

THE USE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE CLEMENTINE HOMILIES

The Clementine Homilies is a religious romance that purports to be the autobiography of Pope Clement, the successor to Peter as Bishop of Rome. Since there is considerable dispute about that – some scholars believe they were actually written as late as the fourth century – the Homilies are part of what has come to be known as the Pseudo-Clementine Writings.

A major feature of the *Homilies* is the playing out of a doctrinal battle between St. Peter and one Simon Magus, a magician purported to be the father of Gnosticism. In some quarters, notably the Tübingen School of New Testament criticism, the Homilies were thought to be reflective of the struggle between “Jewish Christianity” and the Pauline heresy for control of the church. Simon Magus was considered to be a pseudonym for St. Paul.¹ More recently, however, the Homilies are thought to be the production of an Arian Christian of Syriac nationality, who sought to express a historical and quasi-philosophical doctrine of the Arian Saviour.²

The purpose of this paper is to examine the use of scripture in the battle between Christianity and Gnosticism, personified by St. Peter and Simon Magus. Homilies XVI through XX will be the focus of this study. For further illumination, the approaches of the two protagonists will be compared to the works of Irenaeus and Ptolemy in similarly making the case for their beliefs.

Observations Concerning The Clementine Homilies

In examining Homilies XVI through XX, it is observed that there are 91 discrete instances of reference to scripture. Of these, 67 are attributed to St.

¹ Clementines, “The Catholic Encyclopedia”, (www.newadvent.org/cathen/04039b.htm).

² C. Bigg, D.D., The Clementine Homilies, in “Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica, Volume II”, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, MDCCCXC), 192.

Peter; with the balance – 23 – being coming from Simon Magus. One reference is attributed to Lazarus in Homily XX.³

Two thirds of Simon's quotations come from the Old Testament, virtually all from the Pentateuch. He makes passing references to Psalms, Daniel and Lamentations. His New Testament References are predominantly from Matthew, with one reference to Luke.

Peter's use of the Scriptures is more extensive than Simon's; not only in number, but also in breadth. He makes reference to all of the Synoptic Gospels – although the bulk of his references are to Matthew - as well as passing references to Galatians, Ephesians and James. He also demonstrates greater breadth in his use of the Old Testament. While the majority of his references also come from the Pentateuch and Psalms, he also refers to Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.

The above pattern is not unusual when one considers that the Homilies are a "romance", and not an historical account of an actual dialogue. Throughout, Simon apparently serves as a stalking-horse for St. Paul. All but four of Simon's references are made in Homilies XVI and XVII. Indeed twelve are made in Chapter VI of Homily XVI alone. By Homily XVIII the initiative has passed almost entirely to Peter. At that point Simon's role is simply a foil. He makes no further direct use of scripture from this point

Whether the author of the Homilies intended that "Simon" represent the historical Simon Magus; or Paul, whose views were considered heresy, at least initially, by the Jerusalem Church; or Iamblichus, the disciple of the great pagan antagonist of the third century, Porphyry, as some suggest,⁴ his ostensible role in this romance would still be to oppose Peter and the doctrines of Christianity. One would expect that he would be a serious opponent, and put forward the truth claims of the pagan or Gnostic communities. However, since Peter is the protagonist, one would expect that Simon's true role is to be the set-up man for him in making whatever

³ Please refer to the appendices for a breakdown of the occurrence of reference to Scripture.

⁴ Clementines, op.cit.

statement of doctrine or philosophy the writer wanted to leave with his audience.

The central doctrine of the Homilies is the Unity of God.⁵ That is the theme of Homily XIV. Through the dialogue between Peter and Simon God is presented as transcendent and unknowable, the Creator of the World, infinite, though He has shape and body, for He is the exemplar after which man was fashioned.

Hearing that Peter was to preach about the unity of God at Laodicea, Simon Magus travelled from Antioch to publicly dispute with him. Before Peter could begin Simon, who was in the crowd, challenged him to debate. Peter began by asserting. "there is one God who made the heavens and the earth, and all things that are in them. And it is not right to say or to think that there is any other." Simon replied: "...the Scriptures believed in amongst the Jews say that there are many gods, and that God ...has Himself spoken of many gods in His Scriptures."⁶ He turned to the Old Testament to prove his case:

For instance, in the very first words of the law, He evidently speaks of them as being like even unto Himself. For thus it is written, that, when the first man received a commandment from God to eat of every tree that was in the garden,(1) but not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the serpent having persuaded them by means of the woman, through the promise that they would become gods, made them look up;(2) and then, when they had thus looked up, God said,(3) 'Behold, Adam is become as one of us.' When, then, the serpent said,(4) 'Ye shall be as gods, 'he plainly speaks in the belief that gods exist; all the more as God also added His testimony, saying, 'Behold, Adam is become as one of us.' The serpent, then, who said that there are many gods, did not speak falsely. Again, the scripture,(5) 'Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the rulers of thy people, 'points out many gods whom it does not wish even-to be cursed. But it is also somewhere else written,(6) ' 'Did another god dare to enter and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, as did I the Lord God? 'When He says, 'Did another God dare? 'He speaks on the supposition that other gods exist....⁷

⁵ Clementines, Op. cit.

⁶ Homily XVI, 5

⁷ Homily XVI, 6

In a verbal flurry, Simon landed some twelve scripture “blows” on his opponent before the assembly; quoting (1) Gen ii. 16,17 (2) Gen. iii. 22, (3) Gen iii.5, (4) Ex. Xxii. 28, (5) Deut. Iv. 34, (6) Jer. x.11, (7) Deut. Xiii. 6, (8) Josh, xxiii. 7 Sept., (9) Deut. x. 17 (10) Ps xxxv. 10, 1.1, (11) Ps. 1.1, and (12) Ps. Lxxxii.1. He wondered how, when there were so many passages testifying to many gods, Peter could say we ought not to think or say there are many.⁸ The weight of his argument, closely made point-by-point, was intended to overwhelm.

In like style, Peter counter-punched; appealing to the Old Testament to prove the unity of God:

The law, which frequently speaks of gods, itself says to the Jewish multitude, (1) ‘Behold, the heaven of heavens is the Lord's thy God, with all that therein is; implying that, even if there are gods, they are under Him, that is, under the God of the Jews. And again, (2) ‘The Lord thy God, He is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath, and there is none other except Him.’ And somewhere else the Scripture says to the Jewish multitude, (3) ‘The Lord your God is God of gods; so that, even if there are gods, they are under the God of the Jews. And somewhere else the Scripture says in regard to Him? (4) ‘God, the great and true, who regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward, He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow. ‘The Scripture, in calling the God of the Jews great and true, and executing judgment, marked out the others as small, and not true. But also somewhere else the Scripture says, (5) ‘As I live, saith the Lord, there is no other God but me. I am the first, I am after this; except me there is no God.’ And again: (6) ‘Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.’ And again: (7) ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord.’ And many passages besides seal with an oath that God is one, and except Him there is no God. Whence I wonder how, when so many passages testify that there is one God, you say that there are many.’⁹

In his defence, Peter quoted (1) Deut x.14 (2) Deut. Iv. 39. (3) Deut. X. 17, (4) Deut. x. 17. (5) Isa. Xlix. 18, xlv. 21, xliv. 6. (6) Deut. Vi. 134. and (7) Deut. Vi. 4.

The verbal sparring continued, with each party quoting scripture as justification for his arguments.

⁸ Homily XVI, 6

⁹ Homily XVI, 7

Simon tried to show that the Scriptures contradict themselves, saying:

*I adduced clear passages from the Scriptures to prove that there are many gods; and you, in reply, brought forward as many or more from the same Scriptures, showing that God is one, and He the God of the Jews... what conclusion ought we to come to in consequence of this, but that the Scriptures themselves lead us astray?*¹⁰

Peter replied:

*They do not lead astray, but convict and bring to light the evil disposition against God which lurks like a serpent within each one ... Each one ... examining the Scriptures and finding everything in them, he moulds his idea of God according to his wish ... each one finds in the Scriptures whatever opinion he wishes to have in regard to God...*¹¹

Simon appealed to Genesis i. 26 saying:

'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'
*Now 'let us make' implies two or more; certainly not one only.*¹²

Peter explained:

*One is He who said to His Wisdom, 'Let us make a man.' ... It is united as soul to God, but it is extended by Him, as hand, fashioning the universe.*¹³

Simon, exasperated, replied:

*"What then? Even if the Scriptures say that there are other gods, will you not accept the opinion?"*¹⁴

Peter answered, quoting Deuteronomy xiii. 1:

If the Scriptures or prophets speak of gods, they do so to try those who hear. For thus it is written: 'If there arise among you a prophet, giving signs and wonders, and that sign and wonder shall then come to pass, and he say to thee, Let us go after and worship other gods which thy fathers have not known, ye shall not hearken to the words of that prophet; let thy hands be among the first to stone him. For he hath tried to turn thee from the Lord thy God. But if thou say in thy heart, How did he do that sign or wonder? thou shalt surely know that he who tried thee, tried thee to see if thou dost fear the Lord thy God.'

¹⁰ Homily XVI, 9

¹¹ Homily XVI, 10

¹² Homily XVI, 11

¹³ Homily xvi, 12

¹⁴ Ibid.

The discourse seesawed back and forth; covering a broad range of topics: the contradictions of the Scriptures, other beings called gods, Christ being not God but the Son of God, the unbegotten and the begotten being necessarily different from each other, the nature of God, the name of God, the shape of God in man, and the character of God.

In Homily 17, Simon turns to casuistry in interpreting the New Testament to challenge Jesus teaching. The most direct example is his use of Matthew xi.27 - “No one knew the Father except the Son, as no one knoweth even the Son except the Father, and those to whom the Son may wish to reveal Him.” Simon’s argument is that the Framer of the World was known to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses, indeed to everyone. Therefore the Father, whom nobody knows except the Son, cannot be He who was known to all.¹⁵ He employed the same technique in xvii.v to assert Jesus was inconsistent in his teaching in referring to God as both just and good – revealing a Gnostic perspective that the two cannot co-exist in one being.

Peter’s use of scripture is more direct. In XVII.xvii he disputes Simon’s claim that only the just man can see a true vision¹⁶ by referring to three instances from Scripture where the impious did see true dreams and visions: Gen.xx.3 – Abimelech is warned not to defile Sarah; Gen 4:14 – Pharoh had a dream presaging famine; and Dan iii.25 – Nebuchadnezzar saw the Son of God in the furnace with the three men cast into the fire. He was able to infer from these examples that we cannot hold with certainty that the man who has seen visions, and dreams, and apparitions is pious; which permitted him a segue into revelation being the vehicle of truth for the pious man.¹⁷

In the subsequent chapter, he testified to its efficacy in his own case, recognizing Jesus as the Son of God because the Father revealed it to him. He also used the statement of an angry God to Aaron and Miriam (Num.

¹⁵ Homily XVII.iv

¹⁶ Homily XVII.xv

¹⁷ Homily XVII.xvii

xii.6) to expound a position that statements of wrath are made in visions and dreams, but that statements to a friend are made face-to-face as occurred with Moses.¹⁸ In Chapter xix we see that Peter is able to use the position he has carefully built to neutralize Simon. He states that if Jesus appeared to Simon in a vision it was as one enraged with an adversary; whereas he, Peter, had accompanied the Lord for a whole year and was taught by him face-to-face.¹⁹

From Homily XVII onward Simon makes comparatively little use of Scripture. He is attributed with five references in Homily XVII, four in Homily XVIII, and none at all in Homilies XIX and XX. Peter, on the other hand, makes consistent and extensive use, about evenly divided between the Old Testament and the New, primarily Matthew. This usage is consistent with his role as the protagonist in an Apologetic. Simon's is consistent with his role as foil for the discussion – a flurry to start and to set the scene, and just enough to sustain the discussion as it moves forward.

By Homily XIX, Peter is doing more exposition – teaching – than defence of the Christian message. The message, however, sounds somewhat foreign to twenty-first century Christian ears because of its heterodoxical nature. God is transcendent and unknowable, the Creator of the World. He is the self-begotten from whom proceeds His Wisdom like a hand. (Homily XVI). Though infinite, He has shape and body, for He is the Archetype of all beauty, and in particular the exemplar after which man was fashioned. (Homily XVII). The elements proceed from God as His Child. From them the Evil One proceeded by an accidental mingling. (Homily XIX). God is infinitely changeable, and can assume all forms at will. The Son proceeds from the most perfect of these modifications of the Divine nature and is conceptional with that modification, but not with the Divine nature itself. The Son is not God, in the full sense, nor has He all the power of God. He cannot change Himself, though He can be changed at will by God (Homily XX).

¹⁸ Homily Xvii.xviii

¹⁹ Homily Xvii.xix

Homily XX summarizes Peter's teaching: ²⁰

- a. the Devil is appointed king of the present world,
- b. he is used by God who cannot punish sinners directly,
- c. Christ was created to rejoice in authority over the good, and saves them to eternal life,
- d. both please themselves and in so doing serve God,
- e. both are ministers and agents of God's good pleasure, and
- f. it is God who acts throughout.

Peter's use of Scripture is pragmatic. Some parts of it are meant to try us; therefore the user must discriminate between the spurious and the genuine.²¹ It is also based on faith, rather than interpretation of scripture. Simon acknowledges this when he says, "I heard you say, 'I, for my part, believe no one who says anything against Him who created the world, neither angels, nor prophets, nor Scriptures, nor priests, nor teachers, nor any one else, even though one should work signs and miracles, even though he should lighten brilliantly in the air, or should make a revelation through visions or through dreams.'"²² Peter confirmed that this was indeed so in XVII.xxii.

Commentary From Secondary Sources

W.R. Cassels has noted that in the *Clementine Homilies* there are more than a hundred quotations or sayings of Jesus, or references to his history; but in no case does the author name the source from which they are derived.²³ It is clear, however, the author does quote from a written source, and not from tradition, from the use of such expressions as "in another place he has said," which refer not to other localities or circumstances, but

²⁰ F. W. Bussell, *The Purpose of the World-Process and the Problem of Evil as Explained in the Clementine and Lactantian Writings in a System of Subordinate Dualism*, in " *Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica*, Volume IV" , (Oxford: Clarendon Press, MDCCCXCVI), 169.

²¹ Homily XVIII.xx

²² *Ibid*, xxi.

²³ The scripture references in the text of the Clementine Homilies appear to be the attempt of the translators and apologists to place the author's text in context for the reader.

another part of a written history.²⁴ These quotations systematically vary from the parallels in our canonical Gospels to the extent that apologists are obliged to explain them as "free quotation from memory" and "blending of passages".²⁵ Indeed, only two or three, of a very brief and fragmentary character, literally agree with our Synoptics. The rest differ more or less widely from the parallel passages. In several cases, they agree, more or less, with quotations of Justin from the *Memoirs of the Apostles*. Others, have no parallels at all in our Gospels, and even apologists are compelled to admit the collateral use of an apocryphal Gospel.²⁶

Only four brief and fragmentary phrases really agree with parallels in our Synoptics; and they are either not used in the same context, or are of a nature far from special to them. Others, professed to be direct quotations of sayings of Jesus, have no parallels in our Gospels at all.²⁷ Indeed, Cassels notes that the author of the *Homilies* has no idea of any canonical writings but those of the Old Testament; and even with regard to these, some of the quotations have shown that he held peculiar views, and believed that they contained spurious elements. There is no direct reference in the *Homilies* to any of the Epistles of the New Testament.²⁸

As William Sanday has observed, all the quotations from the Old Testament found in the Homilies are taken from five (iii, xi, xvi, xvii, xviii) out of nineteen.²⁹ Note that Sanday refers to nineteen Homilies, rather than twenty.³⁰ Homily 20 contains a further 10 references to the Old Testament. Sanday notes that if Homilies XVI and XVII had been lost, there would have

²⁴ Cassels Walter Richard, Supernatural Religion: An Inquiry into the Reality of Divine Revelation, (London: Watts & Co., 1902) found at (<http://www.freethought.vze.com>)

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Cassels, op. cit.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Sanday, W., The Gospels in the Second Century, (London: The Christian Evidence Society, 1876), found at (http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=47102), 25.

³⁰ The reference to 19 Homilies instead of 20 may be explained by the fact that the dispute between Clement and Appion in Homily 20 is held to be a late addition. See C. Bigg, D.D., The Clementine Homilies, in "Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica, Volume II", (Oxford: Clarendon Press, MDCCCXC), 183

been no evidence that the author was acquainted with any book of the Old Testament besides the Pentateuch. If the five Homilies (plus Homily 20) had been lost, there would have been nothing to show that he was acquainted with the Old Testament at all.³¹

Of the ninety-one scriptural references in Homilies XXIV through XX, 67 of them are from the Old Testament; 36 are uttered by Peter. Ostensibly, Peter uses the authority of scripture to defend Christianity against the heresy of his rival Simon. However, as Walter Bauer notes, the Old Testament was only of limited usefulness in opposing the heretics. Even those who did accept it, read it from their own perspective and did not allow themselves to be influenced by the opposing viewpoint; they had their "own interpretation" (see 2 Pet. 1.19-21).³² But in addition to that, a primary consideration was the fact that the controversy focused primarily on Christological issues, and the Old Testament was not very productive for that. The question, therefore, is why would Peter concentrate so heavily on the Old Testament to combat the perceived heresy of Simon/Paul?

Perhaps the answer is to be found in recalling the origin and date of *The Clementine Homilies* themselves. They are a "romance", written long after the death of both Peter and Paul, or Simon Magus for that matter. As such, the author was able to take some liberty with the historical account to advance his own purposes. There have been many theories advanced. Walter Cassels regards them as emanating from the Ebionites of the early church, and therefore advancing the truth claims of Jewish Christianity against the heresies of Marcion and Paul.³³ Henry Sheldon would generally concur, but orients the author's polemic as directed primarily at Marcion.³⁴ F.C. Baur argued that the pseudo-Clementines are an important witness to Petrine

³¹ Sanday.

³² Walter Bauer, *The Old Testament, the Lord, and the Apostles*, <http://www.biblicalstudies.ru/Books/Bauer10.html>

³³ Cassels, *op cit*.

³⁴ Sheldon, *op. cit*.

(Jewish) Christianity and its struggle with Pauline Christianity.³⁵ F.W. Bussell considers the Homilies to be a form of modified Marcionitism, designed to combat other forms of Gnosis without breaking from the Old Testament.³⁶ Jean Magne sees the *Homilies* as being a good example of the conflict between Judeo-Christianity and Gnosticism.³⁷ Nicole Kelley refines this concept somewhat in considering the Recognitions – and by inference its sibling, the Homilies – as a multi-pronged attack on different belief groups – Marcionites, Arians, Bardaisanites, and Pauline Christians.³⁸

The most intriguing view here is that expressed in the Catholic Encyclopedia; which holds that the *Homilies* were based on an earlier document written by an Arian, contemporary within the reign of Constantine, who manages to accept the formula of Nicea by a feat of legerdemain, in order to save himself.³⁹ Moreover, Simon and his disciples represent not St. Paul, but Iamblichus, the disciple of the great pagan antagonist of the third century, the neo-Platonic philosopher, Porphyry.⁴⁰ Iamblichus was the chief restorer and defender of the old gods. His system was made the official religion by Julian (361-3). Pseudo-Clement, according to the Encyclopedia, defends the Old Testament against the School of Porphyry, and the debased neo-Platonism of 320-330;⁴¹ teaching the supremacy of the Creator of all. As such, the Homilies were useful weapons

³⁵ George Howard, *The Pseudo-Clementine Writings and Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew*, in "New Testament Studies" Oct 1994, Vol 40, Iss 4, 622

³⁶ F. W. Bussell, *The Purpose of the World-Process and the Problem of Evil as Explained in the Clementine and Lactantian Writings in a System of Subordinate Dualism*, in "Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica, Volume IV", (Oxford: Clarendon Press, MDCCCXCVI), 151

³⁷ Magne Jean, *Logique des Dogmes*, (<http://www.egodeath.com/jeanMagne-LogiqueDesDogmes.htm#Toc112080631>)

³⁸ Kelley Nicole, *Problems of Knowledge and Authority in the Pseudo-Clementine Romance of Recognitions*, in "Journal of Early Christian Studies"; Fall 2005; 13, 3", (ProQuest Religion), 345

³⁹ Clementines, op.cit. The Homilies has a discourse on the generation of the Son (xvi, 15-18, and xx, 7-8). The writer calls *God* *autopator* and *autogennetos*, and both Mother and Father of men. *God* is changeable, and the unchangeable Son is projected from the best modification of *God*. The Son may be called *God*. He is *homousios to Patri*, begotten *ek tes ousias*, He is not *treptos* or *alloiotos*. Apparently He is not *kristos*, nor was there a time when He was not.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

against the momentary resurrection of polytheism, mythology, theurgy, and idolatry.⁴²

In that context – an apology for an Arian saviour written following Nicea and while the Church was facing strong competition from neo-paganism – the theology and method illustrated in the *Homilies* has some coherence. Kelley's concept that the text of the *Recognitions* (*Homilies*) redefines the field of competition to reduce a plethora of rivals to two; providing a choice between prophetic and false knowledge, and ultimately between salvation and damnation⁴³, has currency in such an environment. The *Recognitions* (*Homilies*) target an audience that knows the ideas and texts of various religious competitors. According to Kelley, by repositioning them within the framework of a story where the competitors are always wrong, where Peter and his companions always right, where the only valuable commodity is Peter's prophetic knowledge of God's providential design, they demand readers abandon their understanding in favour of its own truth claims.⁴⁴ What better way, she asks, is there to ratify one's beliefs at the expense of competing religious ideas than to appeal to Jesus' foremost apostle and his successor Clement as guarantors of authenticity and truth?⁴⁵

Indeed, the article in the Catholic Encyclopedia suggests that the original writings were meant for catechumens, and that the arguments are adapted to the needs of inquiring heathens.⁴⁶ In the form of the dialogue between Peter and Simon, the uninitiated are introduced to the Unity and Nature of God. (The doctrine, according to Rufinus, is the Arianism of the second half of the fourth century. The Son is a creature; the Holy Ghost the creature of the Son.)⁴⁷ There is little characteristically Christian doctrine

⁴² Clementines. op. cit.

⁴³ Kelley, 345.

⁴⁴ Kelley, 346.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 347.

⁴⁶ Clementines, op.cit.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

expounded. Much is said about baptism, but there is little about repentance. Christ is always spoken of as "the True Prophet.", as the revealer to men of God, of truth, of the answers to the riddle of life. The denial of two Gods, a transcendental God and a Creator, is directed against popular neo-Platonism. Replies are made to objections to Christianity drawn from the Old Testament.⁴⁸

Perhaps F.W. Bussell, best summarizes the value of the pseudo-Clementines focusing on two points in which he says their merit is conspicuous; "a firm adherence to the *righteous* and *personal* conception of God (at least so far as *human* responsibility is concerned, in distinction to *diabolic*), and a firm belief in the *freedom* of man and his discipline by the adversity and temptations of this present life."⁴⁹

Since the setting of the novel is the mid-first century, contemporary with Peter and Simon Magus, the unknown author of the Homilies never cites a book of the *New Testament*. by name, which would be an anachronism at the date he has chosen. The scripture references, which have been "identified" by the translators and critics of the work in more modern times, are, therefore largely drawn from the *Old Testament*. Such *New Testament* references that are identified appear to be mostly based on Matthew, but as already observed, they do not accurately reflect it. That also may be appropriate to the setting – before the conversion of Saul, and before the striking of any canon of definitive gospel accounts of the ministry of Christ.

The Use of Scripture in Ptolemy and Irenaeus

Ptolemy

Ptolemy, a Gnostic writing in Rome about 160CE, was a personal disciple of Valentinus. He is notorious for being the first among the Valentinians to go beyond the founder's complete rejection of the Old

⁴⁸ Clementines. op. cit.

⁴⁹ Bussell, 188.

Testament⁵⁰ Specifically, he differentiated between various parts of the law, and traced one of them back to God.⁵¹ The other parts were made by Moses and by men.⁵² This, he argued, could be proved from the words of the Saviour about divorce. It is forbidden by the Law of God, but allowed under the Law of Moses.⁵³

Ptolemy further maintained that the Law of God himself, is again divided into some three parts:⁵⁴

- a. the pure legislation of the Decalogue, unmixed with evil; properly termed the *law* which the Saviour came *to fulfill*;⁵⁵
- b. the laws mixed with evil, like the law of retaliation, that the Savior abolished as incongruous with his nature,
- c. the typical and allegorical laws in the image of things which are spiritual – the actual ceremonial law.

As Bauer notes, Ptolemy not only expressly rejected the teaching of the church, according to which "the God and Father" had given the law, but also rejected a view which regarded the devil as the actual legislator.⁵⁶ The Lawgiver is the Demiurge, maker of the world, who by virtue of standing between perfection and injustice may properly be called 'just'.⁵⁷

St. Irenaeus

St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon during the persecution of Marcus Aurelius, is renowned for his work *Adversus haereses*, which was directed against false knowledge.

According to John Behr, Irenaeus' basic charge against the Valentinians, of which Ptolemy was one, is that they have disregarded "the order and the connection of the Scriptures,"; not accepting their coherence

⁵⁰ Bauer, op. cit.

⁵¹ Bauer, op. cit.

⁵² Ptolemy, *Epistula Ad Floram*, in "Epiphanius, *Panarion* 33.4.1

⁵³ Ibid, 33.4.3

⁵⁴ Ibid, 33.5

⁵⁵ Ibid, 33.5.1, quoting Mt. 5:17.

⁵⁶ Bauer, op. cit.

⁵⁷ Ptolemy, 33.7

of the Scriptures, but preferring their own fabrication, created by adapting passages from Scripture to a different hypothesis. He argues further that Gnostics take things out of context and out of sequence and reorder it to fit their own purposes.⁵⁸ For Irenaeus, the apostolic preaching of the Gospel in its interpretative engagement with Scripture, is the basis of his appeal to canon and tradition, and the full regard of the apostolic writings as themselves Scripture.⁵⁹

That Irenaeus is concerned with the preaching *of the apostles*, rather than the authentic words of the "historical Christ," is significant. He condemns the Valentinians exegesis of Scripture, based on their own "hypothesis", rather than that foretold by the prophets, taught by Christ and delivered ("traditioned") by the apostles. For Irenaeus, the Canon of Truth is the crystallization of the coherence of Scripture, read as speaking of Christ revealed in the Gospel, through apostolic preaching of Christ "according to Scripture."⁶⁰ According to Irenaeus, his opponents' response to the charge that their teaching is not to be found in Scripture is simply to assert that these Scriptures are not authoritative. Irenaeus' rejoinder is that those who distort this canon think that the truth resides in their own interpretations, their own fabrications, and so end up preaching themselves.⁶¹

The first part of *Adversus Haereses* is directed against Ptolemy.⁶² Irenaeus begins by criticizing Ptolemy's system of exegesis; particularly the cut-and-paste approach that takes material out of context and erodes authority.⁶³ He then proceeds to illustrate his criticisms with specific examples to Ptolemy's use and abuse of the text; specifically engaging, among others, his depiction of the story of Jairus' daughter (Mark. 5:22-24,

⁵⁸ Behr, John, *The Way to Nicea*, in "The Formation of Christian Theology, Vol.1", (<http://old.svots.edu/Events/Summer-Institute/2003/readings/behrr-tradition.html>)

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses: Book 1*, Pr.2

⁶³ Ibid, 8.1

35-43),⁶⁴ and his commentary on John: 1:1.⁶⁵ His method is to juxtapose the words of Ptolemy with the words of scripture. The simplicity of the latter makes his case eloquently:

And still further, he also indicated the first Tetrad. For, in discoursing of the Saviour and declaring that all things beyond the Pleroma received form from Him, he says that He is the fruit of the entire Pleroma. For he styles Him a "light which shineth in darkness, and which was not comprehended" by it, inasmuch as, when He imparted form to all those things which had their origin from passion, He was not known by it. He also styles Him Son, and Aletheia (Truth), and Zoe, and the "Word made flesh", whose "glory," he says, "we beheld; and "His glory was as that of the Only-begotten" (given to Him by the Father), "full of grace and truth." (But what John really does say is this: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.") Thus, then, does he [according to them] distinctly set forth the first Tetrad, when he speaks of the Father, and Charis [Grace], and Monogenes [Only-begotten], and Aletheia [Truth]. In this way, too, does John tell of the first Ogdoad, and that which is the mother of all the Aeons. For he mentions the Father, and Charis, and Monogenes, and Aletheia, and Logos, and Zoe, and Anthropos, and Ecclesia.

Such are the views of Ptolemaeus.

Conclusion

In considering the pairings presented here – Peter vs Simon Magus and Ireneaus vs. Ptolemy – the following observations may be made.

1. Peter and Ireneaus both hold with the value of the Apostolic Tradition in informing the use and understanding of scripture.

⁶⁴ Ireneaus, 8.2

⁶⁵ Ibid, 8.5.

- a. Peter received instruction directly from the Lord himself, and interpreted scripture from that time based on what was thus revealed to him.
 - b. Ireneaus, standing in Apostolic succession as both Presbyter and Bishop inherited that understanding from Peter and the other Apostles; and, himself, takes his place within that tradition.
2. The Tradition, for Peter, is that of the Old Testament, which was the Scripture of his time. The tradition for Ireneaus includes not only the Old Testament, but the writings of and about the works of the Apostles.
3. Peter, without tradition of the “new covenant” to inform him must discern the truth of the Scripture in the light of the revelation he has received, and his faith in God and the Christ. Ireneaus, with more of a body of works to inform him is more restricted by them.
4. Both Simon Magus and Ptolemy rely on the reinterpretation of Scripture to make their case.
 - a. Simon does so through casuistry and other sleight of hand techniques to present scripture from another point of view. We are not presented with evidence of him outright denying the truth of scripture; but rather seeking to understand it by exploration of its concepts in dialogue – almost in a Socratic manner.
 - b. Ptolemy does so in written form, cutting and pasting to re-order and reinterpret Scripture to suit his understanding and purposes.

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