CHAPTER 7

Conclusion: Irenaeus’ Intertextual Reception of Genesis 1–3 in Adversus Haereses

7.1 Introduction

For Irenaeus scripture reading is intertextual. It is like carefully placing tiles into a mosaic to reveal the image of a king (Haer. 1.1.8), or reading a Homeric poem in its proper narrative arrangement (Haer. 1.9.4), or listening to an orchestra of finely tuned instruments projecting a single melody to God (Haer. 2.28.3). Scriptural consonance guides his theological exegesis so that interpreting any one part of scripture requires the voices of other scriptures (Haer. 3.12.9, Haer. 5.13.2). For Irenaeus, the “proofs in the Scriptures cannot be shown except from the Scriptures themselves” (ostensiones quae sunt in Scripturis non sunt ostendi nisi ex ipsis Scripturis).1 This penchant for scripture consonance stems from his doctrine of revelation and especially his doctrine of creation. He argues generally that God the Father has created all things by means of the Word and Wisdom and though the creation is composed of many and various elements, it is nonetheless uniformly harmonious. Likewise, the scriptures record the work of God from the beginning of creation and are given by the same God in many and various forms. Therefore, when interpreted properly all portions of scripture, beginning with Gen 1–3, are found perfectly consonant with the rest of scriptural revelation.

Irenaeus’ hermeneutic of scriptural consonance, therefore, permits him to use any particular method of exegesis as long as that method proves the consonance of scriptural revelation. Irenaeus is not beholden to any particular method or style of interpretation, but instead demonstrates an enthusiasm for applying a variety of methods of textual integration that generate a great diversity of intertextual relationships from across the whole counsel of scripture. The complexity of these intertextual relationships communicates a mastery of the scriptural material and interpretive mind that is actively engaged in textual integration. To be sure, Irenaeus recognizes that scripture consonance does not solve all the ambiguities in the scriptures, because there is a natural limit to human reason, and, after all, some of the mysteries in scripture should be left to God. But when Irenaeus turns to Gen 1–3, he never offers an isolated

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1 Haer. 3.12.9.
reading of these texts apart from the rest of scripture, but instead his reading of creation is consonant with the rest of divine revelation.

In order to study the complexity of Irenaeus’ intertextuality, the previous chapters surveyed every verifiable citation, allusion, and echo of Gen 1–3 in Adversus haereses, as well as any text that Irenaeus reads alongside Gen 1–3. From this analysis, I detected a variety of reading strategies and provided analytical descriptions of these strategies, which delineate precisely how Irenaeus works scripture intertextually. These reading strategies include: a literary reading, prophetic reading, a typological reading, verbal connections or patterns, an organizational function, narratival or creedal arrangements, a prosopological reading, illustrative identification, and general-to-particular reasoning. While previous studies on Irenaeus’ exegesis have observed the mosaic of scriptural passages that pervades his writings, this work advances the conversation by evaluating the way his intertextual reading is expressed in his applied exegesis.

This final chapter provides a comprehensive summary of all the reading strategies that developed through the preceding chapters and explains in more detail how Irenaeus uses these strategies to network scriptural texts. I begin with a summary of Irenaeus’ presentation of Gnostic intertextual readings of Gen 1–3 discussed in Haer. 1–2. Certainly Irenaeus is not the only ancient interpreter networking scripture, and with the exception of their numerological interpretations, Irenaeus and his Gnostic opponents are employing similar reading strategies. From Irenaeus’ perspective the distinction between his reading and that of his opponents is located in competing theological perspectives that inform their views on the authority of the Mosaic accounts and the particular intertexts or narratives they read alongside Gen 1–3. After summarizing Irenaeus’ presentation of the Gnostic reading of Gen 1–3, the rest of this chapter details the key aspects and examples of Irenaeus’ intertextual reading of Gen 1–3 based upon his applied exegesis assembled in the previous books. For the Bishop of Lyons, the creation accounts are only properly understood within carefully constructed intertextual relationships fashioned with other passages within scripture revelation that best serve to communicate his theological perspective.

7.2 Irenaeus on the Gnostic Reading of Gen 1–3

Irenaeus’ account of Gnostic exegesis, described in Haer. 1–2 is, first of all, marked by a competing doctrines of revelation and creation. Both Irenaeus and the Gnostics read Gen 1–3 from different vantage points and with differ-