CHAPTER 3

Refuting Gnostic Creation: The Intertextual Reception of Genesis 1–3 in Book 2 of Adversus Haereses

3.1 Introduction

Whereas Haer. 1 was concerned with exposing the theological systems of the Valentinians and various other Gnostics schools, Haer. 2 aims to refute them on key points doctrine. Given the Gnostic preference for secrecy and obscurity, Irenaeus suggests it is impossible to address every point of contention, so he only considers those that, in his view, are particularly damaging to the Gnostic myth. Irenaeus believes this rhetorical strategy will reveal a variety of inconsistencies and contradictions in the foundations cosmological speculations that ultimately will cause their whole system to collapse. Unlike Haer. 1, however, Irenaeus never cites the Gnostics reading of Gen 1–3 directly in Haer. 2, though he does distinguish their competing views on the authority of the Mosaic accounts. Instead, his philosophical and theological argumentation begins to reveal his own hermeneutical approach to Gen 1–3 that will be developed in the other books.

The majority of the book, Haer. 2.1–30, focuses on the refutation of the Valentinians, while the last few chapters, Haer. 2.31–35, turn to the refutation of other select Gnostic sects. Within this broad structure, the argument of Haer. 2 is divisible into five sections: Haer. 2.1–11, Haer. 2.12–19, Haer. 2.20–28, Haer. 2.29–30, and Haer. 2.31–35. The first section, Haer. 2.1–11, evaluates the Valentinian distinction between the Creator-God and the Pleroma. He refutes any notion of a Pleroma existing above God, and draws on concepts of divine aseity to affirm God's sufficiency in creation. Then in Haer. 2.12–19, he comments on the nature of the spiritual emissions of the aeons and the salvation of the pneumatic seed. Drawing on the pre-Socratic philosophers Xenophanes and Antiphanes, he questions how ignorance could have arisen from perfection. In Haer. 2.20–28, he returns to issues of hermeneutics, and addresses the problems with gametria, or numerology, in Gnostic exegesis. The next brief section, Haer. 2.29–30, appraises the Valentinian consummation and the

1 Haer. 2.pf.2.
Demiurge, and he refutes the belief that the spiritual Gnostics ascend higher than their Creator. Finally, in *Haer.* 2.31–35, he responds to those who have followed the Valentinian traditions including among others: Saturninus, Basilides, and Carpocrates. He rehearses many of the previous arguments against these schools of Gnosticism, but develops some new thoughts concerning ethics and the transmigration of souls. He concludes *Haer.* 2 with a final reference to the unity and harmony of the scriptures that testify to the existence of one true God.

Within this structure the uses of Gen 1–3 are reserved to one opening section (*Haer.* 2.2.5) and three latter sections (*Haer.* 2.26.1, *Haer.* 2.30.7, 9, and *Haer.* 2.34.4). It is not surprising that we find allusions to Gen 1–3 in the opening and closing sections; Irenaeus has a tendency to frame his work with allusions to Gen 1–3.3 The overall infrequency of his use of Gen 1–3 in *Haer.* 2, does not detract from the importance of these references. In *Haer.* 2.2.5, for example, he defends the authority and trustworthiness of the Mosaic account of creation as a whole. This clearly delineates a point Irenaeus inferred throughout *Haer.* 1 when he argued that the Gnostics adapt and amend Gen 1–3 according to their system.4 Irenaeus assumes the work of God in creation is an epistemological grounding for his theological framework and argumentation, which should be understood in continuity with rest of apostolic testimony. His use of Gen 1–3 in his other philosophical arguments develops the other aspects of his intertextual hermeneutic as well. He continues his use of verbal connections, as well as prosopological exegesis. But he also applies a narratival reading, and uses collections of texts for illustrative purposes.

3.2 Reading Moses with the Apostles: *Haer.* 2.2.5 (Gen 1:1, Gen 1:3)5

In the opening lines of *Haer.* 2.1.1, Irenaeus states his basic argument, or first principle, that there is one God who created all things. This theology of creation is the basis for Irenaeus’ theology of revelation in general and theology of scripture in particular. The Gnostic Pleromic emanations that oppose this

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3 References to Gen 1–2 are found in *Epid.* 11 and 97 and the closing paragraph of *Haer.* 5.36.3.
4 *Haer.* 1.8.1.
5 This is a general allusion to God “speaking” (εἰπεν) creation into existence found in Gen 1:3, 6, 9, etc. In *Haer.* 4.32.1, Irenaeus explicitly cites Gen 1:3 for the same purpose. Steenberg, states that *Haer.* 4.32.1 is the “only quotation” of Gen 1:3, which technically is correct. However, the present section alludes to this passage generally and the purpose of citing Gen 1:3 here and *Haer.* 4.32.1 is the same. Steenberg, *Irenaeus,* 70.