



BRILL

Vigiliae Christianae 66 (2012) 341-361

Vigiliae
Christianae
brill.nl/vc

Irenaeus as Logos Theologian

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Abstract

Despite the prevalence of “Logos” as a christological title in his works, Irenaeus of Lyons has not been considered a Logos theologian due to an untenable presupposition that the Greek doctrine of the Logos has no place in the biblical thought of Irenaeus. The purpose of this article is to study Irenaeus’ use of “Logos” in explaining the nature and work of the Second Person, particularly in his pre-incarnational state. Furthermore, I read Irenaeus in conjunction with Justin’s Logos theology to demonstrate that Irenaeus alters the dominant understanding of Logos theology in the second century. In Irenaeus’ works, the title “Logos” functions to unite the Father and Son in one, equal divine nature, allowing the Son to work on behalf of the Father in creation as an agent of creation and revelation.

Keywords

Irenaeus, Justin, Logos, Word, Christology

Irenaeus of Lyons rarely is considered a Logos theologian, despite the prevalence of λόγος as a christological title in his works. The reason for this neglect in early twentieth century scholarship was the common assumption that Logos theology, as a product of the “Hellenistic mind,” was out of place in the “biblical theology” of Irenaeus.¹ Although the strict division between

¹ For example, see André Audet, “Orientations Théologiques chez Saint Irénée,” *Traditio* 1 (1943), 15-54, F.R.M. Hitchcock, *Irenaeus of Lugdunum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), John Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus* (London: The Epworth Press, 1948), and F. Vernet, “Irénée (Saint),” *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, VII/2, 1927, 2394-2535. Lawson exemplifies this bias against Logos theology. Although he admits that there is a Logos doctrine present in Irenaeus, he concludes from what he identifies as Irenaeus’ thoroughly biblical understanding of God that Irenaeus has no need of a Logos doctrine. He writes, “. . . for if the Living God be in intimate contact with the world

the so-called “Hellenistic” and “Hebraic” mind has been challenged in more recent scholarship, Irenaeus’ Logos theology remains underappreciated due to a focus on his understanding of Christ’s work in the incarnation, where the title “Son” is more prominent, and a concomitant focus on the scriptural content of *Haer.* 3-5 and *Epid.* over the rhetorical and logical content of *Haer.* 1-2, where Logos theology comes to the forefront.² The result of this scholarly neglect has been, not only the loss of the importance of Logos theology to Irenaeus’ overall understanding of the nature of the Second Person,³

of men one may well ask what need there is for a Mediator of Creation and Revelation.” Lawson, *Biblical Theology*, 135. Thus, its presence is superfluous and reflects a contradiction of which Irenaeus was unaware. Deciding, almost arbitrarily, that the biblical idiom represents the “real Irenaeus” Lawson leaves Irenaeus’ Logos theology virtually untouched, focusing instead on the doctrine of recapitulation and the Second Person’s work in the incarnation. Even where Logos theology is not considered foreign to biblical thought as evidenced, for example, by its presence in the Johannine writings, Logos theology has not been understood as “biblical” because, by Irenaeus’ time, it has undergone a thorough “Hellenization” through the work of the apologists. Thus, its presence is inappropriate in Irenaeus’ work. For example, Jaroslav Pelikan writes, “Although Irenaeus was not unacquainted with the apologetic doctrine of the Logos, he made relatively little use of it. The use of the idea of Logos in Revelation 19:13 should have shown that there was a place in the language of the church for a conception of this idea which owed very little to philosophical speculation.” Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, repr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 187. Somewhat more surprising is the absence of a consideration of Irenaeus’ Logos theology in Aloys Grillmeier’s *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, *From the Apostolic age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. John Bowden, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975).

² See the more recent, otherwise fine studies on Irenaeus for their insufficient treatment of his Logos theology: Ysabel de Andia, *Homo Vivens: Incorruptibilité et divinization de l’homme selon IRÉNÉE DE LYON* (Paris, 1986), Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 2, *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh, and Brian McNeil, ed. John Riches, 1984, repr. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), Mary Ann Donovan, *One Right Reading: A Guide to Irenaeus* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1997), and Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³ The nomenclature of “person” (ὑπόστασις, *persona*) in the technical, Trinitarian sense of the later fourth century is anachronistic in the second century. While second century figures, Irenaeus among them, understand a real distinction between Father, Son, and Spirit, they have yet to develop technical terminology to distinguish them other than through the use of different titles. Still, in describing Irenaeus’ theology, the terminology of “person” is useful insofar as it presents a neutral means of reference. Therefore, while I will refer to the Logos/Son by this traditional nomenclature throughout this study, I do not claim this terminology as descriptive of Irenaeus’ theology.

but also his contribution to the development of Logos theology in general.⁴

In this essay, I will demonstrate against this scholarly consensus that Irenaeus' Logos theology is central to his understanding of the nature of the Second Person, particularly in his pre-incarnational identity and work. Logos theology emerges as Irenaeus' central tool in meeting the challenge posed by his opponents, the Valentinians in particular. However, the meaning he derives from the christological title "Logos" significantly alters the dominant Logos theology of the second century. Prior to turning to Irenaeus, I will address the dominant Logos theology of the second century through engaging the works of its most well known protagonist, namely, Justin Martyr.⁵

1. Logos Theology prior to Irenaeus

Logos theology is a central aspect of Justin's work.⁶ He is drawn to Logos theology because of his intention to demonstrate the reasonableness of

⁴ The neglect of Irenaeus' Logos theology is symptomatic of a larger problem, namely, the marginalization of Irenaeus' Trinitarian theology and his contribution to the development of the Trinity. Most twentieth century Irenaeian scholars have been silent or disparaging regarding Irenaeus' understanding of the Trinity. Recovering Irenaeus' Logos theology may be seen as a first step toward recovering his Trinitarian theology. Not surprisingly, one of the only meaningful studies of Irenaeus' Logos theology of late approaches the doctrine within the larger context of Irenaeus' Trinitarian theology. Michel René Barnes, "Irenaeus's Trinitarian Theology," *Nova et Vetera* 7 (2009), 67-106.

⁵ For the sake of space, I will limit my study of second century Logos theologians to Justin. However, any of those figures generally included under the appellation "apologist" would have served to demonstrate similar Logos themes, notably, Tatian, Athenagoras, or Theophilus. Adolf von Harnack was correct in his assessment that "[t]he Logos doctrine of the Apologists is an essentially unanimous one." Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 2, trans. Neil Buchanan (New York: Russell and Russell, 1958), 244. Justin is important for my purposes because the scholarly consensus holds that Irenaeus knew and was influenced by the works of Justin. In particular, see J. Armitage Robinson's introduction to his English translation of the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*. Robinson, intro. and trans., *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (London: S.P.C.K., 1920).

⁶ Justin is not the first writer to refer to Christ as "Logos." The writer of the fourth Gospel used the title to argue that Christ, the Logos, was in the beginning with God and that all things were created through him (John 1:1-5). Ignatius of Antioch also used the title once to refer to Christ: "... Jesus Christ his Son, who is his Logos which came forth from silence." *Magnesian* 8.2, trans. J.B. Lightfoot, ed. and rev. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 155.

Christianity by showing its similarity to the beliefs of the respected philosophical schools. By the mid-second century, “Logos” had become standard parlance among these various schools referring to a cosmic and pervasive, semi-divine force or being at work in the universe. Its provenance is in Stoicism where it described both the governing faculty of a human being and the pervasive, divine force that created the material world and subsequently imposed order on it.⁷ In Middle Platonism, this latter meaning is assumed and becomes the term for Plato’s all-pervasive World Soul as described in the *Timaeus*.⁸ As recent scholarship has argued, Logos theology also has precedent within some strands of Jewish theology, in particular with the Jewish emphasis on the Word of God as above the angels and below the Creator.⁹ Thus, to explain the central figure of Christian belief in terms of “the Logos” served to connect Christianity with a number of ancient and honored philosophical and religious traditions.

Justin speaks of the Logos in terms of a mediating agent who works on behalf of God in the world. The primary mediating work of this agent is the work of creation. Justin writes, “But [God’s] Son, who alone is called Son in the proper sense, the Logos who, before all the things which were made, was both with him and was begotten when at the beginning he made and ordered all things through him . . .”¹⁰ Using the creation account in Genesis 1, Justin notes in two places the significance of God’s creating with a word and links this speech to the figure of the Logos (1 *Apol.* 59.2-5, 64.5). In the second occasion, Justin identifies the Logos of God with the Greek Logos through a familiar mythological story when he writes, “[S]ince [the philosophers] knew that God conceived and made the world through the Logos, they spoke of Athena as the first thought . . .”¹¹ In the *Dial.*, Justin uses the language of ἀρχή to express the same truth. For example, he writes that the Logos “was begotten both as a beginning [ἀρχή]

⁷ A.A. Long, “Stoic Psychology,” in *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, ed. Keimpe Algra et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 560-584.

⁸ John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, rev. ed. (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press), 45-49.

⁹ Mark J. Edwards, “Justin’s Logos and the Word of God,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3:3 (1995): 261-280. For example, in rabbinic literature perhaps contemporary with Justin, the *Memra* often takes on characteristics of a superhuman, pre-existent being second only to God in majesty.

¹⁰ 2 *Apol.* 6.3. See also 1 *Apol.* 59.5, 64.5, *Dial.* 61.3, 84.2. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of ancient texts are mine.

¹¹ 1 *Apol.* 64.5, trans. L.W. Barnard, *St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies*, Ancient Christian Writers 56, (New York, Paulist Press, 1967), 69-70 with minor revisions.

before all his works, and as his offspring.”¹² His use of ἀρχή as a description of the creative work of the Logos likely is indebted to the long philosophical tradition behind ἀρχή. In various philosophical schools, ἀρχή referred to “principle” or “cause” and was central to the philosophical discussions of the origins of the world.¹³ However, he might have been drawn to the concept because of its appearance in connection with the personified figure of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22ff.¹⁴ Justin alludes to the passage in this context through referring to Solomon.

Despite his claim regarding the presence of the Logos’ mediatory work in Scripture, Justin’s language and manner of argumentation suggests a Middle Platonic influence as the primary source of the idea.¹⁵ The Middle Platonists spoke of an effectual or active power in the world through the use of “power” (δύναμις) language.¹⁶ This active, immanent power was

¹² *Dial.* 62.4, trans. Thomas B. Falls, *Dialogue with Trypho*, rev. Thomas P. Halton; Fathers of the Church 3 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 96. See also *Dial.* 61.1.

¹³ J.C.M. van Winden, “In the Beginning: Some Observations on the Patristic Interpretations of Genesis 1, 1” in *ARCHE: A Collection of Patristic Studies by J.C.M. van Winden*, ed. J. den Boeft and D.T. Runia (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 61-77. Previously published in *Vigiliae Christianae* 17 (1963): 105-21.

¹⁴ “The Lord made me the beginning [ἀρχή] of his ways for his works. He established me before time was in the beginning, before he made the earth: even before he made the depths; before the fountains of water came forth: before the mountains were settled, and before all hills, he begets me.” Prov. 8:22-25, LXX. References to a personified agent, called “Wisdom,” who was present with God before the creation of the world are prevalent in the Jewish Wisdom literature (e.g. Ps. 104:24, Prov. 3:19, Wisd. 7:22, 9:2, 9:9, Sir. 1:4, 24:9, 33:7-9). The presence and work of Wisdom in creation becomes prominent in Second Temple Jewish literature. See James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 44-45.

¹⁵ The Middle Platonic influence on Justin has been most convincingly argued by C. Andresen, “Justin und der mittlere Platonismus,” *ZNTW* 44 (1952-3), 157-195. Other works arguing for a Middle Platonic background to Justin include Barnard, *Justin Martyr* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), Jean Daniélou, *The Development of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea*, vol. 2, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, trans. and ed. John Baker (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1973), Edwards, “On the Platonic Schooling of Justin,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 42 (1991): 17-34, Osborn, *Justin Martyr*; *Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie*: Herausgegeben von Gerhard Ebeling 47 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1973), and Charles Munier, *L’Apologie de Saint Justin Philosophe et Martyr* (Fribourg, Suisse: Éditions Universitaires, 1994).

¹⁶ Δύναμις played a crucial role in Plato’s philosophy. See Michel René Barnes, *The Power of God: Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press), 2001, 54-93. According to Daniélou, however, δύναμις

contrasted, and ontologically subordinated, to the static, transcendent nature of the One, which enabled the Middle Platonists to affirm a creative and providential function of God in the world while keeping the divine nature free of mixture and contact with material creation—God’s power was distinct from him.¹⁷

Invoking this contrast, Justin continually describes the Logos as the Power (δύναμις) of God in the world. He writes, “Jesus Christ alone has truly been begotten as Son by God, being His Logos and First-Begotten and Power...”¹⁸ In the *Dial.*, Justin makes the same equation between Logos and Power and specifically connects δύναμις to the creative work of God when he claims “God has generated from himself a certain rational power as a beginning for all creatures.”¹⁹ Elsewhere, he contrasts this creative δύναμις in the world with the God who transcends the world. Justin writes, “[The Logos] is the Power of the ineffable [ἄρρητος] Father.”²⁰ The adjective ἄρρητος has a semantic connection to speech, as in “unutterable.”

did not acquire the meaning of the effectual or active power of God in the world until the writings of the Middle Platonists. Daniélou, *Gospel Message*, 347 (see 346-354 in relation to the current discussion). Daniélou’s crucial example from Middle Platonism highlights a text from Atticus quoted by Eusebius: “Plato holds that the world is the fairest work, and has attributed to the creator of the universe a power by means of which he created the world which did not exist before.” Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 15.6 as quoted in Daniélou, *Gospel Message*, 347.

¹⁷⁾ The contrast between the two gods, and the attribution of the work of creation to the second, active god, is evident in the *Didaskalikos*: “[The First God] is Father through being the cause of all things and bestowing order on the heavenly Intellect and the Soul of the World in accordance with himself and his own thoughts. By his own will he has filled all things with himself, rousing up the Soul of the World and turning it towards himself, as being the cause of its intellect. It is this latter that, set in order by the Father, itself imposes order on all of nature in this world.” *Didask.* 10.3, trans. Dillon, *Alcinous: The Handbook of Platonism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 18 with minor revisions. Edwards traces the same distinction of the transcendent, static god and immanent, active god in the thought of Numenius in comparison to Justin’s understanding of the Logos. Edwards, “Platonic Schooling of Justin,” 17-34. Dillon summarily shows that although the entities in the Middle Platonic system of first principles varied from author to author, the second and third entities always are subordinate to the First God. Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 45-49. The reason that the second and third entities necessarily were subordinated is that the transcendent nature of the First God precluded his action in the material world.

¹⁸⁾ 1 *Apol.* 23.2. See also 1 *Apol.* 33.6 and *Dial.* 61.3.

¹⁹⁾ *Dial.* 61.1.

²⁰⁾ 2 *Apol.* 10.8. See also 2 *Apol.* 13.4.

In other words, the Father who does not speak has the Logos (Word) as his voice in creation.²¹

This contrast between God and the Logos is displayed most clearly in Justin's interpretation of the Old Testament theophanies to which he refers in 1 *Apol.* 63 and develops in detail in *Dial.* 48-62.²² Justin believes the subject of the Old Testament theophanies is the Logos rather than the Father. He introduces the theophanies to prove the divine nature of Christ in response to Trypho's critique that the belief in a divine Christ who becomes flesh is illogical.²³ To argue that a divine Christ could become flesh, Justin must first prove from Scripture the existence of another God besides the Most High God. For Justin, the theophanies show another God in addition to the God in heaven because Scripture refers to the figure that appeared on earth as "God" and "Lord." Ostensibly, Justin uses the scriptural account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and Psalms 45/4 and 110/109 to demonstrate that Scripture speaks of two different Gods and Lords. Nevertheless, the logic of the argument depends upon Justin's philosophical assumptions regarding the nature of God as transcendent and unable to appear in and work in material creation. This logic is displayed in his interpretation of the theophany of Exodus 3, where he writes, "[N]o one with even the slightest intelligence would dare assert that the Creator of all things left his super-celestial realms to make himself visible in a little spot on earth."²⁴ This characteristic of the Most

²¹ Justin uses δύναμις in other ways as well. For example, he states that Christ is not only the Power of God but is himself a power alongside God's own power (1 *Apol.* 32, 40, 60). He simultaneously can claim that Christ was conceived by the power of God and that he was conceived by the power of the Logos (1 *Apol.* 32-33, 46). He even says that the word (λόγος) coming from the mouth of the Christ who walked on earth is the power of God (1 *Apol.* 14). These varied uses of power language within the same argument demonstrate the degree to which the meaning of δύναμις in reference to Christ had yet to be determined.

²² Justin's description of the work of the Logos in the theophanies comes in the context not of the Logos' work as agent of creation, but in the Logos' work as revealer of the purposes and identity of God the Father to the material world. There is not the space to develop this function in Justin's Logos theology here and, in any case, its implications for Justin's understanding of the nature of the Logos do not differ substantially from the insights gained by a study of the Logos' creative function.

²³ Trypho's question is occasioned by the various Messianic proofs given in the preceding chapters where Justin claims, without argumentation, that the Messiah is divine (*Dial.* 36.2ff).

²⁴ *Dial.* 60.2. Likewise, in a summary statement in *Dial.* 127.1-2, Justin writes, "And I presume that I have shown sufficiently that when God says, 'God went up from

High God requires that the one who literally appears on earth in the theophany accounts must be a different being, even though Scripture calls this being “God.”

Justin’s use of Logos theology, indicated by both the philosophical precedents identified here as well as the manner in which he argues for the presence of the Logos in Scripture, raises two observations critical to the nature and work of the Second Person. First, Justin believes the Logos is divine. This truth is discerned from his insistence both that the Logos acts as God in his role in creation and appearance in the theophanies, and that he is called such in Scripture.²⁵ Second, the divine nature of the Logos is not equal to the divine nature of God. Rather, the nature of the Logos is a diminished or lesser divinity confirmed by his use of power language and its Middle Platonic origin indicating the diminished divinity of the World Soul as compared to the Primary God. The Logos is the figure who is seen in the theophany accounts precisely because the transcendence of the Most High God precludes his location in material creation. The result of this conception for Justin is a Logos who functions primarily as an intermediary between God and material creation and whose ability to work in the world is predicated upon his diminished divinity.²⁶ In other words, the Logos can work in the world because he is not transcendent and invisible to the same degree as the Father.

Abraham’ . . . you should not imagine that the Unbegotten God himself went down or went up from any place. For, the ineffable Father and Lord of all neither comes to any place, nor walks, nor sleeps, nor arises, but always remains in his place. . .” Falls, 191. On Justin’s use of spatial language to maintain the divine transcendence, see Andre Méhat, “Le ‘Lieu Supracélestre’ de Saint Justin à Origène,” in *Forma Futura: Studi in Onore del Cardinale Michele Pellegrino* (Torino: Bottega d’Erasmus, 1975), 282-294.

²⁵ Alan F. Segal’s work is instructive for understanding how the rabbis would have understood the sort of power arguments made by Justin. According to Segal, the rabbis saw this argumentation as heretical precisely because it emphasized a second divine figure in heaven alongside the Most High God. Segal specifically shows how the texts upon which Justin relies to prove the divinity of Christ in *Dial.* (e.g. Gen. 1:27, 3:22, Ps. 45:7-8, and Dan. 7:9) are the very texts that the rabbis put into the mouths of those persons espousing the two powers heresy. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 221-225.

²⁶ This understanding of the relationship between the Logos and God is reiterated in several of Justin’s proto-Trinitarian statements where the Son is located in second place or rank (χώρα, τάξις) to the Father. 1 *Apol.* 13.3, 60.5-7.

2. Irenaeus' Logos Theology

One of the difficulties with considering Irenaeus as a Logos theologian is the apparent lack of a motive that would draw him to use "Logos" as a christological title. Unlike Justin, Irenaeus is not concerned to demonstrate where Christianity aligns with the assumptions of Greek philosophy. Indeed, in certain places, Irenaeus explicitly rejects such correlation, arguing instead that the faulty beliefs of his opponents were inspired by the writings of the philosophers.²⁷ More to the point, Irenaeus' understanding of the divine nature, as dictated by his polemical argument of *Haer.* 2 expressly denies that God is in need of a mediating agent to work and move in creation, for this was the purpose of the Valentinian Aeons. Rather, Irenaeus defines God as the "Fullness" in whom all creation exists.²⁸ He maintains God's transcendence not through spatial language, as we saw above in Justin's work (God exists in his own place), but through defining God in a higher order of being.²⁹ The result, as Adelin Rousseau has aptly phrased it, is that there is no filter that exists between God and humanity.³⁰ God is free to move and work in creation. It would seem, then, that the motives drawing Justin, and the other apologists, to Logos theology are absent in Irenaeus' work.

In order to understand Irenaeus' Logos theology, one must first identify a motive for its presence in his work. Irenaeus is drawn to the title because of its prior use within Valentinianism. According to Irenaeus' exposition in the first chapters of *Haer.* 1, the Valentinians used "Logos" as a title for two central figures within their convoluted protological drama. First, "Logos" is a title of one of the original 30 Aeons of the divine *Pleroma*. Additionally, Logos is an alternate title for the Aeon principally called "Savior," who

²⁷) See *Haer.* 2.14.

²⁸) *Haer.* 2.1.1-2.

²⁹) *Haer.* 2.12.1, 2.13.3-4, 4.11.1. Barnes writes, "Irenaeus will have none of this 'spatial' understanding of the godhead: it denies the simplicity of God, who is without compound, and is 'wholly' whatever he is... This is the life of *Spirit*." Barnes, "Irenaeus's Trinitarian Theology," 76. The fundamental contrast between God and creatures, whether it is put in terms of simple spirit and compound material, as Barnes does, or in terms of "uncreated" and "created," as Jacques Fantino does, runs throughout Irenaeus' work and is essential to grasping his understanding of the divine nature. Fantino, *La théologie d'Irénée: Lecture des Écritures en réponse à l'exégèse gnostique. Une approche trinitaire* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1994), 344ff.

³⁰) Rousseau, trans., intro., and notes, Irénée de Lyon, *Contre les Hérésies 2.1, Sources Chrétiennes* 293 (Paris: Cerf, 1982), 122.

is the product of all the Aeons in a corporate act of worship of the First-Aeon.³¹ In both cases, these Aeons are later emanations from the First-Aeon, and as such, they are located at an ontological and epistemological distance from the First-Aeon.³² Irenaeus found this Logos theology at odds with the traditional use of “Logos” as handed down from the apostles, most notably its use in the Fourth Gospel. Nonetheless, since the title was part of the apostolic inheritance, Irenaeus does not intend to relinquish it to his opponents anymore than he wants to relinquish the Fourth Gospel.³³ Therefore, Irenaeus employs “Logos” as a christological title in order to reclaim the title as the rightful property of the Church. Notably, the meaning he draws from the title directly contrasts to the Valentinian emphasis on the Logos as epistemologically and ontologically distant from the Most High God. This meaning is shown in the Logos’ two pre-incarnational functions, namely, creating the world and revealing the Father to the world.

2.1 *Logos as Creator*

For Irenaeus, the Logos is, first, the mediating agent through whom God creates all things. Texts that attest to the mediating work of the Logos in

³¹ *Haer.* 1.2.6. In some interpretations, this latter figure, working through the Demiurge, serves as the instrumental cause of an unintended and inherently evil material creation. On this point, see Fantino, *Théologie d'Irénée*, 171-175. Fantino's primary text for this understanding comes not from Irenaeus' report but from a fragment of Heracleon. Nonetheless, aspects of *Haer.* 1 also support this interpretation of the creative work of the Valentinian Logos, notably *Haer.* 1.4.5.

³² *Haer.* 1.1.1-2. As Barnes notes, the intervals between the Aeons are “the ontological basis (or expression of) the inferiority of each succeeding rank of super-celestial offspring: each degree of separation from the first cause produces offspring of diminished content and dignity compared to its antecedents.” Barnes, “Irenaeus's Trinitarian Theology,” 76. Similarly, Denis Minns writes, “Fundamental to the concept of the [Valentinian] chain of being is the idea of a lessening or diminishing of whatever is communicated from one Aeon in the chain to the next.” Minns, *Irenaeus* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 30. Accordingly, in the Valentinian understanding, only the Nous is able to contemplate fully the mystery of the First-Aeon, precisely because, as the third emanation, the Nous emanated directly from, and is positioned relatively close to, the First-Aeon. The farther an emanation is positioned from the first source, as a result of its emanation order, the less knowledge it possesses of the Most High God until finally the last Aeon falls into error out of complete ignorance.

³³ The significant role the Fourth Gospel, and the Prologue in particular, plays in Irenaeus' christology has been demonstrated thoroughly by Bernhard Mutschler, *Irenäus als johanneischer Theologe. Studien zur Schriftauslegung bei Irenäus von Lyon*, STAC 21 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

creation, or to the Logos as Creator, abound throughout the five books of *Haer.* and the *Epid.*, showing the fundamental importance of this pre-incarnational work to the nature of the Logos in Irenaeus' understanding. Irenaeus writes, "[God] formed all things that were made by His Logos that never wearies."³⁴ Elsewhere he writes, "[W]e should know that he who made and formed and breathed in them the breath of life, and nourishes us by creation, establishing all things by his Logos, and binding them together by his Sophia—this is he who is the only true God . . ."³⁵ Similarly, he writes in *Haer.* 3, "[T]here is but one God, who made all things by His Logos."³⁶ Other examples of this mediatory understanding include, "[H]e who from the beginning founded and created them, the Logos" and "For the Creator of the world is truly the Logos" and "God is verbal, therefore he made created things by the Word . . ."³⁷ In other contexts, the creative work of the Logos occurs in a statement of fundamental Christian belief. For example, in a *regula* statement in *Haer.* 1, Irenaeus writes, "For God needs none of all these things, but is He who, by His Logos and His Spirit, makes, and disposes, and governs all things, and commands all things into existence . . ."³⁸ To these examples, others could be added, but these texts, drawn from each of the books of *Haer.* and the *Epid.* suffice to demonstrate the pervasiveness of the Logos as Creator theme in Irenaeus' works.

The underlying truth expressed in these texts was witnessed also in Justin's Logos theology, namely, God is the Creator proper, but he creates through the medium or agent of the Logos, an action which, subsequently, shows the divine status of the Logos. Furthermore, Irenaeus likewise is adamant that the presence of a divine agent through whom God creates is testified to in Scripture, and he employs many of the same passages as Justin and other apologists in support.³⁹ Nonetheless, the use of δύναιμις

³⁴ *Haer.* 2.2.4, ANF 1:361 with minor revisions.

³⁵ *Haer.* 3.24.2. For Irenaeus, "Sophia" (σοφία, *sapientia*) is an alternate name for the Holy Spirit in the same way that "Logos" is an alternate name for the Son. For a good study on Irenaeus' pneumatology, see Hans-Jochen Jaschke, *Der Heilige Geist im Bekenntnis der Kirche*, Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie 40 (Münster: Verlag Aschendorff, 1976).

³⁶ *Haer.* 3.11.1.

³⁷ *Haer.* 4.10.2, ANF 1:474, *Haer.* 5.18.3, ANF 1:546, and *Epid.* 5, trans. John Behr, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: On the Apostolic Preaching* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 43.

³⁸ *Haer.* 1.22.1, ANF 1:347 with minor revisions.

³⁹ For example, Irenaeus predominantly uses John 1:1-3 (*Haer.* 2.2.5, 3.8.3) and Ps. 33/2:6 (*Haer.* 1.22.1, 3.8.3, *Epid.* 5) both of which Theophilus of Antioch used. *Autol.* 1.7, 2.10, 22.

language which marked Justin's argument in favor of this mediatory action is absent from Irenaeus' argument, and this absence represents a central divergence between Justin's and Irenaeus' respective Logos theologies.

The reason for the lack of "power" language in Irenaeus' discussion of the Logos' creative work again can be traced to his polemic with the Valentinians. Δύναμις, most often rendered *virtus* by the Latin translator,⁴⁰ was a fixture to the vocabulary of Valentinianism, or at least, in the vocabulary Irenaeus uses to describe Valentinian thought. Primarily, "power" language occurs repeatedly in Irenaeus' description of the Valentinian topological or spatial understanding of the Divine *Pleroma*.⁴¹ For example, this term in the singular often refers to the First-Aeon⁴² or to one of the Aeons of the *Pleroma* in Valentinian teaching.⁴³ Used in the plural form, it also refers to the Aeons or to a certain number of Aeons as a whole.⁴⁴ The Valentinians may have used δύναμις of the Demiurge.⁴⁵ Regardless of whether power language is original to Valentinian vocabulary, this evidence demonstrates that in Irenaeus' mind, δύναμις is linked to Valentinian descriptions of the Aeons.⁴⁶

While not opposed to taking a title or term characteristic of Valentinian theology and rehabilitating it for his own thought, as demonstrated with his use of λόγος, Irenaeus does not rehabilitate δύναμις. Unlike Justin, he

⁴⁰ Bruno Reynders, *Lexique Comparé du Texte Grec et des Versions Latine, Arménienne et Syriaque ed L' "Adversus Haereses" de Saint Irénée* (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1954), 60.

⁴¹ The spatial aspects of Valentinian theology result from their theory of emissions or emanations, which posited the existence of 29 Aeons situated *between* the First-Aeon and the material world and, thereby, served to maintain his transcendence. William R. Schoedel effectively has underscored this spatial aspect of Gnostic theologies in general, although he does not adequately identify Irenaeus' move away from this spatial conception. "Topological' Theology and Some Monistic Tendencies in Gnosticism in *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honour of Alexander Böhlig*, ed. Martin Krause (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), 88-108. As noted above, Barnes has identified the importance of Irenaeus in rejecting this language. See above n29.

⁴² *Haer.* 1.12.4, 1.13.6, 1.15.2, 5, 1.16.3, 1.21.2, 4, 123.3. This is not an exhaustive list (as with ns43 and 44).

⁴³ *Haer.* 1.3.3, 1.3.5, 1.11.3-4, 1.12.1, 1.14.5, 1.24.4, 2.20.1.

⁴⁴ *Haer.* 1.11.1, 1.18.1, 3.16.1.

⁴⁵ *Haer.* 2.11.1.

⁴⁶ According to Irenaeus' account, the Valentinian use of δύναμις diverges somewhat from the use of δύναμις in the Middle Platonists and the apologists. As noted above, the latter two groups employed δύναμις as a title, not of the Most High God, but of his agent(s) working in the world. For the Valentinians, δύναμις can apply equally to the Most High God or to the lower Aeons working in the world.

never describes the Logos as a Power or the Power of God.⁴⁷ In contrast, Irenaeus more often associates δύναμις language with entities that are created by God. He writes, “God stands in need of nothing and . . . He created and made all things by His Logos, while he neither required angels to assist Him in the production of those things which are made, nor of any power [*Virtute*] greatly inferior to Himself. . . .”⁴⁸ Elsewhere, he writes, “It was not angels, therefore, who made us, nor who formed us, neither had angels power to make an image of God, nor anyone else, except the Logos of the Lord, nor any power [*virtus*] remotely distant from the Father of all things.”⁴⁹ The absence of δύναμις language suggests that it is not by virtue of a lesser divinity that the Logos creates and acts as mediator, as we saw with Justin. Possibly, Irenaeus leaves this divine title to the Valentinians because he is aware of the Middle Platonic (and Justin’s) significance of δύναμις as a lesser divine being and deems such a significance inadequate to describe the nature of the Logos. Another possibility explaining the absence of δύναμις language is that Irenaeus does not find a good scriptural precedence for “Power” as a divine title, as he did for “Logos.”⁵⁰ Whatever the reason, the lack of δύναμις language suggests that Irenaeus’ Logos theology ought not to be interpreted along the same lines as the Middle Platonists’ and Justin’s use of “Logos,” which, as we saw, implied a

⁴⁷ In several places, Irenaeus speaks of God having power and of God creating by his power (e.g. *Haer.* 2.10.4, 2.30.9, 4.38.3). These passages could be interpreted as referring to the Logos as the Power of God in a Middle Platonist context, particularly as they show a similar structure to other passages where Irenaeus speaks of God creating by his Logos. Nonetheless, in the passages that refer to God’s creative power, Irenaeus avoids linking this power and the entity he has elsewhere called the Logos (Logos language is absent). Likewise, in passages where he speaks of God creating through the Logos, he does not use the language of power. *Epid.* 10 has been interpreted in the past as linking the Logos and the Sophia with the term “powers.” However, Anthony Briggman recently has shown on the strength of the Armenian grammar, that “powers” in this passage refers not to the Logos or Sophia, but to a lower class of angels. Briggman, “Re-Evaluating Angelomorphism in Irenaeus: The Case of Proof 10,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 61.2 (2010), 583-95.

⁴⁸ *Haer.* 2.2.4, ANF 1:361. Likewise, in several uses of Ps. 33/2:6, Irenaeus speaks of the Logos (and the Sophia) *creating* the powers, in conformity with the Psalmist’s use of the word (*Haer.* 3.8.3; *Epid.* 5).

⁴⁹ *Haer.* 4.20.1, ANF 1:487 with minor revisions. Here the language of “remotely distant” invokes the Valentinian understanding of the Aeons as spatially separated from the First-Aeon, as I described above (see n41).

⁵⁰ Although a scriptural precedence indeed exists, namely I Cor. 1:24, Irenaeus never uses this verse in his works.

contrast between God and the Logos and ultimately affirmed the Logos' diminished divinity.

Unfortunately, Irenaeus does not give a good reason or argument (corresponding to Justin's δύνωμις argument) as to why God creates, or needs to create, through a mediator. However, his likely motive for adopting the mediating language is because he finds it in Scripture. For example, he identifies the presence of the mediating Logos as a mark of Paul's theology when he writes, "[T]he apostle [Paul] did, in the first place, instruct the Gentiles...to worship one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and the Framers of the whole creation; and that His Son was His Logos, by whom he founded all things..."⁵¹ Likewise, he cites John as a scriptural authority to this truth, writing, "For this is a peculiarity of the pre-eminence of God, not to stand in need of other instruments for the creation of those things which are summoned into existence. His own Logos is both suitable and sufficient for the formation of all things, even as John, the disciple of the Lord, declares regarding him: 'All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made.'⁵² Furthermore, the mediation of the Logos in creation is traditional, indicated by its strong presence in the *regula* passages. For example, Irenaeus writes, "And this is the order of our faith, the foundation of [the] edifice and the support of [our] conduct: God, the Father, uncreated, uncontainable, invisible, one God, the Creator of all: this is the first article of our faith. And the second article: the Word of God, the Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, who was revealed by the prophets according to the character of their prophecy and according to the nature of the economies of the Father, by whom all things were made..."⁵³ As with other aspects of the *regula*, Irenaeus passes on the mediatory language he receives.

Unlike with Justin, then, Irenaeus' notion of the mediating work of the Logos in creation stems not from a Middle Platonic notion imposed upon

⁵¹ *Haer.* 4.24.1, ANF 1:495 with minor revisions.

⁵² *Haer.* 2.2.5, ANF 1:361-362 with minor revisions. See also *Haer.* 3.8.3. Irenaeus' only attempt at justification for the apparent contradiction that the God who stands in no need of instrumentality creates through the Logos is his reference to Scripture. Irenaeus' work is replete with passages containing the conflicting ideas that God creates by himself and that he creates through the Logos with, likewise, no explanatory comment. For example, see *Haer.* 2.30.9, 4.7.4, 4.20.1, and 5.28.4. The ease with which he connects these ideas suggests the unity he perceives between God and the Logos. I will address this unity in more detail in the next section.

⁵³ *Epid.* 6, Behr, 43.

Scripture but from Scripture and the teaching of the Church. As such, the notion of mediation is not dictated by philosophical principles, and Irenaeus is free to make the language work for him in other ways. Notably, the logic of the mediation of the Logos in creation does not force Irenaeus to posit a diminished divinity of the Logos/Son in relation to God/Father. For Irenaeus, the contrast is not between God on the one hand and the Logos on the other, but between God and the Logos on the one hand and all other created things on the other.⁵⁴

2.2 *Logos as Revealer*

The second pre-incarnational function of the Logos in Irenaeus' work is his role as the sole revealer of God/Father. Irenaeus believes that the unique identity of the Second Person as the divine Logos gives him the ability to reveal God, both prior to and during the incarnation. A typical Irenaean statement regarding this revelatory function is as follows:

For no one can know the Father, unless through the Logos of God, that is, unless by the Son revealing [Him]; neither can he have knowledge of the Son, unless through the good pleasure of the Father. But the Son performs the good pleasure of the Father; for the Father sends, and the Son is sent, and comes. And his Logos knows that his Father is, as far as regards us, invisible and infinite; and since he cannot be declared [by any one else], he does himself declare him to us; and on the other hand, it is the Father alone who knows His own Logos. And both these truths our Lord has declared. Wherefore the Son reveals the knowledge of the Father through His own manifestation.⁵⁵

As the manifestation of the Father, elsewhere the Logos/Son is called the “knowledge of the Father,”⁵⁶ the “measure of the Father”⁵⁷ “the comprehensible” and “the visible” of an “incomprehensible” and “invisible”

⁵⁴ *Haer.* 4.11.2. On the basis of this passage (and others like them), Fantino interprets the work of the Son (and the Spirit) in creation as proof of their uncreated natures. Fantino, *Théologie d'Irénée*, 344ff. Likewise, M.C. Steenberg writes, “[Irenaeus] is happy to allow that there should be multiple ‘who’s’ involved in the process of creation, but there is no option but for these ‘who’s’ to somehow be God himself.” Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption*; Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 91 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 72. On the Irenaean contrast between Creator and creature, see above n29.

⁵⁵ *Haer.* 4.6.3, ANF 1:468 with minor revisions.

⁵⁶ *Haer.* 4.6.7.

⁵⁷ *Haer.* 4.4.2.

Father,⁵⁸ and the one who “did show the Father’s brightness.”⁵⁹ In each case, the justification of the unique revelatory role of the Second Person is his full knowledge of the Father, which Irenaeus supports through the use of Logos theology.⁶⁰

Irenaeus develops the Logos’ full knowledge of the Father largely in the context of his rhetorical and logical polemic of *Haer.* 2. As we have seen, the Valentinians possessed a topological or spatial understanding of the divine nature, resulting from their theory of emissions. Irenaeus discerns that this understanding renders the divine nature compound, made up of thirty different Aeons, one part Nous, one part Logos, etc. Against this understanding, Irenaeus affirms a simple divine nature, affirming that in whatever God is, he exists completely and fully. He writes, “[God is] simple, uncompounded Being, without diverse members, and altogether like, and equal to Himself, since He is wholly understanding, and wholly spirit, and wholly thought, and wholly intelligence, and wholly reason, and wholly hearing, and wholly seeing, and wholly light . . .”⁶¹ Specifically, Irenaeus affirms that the divine nature is “all Logos.”⁶² While Irenaeus is, at this stage of his argument, technically referring to the Father, as opposed to the Second Person, with the descriptive λόγος, the principle that God is Logos affirms that the revealer, who is himself Logos by nature, has full knowledge of the nature of the Father.

Moreover, as he is the same nature as the Father, the Logos is enabled to reveal him precisely because the knowledge and the vision of the Son who is Logos is the same as knowledge and the vision of the Father who is Logos. Irenaeus writes, quoting John 14:9, “And again, the Lord replied to

⁵⁸ *Haer.* 3.11.5.

⁵⁹ *Haer.* 4.20.11.

⁶⁰ Following Scripture, Irenaeus often speaks of this unique relationship using Father-Son language. However, Irenaeus adds Logos imagery to certain interpretations of Scripture passages that invoke only Father-Son language. For example, he writes, “For the Son is the knowledge of the Father; but the knowledge of the Son is in the Father, and has been revealed through the Son; and this was the reason why the Lord declared: ‘No man knows the Son, but the Father; nor the Father, save the Son, and those to whomever the Son shall reveal [Him].’ For ‘shall reveal’ was said not with reference to the future alone, as if then [only] the Logos had begun to manifest the Father when He was born of Mary, but it applies indifferently throughout all time.” *Haer.* 4.6.7, ANF 1:469 with minor revisions. The scriptural quotation here is from Matt. 11:27, which has no reference to the Logos. Irenaeus inserts this language.

⁶¹ *Haer.* 2.13.3, ANF 1:374. See *Haer.* 1.15.5, 1.16.3, 2.28.4-5 and 4.11.2.

⁶² *Haer.* 2.13.8.

Philip, who wished to behold the Father, ‘I have been so long a time with you, and yet you have not known me, Philip? He that sees Me, sees also the Father; and how do you say then Show us the Father? For I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; and henceforth you know Him, and have seen Him.’⁶³ Irenaeus understands this mutual interpenetration of Father and Son according to his Logos theology—as both entities are Logos in nature, both fully interpenetrate one another.⁶⁴

As the Logos is the only agent with full knowledge of the Father, he is the revealer of the Father not only in the incarnation, but in all stages of the economy. Specifically, it is the Logos who is manifested to the Old Testament prophets and the patriarchs in the theophanic passages.⁶⁵ It is possible that Irenaeus first obtained the interpretation of the Logos as the subject of the Old Testament theophanies from Justin. Nonetheless, the significance that Irenaeus attaches to the presence of the Logos and his motivation for finding the Logos, as opposed to the Father, in these passages is distinct from Justin’s interpretation.

Whereas for Justin, the presence of the Logos in the theophanies was the physical presence of a separated, lesser divine power, for Irenaeus, these visions are not the physical presence of the Logos, but are *prophetic* and as such, by his own definition, non bodily. Accordingly, they foretell of the coming reality of a physical manifestation of the Logos, but they are not a physical reality in and of themselves. Passages where Irenaeus indicates the manner in which Old Testament figures, primarily the prophets, “see” God infer this interpretation. For example, Irenaeus writes, “[T]he prophets, receiving the prophetic gift from the same Logos, announced his advent according to the flesh . . . foretelling from the beginning that God should be seen by men, and hold converse with them upon earth, should confer

⁶³ *Haer.* 3.13.2, ANF 1:437 with minor revisions. Manuscript evidence varies, but the strongest Greek manuscripts omit the “also” (καί) from Jesus’ statement, “He that sees me sees also the Father,” making the mutual interpenetration of Father and Son in this text even more apparent. Unfortunately, no Greek fragment survives for this passage of *Haer.*, although Rousseau’s retroversion omits a καί: Ὁ ἑωρακὸς ἐμὲ ἑώρακεν τὸν Πατέρα. Rousseau, *Irénée de Lyon. Contre les Hérésies; SC 211* (Paris: Cerf, 1974), 253.

⁶⁴ This understanding of the relationship between the Father and Son has been called “reciprocal immanence.” Jules Lebreton, *Histoire du dogme de la Trinité: des origines au concile de Nicée, Bibliothèque de Théologie Historique*, vol. 2, *De Saint Clément à Saint Irénée*, ed. G. Beuchesne (Paris: Beuchesne, 1928), 555. Barnes follows him in the use of this phrase. Barnes, “Irenaeus’s Trinitarian Theology,” 78ff. The description emphasizes the strength of Irenaeus’ Logos theology against the topological theology of the Valentinians.

⁶⁵ For programmatic statements of this understanding, see *Haer.* 3.11.8 and *Epid.* 45.

with them, and should be present with his own creation . . .”⁶⁶ Irenaeus here emphasizes the future aspect of this physical appearance. If this physical manifestation occurs in the future, then the visions recorded in the Old Testament are qualitatively different than the visions of Jesus Christ recorded in the New Testament. Irenaeus writes, “The prophets, therefore, did not openly behold the face of God, but [they saw] the dispensations and the mysteries through which man should afterwards see God.”⁶⁷ In other words, God is only physically seen when the Logos is made flesh.

The link from these prophetic passages to the theophanic texts is the figure of Moses who in *Epid.* 46 is said to have seen and spoken with the pre-incarnational Logos, a vision which Irenaeus interprets according to the episode in Exodus 33:20-22. In this account, God permits Moses only to see a part of his glory because “no man sees my face and shall live.”⁶⁸ Irenaeus then contrasts Moses’ prophetic vision in the Exodus account with the vision of the incarnate Christ given to the disciples on Mt. Tabor and recorded in the gospels. Moses is present with Jesus during his transfiguration on Mt. Tabor allowing Irenaeus to underscore the contrast between the *kind* of seeing that occurs before and after the incarnation. Moses “sees” God in both accounts; nevertheless, only in the second account was a physical manifestation of the Logos involved. Irenaeus writes of the vision on Mt. Tabor that Moses conferred “with [Jesus] face to face on the top of a mountain, Elias being also present, as the Gospel relates, [God] thus making good in the end the ancient promise.”⁶⁹ The physical presence of the incarnate Logos/Son on Mt. Tabor (and in the whole of the incarnation) fulfills the promise of the prophetic vision that God will one day be seen. Thus, continuity exists between the two visions, against the Valentinians’ understanding, but they are not identical.

⁶⁶ *Haer.* 4.20.4, ANF 1:488.

⁶⁷ *Haer.* 4.20.10, ANF 1:490. In another place, Irenaeus likens the visions of the Old Testament to the heralds of a coming king. He writes, “For the advent of the King is previously announced by those servants who are sent [before Him], in order to the preparation and equipment of those men who are to entertain their Lord.” *Haer.* 4.34.1, ANF 1:511. This interpretation of the manner in which the prophets “see” the Logos conforms to his understanding of prophecy in general. Irenaeus writes, “For prophecy is a prediction of things future, that is, a setting forth beforehand of those things which shall be afterwards.” *Haer.* 4.20.5, ANF 1:489.

⁶⁸ Exod. 23:22 as quoted in *Haer.* 4.20.9.

⁶⁹ *Haer.* 4.20.9, ANF 1:490.

Irenaeus' language suggests that Moses, and the Old Testament patriarchs, did see something in the theophanic/prophetic manifestations of the pre-incarnational Logos. In the previous example, Irenaeus does not negate Scripture's account that Moses "saw" the backside of God in the Exodus account. Nevertheless, the content of the vision differs between theophanic/prophetic visions and incarnational visions. The Logos is "seen" in both instances, but in the former, the Logos is not seen in his humanity. In *Haer.* 5, Irenaeus clarifies his understanding of the object seen in the theophanic/prophetic visions by likening them to the docetic christologies of his opponents:

Vain indeed are those who allege that [Christ] appeared [in the incarnation] in mere seeming. For these things [the actions of the incarnate Christ] were done not in appearance only, but in actual reality. . . . But I have already remarked that Abraham and the other prophets beheld him after a prophetic manner, foretelling in vision what should come to pass. If, then, such a being has now appeared in outward semblance different from what he was in reality [as docetic christologies hold], *there has been a certain prophetic vision made to men*; and another advent of His must be looked forward to. . . .⁷⁰

In other words, if the spiritual Christ truly did not assume flesh, but only "appeared human," then humans living at the time of Jesus Christ "saw" him in the same manner in which the prophets "saw" him, which is to say, not physically or in reality. This comparison suggests that Irenaeus understands a theophanic/prophetic vision as a sight of something perceived to be "out there" but which in fact is not. That which is "seen" is a mental or spiritual vision as if it were sensible, but in reality it is an interior vision through the eyes of the mind.

Conversely, according to Irenaeus' understanding, the incarnation marks the foretold time when the Logos would fully and physically appear in reality. In the incarnation, the Logos fully assumed flesh such that humans can see God in reality, that is physically, for the first time. Irenaeus writes, "What then did the Lord bring us by His advent? He brought all possible novelty, by bringing Himself who had been announced."⁷¹ For Irenaeus,

⁷⁰ *Haer.* 5.1.2, ANF 1:527, italics added.

⁷¹ *Haer.* 4.34.1, ANF 1:511. The interpretation of Irenaeus' understanding of the pre-incarnational appearances of the Logos is an open question in scholarship. My position has been argued by P. Gervais Aebly, *Les Missions Divines: De Saint Justin à Origène* (Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1958), 44-49, Behr, *The Way to Nicaea* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 114-120, Albert Houssiau, *La christologie de Saint Irénée*

despite the continuity of the economy through the Old and New Testaments, the incarnation marks an unprecedented revelatory event.

This argument regarding the nature of the pre-incarnational visions of the Logos as merely prophetic exists elsewhere. Nonetheless, the implication of such an interpretation for the nature of the Logos often remains unobserved. Irenaeus' argument that the Logos remained unseen prior to the incarnation eliminates the logic resulting in a diminished divinity of the Logos at work in Justin's interpretation of the theophany passages and his Logos theology in general. In Irenaeus' understanding, the Logos did not appear on earth because he could be contained/seen and the Father could not be contained/seen. In fact, according to Irenaeus' Logos theology, the Logos, like the Father, is invisible by nature. Irenaeus writes, "[God's] Logos, invisible by nature, was made palpable and visible among men . . ." ⁷² Rather, the Logos is the subject of the theophanies because he is the same subject who is incarnated in Jesus Christ and continues the work of revelation that started in the beginning. This interest in the continuity of the Logos/Son working as the revealer of God/Father in all parts of the

(Louvain, 1955), 80-104, and Réal Tremblay, *La manifestation et la vision de Dieu selon Saint Irénée de Lyon* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1978), 71-76. Conversely, Antonio Orbe states that the appearances of the Son in the Old Testament are not qualitatively different from the appearance in the incarnation. The sameness of the appearances, he says, is Irenaeus' primary means of uniting the Old and New Testaments. According to Orbe, the interpretation of these appearances as prophetic does not account for the anti-Valentinian and anti-Marcionite polemic in which Irenaeus' discussion of the theophanic appearances are located because the Valentinians and Marcionites believed that the Son did not appear until the New Testament. Therefore, the force of Irenaeus' argument for the continuity of the Testaments, Orbe says, depends on the literal appearance of the Logos/Son in the Old Testament. Orbe, *Hacia la Primera Teología de la Procepción del Verbo*; *Estudios Valentinianos*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1958), 657-658. Orbe's argument works only on the level of theory and fails to address the actual texts. Although Orbe makes a strong argument, the multitude of texts I cite above support a prophetic understanding of the pre-incarnational visions. Finally, besides the numerous texts for which he cannot account, Orbe's interpretation presents several difficulties. First, he has no way of showing the newness of the incarnation in Irenaeus' scheme. Without a qualitative difference in the appearances of the Logos before and after the human birth, the incarnation cannot be the special, unique revelation that Irenaeus everywhere emphasizes. Second, Orbe's interpretation forces an ontological subordination understanding of the relationship between Father and Son that mirrors what I found in Justin's work—the Logos/Son is able to be seen because of his diminished divinity. As I have suggested, and will reiterate momentarily, such a position does not fit with Irenaeus' understanding of the nature of the Logos and his use of Logos theology in general.

⁷² *Haer.* 4.24.2, ANF 1:495 with minor revisions. See also 3.29.2, 5.16.2, and 5.18.3.

economy leads Irenaeus to affirm the Logos as the subject of the Old Testament theophanies.

2.3 *The Nature of the Logos*

Irenaeus' Logos theology reveals an alternate logic supporting his argument for the mediating creative and revelatory functions of the pre-incarnational Logos, and in turn, an alternate understanding of the nature of the Logos than was witnessed in Justin's work. Namely, Irenaeus believes that the Logos can work on behalf of God in the world because he is divine in the same manner that God is divine. His Logos nature allows him to fully interpenetrate the Father, which results in his full epistemological knowledge of the Father and his ability to manifest the Father. Far from necessitating a diminished divinity of the Second Person, this logic asserts that the Logos can only reveal God because, as Logos, he is the *same* as God.

3. Conclusion

In contrast to the majority opinion of commentators, I have shown that Irenaeus indeed possesses a Logos theology that is not ancillary to his understanding of the nature of the Second Person. However, Irenaeus' Logos theology does not reflect the standard Logos theology of the second century. Notably, it is not ruled by a Middle Platonic logic that forces a contrast between the transcendent Most High God and his subordinate Power. Quite the opposite, Irenaeus uses Logos theology to affirm the sameness and unity of Father and Son. In this respect, Irenaeus' understanding of the relationship of the Father and the Son, seen through the lens of his Logos theology, not only represents an effective polemic against the Valentinians, but a significant advancement upon the work of the apologists as well.

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