservient to any philosophical school, but he does not fall however into fideism. The context of Irenaeus' time was very different from that of the Middle Ages. When St Thomas was using Aristotelian tools almost entirely in his theology, it was also the time of the great Christianity of the thirteenth century, the time when cathedrals were being built. In a way, Aristotelianism was the "rational cathedral"

[26] Lees: *Fidei regula, Regula veritatis*, 56–59.

[27] Ibid., 58–59.

[28] Ibid., 65.

[29] See the notion of "being of faith (être de foi)", Pasquier: Aux portes de la gloire, 136; *passim*.

[30] Bastit: *Homo vivens*, une redondance?, 303–332.

[31] Respectively *Ah* I, 25, 6 and II, 14, 5.

[32] Le Boulluec: La Notion d'hérésie, 140–142, « Hérésie et Aristotélisme », where Aristotle in Irenaeus is presented as an instrument of heresiological polemic.

that allowed Saint Thomas to "adore" the one and triune God in his theology. In Irenaeus, faith and reason are much more "blended" to use an expression and concept familiar to him (κρᾶσις). In this way, trying to find in Irenaeus the very reason of Aristotle (or that of the Porticus school), as Bastit does, seems a delicate operation.[33] In comparison, this identification of philosophical sources is much easier in Augustine, who clearly grew up as a philosopher before becoming a theologian.

If possible, we should study Irenaeus' reasoning with Irenaeus' own reason. And this reason is not a medieval cathedral, but rather a simple dwelling house, a domestic hearth, where, in his time, the Eucharist took place. Irenaeus' reason is therefore imbued with a great deal of common sense, with a consideration of the concrete, as in a family home. But it is not a grandiose instrument in the service of his theology, as in the case of Aristotelian-Thomism. And maybe Bastit does not always take these notions of the history of theology sufficiently into consideration.[34]

This volume also has the merit of addressing the question of time and history in Irenaeus, an eminently important subject. This theme is addressed in the articles by Y. De Andia on the "symphony of salvation" and D. Scordamaglia on the theology of history. These two studies are of a high scientific quality, and yet they sometimes suffer from the limitations of a reflection too marked by a concern for coherence with subsequent theological developments. Y. De Andia makes some very judicious remarks on the Trinitarian dimension of the notion of "rhythm" in Irenaeus.[35] But she does not to mention two important occurrences of this theological word in Irenaeus' description of the "kingdom of the just", in other words the millennium. One gets the impression that the question of the millennium remains taboo.

The same spirit pervades D. Scordamaglia's article. He achieves the feat of writing a long study on history without once mentioning the millennium, the keystone of the whole Irenaean theology of history. There are many interesting remarks in this article, but the discourse is sometimes a little smoothed out. Here again, we sense a coherent rewriting of the Irenaean text in the light of statements of faith after Irenaeus. This is the case, for example, with the use of the expression "the immediate vision of the Father" in the last paragraph of the section devoted to eschatology.[36] For the author, "incorruptibility" only means "immersion in the divine fullness" and has nothing to do with the resurrection of the flesh. Reading this paragraph, one gets the impression that Irenaeus had a prophetic vision of Benedict XII's Constitution *Benedictus Deus* on the "immediate vision" of the divine essence for separated souls.[37]

[33] Ayroulet: Irénée ou l'unité de la foi, 158.

[34] For an answer, see Bastit: D'Irénée à Thomas d'Aquin en passant par Jean de Damas.

[35] De Andia: La symphonie du salut, 142.

[36] Scordamaglia: Esquisses sur l'unité, 373.

[37] Benoît XII, Constitution *Benedictus Deus*, January 29th, 1336; DS 1000. Geréby: A Supremely Idle Question, 488.

But it is precisely this dogmatic point that causes difficulty for Irenaeus, because, in the wake of Judeo-Christian theology and in an anti-Gnostic context, he recognises that these separated souls have a diminished status and not yet full vision, which, according to him, will only take place at the resurrection. Separated souls go to an "invisible place" to await the resurrection.[38] So, here again, an effort to explain Irenaeus "by himself" rather than by later dogmatic developments would have been welcome.

The second article by D. Lees, on the distinction between divine τάξις and divinising τάξις, is also part of this almost excessively theological orientation. It could be described as a "systematic reduction" of Irenaeus' theology or an "ultra-systematic" presentation. Drawing inspiration from H.U. Balthasar's notion of "Trinitarian inversion", D. Lees brings creation in the image of God, the Incarnation, anthropology and salvation history into the same system. He notes that sometimes the Son has "precedence" over the Spirit (divine τάξις) and sometimes it is the Spirit who has it over the Son (divinising τάξις).[39] In Balthasar, however, the Father always comes first.[40] In Irenaeus, on the other hand, the Father sometimes comes first and sometimes last. The two Trinitarian approaches therefore have a different aspect. There is no doubt that Irenaeus does not reduce himself to an approach that is too systematic and consistent with later theological propositions. The distinction made by G. Emery, in listening to the Fathers of the Church, between a Trinitarian order of origin (Father, Son, Spirit) and an order of baptismal experience (Spirit, Son, Father) seems more useful in the case of Irenaeus.[41]

Ch. Guignard discreetly underlines this in his article on recapitulation and Marian theology. In doing so, he puts into perspective a study on Irenaeus, which he feels is too influenced by the theology of the Immaculate Conception.[42] He also warns against using the notion of "co-redemptrix" to discuss Marian theology in Irenaeus.[43] Similarly, the Greek Orthodox scholar Ch. Filiotis-Vlachavas warns us against reading the question of Roman primacy in too medieval or contemporary terms.[44] The position of Orthodoxy on this question is, of course, open to debate, but Orthodox theology, by calling almost exclusively on the Fathers of the Church for its speculative reflection, perhaps avoids falling into too many anachronisms. It is surely fruitful to place the question of Roman primacy in its patristic context, before speculating effectively on the actuality of this theological issue.

[38] *Ah* V, 31, 2.
[39] Lees: Les deux mains de Dieu, 184.
[40] Von Balthasar: Theo-Drama. T. 3: The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ, 183–202.
[41] Emery: The Trinity. An Introduction, 11.
[42] Guignard: Il fallait qu'Adam fût récapitulé dans le Christ, 407, n. 70.
[43] Ibid., 431.
[44] Filiotis-Vlachavas: Saint Irénée dans la théologie, 285–288.

Rejection of dogmatism about Irenaeus, but not of Irenaean dogmatics

Trying to explain Irenaeus first "by himself" does not mean cutting off all dogmatic study about the Doctor of Unity. But just as the attentive reader of the Bible likes to "waste time" by focusing on the literal meaning of the text before moving on to the more spiritual aspects, so, in the case of Irenaeus, taking the time to understand him first within the coherence of his work and his times is the best way to draw dogmatic teaching from him for today.

2. Overcoming division or rediscovering unity

The unity of the Irenaean scientific community is thus tested by a rather profound difference in point of view. What do the historicising school and the theologising school described above have in common? The former emphasise the theological discontinuity between the time of Irenaeus and later periods. The others, on the other hand, sometimes overemphasise the continuity of Irenaeus' teaching with later theology. How can we remedy this latent schism in the Irenaean scholarly community?

First, spending time "contextualising" Irenaeus, or on the contrary "theologising" him, is a kind of "crutch" that the researchers do not necessarily need to advance in their research. In a way, it is reassuring to find meaning in Irenaeus by linking him to a given historical context or by associating him with the coherence of later dogmatic development, but these concerns can prevent access to Irenaeus himself. It therefore requires a certain ascesis in order not only to "grasp" Irenaeus, but also to "allow oneself to be grasped" by him.[45] In other words, it is important to approach Irenaeus as a poor man, without preconceptions, but rather in the light of what he and we have in common today: his love for Christ and the Church.

Second, it is undoubtedly possible to be a historian without being "communitarian" about the pre-imperial Church. Similarly, it is possible to be a theologian without being "concordist" about the development of dogma. In this way, one's vision of history will play an important role in uniting the community. If the two "schools" accept a common vision of history based on a balance, or even harmony, between discontinuity and continuity, then their respective approaches can be reconciled. Each can maintain a legitimate historical or theological approach, without opposing the other, but complementing each other. To this end, it would be very fruitful to study Irenaeus' own conception of history. We will come back to this in the final part of this article, which looks at future directions.

[45] In the spirit of *Ah* V, 36, 3: "God willed that his Progeniture, the first-born Word, should descend to the creature, that is to say to the modelled work, and be seized by it, and that the creature in turn should seize the Word and ascend to him".

II. ON THE NOTION OF UNITY IN IRENAEUS

"About unity in Irenaeus" could be the subject of a very in-depth study. We will only give a few broad outlines here, which we felt would be useful about the present book.

1. The philosophical meaning of unity

The notion of unity itself is not so easy to define. In its original, etymological sense, unity is the character of that which is "one".[46] This unity can be considered within a larger whole. For example, in a basket of twelve eggs, there are twelve units (or unities) of eggs. But it can also be seen as forming itself into an indivisible, non-compound whole, virtually identical to its being. Thus, a human soul forms a unity. The first meaning of unity is numerical, the second is metaphysical.

There is also an organic sense of unity. It is constituted in and by diversity; it requires a multitude of members who are dependent on one another. But it is not as homogeneous as unity by aggregation. With organic unity, each member retains a degree of autonomy.[47] Regarding this last mode of unity, philosophy varies in determining what actually makes the unity between the different members. An idealistic approach will place this unity in the human spirit or in God. This is the case, for example, with nominalism, which does not accept that similarity exists in things, but only in the mind. Likewise, for Kant, the mind brings about a *synthetic unity* between the parts of an action, for example.[48] But another school, a realist school, sees the principle of unity in things themselves. In this view, for there to be unity between several things, there must be something in common between them. The real unity of pure diversity is not possible. There must at least be an analogy in the reality of things between these diversities.

To this notion of "unity in diversity" is added an aesthetic variant, present in both Plato and Aristotle with reference to literary composition. "Unity in variety" is recognised as an important condition for formal beauty in a work of art.[49] And in this case, diversity possesses a dynamic characteristic of movement towards unity, with a view to achieving harmony between the various elements.

[46] Dewey: Unity, 734.
[47] Ibid., 736a.
[48] Ibid., 735.
[49] Ibid., 736–737.

2. Unity in the book "Irénée de Lyon, théologien de l'unité"

a) In general

In the book reviewed, unity is above all conceived as an organic unity. On the whole, the authors avoid anything that might resemble metaphysical unity, or rather its caricature, a materialistic type of unity. The general spirit of this book is to oppose a "unitarian unity", an essentialist, static and monolithic conception of unity. Our era is still scarred by such disastrous unitarian mottos as "Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Fürher". This book rightly counters this monistic vision of unity. The authors of this volume prefer a "unity in diversity", a kaleidoscopic unity. From the outset, then, they are moving towards a unity that is organic and aesthetic. And it is a fact that the aesthetic approach to unity is wonderfully suited to the symphonic and musical aspect of Irenaeus' theology, as well as to its architectural dimension.

b) In Awet Andemicael's article

The author who best conceptualised the organic-aesthetic unity in Irenaeus is Awet Andemicael. We therefore summarise her thought. Her article has the merit of being as brief as it is clear. In our view, it is a fine example of "feminine theology" insofar as it is an approach to unity through love. According to the author, in Irenaeus everything is unified in the love of God. Andemicael builds her argument around three examples: the Quartodeciman question reported by Eusebius of Caesarea, a musical passage in *Adversus Haereses*, book II and an Irenaean commentary on the Tower of Babel in *Dem* 22–23.[50] The author's thesis is to show that diversity is not primarily a temporary condition to be endured while awaiting unity, but that it is rather "the real condition of the possibility of unity".[51] Thus "difference and distance are necessary for unity and cohesion".[52] This difference is not, however, the last word in unity, but rather a "starting point".[53] The author thus recognises the dynamic dimension of Irenaean unity, seen as a process.

A. Andemicael goes a step further when she states that "Irenaeus clearly distrusts modes of unity based on similitude. Instead, he seems to prefer multiplicity reduced to harmony in unity rather than uniformity presented as a force".[54] For the author,

[50] *Dem*: Irenaeus of Lyon, *On the Apostolic Preaching*.
[51] Andemicael: *Unum genus humanum*: Irénée sur l'unité de l'humanité, 446.
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] *Ibid.*, 447.
[54] *Ibid.*

then, there is no similarity in reality between the different members of this unity. How, then, can this unity be achieved? Unity is achieved principally through the action of God, who is the only true principle of unity:

> The unity of creation is a dynamic process, not a static state. It requires and reinforces the differences between those who take part in it, precisely because *the paradoxical coincidence of harmony and diversity* makes God's creative involvement manifest and requires God's ongoing commitment if it is to remain viable and coherent.[55]

It is therefore God who, not without analogy with the idealist approach described above, plays the role of thought. Unity is first and foremost in him. God thinks unity, he loves unity, he is unity, he makes unity, and diversity is the concrete path towards unity that he assigns to human beings here on earth. At this stage of her reflection, Awet Andemicael agrees with A. Bastit's observation that in Irenaeus the human race is seen as "a single collective being, more or less interchangeable with *homo*".[56] But it is clear that this "unitarian" conception of the unity of the human race is not the author's main orientation. She is quick to return to her main idea:

> The oneness of the human race is not, for Irenaeus, based primarily on agreement *between individuals*, but rather on the coherence *of God's intimate and personal relationship with humanity as a whole*[57].

The vertical theological relationship between God and man therefore takes precedence over horizontal human relationships. Ultimately, for the author, multiplicity does not compromise the unity of the human race, but "it facilitates this unity, because unity is *founded on God and effected by God*".[58] A. Andemicael's vision is powerful and appealing. However, there is a risk of ending up with two separate orders, which is exactly what the Gnostics confessed. If, in fact, we absolutize this theory based on "the paradoxical coincidence of harmony and diversity", the risk is to have, on the one hand, unity and harmony in God and through God, and on the other hand, multiplicity and diversity in man, without there being any real intelligible relationship between these two orders, other than a relationship of opposition, contradiction, in short, of paradox. This thesis could be summed up in the following sentence: the human race is diverse because God is one.

[55] *Ibid.* Emphasis added.
[56] *Ibid.*, 448.
[57] *Ibid.*, 450. (Emphasis by the author). The same type of approach in Springer: L'image "ré-imaginée", 388.
[58] *Ibid.* (Emphasis added).

The problematic confession of two orders that are too separate – divine and human – is recalled by Irenaeus on the subject of Carpocrates. According to this Gnostic, "it is indeed through faith and love that we are saved, all the rest is indifferent; according to the opinion of men, this is called sometimes good, sometimes bad, but in reality, there is nothing which, by its nature, is bad".[59] According to this principle, there is a clear equivocity between the divine sphere and the human sphere. So, disunity between men, perceived as evil, is merely a "human opinion". The main thing is to believe in the unity of God; the rest is secondary. And this is the risk that Andemicael's thesis runs. If we do away, with any real similarity between men, any common human moral behaviour tending towards unity and union, is unity still possible?[60] Can unity be achieved by God's grace alone? Is this not an interpretation of Irenaeus in terms of *sola gratia*? Let us now return to Irenaeus to find all the variations of unity in his work.

3. Unity in the writings of Irenaeus

Unity in Irenaeus is a concept which seems to have a wider meaning than that given to it in this book.

a) Irenaean unity in the Gnostic context

A certain metaphysical dimension of unity

There is an element of common sense in Irenaeus' approach to unity. A definition of unity as simply "the character of that which is one" is not foreign to him. This common-sense definition takes precedence over any scholarly reference to a particular school of ancient philosophy. When the Gnostics profess dualism, Irenaeus forcefully reminds us that unity is precisely that which is neither two, nor three, nor many.[61] Unity is that which is one. There is therefore "one and the same" God the Creator and Father of Jesus Christ, one and the same Christ, man and God, one and the same Word and Saviour, one and the same man, body and soul, one and the same Eucharist, made up of the earthly and the heavenly (*Ah* IV, 18, 5). For the Gnostics, the situation is quite different. The Demiurge Creator is not the Father of Jesus Christ, the unity of the divine and the human in Christ is accidental and temporary, the Word and the Saviour are two different Aeons, the human compound of body and

[59] *Ah* I, 25, 5.

[60] This is what Andemicael seems to be saying when she writes (*ibid.*, 448): "Human efforts at social cohesion, however praiseworthy they may be, apart from God, are destined to end either in collective arrogance or in social chaos".

[61] Chaieb: L'Église, lieu de l'unité, 107: "Irenaeus' anti-dualism".

soul is also temporary and unfortunate, and some Encratite Gnostics prefer to use water instead of wine for the Eucharist, out of contempt for the earthly.

This unity in Irenaeus is therefore a kind of "cry from the heart", an expression of his united reason and faith. The unity in his work is like an outpouring that comes precisely from Gnostic dualism. The duality and multiplicity in Gnostic thought serve as a kind of springboard for the affirmation of unity in Irenaeus. Let us quote a passage to which E. Ayroulet alludes, as if "just paying lip service":

> [The Gnostics] having become strangers to the truth, it is fatal that they should roll in every error and be tossed about by it, that they should think variously on the same subjects according to the moment and never have a firmly established doctrine, since they want to be sophists of words rather than disciples of the truth. For they are not founded on the one Rock [*unam petram*], but on the sand, a sand which contains many stones.[62]

Here unity comes closer to its metaphysical meaning. It is an indivisible entity that possesses a unique, non-compound being, symbolised by the rock. In contrast, the multiple – alluding to the parable of the house built on the sand, an amalgam of small stones – corresponds to the unstable foundation of Gnostic doctrine. This Irenaean approach to unity is not just an art of oratory, a "heresiological technique", as M.-L. Chaieb insinuates. In fact, she writes: "The result is an immediate rhetorical fruit that emphasises unity on the side of faith and dispersion on the side of deviance".[63] It does not seem to us that Irenaeus is only at this rhetorical level in such a type of positioning on faith. Faith is one, just as a rock is unique. If Saint Augustine had initial training as a rhetorician, this does not seem to be the case with Saint Irenaeus, who speaks only of his association with Saint Polycarp in Smyrna.[64] What is more, patristic manuals sometimes point out Irenaeus' clumsiness of style, expression and even organisation of ideas.[65] The Bishop of Lyon certainly had a prodigious intelligence and a remarkable biblical and secular culture, but he spoke "without having recourse to the language of human eloquence" (1 Cor 1,17), first and foremost because he was moved by love for Christ and the Church. For this reason, he is ready to use all

[62] *Ah* III, 24, 2, citing Mt 7,24–27; see Ayroulet: Irénée ou l'unité, 160.

[63] Chaieb: Conclusion, 474.

[64] *Ah* III, 3, 4. Le Boulluec: La Notion d'hérésie, 120, n. 18, where the author – despite his reluctance to overstate the doctrinal significance of the patristic writings – sees no particular indication that Irenaeus underwent extensive rhetorical training.

[65] For example, Quasten: Initiation aux Pères de l'Église, 331: "The work as a whole suffers from a lack of clarity of plan and unity of thought. Its prolixity and frequent repetition make for tiring reading".

the means available to his reason. And "metaphysical unity", taken in its broadest sense, is one of the harmonics of unity in Irenaeus.[66]

A certain interchangeability between unity, firmness, stability, reality, and truth
Still in opposition to the spurious multiplicity of the Gnostics, Irenaeus also tends to bring the concept of unity closer to the notions of firmness, stability, reality, and truth. A clue is given by the other allusion in *Adversus Haereses* to the image of the rock in reference to the parable in Mt 7. This time it is translated as "firm rock" (*petra firma*) rather than as "one rock" (*unam petram*)[67]. This gives the impression that "unity" and "firmness" are quite similar concepts in Irenaeus. For Irenaeus, therefore, "one" is everything that is solid and unambiguous, everything that is real as opposed to imaginary, everything that is true as opposed to a lie. A passage at the end of *Adversus Haereses* is explicit on this point:

> And none of this can be understood allegorically, but on the contrary, all is firm, true, possessing authentic existence [*Et nihil allegorizari potest, sed omnia firma et vera, et substantia habentia*], made by God for the enjoyment of righteous men. For just as the One who will raise man is really God [*vere Deus*], so too man will really rise [*vere resurget homo*] from the dead, and not allegorically, as we have abundantly shown.[68]

The notion of unity is not quoted directly, but it is underlying in this passage. In the polemical context in which Irenaeus finds himself, allegory introduces a duality between the letter of the text and its interpretation. Irenaeus is not directly attacking a spiritual reading of Scripture, but its caricature, when the interpretation is entirely detached from the letter expressed by the text. For a Gnostic, the resurrection described in the Bible is entirely spiritual and has nothing to do with the body. Similarly, Irenaeus wrote of the false Gnostic exegesis of the Prologue of St John: "Diverting each of the words of Scripture from its true meaning and using names in an arbitrary manner, they have transposed them into the meaning of their system".[69] Consequently, we understand that the notions expressed by *vera, vere, firma, substantia* in the above quotation, in opposition to the dualistic allegory, are at the service of the concept of unity. Revelation – and the faith that flows from it – is one, true, firm and substantial. The same is true of the notion of resurrection, expressed above,

[66] Also, an example of unity by aggregation, *Ah* III, 17, 2: "Just as dry flour cannot be made into one dough and one loaf without water, so we who were many could not become one in Christ Jesus without the Water from heaven".

[67] *Ah* II, 27, 3 in relation to III, 24, 2 (see above).

[68] *Ah* V, 35, 2.

[69] *Ah* I, 9, 2.

which always appears in Irenaeus as a victory for the unity of life over the duality of death, caused by the separation of soul and body. Thus, the kaleidoscopic unity so well described in this volume – and, in fact, really present in Irenaeus – is perhaps not the only one in his work. In any case, his understanding of unity is broad, and does not exclude a priori a more unitive sense of unity.

b) A Christological understanding of unity

Irenaeus' insistence on unity in the sense described above is not, however, to the exclusion of all duality and multiplicity. Above all, the Bishop of Lyon establishes an order between unity and duality, with the former taking precedence over the latter. It is not surprising that, according to M. Yevadian, quotations from Irenaeus were used in Armenian Christological treatises to demonstrate the Incarnation in line with Cyrillian, or even Julianist, monophysism.[70] Irenaeus is also a theologian of unity because he insists more on unity than on duality, particularly in Christology. The notion of "mixture" (*κρᾶσις*), which he uses quite frequently in Christology and anthropology, goes in the direction of an insistence on unity more than duality. While the later history of theology has set aside the concept of *κρᾶσις* as potentially prejudicial to the "without confusion" of Chalcedon,[71] in Irenaeus, the early theologian, it has a completely orthodox meaning, since, while giving priority to unity, he always preserves duality.[72] In any case, Irenaeus is also a theologian of unity because, in view of the theological jousts that lie ahead, he professes a good-natured preference for unity over duality. This does not, however, make Irenaeus the "father of monophysitism". This has been proved by recent discoveries about the Irenaean heritage in Armenia. M. Yevadian points out that it was a position of Christological balance that was adopted by the Armenian ecclesiastical hierarchy in the 8th century, thanks to borrowings from Irenaeus.[73] This brings us back to the notions of unity–balance and unity–harmony, which are well described in this volume, from an aesthetic point of view.[74] We could say that Irenaeus is a Doctor of unity because he creates unity between unity and duality, and also between "metaphysical unity" and "unity in diversity". And all this in balance and harmony. Unity in Irenaeus is therefore, as it were, at a second level, not only at the level of "unitarian unity" or at the one of "unity-dicersity', but rather at the level of the unity of these two concepts.

On the eschatological level, Irenaeus is all the more respectful of duality that the Gnostics deny it. Gnostic eschatology is in fact of the "absorption into the great

[70] Yevadian: Lire Irénée de Lyon, 250–251.

[71] DS 302.

[72] See, for example, *Ah* III, 18, 7: "He therefore mixed and united man with God". And immediately afterwards, Irenaeus mentions both man and God several times, as if to show that duality remains.

[73] Yevadian: Lire Irénée de Lyon, 256.

[74] *Ah* III, 12, 12: "unity and harmony" (*unitatem et consonantiam*).

whole" type. Even the sexual difference at the end is denied by them. Irenaeus, on the other hand, professes the permanence of man and woman even in the most ultimate destinies of humanity.[75] Irenaeus' theology of unity is far from being a monism.

c) A Trinitarian approach to unity

A comment by M.-L. Chaieb, at the conclusion of this volume, leads us to a few remarks on Trinitarian theology. She writes Irenaeus' conception of unity does not pose the debate in terms of the analytical isolation of concepts but starts from theological experience: the One *is* multiple and encounters, since it is Three.[76]

In the light of what has been said above, this remark seems to us to be more revealing of the spirit of the volume reviewed here than of Irenaeus' theology. In the Trinity, if One is Three, Three is also One. A theologian of unity must take account of both logics. And in Christianity, one certainly equals three, but one also continues to equal one. The rational order of unity is not abrogated. And Irenaeus is right about this, as we have shown. In later Trinitarian theology, the Church has always rejected modalism (an excess of unity at the expense of diversity) and subordinationism (an excess of distinction between the three Persons, who therefore no longer have any substantial unity). So why shouldn't Irenaeus, as an early Catholic theologian, fit into this fundamental perspective of balance in Trinitarian theology? Why, from the outset, give a somewhat "subordinationist" connotation to Irenaean unitary theology? Are the many references to the unity of God in Irenaeus' work really taken into account in this volume? Is the unity of God in Irenaeus always synonymous with the Trinity?

d) Unity in the spirit of a unitive theology

A final harmonic of Irenaean unity lies in its dynamic aspect of movement towards unity. Irenaeus has a unitive theology, which S. Detoc describes very well in his conclusion:

> This general tension from the multiple towards the one, whose ultimate end is union with God, is one of the major axes of Irenaeus' theology. There is undoubtedly good reason to see in "the bodies of the Word" a figure of choice within the range of Irenaean variations which seek to express the unitive finality of God's plan. And this proposal is all the more stimulating because it relates to the focus in which the *eschaton* is already being contemplated: the glorified body of Jesus Christ.[77]

[75] For example, *Dem* 61, on eschatological times, with the mention of "men and women".
[76] Chaieb: Conclusion, 479–480. Emphasis by the author.
[77] Detoc: Les corps du Verbe: un autre paradigme irénéen de l'unité, 349.

In Irenaeus, everything tends towards unity: the union of man with God at the end, the reunion of body and soul at the resurrection. Even carnal union, described with the modesty of his time by Irenaeus, can itself be an image of eschatological unity. Thus the Holy Spirit must delight in our flesh "as a bridegroom in his bride"[78].

III. ORIENTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

1. The centrality of the Irenaean theology of history

This volume of articles cannot claim to deal exhaustively with all of Irenaeus' theology. There are indeed gaps in this work, as in any theology of this world. The most important seems to us to be Irenaean teaching on history. The relationship to time and history is a very important aspect of Irenaeus' writings.[79] And the notion of history is also a focal point of Vatican II, as in this appeal from *Gaudium et Spes*:

> History itself speeds along on so rapid a course that an individual person can scarcely keep abreast of it. The destiny of the human community has become all of a piece, where once the various groups of men had a kind of private history of their own. Thus, the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one. In consequence there has arisen a new series of problems, a series as numerous as can be, calling for efforts of analysis and synthesis.[80]

And Irenaeus has answers to give to this "new series of problems". Yet the historical questions posed by Irenaeus are not sufficiently developed in the present work. And the studies on this theme do not, for the most part, include one of Irenaeus' original features: the millennium, which is like the "mise en abyme" of the whole of salvation history.[81] This historical and eschatological question seems to remain "taboo" among many scholars.[82] S. Detoc is the only Frenchman to mention it in a note.[83] Why do the French have such reservations? The Irenaean Millennium was first published by a French Franciscan, François Feuardent. At the time, he deplored the censorship

[78] *Ah* V, 9, 4.

[79] On this point, see the fine paragraph by Ayroulet: Entre Irénée et Maxime, 460, n. 22.

[80] GS 5; https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_ gaudium-et-spes_en.html (last consultation 12/12/2023).

[81] Pasquier: Approches du millénium, 8; passim.

[82] On this subject, the present book gives the impression of a regression in relation to the movement towards openness over the last few decades described in our recent study. Pasquier: Approches du millénium, 503–517.

[83] Detoc: Les corps du Verbe, 338, n. 13.

of the Millennium, exclaiming that these passages should have been treated "with a pen and not with scissors".[84] While the time for scissors is fortunately over, the time for the pen has not yet really begun in France. Too much modesty remains.[85] G. Kepeklian, from the University of Louvain, speaks of anti-millenarian censorship as a negative reality.[86] Although he is Armenian, this author belongs to the Belgian school of theology, which, undoubtedly since the remarkable article by Bruno Reynders (the author of the famous *Lexicon* on Irenaeus, which still seems to be widely used by the authors of this volume) in 1936, and perhaps earlier (Pierre Halloix?), has taken an open look at this aspect of Irenaean eschatology.[87] Ch. Guignard, from the university of Lausanne, is the only author in this volume to deal with the millennium from a strictly theological point of view. He inserts the Irenaean "kingdom of the just" without scruple into an admirable systematic synthesis based on the notions of Marian recapitulation and procreation.[88]

Taking into account the kingdom of the just can greatly help us to better understand the profound meaning of history in Irenaeus. In the present work, the Trinitarian track is mainly put forward in an attempt to give intelligence to history. It is perhaps not the only one. A Christological essence of history would undoubtedly be worth exploring in Irenaeus. In agreement with E. Ayroulet, "Christocentrism must not be a Christomorphism or a Panchristism".[89] Thus, the history of Christ the Head and that of the Body of Christ are two analogical realities. It is not a question of identifying them strictly. However, in the spirit opened up by D. Lees, it is of the utmost importance to establish a relationship between the history of salvation as a whole and the internal economy of the Incarnate Word.[90]

2. Other related themes

In the wake of the theology of history and the millennium, other Irenaean themes, left in the shadows in the present work, would be worth developing. These include

[84] Feuardent, PG 7, c. 1837: *Calamo, non scalpello*.

[85] In addition to our work, there are only two French studies of note: Giraud: Pour une théologie "apocalyptique" de l'histoire, 415–435; Pousset: De l'*Adversus haereses* (Irénée de Lyon) sur la troisième partie du livre V, 93–122.

[86] Kepeklian: Que savons-nous, 234.

[87] Reynders: Optimisme et théocentrisme chez saint Irénée, 249–251. Reynders: Lexique comparé. T. 1 & 2. And also Houssiau: La christologie de saint Irénée, 134; Spronck: Le salut de la chair dans l'œuvre de saint Irénée, 92–100; Halloix: *Illustrium Ecclesiae orientalis scriptorum*, 664b.

[88] Guignard: Il fallait qu'Adam, 404.

[89] Ayroulet: Entre Irénée et Maxime, 468.

[90] Lees: Les deux mains de Dieu, 189–190.

marriage, women,[91] the resurrection, and the theology of the flesh in relation to contemporary developments on the "theology of the body". The history of Irenaeus' manuscripts should also be explored in greater depth. According to our research, the teaching of Irenaeus remained alive in the Middle Ages not only in Armenia and Georgia, but also in the British Isles, at the other end of Christendom.[92] The Irenaean legacy on the eastern fringes of the empire has been treated remarkably well by three authors in this book.[93] As far as we know, there is no recent equivalent study for the British Isles. However, it was from Oxford that the unabridged version of the *Adversus Haereses* reappeared in the fifteenth century. Finally, in this volume dedicated to the theme of unity, a study of the unity in Irenaeus between the Judeo-Christian line and the Greek approach would also have been welcome.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this in-depth reflection on Irenaean studies in the volume published by Beauchesne in early 2023, it is gratitude to all these authors that spontaneously springs to mind. This work is the fruit of thousands of hours of solitary work and theological exchanges in the context of university teaching and interpersonal encounters. The quality of these studies, in terms of both content and form, is remarkable. But has the time come to speak of an "Irenaean school of theology"? It could be, but such an expression seems premature to describe the work reviewed. To qualify as an "Irenaean school", the scientific community would have to follow three guidelines that we tried to define in our article.

First, it would have to unify the two tendencies observed: the historical approach, on the one hand, and the dogmatic sensibility, on the other. This tension between the historical and the dogmatic is inherent in patristic theology in general. We must therefore accept that some researchers are more inclined towards the historical and others are more attracted to the theological. But the outrageous positions of these two tendencies must be rejected. In 2023, it is no longer acceptable to say that Irenaeus' fight against Gnosticism is an art of oratory that has no real theological significance. Irenaeus did not adopt the "heresy-busting" style, just as he would adopt the "irenic" style if he were alive today.[94] There is more than a manner in the

[91] Chaieb: La femme dans la théologie d'Irénée de Lyon, 97–110.

[92] Pasquier: Approches du millénium, 401–404.

[93] See note 22.

[94] An in-depth study of the notion of heresy is beyond the scope of this article. Kepeklian: Que savons-nous, 241, makes an interesting observation: the West would have given Irenaeus' writings a heresiological orientation from the outset, and this same Western orientation would have led to Irenaeus' censure, particularly of his millenarianism. Armenia, by contrast, would have emphasised

fight against Gnosticism. This controversy also has a substantial dimension. It runs through the entire history of theology and still has resonances today, as D. Bertrand shows.[95] Nor is it acceptable in 2023 to say, for example, that "Irenaeus and Thomas Aquinas are one and the same". The history of theology bears witness to an evolution that is not entirely straightforward. Irenaeus suffered the consequences of an excessive rewriting of pre-Nicene theological history by the imperial and medieval Church, and he was censured, particularly on the question of the millennium.[96] We cannot spontaneously see him as a precursor of later dogmatic developments without taking the time to study him in and by himself.

A comparison of the Irenaean work with an ancient building is worthwhile. This building had magnificent frescoes on its walls, but later centuries sometimes whitewashed these works of art. This symbolises the censorship to which the writings of Irenaeus were subjected. Sometimes new, uglier frescoes were painted over the old ones. The new drawings covering the old ones represent all the medieval pseudepigraphy, the false decretals, the moralising heresiology and also the legendary hagiography (see *Passio Irenaei*). This is the "medieval rewriting" highlighted in this article as a distortion of history. All this – the whitewash and the tasteless frescoes – has for centuries prevented access to the real Irenaeus. Since the sixteenth century, the "theological fine arts" have endeavoured to restore Irenaeus to his original glory:

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the more catechetical dimension of his writings. Our advice is not to contrast the title – *Against Heresies* – with its subtitle – *On the Detection and Overthrow of the So-Called Gnosis* – by saying that the first is heresiological and the second catechetical. A fight against Gnosis has from the outset a polemical and heresiological aspect. Instead, we postulate the evolution of the concept of heresy over the centuries. Heresy gradually moves from the notion of error to that of fault. The focus shifts from the doctrinal to the moral. The dialectic of right and wrong helyett good and bad took precedence over the dialectic of true and false. Heresiology then became a "literary genre" designed to denounce an evil, as, for example, with the medieval schoolman Meinhard of Bamberg, who accentuated the features of the catalogue of heresies by Gennade of Marseille: *Detestabilem iudico Nepotem haereticum* (see Pasquier: Approches du millénium, 398–399). In Irenaeus, the situation is quite different. The literary genre is not primary. Heresiology is seen at its source. It is clearly oriented towards a fight for the truth of faith against the falsehood of Gnosis. The denunciation of the moral behaviour of the Gnostics is also present, but it is never primary. It is a consequence of their doctrine. Irenaeus is clearly at the doctrinal level. We hypothesise that the decisive turning point in the history of heresiology came at the time of the controversy with Jovinian, at the end of the fourth century. At that point, the notions of heresy and moral laxity were explicitly brought together. See Hunter: Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy, 8. We must be careful not to confine Irenaeus today to the stylistic and moralising straitjacket of the medieval heresiologist. Irenaeus predates both Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

[95] Bertrand: L'axe irénéen de l'Incarnation contre la Gnose, 361.

[96] Other Irenaean themes that remained in the shadows for many centuries were the theology of anointing and that of the *imago Dei*. Begasse de Dhaem: *Mysterium Christi*. Christologie et sotériologie trinitaires, 580–581. Ladaria: Mystère de Dieu et mystère de l'homme. Vol. 2: Anthropologie théologique, 202–203.

restoring the original text, at least in Latin, and denouncing the rewriting. But there are two temptations for today's researcher: to cover up again certain less concordant aspects of Irenaeus's theology with whitewash or new frescoes, or to refuse to see that the building is in harmony today with the later additions of a Renaissance tower, a Viollet-le-Duc wing, etc. The "Irenaean building" is both restored to its original splendour and linked to other centuries of theological production.

The second direction indicated by our article concerns unity. We found that the notion of unity is sometimes treated in a rather one-sided way in this book. The Irenaean concept of unity also includes a nuance distinct from "unity-diversity". To make unity with Irenaeus and through Irenaeus is therefore also to include this slightly more unitarian understanding of unity. And this is not sufficiently emphasised in this volume. If Irenaeus is to have any real influence as a "theologian of unity" in the Churches today, it is important, as a prerequisite, first of all to achieve unity with regard to the very concept of unity itself. This article, following in the footsteps of Irenaeus, can humbly help us to do just that.

Finally, the preceding lines are intended to give impetus to research on history and eschatology in Irenaeus. This volume does not treat this theme sufficiently, and important discoveries for the Church today have yet to be made in this area. Irenaeus' historical theology describes a journey and a process in which unity is achieved only at the end. As we move towards our end, it is important for us to get to know Irenaeus better and better, in order to achieve unity.

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