

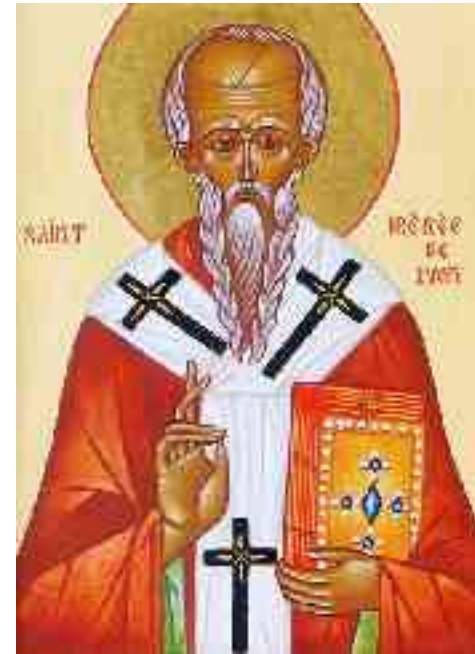


Trinity College

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Is the bible enough?

A Christian response from the Late
2nd Century.



Irenaeus of Lyons
fl. 170's

What is the bible?



- inherited several scriptures from various Jewish groups - scrolls
- legends and sayings of the Lord were also preserved orally
- the four gospels took shape between 2 and 3 generations after Jesus' life and ministry
- predominately oral culture (prophets)
- the idea of the scriptures as a collection of authoritative texts developed in response to challenges of the 2nd century

What do we do with the difficult bits? Valentinus' solution – myth and secret knowledge.



Nag Hammadi Library

There existed along with him Thought, whom they also call Grace and Silence. Silence, however, was no true consort of Depth, who included in himself the idea of male and female, and was the one cause of all things. At last this Depth determined to send forth from himself the beginning of all things, and deposited this production (which he had resolved to bring forth) in his contemporary Silence, even as seed is deposited in the womb. She then, having received this seed, and becoming pregnant, gave birth to Mind, who was both similar and equal to him who had produced him, and was alone capable of comprehending his father's greatness. This Nous they call also Only Begotten, and Father, and the Beginning of all Things.

Irenaeus Against Heresies 1.1.1

What is the bible: Which texts are in? Which texts are out?



But the followers of Valentinus, putting away all fear, bring forward their own compositions and boast that they have more Gospels than really exist. Indeed their audacity has gone so far that they entitle their recent composition the **Gospel of Truth**, though it agrees in nothing with the Gospels of the apostles, and so no Gospel of theirs is free from blasphemy.

Irenaeus Against Heresies 3.11.9

The heretics' problem: they are unable to interpret the scriptures properly



And it is not only from the writings of the evangelists and the apostles that [the heretics] endeavour to derive proofs for their opinions by means of perverse interpretations and deceitful expositions: they deal in the same way with the law and the prophets, which contain many parables and allegories that can frequently be drawn into various senses, according to the kind of exegesis to which they are subjected. And of them, with great craftiness, adapted such parts of scripture to their own figments, lead away captive from the truth those who do not retain a steadfast faith in one God, the Father Almighty, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Irenaeus Against Heresies 1.3.6

How are the scriptures to be interpreted? In the light of apostolic tradition (rule of truth)

The church, though dispersed through our the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith:

[The church believes] in **one God, the Father Almighty**, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in **one Christ Jesus**, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in **the Holy Spirit**, who proclaimed through the prophets the ... birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father “to gather all things in one,” and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, “every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess” to Him, and that He should execute just judgment towards all ... (Irenaeus Against Heresies 1.10)

Where are the scriptures to be interpreted? In the Christian community.



Wherefore it is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the church, who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles, who, together with the **succession of the episcopate**, have received the certain gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father. But [it is also incumbent] to hold in suspicion others who depart from the primitive succession, and assemble themselves together in any place whatsoever, [looking upon them] either as heretics of perverse minds, or as schismatics puffed up and self-pleasing, or again as hypocrites, acting thus for the sake of lucre and vainglory.

Irenaeus Against Heresies 4.26.2.

What do we do with the difficult bits? Irenaeus' solution: Recapitulation



It was necessary that Adam should be summed up in Christ, so that mortality might be swallowed up and overwhelmed by immortality. It was necessary that Eve should be summed up in Mary, that a virgin should intercede for a virgin, that the obedience of a virgin should undo and correct the disobedience of a virgin, and that the sin which came through a tree should be wiped away by the tree of obedience.

Irenaeus, *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*, 33

Is the bible enough? What do we mean by this question?

Is the bible enough to contain all that is required for salvation?

- Yes.

Scriptures are sufficient to demonstrate the unicity of God and the economy of salvation for all creation

Is the bible enough to be interpreted by itself?

- No.

Interpretation must be done in light of apostolic tradition and in the locus of the Christian community