

Eirini ARTEMI\*

**THE HERETIC GNOSTIC  
AND THE REAL “GNOSTIC” IN CHRIST  
ACCORDING TO THE TEACHING  
OF IRENAEUS OF LYON\*\***

Gnosticism was a mixture of a philosophical and religious movements which appeared in pre-Christian times. There are many religious historians who support that its source was in the Jewish community of Alexandria and was later picked up by some Christian groups in Judea and the Galilee<sup>1</sup>. The apostle Paul supported the belief that the heresy of gnosticism was the religion of angels (cf. Col 2:18). The Gnostics recognized a divine hierarchy above the angels who were thought to be more important than Christ.

The Gnostics believed that matter, whether it be the physical universe or the human body, was evil. It is obvious that there was a great tension between spirit and matter. This affected many of their beliefs and especially the way they perceived the world and God’s interactions with it. Gnosis (knowledge, “insight”) was the only way for examining the universe, humanity, the salvation of mankind and of course Jesus Christ<sup>2</sup>. In gnostic Christianity, spiritual gnosis was not just knowledge of facts or figures or an intellectual understanding of theological ideas. Rather, it was an experience. This knowledge or gnosis was subjective in its nature. The gnostic didn’t just believe in God, he or she experienced God. Spiritual gnosis could not be attained through the intellect. It was a special initiatory knowledge given to the few who were ready to receive it. Through devotion and spiritual practice, the gnostic had a revelatory experience that modified human perception, and transfigured the individual<sup>3</sup>.

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\* Dr Eirini Artemi – Theologist & Classical Philologist, Post Doc of Ancient Greek and Byzantine Philosophy of University of Patras, MA & Ph.D. of Theology of National and Capodistrian University of Athens, Lecturer in the Hellenic Open University; e-mail: eartemi@theol.uoa.gr.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. B.A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity*, Minneapolis 1990, 17; idem, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature*, Minneapolis 2007, 14; K. Scouteris, *History of Dogma*, vol. 1, Athens 1998, 282-283.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Daniélou, *Les traditions secrètes des Apôtres*, “Eranos Jahrbuch” 31 (1962) 17.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. Papadopoulos, *Patrologia*, vol. 1, Athens 1991, 145-150.

So, gnosticism was one of the earliest heresies to arise in the Christian Church and it was known mainly from Irenaeus' of Lyon writings, who was one of its chief early opponents. Not all Gnostics believed exactly the same thing, but the general outlines of the belief were fairly clear. The Gnostics were dualists, teaching that there were two great opposing forces: good versus evil, light versus darkness, knowledge versus ignorance, spirit versus matter. According to them, this world, the material cosmos, was the result of a primordial error on the part of a supra-cosmic, supremely divine being, usually called Σοφία (Wisdom) or simply the Λόγος (Word). This being was described as the final emanation of a divine hierarchy, called the Πλήρωμα or "Fullness", at the head of which resided the supreme God, the One beyond Being<sup>4</sup>.

Since the world is material, and leaves much place for improvement, they denied that God had made it. "How can the perfect produce the imperfect, the infinite produce the finite, the spiritual produce the material"? they asked. One solution was to say that there were thirty beings called aeons (αιῶνες), and that God had made the first aeon, which made the second aeon (αιῶν), which made the third, and so on to the thirtieth aeon (αιῶν), which made the world. This, Gnostics pointed out to the initiate, was the true inward spiritual meaning of the statement that Jesus was thirty years old when he began to preach. As anti-gnostic writers pointed out, this did not help at all. Assuming the Gnostic view of the matter, each of the thirty must be either finite or infinite, material or non-material, and somewhere along the line you would have an infinite being producing a finite one, a spiritual being producing a material one<sup>5</sup>. Also, to the Gnostics salvation had a totally different meaning from its Christian meaning. In gnosticism, salvation was to be alerted to the existence of the gnostic's divine spirit and then, as a result of this knowledge, to escape from death from the material world to the spiritual<sup>6</sup>.

For Christians, salvation means deification and salvation began with the incarnation. Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwell in one another in a constant movement of reciprocal love, so humans are, made in the image and likeness of the Holy Trinity, called to dwell in that same Trinitarian movement of love. The salvation began with the incarnation, in which God became human. God incarnated as Jesus was both true God and true man. He had two natures, not separate from each other, and not confused with each other. The crucifixion was God's loving act to break down the barrier of sin between God and humanity. Christians are saved by God's grace alone, we are not capable of saving ourselves, no matter how good we are. This salvation is a process, worked out by participating in and cooperating with the grace of God. It is an ongoing, everlasting process of moving from glory to glory, becoming more and more holy and God-like forever. This is called theosis.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. S. Hoeller, *Gnosticism, new light on the ancient tradition of inner knowing*, Illinois 2002, 2-55.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Scouteris, *History of Dogma*, vol. 1, p. 296.

Generally, gnosticism was a very powerful spiritual phenomenon and the result of a mixture of different religions, such as paganism, Christianity, Persian and Greek philosophical theories, and:

“devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith”<sup>7</sup>.

One of the main things which separated the Gnostics from Christians was the mysticism of their beliefs. It began with their views of God and creation<sup>8</sup>. They viewed the One which they called the true God as having a feminine part which was the Spirit. In accord, they also held that Jesus came from God and the Spirit to form the Trinity. In the gnostic version of creation of the world the Spirit of God was referred as the Wisdom of God or Sophia who was also a feminine creative force. So gnosticism was a very dangerous heresy for the Church and threatened Christians<sup>9</sup>, because it divided the believers into two categories, the “perfect” and “purified” Christians who obtained the real Knowledge and the simple believers who obtained only the faith in Christ<sup>10</sup>.

To sum up, the ancient gnosticism claimed a secret knowledge superior to that of the Church, in effect challenging the teaching authority of the bishops. Also, it held that the spiritual was superior to the physical and that the true Christ was a pure spirit being, thereby rejecting the incarnation<sup>11</sup>. Early Christian Gnostics conceived a division in God prior to creation wherein the material world became the production of the “lesser god” of the division. It led Gnostics to devalue the material world within which a only select few possessed a “spark” of divinity, experienced as a longing for the “true God” beyond hapless matter. The escape route was gnosis or knowledge, a type of “awakening” that not all were capable of undergoing.

**1. Irenaeus of Lyon and the theology of the holy tradition.** Irenaeus of Lyon (Lugdunum) is considered by many to be one of the greatest Christian theologians of the second century. Irenaeus is well known for his work *Against Heresies*, c. 175-185 CE, a theological classic in which he defended the Christian faith against the heresy of gnosticism. For Irenaeus, the real theological tradition is the tradition of the Christian Church and it is gift from God:

<sup>7</sup> Cf. 1Tim 1:4.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Scouteris, *History of Dogma*, vol. 1, p. 297.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Scouteris (*History of Dogma*, vol. 1, p. 299) argued that the Christian gnosticism cannot be countered in Christian heresies, because it rejected the most Christian doctrines and adopted peculiar teachings. But it was a great problem for the Christian Church for many centuries.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. R.E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform*, Illinois 1999, 88.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. R. Arakaki, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Contending for the Faith Once Delivered*, “Again” 27 (2005) n. 3, <https://sethearl.wordpress.com/2006/09/03/irenaeus-of-lyons-contending-for-the-faith-once-delivered/> [access: 28.08.2016].

“For this gift of God has been entrusted to the Church, as breath was to the first created man, for this purpose, that all the members receiving it may be vivified; and the (means of) communion with Christ has been distributed throughout it, that is, the Holy Spirit, the earnest of incorruption, the means of confirming our faith, and the ladder of ascent to God. For in the Church, it is said, God has set apostles, prophets, teachers, and all the other means through which the Spirit works; of which all those are not partakers who do not join themselves to the Church, but defraud themselves of life through their perverse opinions and infamous behaviour”<sup>12</sup>.

Irenaeus supported that the holy tradition was given to the Church and this was the basic distinction between the real tradition of the Church and the tradition of gnosticism<sup>13</sup>. The tradition of the apostles, made clear in the entire world, can be seen clearly in the Christian Church by those who wished to behold the truth. The bishops were the true successors of the apostles so they kept the true tradition without adding any insane ideas, without any errors<sup>14</sup>. Christ didn't give any secret tradition to the Gnostics only, that they only should be worthy and believing<sup>15</sup>. The Church Father explained that the members of the Church, baptised Christians received that preaching and faith from Christ, who is the divine source through his apostles. The words of the apostles and prophets are Christ's words and the very foundation of the Church (cf. Eph 2:19-20). Although the Church scattered in the whole world, carefully preserved it, in this real tradition as if living in one house, the Gnostics had no relation to it<sup>16</sup>. So for Irenaeus, the apostolic tradition was one and public, not private or secret. Lastly, the apostolic tradition, was pneumatic, in other words, spiritual, guided by the Holy Spirit, and it is the final arbiter of truth in the Church.

Perhaps, some scholars would underline that the father of Lyon separated the oral apostolic tradition from the written tradition in scripture. He didn't do anything like that. He thought both the oral tradition and the written tradition, the scripture as equal, and the both reveal the will of God. Scripture and the Church's unwritten tradition are identical in content. The grace and the will of God enlightened the authors of the gospels to hand down to believers the preaching of Christ, so the scriptures became the ground and the pillar of the Christians' faith<sup>17</sup>, and the compass for the life of every Christian, the rule of

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* III 24, 1, ed. A. Rousseau – L. Doutreleau, SCh 211, Paris 1974, 472-474, transl. A. Roberts – W. Rambaut, ed. A. Roberts – J. Donaldson – A. Cleveland Coxe, ANF 1, Buffalo – New York 1885, 458; revised and edited for New Advent by K. Knight, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103324.htm>. Cf. 1Cor 12:28.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibidem* III 4, 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *ibidem* III 3, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 25, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibidem* III 12, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 9, 4.

faith<sup>18</sup>. So, according to Irenaeus, the scriptures provide the basis of real faith, and tradition is appealed to as confirmation of the scripture<sup>19</sup>,

“to flee to the Church, and be brought up in her bosom, and be nourished with the Lord’s Scriptures”<sup>20</sup>.

The development of the oral tradition in the Church didn’t mean the counterfeiting of the context of faith but the better understanding of the God’s words and the perception of the divine economy<sup>21</sup>. Man may not forget, Irenaeus supported, he has finite mind and the infinite nature of God cannot be fully conceived by the human beings:

“there are some things (the knowledge of) which belongs only to God, and others which come within the range of our own knowledge, what ground is there for complaint, if, in regard to those things which we investigate in the Scriptures (which are throughout spiritual), we are able by the grace of God to explain some of them, while we must leave others in the hands of God, and that not only in the present world, but also in that which is to come, so that God should for ever teach, and man should for ever learn the things taught him by God? As the apostle has said on this point, that, when other things have been done away, then these three, faith, hope, and charity, shall endure”<sup>22</sup>.

**2. The Heretic Gnostic and the Real “Gnostic” in Christ.** Irenaeus of Lyon confronted the heretical teaching of the Gnostics with the theological teaching of the Church. Because of his confrontation with the Gnostics, he placed appropriate importance to the continuity of teaching within the Church<sup>23</sup>. He believed that the truth was in the Church only and this was the only effective and powerful weapon against any heretical opinion. In his treatise *Against Heresies*, he expounded and defended the orthodox Christian faith and refuted gnosticism<sup>24</sup>.

The bishop of Lyon explained that the real “gnostic” in Christ differed from the heretic gnostic, because the first participated in the recapitulation of the nature of the human race because of the incarnation, passion, death and resurrection of Christ. The heretic gnostic falsified the oracles of God, and proved himself an evil interpreter of the good word of revelation<sup>25</sup>. He underestimated

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 9, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ibidem* V 20, 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, ed. A. Rousseau – L. Doutrelau – Ch. Mercier, SCh 153, Paris 1969, 258, ANF 1, 548.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 10, 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem* II 28, 3, ed. A. Rousseau – L. Doutrelau, SCh 294, Paris 1982, 274, ANF 1, 399. Cf. 1Cor 13:13.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. K. Ware, *Patterns of Episcopacy in the Early Church and Today, An Orthodox View*, in: *Bishops, But What Kind? Reflections on Episcopacy*, ed. P. Moore, London 1982, 1-24, esp. p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Papadopoulos, *Patrologia*, vol. 1, p. 296.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* I, Prolegomena I.

the real meaning of God's revelation through His creation of the universe<sup>26</sup>. By this way instead of realizing the real divine truth, the heretic gnostic supported blasphemous and impious opinions<sup>27</sup>. Also he had pessimistic attitude for the life. The world was seen as being evil at the time of its origin, because it had been created by an inferior God. Only the deliverance from the material world could bring happiness<sup>28</sup>.

The heretic gnostic didn't have access only in the lower psychic level of salvation, but he himself had attained the higher pneumatic salvation also<sup>29</sup>. In order to be saved the person had to freely choose to believe and to do good works. The psychic level of salvation was decisive in that it opened the person to the possibility of attaining the pneumatic level. Receiving the gnostic tradition was only a first step towards the goal of gnosis<sup>30</sup>. At the pneumatic level the gnostic person was reborn through spiritual resurrection and directly experienced the divine Truth through gnosis-knowledge<sup>31</sup>.

The knowledge which existed in gnostic men came from other sources:

“either the prophets announced, nor the Lord taught, nor the apostles delivered, but of which they boast that beyond all others they had a perfect knowledge. They gathered their views from other sources than the Scriptures”<sup>32</sup>.

It was aptly characterized in the personal mystical experience of the gnostic as Self-Knowledge being the Knowledge of God<sup>33</sup>. So he was spiritual – a pneumatic Christian who had gained connection to the higher spirit and who possessed the inner meaning of scripture and opposed to simply physic Christian.

The gnostic believed that he obtained the knowledge of God through questions, trying to find answers about God, but in reality he managed to cast away the firm and true knowledge of God<sup>34</sup>. James George Bushur argues that according to Irenaeus, the heretic gnostic fell into the abyss of error because he arrogantly sought after the divine essence and must resorted to tenuous speculations. For Irenaeus, the theological task began with humility. The real gnostic in Christ should recognize his own weakness before he was prepared to declare the fullness of God's power<sup>35</sup>:

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Scouteris, *History of Dogma*, vol. 1, p. 299.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* I 6, 1-4.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *ibidem* I 6, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem* I 8, 1, SCh 264, 112, ANF 1, 326.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *ibidem* II 28, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *ibidem* II 28, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. J.G. Bushur, *Joining the end to the beginning divine providence and the interpretation of scripture in the teaching of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons*, Durham 2010, 47.

"But learning by experience that we possess eternal duration from the excelling power of this Being, not from our own nature, we may neither undervalue that glory which surrounds God as He is, nor be ignorant of our own nature, but that we may know what God can effect, and what benefits man receives, and thus never wander from the true comprehension of things as they are, that is, both with regard to God and with regard to man"<sup>36</sup>.

The real gnostic in Christ's desire and love for the knowledge of the divine being was as dependent upon God's will to reveal himself as a creature's desire to live was dependent upon God's gifts of food, drink, and breath<sup>37</sup>. This true believer captured the higher knowledge from his love to Christ and his belief in Christ's deity, incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. So he had true faith because he had followed the rule of faith which was based on the knowledge and praise concerning God<sup>38</sup>. According to Irenaeus the real gnostic in Christ, the believer had the true knowledge which was the teaching of the apostles, and the ancient order of the Church found throughout the world; and the character of the Body of Christ according to the succession of bishops, to whom the Apostles committed that the Church which was in each place<sup>39</sup>.

The gnostic in Christ was a "spiritual" man. In him the Holy Spirit was joined to the soul and body and lightened his mind in order to know God<sup>40</sup>. He didn't attain salvation by learning secret knowledge of his spiritual essence: a divine spark of light or spirit. He didn't then need any secret knowledge to escape from the prison of his body at death. His soul cannot ascend to be reunited with the Supreme God at the time of his death<sup>41</sup>. So the gnostic in Christ didn't disregard the order and connection of the Scriptures and didn't dismember and destroy the truth and moreover the real salvation in Christ<sup>42</sup>. He realized that the Apostles' words in the Scriptures were in full agreement with the tradition of teaching that had come down to the Church leaders of his day<sup>43</sup>.

The believer, who had the true knowledge for God, was made perfect because of his love for God and his righteousness to his neighbour,

"As in the law, therefore, and in the Gospel (likewise), the first and greatest commandment is, to love the Lord God with the whole heart, and then there follows a commandment like to it, to love one's neighbour as one's self; the author of the law and the Gospel is shown to be one and the same. For the precepts of an absolutely perfect life, since they are the same in each Testament,

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem. Cf. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* V 2, 3, Sch 153, 38-40, ANF 1, 528.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Bushur, *Joining the end to the beginning divine providence*, p. 47.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* II 28, 3; E. Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, Cambridge 2001, 160.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* IV 33, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. ibidem V 6, 1; V 8, 2; 1Thess 5:23.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* V 6, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. ibidem.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. ibidem III 3-4.

have pointed out (to us) the same God, who certainly has promulgated particular laws adapted for each; but the more prominent and the greatest (commandments), without which salvation cannot (be attained), He has exhorted (us to observe) the same in both”<sup>44</sup>.

He knew that he could not have attained the absolute knowledge of God in this life, because there were some things (the knowledge of) which belonged only to God<sup>45</sup>. Irenaeus underlined that:

“we are able by the grace of God to explain some of them, while we must leave others in the hands of God, and that not only in the present world, but also in that which is to come, so that God should for ever teach, and man should for ever learn the things taught him by God”<sup>46</sup>.

Finally, the knowledge of God could not become property of man, unless the Holy Spirit helped the human creature’s mind. Without the Spirit’s enlightenment, the man was merely flesh and blood and could have no ability and perspective to inherit the eternal divine kingdom,

“The flesh, therefore, when destitute of the Spirit of God, is dead, not having life, and cannot possess the kingdom of God”<sup>47</sup>.

To sum up for Irenaeus, the real Gnostic in Christ had realized that the human knowledge of God did not begin with the divine essence, but with the divine will. God is not known except in his free and personal association with creation<sup>48</sup>. This became more difficult with the exile of Adam from paradise. The ability to have possession of God’s knowledge became a possibility again because of the incarnation of Christ. Then the doctrine of recapitulation established Christ’s person and work as the ontological ground for the Christian knowledge of God<sup>49</sup>. The obedience in God’s will was the most important factor for obtaining the real knowledge of God; otherwise the man (gnostic) possessed a false knowledge. He was victim of a fraud and he could not manage the likeness to God<sup>50</sup>.

**3. The truth of God as present of the power of Spirit in the Church.** For Irenaeus the Church was the holy place in which the gift of recapitulation was

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem IV 12, 3, ed. A. Rousseau, Sch 100/2, Paris 1965, 514-516, ANF 1, 476.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. ibidem II 28, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, Sch 294, 274, ANF 1, 399.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem V 9, 3, Sch 153, 112, ANF 1, 535.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. ibidem; Bushur, *Joining the end to the beginning divine providence*, p. 43.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* III 16-19; Bushur, *Joining the end to the beginning divine providence*, p. 26.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. G. Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation: A Study in the Biblical Theology of Irenaeus*, Philadelphia 1959, 26-29.



proving the personal history for every faithful man<sup>51</sup>. Within the Church there was the continuity of the real teaching concerning God. The Church received testimony from the prophets, the apostles, and all the disciples and through them and the entire dispensation of God. All these had only the goal of man's salvation, namely, the true faith; which, having been received from the Church because of Spirit's grace<sup>52</sup>. Only the truth which was proclaimed by the Church was constant<sup>53</sup>.

The Church had the truth of God through the grace of the Spirit. The canonicity and interpretation of Scripture was ultimately referred to the authority of the Church. Irenaeus compared the books of the Bible to trees in the garden of the Church:

"It behoves us, therefore, to avoid their doctrines, and to take careful heed lest we suffer any injury from them; but to flee to the Church, and be brought up in her bosom, and be nourished with the Lord's Scriptures. For the Church has been planted as a garden (paradisus) in this world; therefore says the Spirit of God, «Thou mayest freely eat from every tree of the garden», that is, Eat ye from every Scripture of the Lord; but ye shall not eat with an uplifted mind, nor touch any heretical discord"<sup>54</sup>.

Also, the basic pillar of the divine truth was the revelation of the triune teaching. The faith in trinitarian deity was the *regula veritatis* which gave to the Church the characterization of holiness<sup>55</sup>.

The bishop of Lyon insisted that the life of the Church was:

"organically connected to the fleshly existence of this world. The incorruptible life accomplished in the spiritual waters of baptism was not the life of another world, but it was a gift of Holy Spirit for the present world until eternity. Rather, it was the intended perfection of earthly life"<sup>56</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* III 24, 1.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *ibidem*. III 24, 1-2.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem* V 20, 2, SCh 153, 258, ANF 1, 548.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *ibidem* V 20, 1, SCh 153, 254-256, ANF 1, 548: "But the path of those belonging to the Church circumscribes the whole world, as possessing the sure tradition from the apostles, and gives unto us to see that the faith of all is one and the same, since all receive one and the same God the Father, and believe in the same dispensation regarding the incarnation of the Son of God, and are cognizant of the same gift of the Spirit, and are conversant with the same commandments, and preserve the same form of ecclesiastical constitution, and expect the same advent of the Lord, and await the same salvation of the complete man, that is, of the soul and body. And undoubtedly the preaching of the Church is true and steadfast, in which one and the same way of salvation is shown throughout the whole world".

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Bushur, *Joining the end to the beginning divine providence*, p. 76.

The Church was the mystical body of Christ, in which the believers united through the mystery of eucharist<sup>57</sup> have received the gift of immortality<sup>58</sup>. Joel R. Kurz underlined,

“the eucharist thus establishes the faith of the church and imparts to mankind the very divine life of the creator through the life of creation”<sup>59</sup>.

Without the Holy Spirit, it was impossible for the believer to know the Son and the Father and to accept the salvation through the incarnation of the Son<sup>60</sup>. Christ recapitulated and recapitulates not only the past but the future by continuing as head of the Church until the end of the world: “He takes the primacy to himself and by making himself the head of the Church, he will draw all things to himself at the appointed time”<sup>61</sup>. However, Christ as the head of the Church kept the truth in the Church and because of the holy creative attribute of the Spirit, it could go on working in the apostolic ministry of the Church. For the bishop of Lyon, the same power that brought forth life out of non-existence, created the Church through the apostles:

“It certainly was in the power of the apostles to declare that Christ descended upon Jesus, or that the so-called superior Savior came down upon the dispensational one, or he who is from the invisible places upon him from the Demiurge [...] But what really was the case, that did they record, that the Spirit of God as a dove descended upon him; the Spirit, of whom it was declared by Isaiah, «And the Spirit of God shall rest upon him», as I have already said. And again, «The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me». That is the Spirit of whom the Lord declares, «For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaks in you». And again, giving to the disciples the power of regeneration into God”<sup>62</sup>.

For Irenaeus, the Spirit donated the unique truth of God in Church. The latter and the Spirit were inseparable.

“For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and every kind of grace”<sup>63</sup>.

There wasn't any secret doctrine concealed in the Church's common Creed. There wasn't any superior Christianity for intellectuals. The faith publicly confessed by the Church was the common faith of all. This faith alone is

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus Haereses* IV 7, 10.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *ibidem* V 2, 3.

<sup>59</sup> J.R. Kurz, *The Gifts of Creation and the Consummation of Humanity: Irenaeus of Lyons' Recapitulatory Theology of the Eucharist*, “Worship” 83 (2009) n. 2, 115.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* I 9, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *ibidem* III 16, 6.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem* III 17, 1, SCh 211, 328, ANF 1, 444. Cf. Bushur, *Joining the end to the beginning divine providence*, p. 77.

<sup>63</sup> Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* III 24, 1, SCh 211, 474, ANF 1, 458.

apostolic, it was handed down from the Apostles that was, from Jesus and from God. In adhering to this faith, it was publicly transmitted by the Apostles to their successors<sup>64</sup> because of Spirit's grace.

Finally, Irenaeus revisited the idea that the Spirit was presented to the Church now, however, as the gift that brought and brings to life those who receive it<sup>65</sup>. Here the bishop of Lyon implied not only the scripture, but also the baptism and the eucharist to all the participating members as sacramental. By this way any man can become the temple in which the Spirit dwells<sup>66</sup>. The Spirit gave the opportunity to many of the believers to drive out demons effectually and truly, so that those who had been cleansed from evil spirits frequently believed and united with the Church, and took as a present the gift of Spirit's knowledge (divine knowledge).

By the gift of the Spirit which was the enlightenment of the believers of the holy truth, people who became part of the Church comprehended the connection between Old and New Testament. Through the Church, there was a christological interpretation of the Old Testament. The latter defended the unity of the Bible as the revelation of God's redemptive plan in the creation event, both before and after the Fall<sup>67</sup>. In this way it linked Christology with the work of the "two hands of God"<sup>68</sup>. Finally, Irenaeus of Lyon explained how the Spirit revealed the Word through the prophetic visions in Daniel 3 and Ezekiel 1 and how the Spirit donated the truth of God to his believers, real Gnostics in Christ<sup>69</sup>.

As conclusion it could be emphasised that the holy The Spirit accomplished the Father's will in men who had grown old in sin, and gave them new life in Christ. The Spirit, the advocate came down on the disciples at Pentecost, after the Lord's ascension, with power to open the gates of life to all nations and to make known to them the new covenant. So it was that men of every language joined in singing one song of praise to God, and scattered tribes, restored to unity by the Spirit, were offered to the Father as the first fruits of all the nations<sup>70</sup>. Through the baptism that liberates us from change and decay we have become one in body; through the Spirit we have become one in soul<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Saint Irenaeus of Lyons*, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20070328.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20070328.html) [access: 14.10.2017].

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* III 24, 1; A. Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Oxford 2012, 86.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* V 1-3.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *ibidem* IV 14, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. *ibidem* IV 20, 1.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *ibidem* IV 20, 10-11; V. Bebis, *The Pneumatology of St Irenaeus of Lyons*, (Thesis submitted for the degree Doctor of Philosophy), North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus 2010, 48.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* III 17, 1-2.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. *ibidem* III 17, 3.

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The real gnostic in Christ in Irenaeus had belief in the great orthodox doctrines of unity: One God, who is the Father and Creator of all things, immaterial and material, and who orchestrates one harmonious history of revelation and redemption; one Savior, who is both divine spirit and human flesh, both Christ and Jesus; one human nature, which is both spiritual and fleshly; one salvation of both the spiritual and material realms, which is by faith<sup>72</sup>.

The knowledge of God and His eternal glory can be realized through the Incarnate Word of God who is the source of real knowledge. The latter is received through the Church, as the body of Christ, especially by participation in the eucharist. The real gnosis in Christ is revealed in our inner man, if it has been purified and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Finally, the knowledge of God and His eternal glory can be realized partially in this world, through our unity with the Father in His Only-Begotten Son, by the work of the Holy Spirit, and completed in the world to come.

On the other hand, the heretic gnostic thought that there were two gods, the good and the evil. The latter created every material thing. Gnostics interpreted the Scriptures according to their own secret tradition and without accepting the Church tradition of the apostles, prophets and bishops, successors of the apostles. The process of Salvation began when the Gnosis, the Gospel, descended like a beam of light, or a letter, or a bird, through the intermediate spheres and worlds. Only in Church can the believers have the real gnosis of God and through the mysteries of baptism and eucharist the Holy Spirit reveals the real divine truth to the believers. This truth is the one and the same with the truth or the holy tradition, oral and written in Scripture.

Finally, it is obvious that Irenaeus supported that:

“God has placed in the Church, first, apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, teachers”<sup>73</sup>. “Where, therefore, the gifts of the Lord have been placed, there it behoves us to learn the truth, (namely), from those who possess that succession of the Church which is from the apostles, and among whom exists that which is sound and blameless in conduct, as well as that which is unadulterated and incorrupt in speech. For these also preserve this faith of ours in one God who created all things; and they increase that love (which we have) for the Son of God, who accomplished such marvellous dispensations for our sake: and they expound the Scriptures to us without danger, neither blaspheming God, nor dishonouring the patriarchs, nor despising the prophets”<sup>74</sup>.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. J. Bingham, *One God, One Christ, One Salvation. Irenaeus the “peacemaker” was the early church’s best warrior against Gnostic heresy*, in: “Christian History: The Hunger for Secret Knowledge” 96 (2007), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-96/one-god-one-christ-one-salvation.html> [access: 6.10.2017].

<sup>73</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 12:28.

<sup>74</sup> Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus haereses* IV 26, 5, Sch 100/2, 728, ANF 1, 498.

## (Summary)

The fight against gnostics allowed the holy bishop to develop the Christian doctrine with a perfect way. At first, he showed that the knowledge (γνῶσις) that heretics sought in vain in mythical narratives was not real. The only real gnosis was love and grace for believers in Christ and they were given to them by the Holy Spirit. Only in Church man can be saved. And the real "gnostics" were not those who rejected and despised their body in order to worship an "incomprehensible God" and "Creator," but the "spiritual" people who received from the Holy Spirit the resurrection of the flesh and its indestructibility.

GNOSTYK HETERODOKSYJNY  
I PRAWDZIWY GNOSTYK W CHRYSZTUSIE  
WEDŁUG NAUCZANIA IRENEUSZA Z LYONU

## (Streszczenie)

Walka z gnostycyzmem pozwoliła św. Ireneuszowi z Lyonu rozwinąć w doskonały sposób doktrynę chrześcijańską. Przede wszystkim wykazał on, że wiedza (γνῶσις), którą gnostycy dostrzegali na próżno w mitologicznych opowieściach, nie była prawdziwa. Jedyną rzeczywistością gnozą była miłość i łaska udzielona wyznawcom Chrystusa przez Ducha Świętego. Człowiek może być zbawiony tylko w Kościele. Prawdziwymi gnostykami byli nie ci, którzy zwalczali swoje ciało lub gardzili nim jako dziełem niepoznawalnego Boga Stwórcy, ale ludzie duchowi, którzy otrzymali od Ducha Świętego zmartwychwstanie ciała i niezniszczalność.

**Key words:** gnosticism, gnostics, Irenaeus of Lyon, Holy Spirit, spiritual people, aeons.

**Słowa kluczowe:** gnostycyzm, gnostyk, Ireneusz z Lyonu, Duch Święty, człowiek duchowy, eony.

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