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Summary:

This is a very rough transcript of a lecture on Christianity in the second century A.D.

Transcript

New Testament, Early Christianity
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Irenaeus
Lecture #2

Tonight we have to talk about the second century which was a very important and very well represented one. The gap between the year seventy and the year hundred there is nothing, no record at all of any kind. Up until then the records were quite abundant. After that the records are quite abundant. But just at the moment when you want to know what became of the Church the curtain comes down and there is a complete silence. And that is the period, that gap on which the Church historians are concentrating more attention today than any other time. That can easily enough be understood because that is the crucial moment and that is the darkest moment and something has to be found out. Well, on the other side of the gap there emerges the Church in the state of great perplexity. It is very well represented by, you could use the apostolic fathers, but Ignatious might be better than for some things he certainly would be than Irenaeus. But Irenaeus is so representative of the Church at this time and his writings are much more abundant than you have here, you see he fills two volumes and he is typical. This man is perplexed. He was a church man. He was born about 142 in Asia Minor and he came to Gall. Lyons was his city and 177 he made a trip to Rome, they were having some terrible trouble there. He wrote a letter vigorously reprimanding the bishop of Rome and then he went back in the next year and he became bishop of Leon and we don't know how he died. But now the condition of the Church in his day is what is very well set forth in his writings against the heresies. All the trouble is still, you see, the Church has been going on, this was written after 170 and the trouble is still inside in the Church. Nobody ever thinks about the conquest of the Pagans or Paganism as being the enemy of the church. But he says in the last time many shall come in my name. In vain do they worship me and there shall be many false Christs, and they shall say lo, here is Christ, lo here. They are not plugging for Apollo, and Jupiter, and Venus, and things like that. That is the broken reed and when the Church men in church history always say look at the triumph of the church over Paganism they are beating a dead horse because that was never the issue. Paganism was dead as a (?) already and everybody knew it. All the trouble is a different kind. The victory has to be over false Christianity, over false prophets, over false Christs. That is what they had to contend with and that is what worried Irenaeus sick. His famous writings has a interesting title, it is a very significant title,
it is called, "The Analysis and Reputation of Those Who Claim to Have the Fullness of the Gospel". But those who claim of the so styled falsely styled gnosis, to those who have it. In this time they always refer to gnostics as the so called gnostic because there was a real gnosis which was the fullness of the gospel. We cited a passage reference at the last time, that very old passage from Clement perhaps the oldest one after the New Testament itself, where it is preserved in the III Book of (?) - where he says after the resurrection Christ gave the (?) true knowledge to Peter, James and John, only to them, and they gave it to the rest of the twelve and the twelve to the seventies and that is as far as it ever got.

That was gnostics, he gave it to them after the resurrection and when the apostles departed, after that (?) quotes another passage from a very early writer who is now lost, the earliest church historian you see because Clement wasn't a church historian and that (?) said as long as there was an apostle around everything went well. There were these people but they lurked in dark corners. They were over awed by apostolic authority, but he says, when the holy chorus as he calls it, the quorum of the twelve had fallen asleep almost all at once the way was clear for them, there were no successors, there was no one to over awe them, then they came out openly and claimed that they had the gnosis that God had given to the twelve and to the seventy. They claimed they had it because there was no one to stop them any more. Where was the apostolic authority, you see, and everybody claimed it you see. The expression Irenaeus uses, he says they have sprung up like mushrooms. They are everywhere. The majority of the church followed these people because there was nobody to slap them down any more. There was no leadership in the Church. He starts out telling us right at the beginning, I shouldn't have closed the book there but I will follow these notes here, he starts out telling us why he is writing this. He says the church is full of this, everybody is being lead astray. They use the same Bible as we do, they preach the same gospel. We can't tell them from any other people. They look like the real thing. They are the cleverest counterfeits you ever saw, and they are winning the whole Church over. Therefore he says, "I must take it upon myself to do the best I can to answer them." Well why doesn't he refer this, the problem was you see, all these people are Christians, you can tell them. They all go to our Churches, they all go to our meetings, they all claim to have our priesthood. Their greatest leaders, some of them used to be general authorities in fact. They all claim to have it. That being the case what would you do in a case, that a lot of people in the Church started preaching false doctrine. Well you'd refer to the head of the Church, you would refer them to the brethren in charge wouldn't you. You would say go here. Well he doesn't know of any head to refer to and so he says I must answer them to the best of
my ability. It never occurs to him to refer them to a head any where. And when he has to argue for the authority of the Church and say look what we preach is what is preached elsewhere he knows of nowhere to go and so he says diffusion, it is the thing that is taught in the Church everywhere. It never occurs to him for a moment that there might be a successor somewhere to the apostles to whom he might turn and say this is the true gospel because this is what the head of the Church says. He never says that in these two voluminous books, it never occurs to him that there might be someone who could put these people on the track so that he wouldn't have to do it by himself. He starts out saying since many are bringing in false doctrines and making convincing noises, taking liberties with the lovea of the Lord, those were the sayings of the Lord which were written down that hadn't been brought together in the gospel, there were many of them, those talked about in the Book of Mormon you see where it says they were the ones that were distorted, they were the ones that were changed, and many of them removed. The lovea and you have floated around for a couple of centuries more, these sayings attributed to the Lord. A lot of them have been found. There is a volume Wesley edited, a volume of the earliest papyri, these lovea referring to the things that the Lord was supposed to have said. Well they used these and everybody was quoting and there was no authority and everybody was saying well who is in charge around here and everyone claimed he knew what the lord taught the apostles after the resurrection. A person who made that claim was a gnostic. Someone who claimed to have the knowledge, the fullness of the gospel. So he says, they turned many aside, they persuaded them that they have the knowledge, the true knowledge of the gospel. They say they had it right from him who planned all things and ordered them, see the plan was given by the Lord himself and it can only come from the Lord. The gnosis had to come by revelation and for that reason they were able to teach higher and greater things of that God who made heaven. See the Church had lost these things and Irenaeus is going to find himself in a very difficult position because he has either got to say that we had lost nothing since the apostles, we have everything they had, we are just as well off as they are as to argue on the other hand he has to say well the apostles were so much above us that we can never hope to get this wonderful knowledge. It is passed away and uses both arguments. It is a sore dilemma in which he finds himself, because you see, he wants to rebuke these gnostics, he says, you pray that you had as much knowledge as Peter and Paul and James and the other apostles, how presumptuous, how would you dare say such a thing. Alright the answer is, alright if we don't have as much knowledge as they did isn't it time we were getting it. Shouldn't we have it. Hasn't the Church lost something if it has less than it had in the time of the apostles and then Irenaeus shakes his head and
scratches it and gets himself into a lot of trouble and the latest writing about him, both Catholic and Protestant describe him with a good deal of a nin-com-poop. Because the man is so contradictory he never can make up his mind just what is what. Well it is not his fault. He found himself in that position. And then he tried to make out the best that he could. So he is accused of being a, oh a contradictory, a very loose logic, very fuzzy thinking, and that sort of thing. But you see he does the best he can or anybody else could under those conditions.

Well, he says, they claim, you see this shows us what the gnostic is, they claim that they have the knowledge that came from Christ who planned all things, and for that reason they know more than the rest of us. They are able to preach higher and greater things of that God who made the heavens, the earth, and all that in them is. They argue very convincingly because of their training of words. They make truth he says and falsehood indistinguishable. Truth sound truer than truth itself. You can't tell them apart. Notice these aren't Pagans, these aren't philosophers, these aren't outsiders, these are members of the Church and they have taken every thing over. There is no authority to check them, no one to stop them, they are preaching as they want to preach. What finally happens to these gnostics you may ask. They were never checked. There was never a council or conference of the Church to rebuke them. All that happened is that their doctrines were all adopted by the Church. The greatest of Church historians, of modern Church historians, (?) , said they made just one mistake, they came a little too soon and in a few years the rest of the Church caught up with them and went on teaching all the things that they had been teaching anyway. The expression he uses, he says gnosticism is half Catholicism, Catholicism half way. They were half way there. The Church later caught up with them. So it is really the gnostics that won in this controversy. You can see why they can because Irenaeus knows it is wrong but the poor man just doesn't know what should take their place. Well, making what they peer appear truer than truth itself, that is the word he uses here, like false jewelry or debased coins, they aim at all looking like the real thing. They don't say the Church is bad or Christianity is bad or anything. They say that they have it. That they are its best supporters. They are so cleverly disguised in sheep's clothing he says that you can't detect what they really are until they plunge at the flock with impunity. No one has ever stopped them. Therefore I have thought it necessary to take upon myself to examine the straight to you beloved the pretentious and deep mystery which not all understand since not all have the brains for it. And he uses the word (?) . They don't all have the brains for it, notice how far we are from revelation. That is why he is lost you see. We don't understand these mysteries because everybody doesn't have the brains for it and in so far
as it is in our power to teach you this knowledge and give you a clear explanation within
the modest limits of our capacity. Then he goes on and explains that he isn't skilled in
languages and so forth. Well why doesn't he refer them to the authority. There are no
authorities.

Well, he starts out attacking these gnostics. These are the silly things they teach. He
says first of all this business they teach about God. We are following the outline
roughly here. The serious condition in the Church you see, who can remedy it. He
doesn't know, he tried his best when he describes their doctrine. Great revival of gnostic
study because in 1949 they found in Egypt a whole library intact from the fourth century,
a gnostic library. The Nag Hammadi library, even with the bindings in tact. They weren't
rolled they were real books from way back there. The most important finding made.
Even more important than the scrolls from Palestine because these illuminate the
darkest period. Nobody knows what the gnostics were. It puzzles people to pieces. You
find everything conceivable, there are more books written about this than anything in
church history. More has been written, more speculation, more essays, more arguments
and debates about what the gnostics are because Church historians cannot admit the
one thesis that we talked about the last time. The one thesis is that the gospel
remained. That the Christian church is the same Church that the apostles, well it is not
and as soon as you realize that you immediately have the explanation for the gnostics.
They were the smart people taking over. They were taking over the Church, that is all.
We were told that is what would happen. Didn't the Lord say that is what would
happen. Are these the people whom the Lord said would be followed, that they would
follow. He says, and the apostles the same way, the time will come when they will not
endure sound doctrine and so forth. They being the Church. They will get up preachers
after, keeping after itching ears and so forth. The say first of all and this is a shocking thing
he says that the Father is incomprehensible. Now when they ask him what the Father is
they say well he is entirely incomprehensible to us. You don't comprehend him either.
He had no answer to that either. But these are the charges, these are the things that
these gnostics were teaching. You see they were philosophizing everything, that is why
people have argued that's all gnosticism was, this seemed to be the early opinion of the
people was the taking over the Church by philosophers. But it is not necessarily
philosophical because they especially play up the spiritual gifts. They claim to have the
miracles. They claim to have the knowledge that the Lord imparted to the apostles after
the resurrection, so they claim to have baptism for the dead, they claim to have healings,
laying on of hands. We will see what these things are but first of all what their doctrines
are. They say that the Father is incomprehensible. They say that He cannot be grasped,
seen or heard by anyone save His Only Begotten and that is a very shocking doctrine as far as Irenaeus goes. To say that God can't progress, but again you see that that doctrine won, that became the doctrine of the Church in time and that was right. It only took a little time and the rest of the Church caught up.

They give secret lessons, they charge money for them. They say that the spiritual is all that counts and you can forget all about this cynical stuff since God is only a spirit. This world is a material place. There is no material in God they say. God doesn't do anything animals do. Action is the activity of unsatisfied creatures and God being perfect is satisfied. Therefore there is nothing for him to do. He doesn't do. He doesn't come and go. There is nothing physical about him at all and they say that they, since they recognize this fact of his spiritual nature and pay no heed to such things as the word of wisdom, they say they are like pure gold and you can dip pure gold into muck and it will come out just as pure as ever. There is no chemical reaction. And if you are really spiritual you can go out and do anything you want and it won't harm your really spiritual nature. This is a typical gnostic teaching. See they said there were types of men. There was a nomadic who was a spiritual, that was them. And then the psychic who had some of the spirit but they are mental and they are the membership in the church in general. And then there are the (?). They are matter, the people of the world. Well since they are redeemed and in spiritual ways they don't need to bother about any laws of morality or anything else. The results is that they are misbehaving terribly, but they say that that has no bearing on the subject at all because they are spiritual. And as a result of this they get very proud too and they put on. They are given to gestures and all this sort of thing. They glory in knowing more than others. They build their ropes of sand with their philosophy. A skillful counterfeit he says to take the place of the real thing which they do not have. Well, there is a plain statement of what the gnostic is. The gospel had departed. People made a skillful counterfeit to take the place of the real thing that they didn't have. And that is the way they worked it out. They went back and found any kind of evidence they could as to what the apostles (?) and then they imitated them. And the whole charge all the way through Irenaeus is that this is phoney. This is all imitation. They take the real thing. They take the real tradition and they go to the scripture and they work it out their way and then they think they have the real thing. And it is only an imitation. And how did they prove things (?) by clever manipulation of the scriptures. You can prove anything he says by lifting passages out of context. They build their doctrine out of (?), they take a word here and a sentence there and they build up anything they want to. An easy game to play. Well, what are you going to do in a case like that. Prevent another serious charge against them. Well, we will see what is in the book of (?), first. They invent new
fancy words to present the new fancy ideas and new mysteries. They build up systems on personifications and abstractions, (?) for example, the Church, what is that, is it a woman, is it a thing, is it a real thing, well it has become the great reality of some churches as if the Church had an independent existence of itself. The Church can come first. In fact they announced today, the Church doesn't exist for the sake of heaven but heaven exists for the sake of the Church. That is a Catholic formula that you hear quite often. The Church is an abstraction. It is an organization of course but the only reality of course are personalities. But God himself he says has become an abstraction with these people. He says that they say that God the Father is neither masculine or feminine since he is unbegotten, immaterial and incomprehensible. They use a lot of new fancy terms to fill the vacuum, (?) they talk about (?) and (?) and (?) and (?) and after (?) they took these words over and you talked about the (?) all those things that weren't found in the Bible. And the great shock was for a hundred years after the (?) council where people were terribly upset because of all these new philosophical words which weren't found in the scriptures. But why should these be the words to describe God, had the scripture described God so inadequately that you had to use a fancy new vocabulary to bring forth a new concept. They should have all been there. So it worried them. That is why (?) refused to sign for a long time and these are the charges that fly back and forth that have innovations, they use new words and the words were taken back. They didn't use them and then they brought them back in again and said well it means the same thing as it said in the Bible. But we use the word for that purpose and so forth.

They bring forth a vast amount powerful and illegitimate writing. They have gone back into the writings and the records of the Church. The writings of the apostles. Trying everything they can to find out what they can about what the early church was like because they are trying to reproduce it. They are trying to keep the early church on the earth.

Among other things he says they tell a false story of when Jesus said Alpha and Beta at school. He calls it that false and wicked story. We mention it here because it is included by the Church later on and it is now part of the golden legend, that is the story that when Jesus went to school the teacher ask him to say beta and Jesus hauls off and really hits him one and says you ask me to say beta and you don't even know alpha. A false and wicked story, a story with a mystic interpretation. But any way it is accepted by the Church and later on all these things say, they say that water baptism isn't necessary because it is the spirit that counts and it is only an outward sign. Well, it is not necessary in Christian Churches today. You can baptize them with wine, since it is only a symbol, or milk, if you have no other liquid. They say that water isn't necessary and they do a funny
thing. They use a mixture of water and oil called crism, that is used in all the Christians churches today. It was introduced by the gnostics. They brought it in, Irenaeus brought that as one of the charges against them. They say that baptism is purely spiritual, no physical baptism is necessary. It is the inner redemption that counts. Well of course that is true so they reject all the ordinances, not realizing that the ordinances are there for our faith too. And then he gives a very interesting description of the right of the extreme unction as one of the things introduced by the gnostics. Now people when they are dying receive the unction to get them over safely.

Well, these are various things they do. Here is an interesting thing. And they have certain images, this shocks him, both painted pictures and other materials, notice how the Church is changing. Saying there was a portrait made of Christ by Pilot in the days when Jesus still lived among men. Now Robert Eisler has shown that very probably a portrait was made when Jesus received a trail because they didn't fingerprint then, but a picture had to be made of everyone who was taken in for capitol offense, well slaves too in the (?) in (?) and (?) when the slaves guides run away. They post his picture all over town, the government does, the court, the law, because run away slaves were all recorded, they give an accurate description of him along with his picture. And when anyone was tried there was a real picture made, so very probably Pilot would have a picture made of Christ and what did they do with it. They crown these images and set them up along with the images of earthly philosophers such as (?) and Plato and others and paid homage to them and other forms of veneration. They put flowers in front of them just as the gentiles do. No this wasn't idolatry, they weren't worshiping these pictures, they just merely put them up such as the Gentiles do with the busts of Plato and Aristotle and nobody ever worshiped them as idols, you see. And they put flowers in front of them and what would the Christian church do if it had a real picture of Christ today, a portrait made of him. Irenaeus doesn't like that. He says that sort of thing is bad. This is the nonsense that the gnostics are introducing into the church. This sort of thing won't do. They are not condemned for idolatry you notice. The gentiles do not worship images of the philosophers but merely venerate the images and that is what is condemned here. And he doesn't condemn them for worshiping the wrong images you notice. It is really a picture of Christ it may have been you see, he doesn't say they are worshipping the wrong images but the fact that they venerate a picture at all, even a picture of Christ. Flowers in front of him and so forth. He doesn't like.

Well, they say it is impossible for the body since it is made of earth to participate in salvation. It became a set doctrine in the Church, because of course the body is physical and resurrection of the flesh, St. Jerome is going to say that after the resurrection the

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body will begin to melt away and soon all things will be reabsorbed into God's and to come to behold the face of God is not to need a body any more. So all things will be reabsorbed into the contemplation of the great idea of God and all bodies will be absorbed and he uses this expression and into the nothing from which they came. Why resurrection, why all this stuff, why all the Bible, if it is all going to return to the nothing from which it came. Well that certainly is not the teaching of the Bible, but that is where the church is going to end up and it is well on its way with the gnostics. They say the Old Testament prophets therefore are to be discredited, they are old superstitious people that lead the savage tribes in the early days. They are bad because they worship their own God, the creator of this world. And God can't be the creator of this world, that is basic with the gnostics because there is evil in this world and God can't make evil. And that is where the gnostics have him. Irenaeus can't answer that question at all because he won't accept the pre-existence and so he is really stuck.

And there are (?) among them. They condemn marriage, he says they say that Adam was not saved but that he was cursed. Now he thinks that is a terrible thing, Irenaeus does but it is going to become a good doctrine and they condemn marriage already. Well Paul had already condemned that but it is more popular than ever. And then he says, well what are some other charges against them. His answers to them are even more interesting. So you see what the charges are. And how was he going to answer them. They are taking over the Church. They are really everything. They are the majority at this time, very probably. Well he is going to answer them the best he can.

This is his refutation. What he is going to tell them about God. And he can do no better. He can handle the problem no better than they handled it before him. You see what the trouble is in this Church. Now the problem is what are you going to do about it. With all these people, well you say appeal to the general authorities. That is exactly what he wants to do. His big problem is where will we find an authority to which we can appeal and so he appeals to a number of things, he list such things here, he is the scripture and we have miracles and we have tradition, we have the memories of the elders and there is the famous passage about Rome and the bishop which we will read. Well, there are different doctrines being taught in the Church, there are these gnostics and then there are the other doctrines that haven't introduced as much stuff. That doesn't claim to have these revelations. They no longer claim to have these. Oh hay we are forgetting all kinds of things here because of their attempt. One of the things he charges, a serious charge against them is they try to fake gifts of the early church, prophecy and so forth. He gives them some very good descriptions of that. For example they have a Eucharist. They pronounced formulas, he says, over a cup of wine and then
they claim that it turns to real blood and through chemicals they make it turn a bright red, faking these things, you see.

It changes, and they say this is the blood of charis, this is the blood of grace which has been dropped into the cup and it is real blood, and then they get all thrilled, he says, and everybody wants to partake of this cup so as to get the real blood of charis of grace into themselves. Now, of course, the normal objection would be too that if that was really the blood, thought to be the blood of Christ, if it is not the blood of Christ, if it is not the blood of charis, it is the blood of Christ, a very different thing. But he doesn't say that. It is just silly that it is the idea that it should be blood. And there is a fragment from Irenaeus which he quotes of some servants, some pagan servants that heard their Christian masters say they were going to a meeting to partake of the flesh and blood of the Lord. And they ran off and reported that to the authorities. This was during the persecution. Because they, the poor simple naive souls actually thought that they were speaking of real blood.

And, he says, of course that is silly. They were not speaking of real blood at all. It was just in a figurative sense. The slaves, he said, didn't understand what the Christians were talking about so they got it all wrong and accused them of this to the authorities during the persecution. He didn't think of it in that sense. But already this idea of real blood in the cup is one of the things he objects to in the teachings of the gnostics.

Then, what is his refutation of this, you see? It should be, it is not the blood of charis that is in the cup. It is the blood of Christ. He doesn't say that. It is the idea that it is blood at all, is what is observed. They spend their time especially working on women, gullible women, especially rich ones. And they use drugs and stimulants and breathing exercises and everything to give themselves revelations, to give themselves transit. They do everything they can. They give you a course of training. A woman will get a course of training in which she will be, hypnotized and by suggestion led to think that she can, like Madam Beon, that she can prophecy and she gets all flushed and excited - his description of it - and her breathing comes fast and she begins to utter a lot of nonsense and syllables and they say go on, go on you're prophesying. You see, what they are trying to do is to capture the gifts, the spiritual gifts, because they know the Church had to have prophecy. They know they had to have healing. He says, they fake healings by the laying on of hands. He says, they fool many women into thinking that anyone can equal them in gnosis, and that no one can equal them in gnosis, not even Peter or Paul themselves, or any other apostle. They have the vanity of the mystic and think themselves above all rules. Notice the apostles are regarded as far excelling any knowledge the Church possesses at this time and its presumptuous for the gnostic claim to have such knowledge.

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Well, this has become extremely popular everywhere, especially with the women. He tells how they work on them and how they flatter them, and tell them that they have spiritual gifts, and that they, too, can have revelation. And so they have dreams and fits and all sorts of things and it ends up in all sorts of illicit relationships. He talks about the Marcosion doing that, the Valantians and so forth. And he names some of the things they do.

What they are trying to do is perfectly clear, you see. He also says they imitate eternal marriage, marriage through the eternities, he says, by a sort of mock marriage. He says, they have an imitation baptism. They try to copy the baptism of the old church and claim they have a real baptism. And he gives some of their prayers and he more or less makes fun of them because they are mixed with all sorts of philosophical terms.

They didn't know what the prayer was. They tried to make out the best sort of job they could. They mixed it all up. And they also practiced marriage in the eternities, as this marriage for the eons. And they also had works for the dead. They know about these things, you see. Because this is fairly near. And Irenaeus knows about them too. This is the interesting thing about Irenaeus. He is a transition man. He knows an awful lot about the early church, and it doesn't fit in with his philosophy at all because he has adopted a philosophy of the world, hook, line and sinker. He answers them as a philosopher. He never appeals to revelation. You notice, when he wants to appeal to authority, what he wants to appeal to? To scripture? To a miracle? He is very weak there. He can't produce a single miracle. He is much bothered by that, and he uses the argument John Chrysostom uses later. He says, well after all, miracles are not as important as a righteous life, which is true. What the Church had before was righteous living and miracles. They go together. He says that miracles aren't important. He can't produce one. He points out that the gnostics are producing fake miracles. But that isn't satisfactory. What they want in the Church is real miracles. And notice, he says their immense popularity, everybody is going over to him because the people were hungry for this. They missed the Gospel. All a person had to do, he says, is to say that he has the gnosis. He has the knowledge that Christ gave the apostles, and he will have a following like that because people are looking everywhere for that knowledge. They know that the Lord imparted this knowledge to the apostles anciently, and they don't find it anywhere in the Church.

What can Irenaeus say about it if it's in the Church? Well, here it is. But he can't. He has to argue that there is no such knowledge. He uses this argument. He says that if the apostles had known this, they surely would have given this knowledge to those to whom they gave - entrusted the churches. That is the thing to expect, therefore, since
we don't have it. The apostles never had it either. We have all that trouble here. His main appeal is to the tradition. The gnostic cults began in certain centers, you see, especially in Syria. On the Rhone Valley, he says, it was very popular in Rome, it was extremely popular and motalism was one of their doctrines, and motalism was popular in Rome too, for a long time, right up to the time of the Zepherineus. The popes all accepted it.

Well, but along with that he said, if you want to find - now this is a very interesting argument for where you would find the true Church - if you want to find the true all-Christian doctrine, he says, you will have to go to Gaul or to Germany or the back woods in Aleria. Someplace where people are illiterate, where they don't read, and they just preserve these things because they are not the smart ones that make the changes. Where have the doctrines of the Church been hammered out? In the great university city, Alexandria, being by all means the first, and then you have Constantinople, and Rome. A place where you had intellectual ferment, a place where philosophical ideas are always available and always being worked in to the theology of the Church. Now if you want pure doctrine, you must not go to these big cities. He says you must go to the little jerk-water places way out in the woods where they haven't changed and there, he says, you will find the true doctrine. And if you compare what these churches teach, you will find it all the same. Now, there is only one explanation for that, he says, and that is the doctrine that the apostles did give them. Because, incidentally, is it loud enough, can you hear, or would you rather sleep? All right, that's good enough. I can't blame them, but - that's the doctrine that the apostles gave them and that proves it. Notice where he goes. He doesn't go to any head of the church. He goes to this argument of diffusion and uses that again and again. The fact that you find the same doctrine preached here and here and here and here in churches far apart among which there has been no confusion definitely shows that they must be preserving something of the old doctrine. And what they teach is not what the gnostics teach. Now that is a number one argument. And it is a good one, too.

What does it do for the survival of authority in the church? If there wasn't authority in the Church, that should prescribe the doctrine for all the churches, shouldn't it? We quoted a letter attributed to Anacetus the last time which said that the purpose of establishing the bishopric of Rome was to decide on all important questions of doctrine for the whole Church. Well now, when Irenaeus wants to prove that a doctrine is genuine, he doesn't go to the headquarters. He says, this agreement without any collusions will, of course, if there had been a head prescribing this doctrine, the agreement would be easily enough accounted for. Of course they have to agree. Rome
tells them what to believe and they take their arguments. But there is no one to tell them what to believe. That is the whole force of Irenaeus' argument. He says how could they possibly be preaching the same thing unless it was from independent traditions from the apostles. And that shows that is the true doctrine. That is the argument of diffusion which he uses so much.

Now he says, all this that you are teaching is not what the apostles taught and not what the Church teaches today. The Church disseminated through the entire world. He is going to establish the doctrine of the regular church, now you see. Disseminated through the entire world. Received from the apostles and from those who studied with them, or those whom they taught, that doctrine of God and universal rule. And that's what we are to do then, see just what the doctrine is that is most widely diffused in the Church. Irenaeus always argues from this point of view. Never from its establishment from one official center. He traces his doctrine to the disciples, in the plural, you see, to those whom the apostles taught. Not to the successor of the apostle. He should say, you see, if he is arguing, he should say, the Church received its doctrine from the apostle and his successor. But he doesn't say that. He receives it from the apostles in the plural and those whom the apostle taught, disseminated throughout the world. He traces his doctrine to the disciples not to the successors of the apostles. He doesn't even mention Bishops, you notice. In this, if the Bishops are supposed to be at this time, the vessels of authority, that apostolic authority, it never occurs to him to mention them. And the French Priest Revel pointed that out too in his study of Ignatious. Why they never mention bishops in this connection. But he will a little later in another connection. He only talks about those Methekists, those who were taught by the apostles. Then he said, this teaching was accepted by the Church, those scattered in all parts of the world, and carefully guarded as dwelling in a single house. And it believes, the Church believes uniformly in these things, as having one soul and the same heart, with perfect harmony soonphonos, he says. He announces these things and teaches them as if speaking with a single mouth. It is a miraculous thing that all the churches agree on this. If they had one single head at this time telling them what they should agree on, it wouldn't be miraculous at all. The argument would have no force at all. He would use the other argument, which he never mentions. But after all, the apostles put the doctrine at this head and there is where we go and this is your answer. And if the gnostics are wrong, we go to him and we find out if they are wrong. It never occurs to him. This is the only argument that he can use, as if speaking with a single mouth. And though various languages prevail throughout the world, there is but a single and uniform force to this tradition. Notice not a single Church language. The fact that all the churches speak

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their different languages, yet if you go to a church anywhere you will find the same meaning. Neither the Germans, the Iberians, the Kelts, East and West, the Egyptians, the Libyans not these in the middle of the world teach otherwise. But like the Son, God's creature, it is everywhere equally the same. There is no collusion between these. Therefore, we know that it must go back to the apostles. So there is the argument that diffusion, which not only is an argument of silence as far as any apostolic authority is concerned because apostolic authority is not mentioned. Now, you see, they just left their doctrine and departed and that's all. Where you find churches agreeing in this doctrine, that's the old doctrine and that's all. Where you find churches agreeing in this doctrine, that's the old doctrine and that's all you can say about it. The silence is complete on any head to guide the Church and the diffusion argument rests entirely for its force on the idea that there is no one there to make them agree. Their agreement is, therefore, a sure sign that they are genuine.

Well, then, oh yes, we are talking about the tradition of the scripture. Along with this tradition, he says, we have the scripture. Now this is a puzzling thing, he says. What are we to do with this, he says. The scripture tells us all we ever need to know. He has a long discourse on the scriptures here. He says here, for example, we start out here, "A healthy mind, that is accumulus, not running any risk, and religious and truth-loving, can by daily exercise, easily make it self-master of the knowledge which God has put within the power of men and projected to our knowledge." These gnostics were claiming revelation. They didn't have it. They faked it. They used every trick in the books to fake it, you see. They prophesied an awful lot. That was part of it. They were great on prophecy, but somehow or another their prophecies never panned out. Well, Irenaeus says you don't have revelation. He should say, will the Church have revelation but he can't. You don't need revelation. The scriptures will give you anything you need and any healthy mind can find out all this truth that you claim you need to get by revelation. No sir, he says, the answers are all in the scriptures. For these are things which fall under our mind. He says, God has put it within the power of man and subjected to our knowledge for those are the things which fall under our eyes, and have been read clearly and unambiguously, for they are self-explanatory. You don't even need anyone to explain the scriptures because it is all there. You don't read revelation. You don't need special study or anything like that. You just need to read the scriptures, and you will find it all there. He says, the parables must not be adopted to double interpretation. If that rule is kept, he who interprets can do so without risk. Don't go into allegory. Don't give special interpretations. The parables will receive the same interpretation by everybody for those scriptures. Stop all this highfalutin argument about God and go to the scriptures. What
do you find there. Well, he says, I'll admit you don't find a clear description of God. If we cannot find explanations for everything we find in the scriptures, let us not for that reason look for any other God than He who is. Let us grant to God that the scriptures are perfect, while we being younger are lacking in the knowledge of His mysteries and only consider that we are ignorant in the things right under our feet. If we can't explain the tides, the changes of the moon, and so forth, how can we be expected to explain the mysteries of the scriptures.

Immediately after declaring, you see, that the scripture is everything and is clear and equal for everybody, he says, but of course, it is a mystery and you don't really understand a thing in it anyway. We don't understand what's under our feet, you don't expect to understand these things. That is why they say he is weak and contradictory and so forth, because he doesn't give a satisfactory substitute. He doesn't give a good answer to these gnostics on any of these points. Except very interestingly when he goes back into the doctrines of the early churches, he falls back on preexistence. He talks about eternal progression. There, you see, for the first time he is able to answer some of their problems. Their questions of evil, for example, but he doesn't want to know -- It is foolish and blasphemous to try and project the scripture into saying things which it doesn't actually say in so many words. That is a prologic, a projection of the scriptures, something it doesn't say in so many words. That's a very good principle.

And what does he say in the next paragraph in the next sentence? After saying it is foolish and blasphemous to try to project the scripture into saying things that it doesn't actually say in so many words - he is talking about God - does he then quote the scripture describing God? This is what the next sentence is. "For God who is all mind, all reason, all spirited operons, active spirits, all alike, all equal in the same existence and it is useful for us to think of God as we learn from the scriptures." Where will you find these terms in the scriptures? He quoted right out of Fermenidies. This is straight out - this is pure platonism, a neoplatonic definition. It might be right out of Platitus of God. These are the technical terms accepted and used by the schools. He has adopted them all. You see, he has just accused the gnostics of using these philosophical terms, of going to the pagans for information and so forth. He is doing the very same thing. After saying that you can only say what the scriptures say in so many words, then he starts using acceptable schools words that you won't find in the scriptures at all. Well, what about them, when the scripture talks about people who see God and so forth. Well, here is a beautiful charge, number one is that God is incomprehensible. He says irrationally inflated you say audaciously that you know the unspeakable mysteries of God, that we are not ashamed
to reserve God, even reserve to God, even those questions that we regard as the greatest importance and claim to admit that we know the answers to none.

If anyone asks us what is the manner of the Son of God, we came forth from the Father, we say that the thing is inexpressible and that no one knows. And his first charge against the gnostics was that they didn't know. Now, he says, if you ask us we say that we are not ashamed to admit that we don't know. The same with regard to how material substance was brought forth from God. How could God who was perfect and immaterial produce material substance. That was what the gnostics said, that was the shocking question. That is what the philosophers asked. He has just defined God as being all mind, all reason, all spirit and so forth, all alike and all equal in the same. How is he going to explain how materials came forth from God? Well, he says, since the scriptures say nothing on the subject, it doesn't even give us ground for speculation. So we don't know. He is never able to answer their question.

We have but one way, he says, about learning of salvation and that is through those by whom the Gospel has come down to us. They once taught publicly and thereafter through the will of God handed down what they taught as scripture, to be the future foundation and pillar of our faith. The apostles taught publicly that public teaching has ceased. Now we have the scriptures. That takes it over, you see. We appeal to that traditions which is from the apostles which is preserved in the churches by a succession of presbyters. He doesn't say bishops. That is a surprising thing, too, you see. Presbyters means elders. The succession of elders - the elders taught this and the elders taught that, he says. And note it is in the plural again. They, the gnostics, opposed this tradition saying that they are wiser not only than the presbyters, the elders themselves, but even than the apostles. What it amounts to is that they consent neither to the scriptures nor to the tradition. Now the tradition of the apostles which was manifest in the entire world, here is your diffusion again, must be respected by all the Church. This is the tradition that you accept. There are lots of traditions he says, but that which is most widely diffused is the one that must be given priority. That comes first. And we are in a position to innumerate those who were made bishops by the apostles. Notice the first mention of the Bishops now. And the successors to the same in our day, none of these taught any of the mysteries, they certainly would have told it to these men. Yet the apostolic fathers said, no the mysteries are going to die with them, they will not tell what they know. Remember Ignatious knew more mysteries than anybody in the Church and he has no intention of giving them to the people because they would be choked on them. He doesn't use the milk before the meat because it would be like some of Alexandria and like giving a sword to a baby.
But he uses the expression of being like, of choking infants with meat. He said they would be strangled by it and it wouldn't do them any good at all. So they died with him. Now, here is the argument they give. This shows very well what has happened to the authority of the Church. He says the apostles, this is the expression of the bank, the apostles deposited in the Church, this is the whole of the truth, like rich men deposit money in the bank. So, whoever wants to draw from it, or take a drink of life may take a drink of life. And this is the entrance to life. All others are thieves and robbers. Wherefore, if necessary to avoid them and take the greatest care of the things of the Church and apprehend the traditions of the truth. But what if a difference of opinions arise on some minor point within the tradition? Then what do you do? In that case you go back to the oldest churches. Again he knew there is no head to appeal to. Just go back to the oldest churches, in which the apostles have been active. Get a tie-up with an apostle if you can. His boast is that when he was a very young child, and on this rests great authority incidentally, when he was a very young child, he saw Polycarp who was at that time a very old man. He once saw him. And Polycarp had seen John so he ought to know because he once saw Polycarp who saw John. Notice, where is the fullness of authority? If the apostles had successors at all, he could say just as well that I know his successor. I'll write to him. But he can remember that he saw Polycarp who saw John and so you had better respect him for that. Then he says, well what if a difference happens in that case? When you go back to the oldest churches in which the apostles have been active and take from them whatever is certain and clear regarding the question under dispute. What's better than that, you see? Well, but what if they don't have any information on the subject? What do you do in that case? Here you are really up against it. You have got to have revelation now, don't you? Where the apostles have left us no scriptures on the subject, what is there to do but to appeal to the order of tradition which they handed down to those to whom they committed the churches. (Churches still in the plural.)

To which ordination, and then he says, many of the tribes of the barbarians give assent, having believed in Christ without the aid of paper and ink, having his salvation written in their hearts and diligently preserving the old tradition, so in the last analysis you go to them, to the barbarians way out in the sticks who haven't changed these things as fast as we have changed them, and you can find what the Church preached before. See where he goes for his authority.

This faith which they believe without letters, being strangers to our language, we have preserved with unusual purity. And they only know of one God, so we go to them. As far as these books are concerned, and revelations, he says we can't have any other.
Bible than the Bible we have now. He accuses them of using numerology and has used numerology a lot to prove their arguments. To prove that there were thirty eons they take together the ages of the number of people who got together on a certain occasion and who have added them up and divide them by something and you get thirty or something like that. The girl who was healed, her age you add up with the number of pennies that the woman has lost, the lost farthing and so forth, and add that to subject that from the number of servants in the Book of Job and you get such and such a number which will give you a cosmic number and therefore, you have proven that such and such is the case. It is a silly argument by cosmology, by numerology, how does he refute them on this claim that they might have old books that go back to the apostles? He says there can be no other books. For, he says, there can be no other Gospels than four, because after all there are only four principle regions of the earth. There are four winds. The cherubim are quadraformed, animals have four legs to stand on and don't need anymore than four legs, so the Gospel must be tetra-formed. You can't have any more nor less than four Gospels because animals have four legs. He is using the same type of arguments as the gnostics. He falls into their pit every time. And he always ends up giving the same arguments and in the end he says, well, after all, it is just a difference of terminology. What you call the propatour is our God and that is the only difference. We just call him God. You call it the propatour. You say that God couldn't have created this earth because of the evil in it. There is where we disagree. We believe that God created this earth. But what about the evil? Well, that you can't explain, but we might refer now [I believe the time is up and they told me that I must, if I ever were to come back here again, stop at nine o'clock] So, his arguments are very silly here, but he says that man has to be weak and wicked because he is created. Now notice logic with these people, he says the gnostic's logic is more powerful than God. Now could God create a sinless man? No, says Irenaeus because anything that is created is faulty. Only the uncreated is not faulty and God alone is uncreated. All other things are imperfect because they are created. God cannot create an uncreated thing. Therefore, there is a limit to God and he cannot create all evil that is attended on the act of creation and the fact that these are created and limited in their scope. All things being created are faulty. They are all evil because of creation and God couldn't help that. There was nothing he could do about that. He couldn't create an uncreated thing. But how are we going to partake of the glory of God then? Being created. Well, he gets into a very interesting doctrine. He quotes the elders here. When he is in a jam he always quotes the elders and gets out of it sometimes. For example, he says, God was able to give perfection to man, but he being a begotten thing, was not able to receive that perfection. God was
not unable or unlimited in anything, but the newness of the created creature was to blame because he wasn't begotten. Notice the abstract rule this very naive rule of logic is stronger than God's power to create. He can't make a thing that is perfect, for to be created is to lack perfection. Is to lack the profession of the uncreated. He can't create a thing which is mature or bold. He can't create anything free from the taint of newness, which was the taint, you see. The rule of logic and the category of the schools have precedent. God has to give way and in all his arguments he does. But this is an interesting thing he does right at the end. Taking increase from his goodness he is going back to the elders now, he says, taking increase from his goodness and remaining to a fullness, the glory of the unmade which comes to them as a gift of God. Couldn't he have given it to them in the first place? But gradually, as they persevere through long ages, they acquire more and more the virtue of being uncreated. He says, you become uncreated, through time. You see, he has got to have the idea that you are to share eternity with God, you can't be imperfect. So what are you going to do? Well, you become less and less created as you go along. It is an absurd argument, you see. His own words are, "they acquire more and more the virtue of being uncreated and thus the begotten and molded man becomes like the image and likeness of the image of God. Man becomes ever more perfect, progresses constantly toward a state of perfection. Now the perfect is the unbegotten which is God and that is the ultimate perfection, and if man ever reaches perfection, he must reach a state of being uncreated. So his creativeness wears off and he goes along. It was necessary, and here is where he was quoting from the elders, "It was necessary for man first to be born, and having come into being, to increase, and having increased to be strengthened, and having been strengthened, to multiply, and having multiplied having become great, and having become great or mighty to receive glory, and having received glory to behold his own Lord, for God is He who is to be seen. The sight of God is perfect mortality and immortality makes one to be very near, he says, to God Himself. To be very near to God himself.

Well, what was the outcome of all of this. Well, he said that the gnosticism was simply absorbed into the Church. He doesn't answer a single one of the questions without falling right into their own argument. It is a sad case. He is very much perplexed. He knows of no authority to turn to.

F.A.R.M.S. Preliminary Reports are notes or tentative papers reflecting substantial research but not yet ready for final publication. They are made available to be critiqued and improved and to stimulate further research.

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