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Irenaeus of Lyon and the Divine Logos: A Study of *Adversus*haereses

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Abstract: - The concept of the divine Logos was a central topic not only in the Church, but also among the philosophers and theologians of the first centuries of our era. Irenaeus of Lyon, the most significant apologist of that time, focused on human participation in the divine Logos, especially in his main work Adversus haereses. Based on the Holy Tradition and the Scriptures, he offered an orthodox view of the Logos as equal with God, the Creator of the universe. Irenaeus explained that the Logos is inherent in all creatures, but more so in humans and spiritual beings. Because of the divine Logos, rational beings are able to recognize the inner life of God. As a contrast, Irenaeus also outlined false Gnostic ideas about and misunderstandings of the Logos. In sum, he followed the official teaching of the Church and apostolic doctrine about the origin of the divine Logos as the Only-begotten Son of God, the intermediary and cocreator of the cosmos.

Introduction

As the most significant theologian of the second century, Irenaeus of Lyon¹ became famous for his main work, *Unmasking and Refutation of the Gnosis Falsely So-Called*.² His second important

Study was *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*,³ which he wrote after *Adversus haereses*. This eminent Christian writer greatly appreciated philosophy, but he put the living Tradition of the Church before philosophical considerations. He was the first to respond to the threat of gnosis in the official teaching of the Church.

The five books of *Adversus haereses* do not constitute a unified work. As individual parts, they were created gradually in the form of lecture supplements. Irenaeus based these writings on his knowledge of gnosticism, which he acquired by analyzing the gnostic writings, as well as the texts of earlier writers, such as Clement of Rome,

¹ Irenaeus was born around 140 in Smyrna, Asia Minor, and died in 202 in Lugdunum. In his youth he was a pupil of Polycarp of Smyrna, and later—during the reign of Marcus Aurelius—he became a presbyter and bishop in Lyon. He studied in Palestinian Caesarea, as well as in Rome under Pope Anicet. In Lyon, he took action against the Gnostics. See also B. Altaner, A. Stuiber, *Patrologia*, Warszawa, 1990, 186; J. M. Szymusiak, M. Starowieyski, *Słownik wczesnochrześcijańskiego piśmiennictwa* [*Glossary of Early Christian Literature*], Poznań 1971, 206–207.

² In this article I am using the critical edition: A. Rousseau, L. Doubleau, SCh, Paris 1979, namely vol. 1, SCh 263 and 264; vol. 2, SCh 293 and 294; vol. 3, SCh 210 and 211; vol. 4, SCh 100; vol. 5, SCh 152 and 153. I use the English edition, namely, the translation: Philip Schaff, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, Omaha 2019. The first two books of Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* were translated by A. Roberts. The groundwork for the translation of the third and fourth books was furnished by W. H. Rambaut. A. Roberts and William Rambaut, trans., in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*,

vol. 1, Buffalo, 1885. The original works are mostly lost, but survived in the Latin version from the early 3rd century. Hereafter the acronym AH is used, referring to the work in the original language.

³ The critical edition: A. Rousseau, *Demonstratio apostolicae praedicationis*, SCh 406, Paris 1995, and the English edition: A. Robinson, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, London 1920. Hereafter the acronym DAP is used, referring to the work in the original language. This work is linked by content to the second part of *Adversus haereses* (Books III-IV).

Ignatius, Hermas and Justin Martyr.⁴ He found the source and norm of faith in apostolic teaching and in the continuous succession of bishops.

He thus collected and deepened the Christology that had been formulated by previous apologists. At the same time he explained the Trinitarian rule of faith (*regula fidei*) and argued that God had his Logos and his Spirit, which Irenaeus identified with divine Wisdom. He also drew upon biblical theology and teaching about the divine Logos in the New Testament. In the second century of Christianity, his vision of God was the fullest and the most Trinitarian.⁵

The concept of the Divine Logos

Irenaeus of Lyon clearly defined the eternal coexistence of the Logos with the Father. In his view, the emergence of the Logos from God is not dependent on the creation of beings, and God birthed the Logos completely independently of the economy of creation.⁶ When it comes to human beings, however, the Logos only begins to exist when they are called into existence and receive the ability to know it. On the basis of revelation, Irenaeus concludes that the Logos should not be separated into internal and external manifestations.⁷ He also describes the various functions of the divine Logos and presents the Logos as the reason of God or the power that creates the universe.

Irenaeus always described the divine Logos as equal with God the Father, the Creator of the universe. In his theology, the Logos is God, and at the same time the anointed Son of God in the Holy Spirit. Human beings are understood in relation to God and are on the way to full communion with the divine Logos. The relationship between humankind and God is something dynamic, and is realized in the various stages of the history of salvation. Through creation by God, every human being possesses the characteristic of sonship, which bears witness to the communion of humankind with God.

According to Irenaeus, the idea of participation in the divine Logos has its origins in the Book of Genesis, where man is called into life in the image (MHD&+ and likeness (DHD) and likeness (DHD) of God. Yet the human is not perfectly and completely similar to God, so must gradually approximate the perfect model, who is the Son of God. For this reason, the human must become accustomed to accepting the charisms of the Holy Spirit in preparation for full participation in the life and glory of God.

Firstly, in *Adversus haereses*, Irenaeus gives an orthodox view of the divine Logos, a view that is consistent with the Church's proclaimed "canon of truth"

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⁴ See B. Altaner, A. Stuiber, *Patrologia* [*Patrology*], 187-188.

⁵ See J. N. D. Kelly, *Początki doktryny chrześcijańskiej* [*Early Christian Doctrines*], Warszawa 1998, 86-89.

⁶ Ibid., 257–262.

⁷ Irenaeus places the origin of the Logos before the creation of the world, and at the same time he gives up the Philonic distinction between an internal and external Logos. He also disagrees with the comparisons of his contemporaneous Christian writers and apologists. However, he does not completely reject Philo of Alexandria's conviction of the Logos as divine thought and reason. He claims that God must have the Logos within himself, because he himself is a thinking and rational being.

⁸Irenaeus uses specific terms that are important for understanding the topic, namely:
○M◆M⊕⊠MH■ (Latin: participare – to participate), ○M◆□⊠∞∞ (Latin: participatio - participation), and &□H■◆■H∞∞ (Latin: communio — community, participation).

⁹ See K. Matuszewski, *Idea udziału człowieka w życiu Bożym [Idea of the Participation of Man in the Life of God*], Katowice 2010, 26–27.

¹⁰ See Gen. 1:26-27. The critical edition: *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine*, ed. E. Nestle, Stuttgart 1921.

of John the Evangelist. In the first book, he states that the Gnostics falsify Scripture and lie about the true doctrine of the Logos. They wrongly claim that the Logos is neither the Savior, nor the Onlybegotten Son, nor Christ. Yet according to the New Testament, Jesus Christ is the Logos of God (CORDEN CHRIST) CHRIST (CORDEN CHRIST), who became the Savior before the creation. To confirm this, Irenaeus cites the evangelical teaching:

"John, proclaiming one God, the Almighty, and one Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten, by whom all things were made, declares that this was the Son of God, this the Only-begotten, this the Former of all things, this the true Light who enlighteneth every man, this the Creator of the world, this He that came to His own, this He that became flesh and dwelt among us". 14

The Bishop of Lyon explains that God, through his Word and Spirit, created the world, and that he also

"The Father made all things by Him [the Logos], whether visible or invisible, objects of sense or of intelligence, temporal, on account of a certain character given them, or eternal; and these eternal". ²⁰

Word and Spirit, created the world, and that he also

11 See AH I 9.4-5; 10.1-2; 20.1; 22.1; 27.4; 31.3 to
4; Jn. 1:1-18. Irenaeus notes that the power of tradition

¹² See AH I 16.3; 1 Tim. 4:7; Tit. 3:10-11. Irenaeus emphasizes that the gnostic view of the Logos must be rejected and condemned, because the Gnostics are not in line with the reason (□◆① •••×□□□□□◆•••*(••).

¹³ See AH I 9.3; Jn. 3:13; Eph. 4:10; 1 P 2:21.

¹⁴ AH I 9.2 (SCh 264, 138-140): "Iohanne enim unum Deum et unum Vnigenitum Christum Iesum adnuntiante per quem omnia facta esse dicit, hunc Verbum Dei, hunc Vnigenitum, hunc Factorem omnium, hunc Lumen uerum illuminans omnem hominem, hunc mundi Fabricatorem, hunc in sua uenisse, hunc eundem carnem factum et inhabitasse in nobis." The Bishop of Lyon confirms his teaching with texts from the Scriptures (ex dominicisscripturis). See also AH II 30.7; 2 Cor. 12:2-4; Heb. 1:3.

¹⁵ See AH IV 11.2: "Et Deus quidem perfectus in omnibus, ipse sibi aequalis et similis; totus cum sit lumen, et totus mens, et totus substantia, et fons omnium bonorum." Irenaeus defines God as the One who is perfect in everything, and at the same time, in its entirety, being the light, the mind, the essence and source of all good.

¹⁶ See AH II 1.1; 2.6. See also Ex. 20:11; Ps. 146:6; Acts 4:24; 14:15; Eph. 4:6.

¹⁷ See AH II 1.2.5: "Oportet enim aut unum esse, qui omnia continet, et in suis fecit unumquodque eorum quae facta sunt, quemadmodum ipse voluit."

¹⁸ See AH II 3.2; 6. 2-3; Rom. 9:5; Jas. 2:19. Irenaeus writes that all spirits know that God exists above all, and all creatures tremble at the call of his Most High and Almighty Name.

¹⁹ See AH II 2.4.

²⁰ AH I 22.1 (SCh 264, 308): "Qui omnia condidit per Verbum suum, et aptauit et fecit ex eo quod non erat, ad hoc ut sint omnia [...] sed omnia per ipsum fecit Pater, siue uisibilia, sive inuisibilia, siue sensibilia, sive intelligibilia, siue temporalia propter quamdam dispositionem siue sempiternal." See also DAP 3-4; Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16, 2 Cor. 4:18.

Irenaeus points out that the invisible God acts with power and gives creatures a deep spiritual understanding and sense of his almighty greatness (magnam mentis intuitionem et sensibilitatem). Through the Logosthat inheres in creatures (ratio mentibus infixa), people know that there is one only God, the Artist, and the Lord of all things. ²¹ Thanks to the Logos, they can sense the Creator, who with will and power (virtuti et voluntati eius) created the substance for creation.²² Rational beings recognize the God who made the universe through his Word (omnium fabricator) and who is also a wise architect (sapiens architectus) and a great King (maximus rex).²³ They accept that God who created the world is the only one and thatthere is no other God apart from him (solus est Deus, et non est alius Deus praeter eum).²⁴

The author of *Adversus haereses* explains that God, who is completely Logos and Mind (*totus Logos and totus Nus*), transcends all human notions.²⁵ One

can only try to describe himbecause ofhis love for creatures (*propter diletionem*), always taking into account his incomprehensible grandeur.²⁶ It is therefore a mistake to transfer terms which refer to the words spoken by human beings to the eternal Word of God (*Dei aeternum Verbum*), and to describe the origins of the Logos as similar to the formation of human speech (*verbum hominum*). The divine Logos is Life, Indestructibility, Wisdom, Goodness and Truth (*et vita, et incorruptela, et sapientia, et bonitas, et veritas*), and these are not emanations from God (*emissiones*), but the names of his perfection, which always belong to him.²⁷ Thus:

"He is all intelligence, and all word, and in whatever respect He is intelligence, in that also He is word, and that this Nous is His Logos".²⁸

At the same time, Irenaeus contends that the ideas of the Gnostics about the Logos are not only unsustainable, but contradict apostolic doctrine.²⁹ He criticizes their reasoning and their claim that only they can be pneumatics (*spiritales*), because "a certain particle of the Father of universe" was deposited in their souls (*particola quaedam universitatis Patris*).³⁰ The Bishop of Lyon writes that the misguided Gnosticteaching is blasphemy, not only against the Creator but also against Christ and the Holy Spirit.³¹ He stresses that the Saviour's

²¹ See AH II 6.1; 7.5; 9.1; 10.1; Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22. Irenaeus explains that the truth about the one and only Creator of the world (*mundi fabricator Deus*) was preserved by ancient people through oral transmission and then through the prophets of God. The pagans draw this knowledge directly from the creation (*ab ipsa conditione*), and the Church has this knowledge from the apostolic tradition (*ab apostolis traditionem*).

²² See AH II 10.3.

²³ See AH II 11.1; 12.2; 13.8. Irenaeus criticizes the Gnostics for accepting that an angel or some power that is different from God, and that does not know God, made this universe (*fecit hanc universitatem*). In *Adversus haereses* hewrites that all gnostic science about emanations such as *Ennoia* (Thought), *Sige* (Silence), *Nous* (Mind), *Aletheia* (Truth), Logos and *Zoe* is untrue. In his view, it is not rational to think of such emanations as independent entities that exist outside the entity that sustains them.

²⁴ See AH II 16.3. See also DAP 5.

²⁵ See AH II 13.3. According to Irenaeus, God is "unspoken" (*inenarrabilis*) because he is "all-inclusive thought" (*sensus capax omnium*), which is "unlike human thought" (*non similis hominum*

sensui). He is also a light, but a light that is different from the light we experience and know with our senses.

²⁶ See AH II 13.4.

²⁷ See AH II 13.9.

²⁸ AH II 13. 8 (SCh 263, 124): "Sic et qui ait, illum totum Sensum et totum Verbum, et in quo Sensus est in hoc et Verbum esse, et Verbum esse eius hunc Nun." See also AH II 17. 9-10.

²⁹ See AH II 18.3.7; 20.1; 22.5; 26.1; Mt. 7:7; 1 Cor. 8:1; 1 Jn. 1:5. Irenaeus writes that the assumptions and biblical comments of the Gnostics are wrong because they have lost the connection between research and truth.

³⁰ See AH II 19.3.7; 22.3; 25.3.

³¹ See AH II 19.9; 20.3; 22.4; 25.4; Col. 1:18.

descent into this world would have been unnecessary were therean opportunity to know the whole truth by means of ordinary human reasoning,³² as he outlines in the following passage: "For thou, O man, art not an uncreated being, nor didst thou always co-exist with God, as did His own Word; but now, through His pre-eminent goodness, receiving the beginning of thy creation, thou dost gradually learn from the Word the dispensations of God who made thee".³³

In the opinion of Irenaeus, every being receives its character thanks to the action of Providence and the divine Logos.³⁴ It is the Logos that introduces differentiation among the existing entities and gives everything its cause and specific purpose. This fact can be understood by a religious person who has received from God the power of mind and knowledge

"Nothing whatever either has been or is produced in vain or accidentally, but with exceeding suitability [to the purpose intended], and in the exercise of transcendent knowledge, and that it was an admirable and truly divine intellect".³⁷

Irenaeus emphasizes that the secret of participation in the divine Logos is revealed in the teaching of the Church and in the Scriptures. Thanks to Christian doctrine (huncchracterem) and love for God, we can discover the inner life of the deity.³⁸ We need this knowledge of God's mysteries (scientiam misteriorum), because as people we are created relatively recently compared to the Word of God or his Spirit (a Verbo Dei et Spiritu).³⁹ By God's grace (secundum gratiam Dei) and our reasoning, we know that God is allMind (totusmens), Reason (totus ratio), Spirit (totus spiritus operans) and Light (totus lux).⁴⁰ Unfortunately, due to the limitations of human language, we are unable to express everything that concerns spiritual matters and relations with the Logos. We can only learn from the inspired Scriptures that:

"God is all mind, all reason, all active spirit, all light, and always exists one and the same, as it is both beneficial for us to think of God, and as we learn regarding Him from the Scriptures".⁴¹

Irenaeus recalls the official teaching of the Church about God, who is both Logos and Mind (*Logos mens est*). He does so in order to decisively oppose the gnostic teaching about the emanation and presentation of the Logos as a complex entity that abides far from God. At the same time, he describes the origin of the divine Logos as a birth (*generationem*), as well as the declamation the Word by the Father (*prolationem*) or the revelation

neque uane neque ut prouenit factum aut fieri, sed cum magna aptatione et consonantia sublimi, et esse admirabilem Rationem et uere diuinam quae possit huiusmodi et discernere et causas proprias enuntiare."

³² See AH II 14.7.

³³ AH II 25.3 (SCh 294, 254): "Non enim infectus es, o homo, neque semper coexsistebas Deo, sicut proprium eius Verbum; sed propter eminentem bonitatem eius, nunc initium facturae accipiens, sensim discis a Verbo dispositiones Dei, qui te fecit."

³⁴ See AH II 26.3.

³⁵ See AH II 27.1.

³⁶ See AH II 27.2.

³⁷ AH II 26.3 (SCh 263, 294): "Et nihil omnino

³⁸ See AH II 28.1.

³⁹ See AH II 28.2.

⁴⁰ See AH II 28.4.

⁴¹ AH II 28.4 (SCh 294, 280): "Deus autem cum sittotus mens, totus ratio, et totus spiritus operans, et totus lux, et semper idem et similiter exsistens, sicut et utile est nobis sapere de Deo, et sicut ex Scripturis discimus." See also AH II 35.2-3; Ex. 20:11; Ps. 146:6.

of the previously hidden Son (*adapertionem*).⁴² He points out that it is impossible to explain the deity completely, or to depict the essence of the Onlybegotten Son of God (*unigenitum Dei Verbum*). This mystery should be left to God himself (*agnitionem hanc concedendam esse Deo*).⁴³As we read in the next passage of his work:

"God being all Mind, and all Logos, both speaks exactly what He thinks, and thinks exactly what He speaks. For His thought is Logos, and Logos is Mind, and Mind comprehending all things is the Father Himself". 44

In Adversus haereses Irenaeus presentsa beautiful work of creation, which was accomplished through the divine Word and Wisdom (per Verbum et per Sapientiam). 45 Furthermore, he quotes the apostolic doctrine and the faith of the Church that man was formed by God, who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternally existing Son (semper coexsistens Filius Patri). 46 He claims that Christians are responsible for participating in the divine Logos by realizing the divine substance (divinam substantiam) and also for experiencing the goodness of God and the power of the Spirit.⁴⁷ In relations with other people we should be generous, show them goodness, and pray for them. In this way we will achievecommunion with the Logos and will burn like the sun in the Father's kingdom.⁴⁸

In his writing, Irenaeus gives a precise description of human reason (*sensus hominis*)⁴⁹ in the context of the erroneous teaching of the Gnostics on the participation of the soul in the divine Logos.⁵⁰ He explains that all beings were created by the Power of God (*per virtutem Dei*) and are directed by the greatness of his Wisdom (*per sapientiam eius gubernantur*).⁵¹ In particular, he points to spiritual beings such as angels and archangels, and to thrones, reigns and countless other powers.⁵² All were planned and created (*disposuit et perfecit*) as wonderful and great works of God the Creator (*omnia opera a Demiurgo facta sunt*).⁵³ We read about this in the following passage of *Adversus haereses*:

"All things which proceed from Him, whatsoever have been made, and are made, do indeed receive their own beginning of generation, and on this account are inferior to Him who formed them, inasmuch as they are not unbegotten. Nevertheless they endure, and extend their existence into a long series of ages in accordance with the will of God their Creator". 54

⁴² See AH II 28.6.

⁴³ See AH II 28.7-8; 1 Cor. 2:10; 13:9.

⁴⁴ AH II 28.5 (SCh 294, 280): "Deus autem totus exsistens Mens et totus exsistens Logos, quod cogitate, hoc et loquitur; et quod loquitur, hoc et cogitate: Cogitatio enim eius Logos, et Logos Mens, et omnia concludens Mens, ipse est Pater."

⁴⁵ See AH II 30. 9: "Hic Pater, hic Deus, hic Conditor, hic Factor, hic Fabricator, qui fecit ea per semetipsum, hoc est per Verbum et per Sapientiam suam."

⁴⁶ See AH II 30.9; Mt. 11:27.

⁴⁷ See AH II 31.3.

⁴⁸ See AH II 30.1; Mt. 13:43.

⁴⁹ See AH II 29. 3: "Sensus enim hominis, mens, etcogitation, et intentio mentis, et ea quae sunt huiusmodi, non aliud quid praeter animam sunt; sed ipsius animae motus, et operationes, nullam sine anima habentes substantiam."

⁵⁰ See AH II 29.1-3; 30.1; 34.4. Irenaeus writes that the body endowed with the soul only participates in the existence of the soul as long as God wants it to, and the soul only "participates in life" (*participatur vitam*). Therefore, it is a mistake to identify a mental or sensual Demiurge as the one who created spirituals beings (*angelos suos spiritus*) and controls their entire substance (*universae spiritalis substantiae*).

⁵¹ See AH II 30.9.

⁵² See AH II 30.3.

⁵³ See AH II 30.5-6.

⁵⁴ AH II 34.2 (SCh 294,356): "Quae autem sunt ab illo omnia, quaecunque facta sunt, et fiunt, initium quidem suum accipiunt generationis, et per hoc inferiora sunt ab eo qui ea fecit, quoniam non sunt ingenita; perseuerant autem et extenduntur in

Irenaeus states that souls, spirits and all creatures participate in the Logos according to the grace and will of God (*secundum gratiam et voluntatem Dei*).⁵⁵ This special gift of participation in God's life is not derived from human nature, but from the divine (*secundum participationem vitae vivens facta est anima*). Thus all visible and invisible beings are created by the one and only God (*ex uno et eodem Patre omnia*).⁵⁶Consequently, the divine Logos is constantly acting as intermediary in God's creation of the world, as co-creator of the cosmos.⁵⁷

Conclusion

In his main work Adversus haereses, Irenaeus of Lyon very clearly equates the eternal co-existence of the divine Logos with God. In his opinion, the Logos is equal with God the Creator of the universe. The Logos as the Only-begotten Son of God is the intermediary and co-creator of the cosmos. All created beings participate in the divine Logos. Furthermore, there is a communion of humankind with God through the Logos and in the Holy Spirit. The Logos transcends all human notions, and accordingly, human language is too limited to express fully the mystery of the eternal Word and the origins of the Logos. However, the apologist nevertheless describes the perfect Logos as Life, Indestructibility, Wisdom, Goodness and Truth. The Logos introduces differentiation among existing entities and give them cause and specific purpose. Based on the apostolic doctrine and the Scriptures, Irenaeus also explains that deeper participation in

longitudinem saeculorum, secundum uoluntatem Factoris Dei."

the divine Logos can be achieved through study and experience. Overall, all beings can participate in the Logos according to the special grace and will of God.

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⁵⁵ See AH II, 34, 3; Ps. 21,5; 148,5-6.

⁵⁶ See AH II, 35, 4.

⁵⁷The article is based on a PhD dissertation that wasoriginally published in the Polish language: J. Trzebuniak, *Uczestnictwo w boskim Logosie według greckich Ojców Kościoła II wieku [Participation in the Divine Logos according to the Greek Fathers of the Church of the 2nd centrury], "Verbinum" (2019). See also R.M. Leszczyński, <i>Starożytna koncepcja Logosu [The Ancient Concept of Logos]*, Warszawa 2003, 263–268.

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