# **Chapter 4: Scriptures and tradition in Irenaeus and the canonical New Testament**

## **Irenaeus and the Beginnings of Christianity**

The intrinsic connection between Irenaeus and the “New Testament,” and the impact of the writings of the New Testament on his configuration of the beginnings of Christianity can best be ascertained from his remarks on the necessity of precisely four gospels:

Why is it not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the “pillar and ground” of the Church (1 *Tim* 3:15) is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh. From which fact, it is evident that the Word, the Artificer of all, “He that sitteth upon the cherubim” (*Ps* 80:2; LXX *Ps* 79:2), and “contains all things” (*Wis* 1:7), He who was manifested to men, has given us the Gospel under four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit. As also David says, when entreating His manifestation, “Thou that sittest between the cherubim, shine forth” (*Ps* 80:2; LXX *Ps* 79:2). For the cherubim, too, were four-faced (s*Ez* 1:6.10), and their faces were images of the dispensation of the Son of God. For, it is said, “The first living creature was like a lion” (*Rev* 4:7), symbolizing His effectual working, His leadership, and royal power; “the second [living creature] was like a calf” (*Rev* 4:7), signifying [His] sacrificial and sacerdotal order; but “the third had, as it were, the face as of a man” (*Rev* 4:7), an evident description of His advent as a human being; “the fourth was like a flying eagle” (*Rev* 4:7), pointing out the gift of the Spirit hovering with His wings over the Church. And therefore the Gospels are in accord with these things, among which Christ Jesus is seated.

For that according to John relates His original, effectual, and glorious generation from the Father, thus declaring, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (*John* 1:1). Also, “all things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made” (*John* 1:3). For this reason, too, is that Gospel full of all confidence, for such is His appearance.

But that according to Luke, taking up [His] priestly character, commenced with Zacharias the priest offering sacrifice to God (see *Lk* 1:9). For now was made ready the fatted calf, about to be immolated for the finding again of the younger son (*Lk* 15:23.30).

Matthew, again, relates His generation as a man, saying, “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (*Matt* 1:1); and also, “The birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise” (*Matt* 1:18). This, then, is the Gospel of His humanity; for which reason it is, too, that [the character of] a humble and meek man (*Matt* 11:29) is kept up through the whole Gospel.

Mark, on the other hand, commences with [a reference to] the prophetical spirit coming down from on high to men, saying, “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is written in Esaias the prophet” (*Mk* 1:1-2), pointing to the winged aspect of the Gospel; and on this account he made a compendious and cursory narrative, for such is the prophetical character.

And the Word of God itself did not do it differently and conversed with the ante-Mosaic patriarchs, in accordance with His divinity and glory; but for those under the law he instituted a sacerdotal and liturgical service. Afterwards, being made man for us, He sent the gift of the celestial Spirit over all the earth, protecting us with His wings (*Ps* 17:8; LXX *Ps* 16:8; *Ps* 61:5; LXX *Ps* 60:5). Such, then, as was the course followed by the Son of God, so was also the form of the living creatures; and such as was the form of the living creatures, so was also the character of the Gospel. For the living creatures are quadriform, and the Gospel is quadriform, as is also the course followed by the Lord. For this reason were four principal covenants given to the human race: one, prior to the deluge, under Adam; the second, that after the deluge, under Noah (*Gen* 9:8-17); the third, the giving of the law, under Moses (*Ex* 19-40); the fourth, that which renovates man, and sums up all things in itself by means of the Gospel, raising and bearing men upon heavenly its wings into the kingdom.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In the past, this line of reasoning, which helped “enforce”[[2]](#footnote-2) the idea of the four gospels, was referred to as a “massive propaganda campaign.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Even conservative scholars such as Theodor Zahn[[4]](#footnote-4) regarded it as artificial or flawed,[[5]](#footnote-5) as a “desperate attempt to defend a recent innovation” based on “dogmatic assertions and theosophical trifles,”[[6]](#footnote-6) while manifesting “the same fundamental error as the Gnostics’ ‘docetic’ arguments against it.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Irenaeus does seem to offer fairly shallow, embarrassing arguments for his decision—“one of the most momentous taken within early Christianity”[[8]](#footnote-8)—to accept four rather than one gospel. Stanton’s attempt to read Irenaeus differently has not lessened the criticism. Although able to point out some depth and sophistication in the ideas expounded in the passage above, and admitting that “they are in fact a digression in a lengthy and often perceptive discussion of the authority and reliability of the witness of the Scriptures to one God, the Creator of all,”[[9]](#footnote-10) he adds that “most of us have difficulty in accepting [Irenaeus’] view that two of the evangelists were apostles, and two were close associates of apostles.”[[10]](#footnote-11)

How novel this idea of the four gospels was even for Irenaeus himself can be seen from the fact that he generally speaks of “the Gospel” in the singular and only very rarely in the plural.[[11]](#footnote-12) Who would have been convinced by his argument? Why did Irenaeus draw a figurative comparison between the gospels and the four living beings—the lion, calf, man, and eagle— drawn from scripture, the Book of Revelations, to which he does not refer by name, and which was deemed a controversial source among many at the time? From a historical perspective, this is the earliest instance of this analogy, even if the four forms of the *Kerubim*, who are not described as beings in Revelation, already appear in the Book of Ezekiel (*Ez* 1:1-21).

In a modern re-reading, the framing of the introductory paragraph seems decisive: the four principal directions in which the wind blows the four forms of the spirit fills the four regions of the world. The gospel and the spirit of life are one and the same pillar, the main pillar of the church, a concept drawn from 1 *Tim* 3:15, which refers to the church as the pillar of truth. The text clearly points to the broad context of creation and salvation in which Irenaeus places the beginnings of Christianity.

              Irenaeus’ history of salvation starts with the “builder of the universe,” the “Logos,” which, together with the Psalms, he sees enthroned “on the cherubim” and holding the universe together with “wisdom.” The appearance of this Logos or Word is fourfold—there are four logoi or texts—but they are held together by one spirit. These four texts are identified with the “living beings,” who are the images of the Son of God’s order of salvation. These images, however, are not of equal value, but form a hierarchy starting with the lion, which denotes the effectiveness, the priority, and the royal nature of the Son of God, and represents the Gospel of John. The prologue to his gospel not only expresses the divinity of the word, but also testifies to its own divinity and priority over the other gospels. In the image of the calf, Irenaeus sees the sacrifice and other typical features associated with priests, which he feels characterize the Gospel of Luke.  In the Gospel of Matthew he sees a human face, especially as it describes the human origins of Jesus Christ through genealogy—He being the son of David, the son of Abraham. The last Gospel, that of Mark, corresponds to the spirit of prophecy, the eagle, since it begins by speaking of the prophet Isaiah and thus illustrates the spirit flying towards the church.

How little Irenaeus himself sees these Gospels as “the Word of God” is indicated by the transition from this interpretation to the Jewish scriptures, during which he makes the point that “the Word of God itself” “did it no differently” than did these writings. While explaining how, in the Scriptures, God’s Word appears in four ways and engages in discourse with the patriarchs, he turns to the encounter with Moses, during which the Word spoke “in a divine and majestic style,” expressing the primacy of the Torah, then in a priestly manner, which may be an allusion to the Book of Leviticus, and finally through the Incarnation and the spiritual descent associated with it the overshadowing of Mary and all other human beings. The Gospels are inserted into the Son of God’s order of salvation and into the compilation of Scriptural writings, the Jewish Bible. Irenaeus’ salvation-economic justification of the four forms of the Gospel makes it clear that he felt that these writings were not meant to be read historically, but rather to hold a certain position in the hierarchy of authority. Although the covenants and corpora are bound together in the four covenants given to mankind, the Torah comes first, the gospels last. The order is both historical and chronological. The first two covenants were separated by the Flood; the first was given by God before the Flood, the second after it, “at the time of Noah.”  The third covenant is the one given to Moses in the Torah, while the fourth is the one that redeems and renews through Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the fourfold gospels are a fourfold expansion of the fourth covenant between God and man, which itself is hierarchically structured—God, priest, man and prophet—and reflects the first three covenants. In the prophetic one, the quadripartite-form is comprehensively realized. It is easy to see that great importance was attached to the prophetic element not only by Tertullian, but already by Irenaeus.[[12]](#footnote-13) Although Irenaeus sets prophecy at the bottom of his hierarchical ladder, it is precisely this that the spirit blows towards the four cardinal points of the world. The third gospel, that of Matthew, which describes the Incarnation and Christ’s human birth, is not insignificant, but is theologically inferior to the Gospel of John and does not even approach the missionary Gospel of Mark. According to Irenaeus, history is an interim between divine creation, priestly cult, Incarnation, and prophetic dissemination. It belongs to his

rule of truth, affirming that there is but one God, the Father and Creator, who has revealed himself in and through his one Son, Jesus Christ, made known by the one Holy Spirit through the prophets. Read in this way ... Scripture describes and the Hands of God, that is, Christ and the Holy Spirit, effect the one all/embracing economy, or arrangement, of God, which begins with his stated intention to create a human being in his own image and likeness and is completed at the end in Christ himself, who by the Spirit enables all men and women to become living human beings in the image and likeness of God.[[13]](#footnote-14)

How little this salvation-economic view is historically oriented can be seen from the other chronology that Irenaeus develops at the beginning of Book III of *Adversus haereses*—and only at this point.[[14]](#footnote-15) Irenaeus begins the series of Gospels not with John, but with Matthew, after summarizing Luke’s account of the beginning of the apostles’ preaching (*Lk* 24:49; Acts 1:4).[[15]](#footnote-16) After Matthew, he mentions Peter and Paul preaching in Rome and notes that following their death, “Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter.”[[16]](#footnote-17) Irenaeus’ remarks on Matthew and Mark recall the information that Eusebius draws from Papias of Hierapolis.[[17]](#footnote-18) He then adds: “Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.”[[18]](#footnote-19) Perhaps Irenaeus was following the sequence in which the gospels were presented in the collection that he owned. In his assessment of the content, however, he detaches himself from this historical order and sets it in contrast with a salvation-economic one.

             However, Irenaeus even comes up with a third ranking of the Gospels that differs from the two previous ones:

This series is very noticeable; first, because it recurs in exactly the same way in three places [in Irenaeus], next, because it cannot be proved through these that he was dependent on some external motives (as in the case of the animals in Revelation 4:7, or in the historical order of the Irenaean dating of the Gospels) ... Rather, *Adversus haereses* III 9.1ff offers detailed scriptural evidence that he starts with *Matt* in III 10.1-5, continues with *Lk*, in III 10.6, follows with *Mk*, in III 11.1-6, and ends with *John* ... (see also *Adversus haereses* III 11.7 and IV 6.6 ) again when looking over the gospel texts while discussing a certain passage, Irenaeus mentions all four gospels, as the names of the evangelists apparently go through his head in the sequence *Mt*, *Lk*, *Mk*, *Joh*.[[19]](#footnote-20)

Hoh, who noticed this,[[20]](#footnote-21) could not figure out why Irenaeus retained this third manner of ordering the Gospels in three different places in his work. The famous German conservative Protestant scholar of the New Testament, Theodor Zahn (1838–1933), also noted this order, but could only explain it by stating that “the two Gospels, from which the affirmative position of Jesus in the Old Testament is most clearly evident” should be placed first.[[21]](#footnote-22)

This valuable insight is complemented by the fact that this last ordering of the Gospels emphasizes even more clearly than the chronological one the connection between the priestly tradition of Israel and the beginnings of Christianity, as only the Gospels of Matthew and Luke include the genealogy of Jesus along with the story of his birth. Irenaeus himself refers to this phenomenon, when, as shown above, he equates Matthew with the concept of Incarnation and sees in him the figuration of a “man,” and equates Luke with the sacrificial tradition of Israel and sees him as the “priest.”

In addition, it is notable that in presenting this order of the gospels, Irenaeus seems to have followed a manuscript in his collection, as it came down to us later, for in *Adversus haereses*III 9-11, after considering Matthew, then Luke and Mark, and finally John in III 12, he continues with *Acts* (1:16-17). Not only does he refer once to Acts, but, in the same chapter, he also deals with *Acts* 2, then *Acts* 3, 4, 5, 10, to which he adds *Acts* 8 and 9, then moves on to *Acts* 17, 14, 7, and 15. In the next chapter of Book III, which is Chapter 15, he moves on to the letters of Paul. Here he first cites *Rom* 10, followed by 1 *Cor* 15, *Gal* 1-2, before showing the connection between Luke and Paul in *Adversus haereses* III 14 by going back first to *Acts* 15-16, then to 2 *Tim* 4, *Col* 4 and *Acts* 20. Finally he adds a long string of authorities, which takes him through the Gospel of Luke, beginning with *Lk* 1 and ending with the final chapter, *Lk* 24. Indeed, few chapters in between are omitted. In *Adversus haereses* III 15, he continues this list with some material drawn from *Acts*. And in *Adversus haereses* III 16, he turns to John, but apparently in order to introduce his first two Epistles, both of which he explicitly cites (in the singular, as if they amounted to one Epistle), first 1 *John*, then 2 *John*. Finally, he quotes from 1 *Peter* in the same chapter. After further systematic discussion in *Adversus haereses* III 17 - IV 14, Irenaeus starts speaking about the opening of the Book of Revelations in IV 14 (*Rev* 1) and *Adversus haereses* IV 16, sounding as though he has *Jam* 2 in mind. In *Adversus haereses* IV 17, he makes another explicit reference to John and *Revelation* (5:8), drawing more quotes from the text (11:19; 21:3 ) in IV 18. He draws a final one from *Rev* 3 in *Adverses haereses* IV 20, after quoting from *Hermas* 2.[[22]](#footnote-23) In that same chapter lie four further citations from *Revelation* (1:12-13; 1:17-18, 5.6; 19:11-12). Of course, the fact that *Adversus haereses* V, from Chapter 26 onwards, is increasingly packed with quotes from *Revelation* is less surprising in view of the salvific-historical orientation of Irenaeus' argument.

The sequence of the quotes in *Adversus haereses* III 9 to IV 20 suggests that Irenaeus followed a physical copy of his collection that comprised nearly all of the great texts, as we know them, in the New Testament. Even if not all twenty-seven texts of today’s New Testament are verifiable in Books III 8 to IV 20, the quotes and their order—despite the diversity of the passages between them—point to his repeated reference to what was at least an extensive copy.[[23]](#footnote-24)

In the first of the aforementioned orders of the Gospels,  Irenaeus does not necessarily see history as a chronological sequence, but rather as a display of God’s acts of salvation. These provide the overall structure of the account, while history with its concrete dates and events seems rather peripheral.

From this it follows that Irenaeus’ catechesis, as preserved in his work *Epideixis*, is likewise not historically, but rather theologically oriented, as can be seen from his reflection on the Jewish writings, from which he proceeds to the order of Scriptures.

In the *Epideixis*, after naming the threefold God while addressing man as Father, Son and Spirit, Irenaeus begins with Creation, followed by the story of the Fall, sin, God’s judgment and curse, blessing and covenant, Abraham, Exodus, the conquest of the land, and David. He goes on to state that “the prophets sent by God through the Holy Spirit instructed the people and turned them to the God of their fathers, the Almighty; and they became heralds of the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, declaring that from the posterity of David His flesh should blossom forth.”[[24]](#footnote-25) A summary of the notion that Jesus as Logos already served as God’s communication with men in the Scriptures can be found in Chapters 40-42 in a description that recalls the Gospel of Matthew:

So then He who was proclaimed by the law through Moses, and by the prophets of the Most High and Almighty God, as Son of the Father of all; He from whom all things are, He who spake with Moses—He came into Judea, generated from God by the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary, even of her who was of the seed of David and of Abraham, Jesus the Anointed of God, showing Himself to be the One who was proclaimed beforehand by the prophets. (*Epid.*40)

This arrival is linked back to history not only through the prophets, but also through Jesus’ “forerunner, John the Baptist” (*Epid.*41). It is here that Irenaeus sketches out the beginnings of the Church:

His disciples, the witnesses of all His good deeds, and of His teachings and His sufferings and death and resurrection, and of His ascension into heaven after His bodily resurrection – these were the apostles, who after (receiving) the power of the Holy Spirit were sent forth by Him into all the world, and wrought the calling of the Gentiles, showing to mankind the way of life, to turn them from idols and fornication and covetousness, cleansing their souls and bodies by the baptism of water and of the Holy Spirit; which Holy Spirit they had received of the Lord, and they distributed and imparted it to them that believed; and thus they ordered and established the Churches. (*Epid.*41).

As reported in the Acts of the Apostles (*Acts* 1:8), it was the apostles, who fortified by the power of the Holy Spirit, were sent out into the world. Irenaeus uses the Acts not only when describing the origins of the Church in his *Adversus haereses*, but also as the matrix for his *Epideixis*.

At this point, however, Irenaeus is interested neither in describing the actions or activities of individual historical apostles, nor in staging the development of the early Church or the miracles and successful missionary work of these apostles. Instead he focuses on the prophetic “Grace of God” and the indwelling of the “Holy Spirit” in people:

For such is the state of those who have believed, since in them continually abides the Holy Spirit, who was given by them in baptism, and is retained by the receiver, if he walks in truth and holiness and righteousness and patient endurance. For this soul has a resurrection in them that believe, the body receiving the soul again, and along with it, by the power of the Holy Spirit, being raised up and entering into the kingdom of God ... That all these things would so come to pass, the Spirit of God declared beforehand by the prophets. (*Epid.*42)

Instead of describing the further growth of the Church and the historical beginnings of Christianity, the chapters follow the biblical evidence non-chronologically and refer to the preexistence of the Son, the theo- and logophania described in the Scriptures (*Epid.*43-52), the prophesies of the Incarnation (*Epid.*53-60), the “unity, harmony and peace” among animals and people (*Epid.*61), the Resurrection of Christ (*Epid.*62), the Nativity of Christ (*Epid.*63-64), Christ’s Entry into Jerusalem (*Epid.*65), and again his birth (*Epid.*66), his acts of healing (*Epid.*67), his Passion, Death, Descent intoHell, and again his Resurrection and Ascension (*Epid.*68-85). The prophecies state that “the testimony of the apostles” and with it “our faith in him is well established and the tradition of the preaching [are] true” (*Epid.*86). To Irenaeus, the testimony of the apostles is what is reported in the Gospels, but as this is not secure knowledge, it needs the prophetic verification of the Scriptures.

Even less developed than his life of Jesus is Irenaeus’ account of the beginnings of the Church. He could have drawn more heavily on the Acts, but he uses these as evidence of the truth, not as a treasure trove of historical detail. Once again, he appealsto the spirit of prophecy spirit, since the predictions testify to the “renewal of the spirit” (*Epid.*89), the replacement of the Synagogue by the Church (*Epid.*94-96), which has brought about the “divorce in mankind” (*Epid.*97). More than a sequence of charismatic missionary successes, the birth and growth of the Church is a spiritual progress.

Irenaeus makes a different argument in his anti-heretical work, *Adversus haereses*, in which he counters the “attack on the ecclesiastical authorities of origin” in Book III and “the unwritten tradition and the Bible,”[[25]](#footnote-26) as discussed earlier. To secure their authority, he states that the churches founded by the apostles serve “as prominent examples of their apostolic origin,” but also of the work and the success of the apostles. One proof of institutional achievement is “the Roman list of bishops.”[[26]](#footnote-27) Because his opponents are evidently scholars who insist on scriptures, Irenaeus cannot help but point out that the barbarians had “their salvation written in their hearts by the spirit without paper and ink,” and that having no scriptures, they “follow the old tradition.”[[27]](#footnote-28) Not only does he criticize those heretics who make use of the gospels and especially the writings of Paul, but he also admits that the ecclesiastical writings have not yet been translated into the language of the barbarians and that he has evangelized people without Christian scriptures. Only when responding to the writings put forth by heretics does Irenaeus turn “to the evidence from the writings of the apostles who wrote down the gospel.”[[28]](#footnote-29)

In his account of the institutional elements of the early Church, the list of Roman bishops, the texts and oral tradition, Irenaeus does not refer to the historical actions of the apostles or discuss key individuals such as Philip, Paul, Stephen, et alia; instead he focuses on the theological content of preaching activities through which God pours out his spirit on people, as announced by the prophets.[[29]](#footnote-30) To explain this in detail, he relies on the statements of the Old Testament prophets as well as the Acts of the Apostles and Pauline Epistles that supplement the prophets in various ways. In this sense, he follows the Christian collection of scriptures and particularly in this instance, the Acts of the Apostles, without consciously offering a narrative account of the beginnings of Christianity. This story arises rather incidentally in Book III in a chronologically structured argument on the “concept of ​​God” that emerges in the preaching of the apostles.[[30]](#footnote-31) His account here is based not on the Pauline letters, which he uses elsewhere (though he often prefers the pseudo-Pauline, Ephesians and Colossians and the Pastoral Letters), but the Acts of the Apostles. Irenaeus quotes from every chapter in the *Acts* save 12-13, 18-19, and 22-25.[[31]](#footnote-32) He thus uses the *Acts* as the benchmark for Paul’s letters because, as he states, he wishes to show at a suitable point[[32]](#footnote-33) that “all letters” of Paul “agree” with the statements of the Acts of the Apostles.[[33]](#footnote-34)

Finally, it is also the *Acts* that offer Irenaeus historical evidence of the authority of Luke, which is based on his closeness to Paul and his “collaboration in the Gospel.”[[34]](#footnote-35) Irenaeus thus supports his claim that Luke was the author of both the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles on the basis of a work that he believe was authored by this very person, without realizing the circularity of his argument.[[35]](#footnote-36) On the other hand, he also establishes Paul’s authority with the help of the Acts of the Apostles.[[36]](#footnote-37) Nonetheless, his strongest argument for the authority of Luke,[[37]](#footnote-38) Paul, Mark,[[38]](#footnote-39) John, and Matthew[[39]](#footnote-40) lies in their understanding of God, that is, their prophetically ordained belief in the one and only God, Jesus Christ.[[40]](#footnote-41)

This is the message that Irenaeus develops in the final two books of *Adversus haereses*(IV and V). In Book IV, he explicitly addresses the preaching of Christ in the four gospels, the writings of Paul, and the other scriptures. Towards the end of Book V he then breaks a lance for belief in the promised millennial kingdom and refers to Papias of Hierapolis as his informant.[[41]](#footnote-42) Irenaeus’ millenarianism does seem to have been controversial; even he appears insecure about it, though we know from Tertullian how important this kind of eschatological topic was to him and others at the time. Strongly averse to millenarianism,  Eusebius, reports in his portrait of Irenaeus, of whom he is otherwise highly respectful, that it is precisely his belief in a thousand-year kingdom of Christ that makes him suspect.[[42]](#footnote-43) Be that as it may, Irenaeus’ remarks on the millennium remind us that he was thinking about the Church not in historical terms, but rather in terms of the spiritual past, present, and future of the world. Because the intermediate kingdom is the time of the souls’ purification, education, and realization of God and his glory, the heavenly kingdom is not subjugated to time or limits, and, therefore, to no future temporal kingdom of Christ on earth.[[43]](#footnote-44)

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1. Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 11,8. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hengel (2008). "Die vier Evangelien und das eine Evangelium von Jesus Christus. Studien zu ihrer Sammlung und Entstehung." 103. Hengel nonetheless assumes with no further explanation that the foursome of the Gospels already existed and was broadly accepted prior to Irenaeus. In this, his predecessors are Skeat (1997). "The Oldest Manuscript of the Four Gospels?", , Skeat (1992). "Irenaeus and the Four-Gospel Canon." And he has followers like Stanton (1997). "The Fourfold Gospel." Watson, however, admits that Irenaeus’ „main concern“ was „to ensure full recognition for all four texts alike;”, Watson (2016). "The Fourfold Gospel. A Theological Reading of the New Testament Portraits of Jesus." 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Skeat (1997). "The Oldest Manuscript of the Four Gospels?", 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Swarat (1991). "Alte Kirche und Neues Testament. Theodor Zahn als Patristiker." , Kinzig (2001). art. Zahn, Theodor v. Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Walter Schmithals calls it an artificial argument („künstliche Argumentation“), Schmithals (1985). "Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien." 1. Skeat (1992)“Irenaeus and the Four-Gospel Canon“ lists and discusses a range of anomalies. In this he also follows Theodor Zahn who understood this passage as an older tradition followed by Irenaeus, a suggestion refuted by Hans von Campenhausen. Campenhausen and Baker (1972). "The formation of the Christian Bible." 189. 199. Bernhard Mutschler offers a detailed commentary on this passage without, however, mentioning the problem, Mutschler (2006). "Das Corpus Johanneum bei Irenäus von Lyon. Studien und Kommentar zum dritten Buch von *Adversus Haereses*." 249-280. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Zahn (1888). "Geschichte des Neutestamentlichen Kanons, 1, 1-2 Das Neue Testament vor Origenes." 153. First the translation and then the interpretation by Stanton (1997). "The Fourfold Gospel." 319. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cullmann (1956). "The Early Church." 50-52, Cullmann (1945). "Die Pluralität der Evangelien als theologisches Problem im Altertum." [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Stanton (1997). "The Fourfold Gospel." 318. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Ibid. When he adds that Irenaeus understands “apostolic” as meaning “acceptably broad,” he is misreading Irenaeus to fit his modern scholarly approach since the Church Father makes it crystal clear that he understands apostles in the sense of those who were Jesus’ apostles, namely Matthew and John, and apostolic men to be Mark and Luke. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. See Benoît (1960). "Saint Irénée. Introduction à l'étude de sa théologie." According to Benoit, of the 47 uses of the term in Irenaeus book III of *Adversus haereses*, 41 appear in the singular. Of these, 12 refer to individual gospels are addressed. Thus, only 6 appear in the plural. A slightly different count is presented by Blanchard (1993). "Aux sources du canon, le témoignage d'Irénée." 157. He counts 75 instances of the singular and 5 of the plural in Book III; see also Stanton (1997). "The Fourfold Gospel." 319. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. See Hvidt (2007). "Christian Prophecy. The Post-Biblical Tradition." 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. So Behr (2013). "Irenaeus of Lyons. Identifying Christianity." 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. See Hoh (1919). "Die Lehre des hl. Irenäus über das Neue Testament (gekrönte Preisschrift)." 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. See Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 1,1. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 1,1. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. See Papias of Hierapolis cited in Euseb. Caes., Hist. eccl. III 39,15-16: „This also the presbyter said: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord’s discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely.” These things are related by Papias with reference to Mark. With regard to Matthew, he writes as follows: “So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and every one interpreted them as he was able“, trans. NPNF [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 1,1. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Hoh (1919). "Die Lehre des hl. Irenäus über das Neue Testament (gekrönte Preisschrift)." 16-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Similar Armstrong (2010). "The Paschal Controversy and the Emergence of the Fourfold Gospel Canon." [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Zahn (1906). "Einleitung in das Neue Testament." 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. On this, see Bingham and Todd (2012). Irenaeus's Text of the Gospels in *Adversus haereses*. The Early Text of the New Testament, [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. The evidence in Iren., *Epid*. is less clear, even though he seems to follow the Book of Genesis in the opening of *Epideixis*. Nevertheless, what is noticable in this book, is how closely Irenaeus once again follows the sequence of writings as we know them from the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures. (In this work, he also does not use the terms “Old” or “New Testament.”) Scripture, too, ranks below the salfivic action of God, which is tangible in Jesus’ birth, life, suffering, and death. The protagonist in this work is Jesus, as foretold in the prophetic Scriptures. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. See Iren., *Epid.* 30 (trans. Robinson, here and in other places slightly altered). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Iren., *Adv. haer.* III 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. See Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 4,2. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 5,1. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. See Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 6,1-15,3. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 12,7. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. See Hoh (1919). "Die Lehre des hl. Irenäus über das Neue Testament (gekrönte Preisschrift)." 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. He does so when writing about the council of the apostles, Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 13,3. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 12,9. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 14,1-4, 14,1. Further references in Hoh (1919). "Die Lehre des hl. Irenäus über das Neue Testament (gekrönte Preisschrift)." 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. See Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 14,4. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. See Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 15,1. See Hoh (1919). "Die Lehre des hl. Irenäus über das Neue Testament (gekrönte Preisschrift)." 28-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. See Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 16,5 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. See Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 16,3. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. See Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 16,2. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. See Iren., *Adv. haer*. III 16,6-25,7. See also the content of books IV and V. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. See Iren., *Adv. haer*. V 33,1 – 36,3. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. See Euseb. Caes., *Hist. eccl*. V 26; on this, see Parvis (2012). Who was Irenaeus? An Introduction to the Man and his Work. Irenaeus. Life, Scripture, Legacy, 14. 21-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. See Hill (1992). "Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Future Hope in Early Christianity." 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)