

# Scholarly Frameworks for Reading Irenaeus: The Question of Theophanies

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## Abstract

Irenaeus' understanding of Old Testament theophanies and their exegesis is one of the loci of marked disagreement in scholarship. After a detailed survey of the various scholarly positions, this article argues against the oft-repeated judgment that Irenaeus' treatment of theophanies would set forth a theological corrective to, or even an explicit rebuttal of, Justin of Neapolis' Logos-theology, and shows that Irenaeus' exegesis of theophanies is also consistent with that of authors who have read *Adv. haer.* (Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen). If the bishop of Lyons participated fully in the tradition of interpreting Old Testament theophanies as "Christophanies," it follows that some strands of scholarship are severe misreadings of Irenaeus.

## Keywords

Theophanies – exegesis – Irenaeus – Justin – Tertullian – Orbe – Ochagavía – Behr

## Introduction

A significant body of scholarship on Irenaeus of Lyon is dedicated to the question of theophanies and their interpretation in early Christianity. Nevertheless, as a recent contributor to this discussion remarks, "[t]he interpretation of Irenaeus' understanding of the pre-incarnational appearances of the Logos is an open question in scholarship."<sup>1</sup> The pages to follow offer a critical presentation of these divergent accounts, testing them against the data resulting from

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1 J. Lashier, *Irenaeus on the Trinity* (Leiden: Brill, 2014) 129 n. 149.

a comparison between the bishop of Lyons' exegesis of theophanies and that of other writers who are in some way linked to Irenaeus—Justin of Neapolis, Melito of Sardis, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria.

## 1 Irenaeus on Theophanic Visions: Brief Survey of Scholarship

### 1.1 *Aróztegui on Theophanic Visibility κατ' ἔμφασιν*

In a detailed study of Irenaeus' interpretation of God's manifestation to Abraham in Genesis 18, Manuel Aróztegui Esnaola pays special attention to *Adv. haer.* 5.1.2. The bishop of Lyons criticizes here the Valentinian understanding of the Incarnation as an appearance "in mere seeming" (*putative*), as another instance of what the patriarchs and prophets beheld *prophetic*, *per visionem*—in short, "simplemente una logofanía más."<sup>2</sup> This accusation seems to match the Valentinian position in the *Dialogue of Adamantius*, which is that Christ displayed his "heavenly flesh" or "body" both in the theophanies and in the Incarnation,<sup>3</sup> so that the Incarnation offers nothing more than the *apparent* physicality of theophanies such as that at Mamre.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, Irenaeus and, later, Tertullian, point out that the manifestations of the Logos in the Old Testament are "human-like," different from and anticipatory of the "real humanity" of the Logos-made-flesh. According to Irenaeus, "God ... spoke in human shape (*in figura humana* / ἐν σχήματι ἀνθρωπίνῳ) to Abraham and again to Moses"; the Logos "always ... points out to men the various forms ... of the dispensations (*species dispositionum*) of the Father."<sup>5</sup> The Valentinians, however, hold that at the Incarnation the Savior assumed, by dispensation (*dispositione*), a body "constructed with unspeakable skill

2 M. Aróztegui Esnaola, *La amistad del Verbo con Abraham según san Ireneo de Lyon* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2005) 42.

3 *Adamantius* 5.851c-d, e: "Adamantius asserts that Christ assumed earthly flesh—that is, from us, but Marinus is emphatic that he took heavenly flesh." Ἀδαμάντιος φάσκει ἐπίγειον αὐτὸν σάρκα ἀνειληφέναι, τούτεστιν ἐκ τῆς ἡμετέρας, Μαρίνος δὲ οὐράνιον διαβεβαιούται (GCS 4:176; English translation in *Adamantius, Dialogue on the True Faith in God. De recta in Deum fide*. Translated with Commentary by R.A. Pretty [Leuven: Peeters, 1997] 150). The subsequent exchange (GCS 4:178; Pretty, 151) concerns the "substance in heaven having flesh and bones" which constitutes Christ's "heavenly flesh."

4 *Adamantius* 5.851e (GCS 4:180, 182; Pretty, 152; 153): "We say that Christ assumed a body in appearance (δοκῆσει). Just as the angels appeared to Abraham, and ate and drank with him, thus also he appeared"; "I believe that just as the angels appeared to Abraham, and ate and drank and conversed with him, so Christ appeared to humans."

5 *Iren. haer.* 4.7.4, 4.20.11 (SC 100/2:462, 668).

(*inenarrabili arte*), so that it might be visible and tangible, and capable of enduring suffering.<sup>6</sup> Tertullian is more insistent on the carnality of theophanies, although he describes the “flesh” of theophanic appearances as not having been born (*sine nativitate*) and therefore not subject to change and mortality; it is not the natural self-manifestation of the visionary subject (*carnem non propriam*)—whether angels or God—but merely its manifestation in a bodily appearance (*in carnis habitu*) assumed for the occasion.<sup>7</sup>

In conclusion, Irenaeus, like other early Christian writers, viewed theophanic apparitions as a phenomenon in which the outward appearance is not a self-expression of the visionary subject (God or angels), but a providential adaptation to the recipient. It is perhaps necessary to highlight the fact that, unlike Augustine some centuries later, Irenaeus does not think of such sensible adaptive manifestations of the Logos as created.<sup>8</sup>

It is to Aróztegui’s merit to have shown that Irenaeus’ conception is very much in line with the contemporary philosophical explanations of natural phenomena.<sup>9</sup> Aside from the Aristotelian and Stoic distinction between the underlying substratum (*ὑποκείμενον*) and its properties and appearance (*ποιότητες, σχήμα*), he points to the Ps-Aristotelian treatise *De Mundo*, which proposes that among aerial phenomena, some are “appearances”—rainbows and luminous streaks in the sky—while others, such as stars and comets, have actual substance and reality.<sup>10</sup> “Realities” (*τὰ καθ’ ὑπόστασιν*) differ from “appearances” (*τὰ κατ’ ἔμφασιν*) in that their properties are inherent to the

6 Iren. *haer.* 1.6.1 (SC 264:92).

7 Tert. *marc.* 3.9.6; *carn. Chr.* 6.7.

8 Pace M.R. Barnes (“Irenaeus’s Trinitarian Theology,” *NV* 7 (2009) 67-106, at 88), whose reading of Irenaeus is distorted by an inadequate Augustinian lens. Consider his paraphrase of Irenaeus (emphasis added): “Moses did not see God: nor did Elijah, nor Ezekiel, nor any of the prophets: they saw God revealed in similitudes, *created representations of himself*, peculiar to the moment and chosen in accordance with the full economy of salvation ...” (90). One wonders where in Irenaeus the notion of created theophanies can be found. As observed by J. Ochagavía (*Visibile Patris Filius: A Study of Irenaeus’ Teaching on Revelation and Tradition* [Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1964] 94), “the doctrine of Augustine on theophanies offers a tremendous contrast to the teachings of Irenaeus ... Does Irenaeus say, like Augustine and Western theology ever since, that the Word made use of a creature—‘assumed’ a creature, in technical language—in order to appear to man? Although he really never touches the question explicitly, his way of speaking seems to indicate that the Word was simply present in a visible manner. Irenaeus never felt the need of saying that the Word assumed a creature or anything of the like.”

9 Aróztegui, *La amistad del Verbo*, 52-58.

10 Ps.-Aristotle, *De Mundo* 4.395a.

ὕπόστασις—the luminosity of a star, for instance, comes from a real object; by contrast, in the case of “appearances” the sensible manifestation does not come from an equally material body but from an immaterial ὑπόστασις.

Irenaeus does explain, at some point, that God “appeared to Abraham, revealing Himself through the Word, as through a ray of light.”<sup>11</sup> In Ps-Aristotle’s classification, this would be a phenomenon κατ’ ἔμφασιν. The applicability to the question of theophanies and Incarnation is evident:

The visibility of the Word in the logophanies of Abraham is a visibility κατ’ ἔμφασιν. This means, following saint Irenaeus, that in its apparitions to Abraham, the Word has a pneumatic or divine ὑποκειμενον in which, by virtue of a metaphysical miracle, inhere sensible ποιότητες.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.2 *Giulea on the Logos as God’s Noetic Form*

A series of studies by Dragoș Giulea demonstrate that the bishop of Lyons shares in the vast christological tradition that conceptualizes the reality of Christ as the noetic form of God.<sup>13</sup> As a matter of fact, the various translators have had to wrestle with the possibility of Irenaeus being particularly forceful in affirming the “invisible form” of the Logos in a line from *Epid.* 34.<sup>14</sup> It is significant that the various renderings of the phrase fall into two categories, suggesting either a (physically or noetically) perceptible reality, or a mode or manner of existence.

11 Iren. *epid.* 24 (Behr, 55).

12 Aróztegui, *La amistad del Verbo*, 57.

13 See the extensive dossier and excellent discussion in D.A. Giulea, “*Simpliciores, Eruditi*, and the Noetic Form of God: Pre-Nicene Christology Revisited,” *HTR* 108 (2015) 263-288 and his *Pre-Nicene Christology in Paschal Contexts: The Case of the Divine Noetic Anthropos* (Leiden: Brill, 2014) ch. 12 (“The Noetic Anthropos of Pre-Nicene Christian Hellenism”), which discusses Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus of Rome, Tertullian, the Ps-Clementines, and Arnobius. For Irenaeus, see Giulea, *Pre-Nicene Christology*, 315-318; “Noetic Form,” 270-274; “Origen’s Christology in Pre-Nicene Setting: The Logos as the Noetic Form of God,” *ETL* 92 (2016) 407-437.

14 *Des heiligen Irenäus Schrift zum Erweise der apostolischen Verkündigung: ΕΙΣ ΕΠΙΔΕΙΞΙΝ ΤΟΥ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΥ ΚΗΡΥΓΜΑΤΟΣ*. In armenischer Version entdeckt, herausgegeben und ins Deutsche übersetzt von Karapet Ter-Mëkërttschian und Erwand Ter-Minassiantz, mit einem Nachwort und Anmerkungen von Adolf Harnack (TU 31; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1907) 19-20: “Denn er ist selbst das Wort des allmächtigen Gottes, welches in unsichtbarer Gestalt in uns allgemein in dieser ganzen Welt verbreitet ist ...”; S. Irenaeus, *The Proof of the Apostolic Preaching with Seven Fragments*. Armenian Version edited and translated by H.L. Bishop Karapet Ter-Mëkërttschian and Rev. Dr. S.G. Wilson, with the co-operation of H.R.H. Prince Max of Saxony (PO 12: 685): “As He was the Son of God, the ruler of

**Wilson:** the Son of God, the ruler of all who *in an invisible form* is universally immanent among us in all the world ...

**Smith:** the Word of God Almighty, who *in His invisible form* pervades us universally in the whole world ...;

**Froideveaux:** le Verbe du Dieu tout-puissant lui-même qui *selon sa condition invisible* [testleann, genitive-datif de *tesil* qui peut tres bien traduire μορφή, cf. Phil., II, 6] est répandu chez nous dans tout cet univers ...;

**Brox:** das Wort des allmächtigen Gottes, welches *in unsichtbarer Gestalt* in uns über die ganze Welt verbreitet ist ...

**Robinson:** the Word of God Almighty, who *in unseen wise* in our midst is universally extended in all the world ...

**Behr:** the Word of God Almighty, who *invisibly* pervades <...> the whole creation ...;

**Rousseau:** *Verbum Dei omnipotentis quod secundum invisibilem aspectum communiter-extensum est in universo mundo*; ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος ὁ κατὰ τὸ ἄόρατον συμπαρεκτεινόμενος πάση τῇ κτίσει ...; le Verbe du Dieu tout-puissant, Verbe qui, *au plan invisible*, est coextensif à la création toute entière ...

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all who *in an invisible form* is universally immanent among us in all the world ..."; *Saint Irénée, Démonstration de la prédication apostolique*. Traduite de l'arménien et annotée par Joseph Barthoulot, avec une introduction et des notes par J. Tixeront (PO 12:773): "Et comme il est Lui le Verbe du Dieu tout-puissant, dont la présence invisible est répandue en nous et remplit le monde entier ..."; *St Irenaeus, The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*. Translated from the Armenian with introduction and notes by J. Armitage Robinson (London: SPCK, 1920) 101: "Now seeing that He is the Word of God Almighty, who *in unseen wise* in our midst is universally extended in all the world ..."; *St. Irenaeus, Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*. Translated and annotated by Joseph P. Smith (ACW 16; Westminster, MD: Newman, 1952) 69, 172 n. 171: "And because He is Himself the Word of God Almighty, who *in His invisible form* pervades us universally in the whole world ..."; "in His invisible form": The text has not 'His' but simply the ('third person') article; not simply 'in an invisible form,' but with contrast of the invisible and visible forms; cf. AH 5.18.3."; *Irénée de Lyon, Démonstration de la prédication apostolique*. Nouvelle traduction de l'arménien avec introduction et notes par L.M. Froideveaux (SC 62; Paris: Cerf, 1959) 87 and n. 5: "et parce que c'est le Verbe du Dieu tout-puissant lui-même qui selon sa condition invisible est répandu chez nous dans tout cet univers ..."; "testleann, genitive-datif de *tesil* qui peut tres bien traduire μορφή (cf. Phil., II, 6), comme un peu plus bas *jewoyn*"; *Irenäus von Lyon. Epideixis. Adversus Haereses. Darlegung der apostolischen Verkündigung. Gegen die Häresien*. Übersetzt und eingeleitet von Norbert Brox (Freiburg: Herder, 1993)

The two translations are undergirded by specific theological interpretations of Irenaeus. Giulea sides with the translations of Smith and Froideveaux<sup>15</sup> and aligns himself with the scholarship of Antonio Orbe and Juan Ochagavía. These scholars understand Irenaeus to think that “the pre-incarnate Word was in possession of a sort of visibility to the mind that was anterior to the visibility to the eyes of the flesh,”<sup>16</sup> but which does not preclude the possibility of a certain visibility adapted to the recipient.<sup>17</sup> Read in this light, the famous Irenaeus statements about the Son as *visibile Patris* (4.6.6), *mensura Patris* (4.4.2), *agnitio Patris* (4.6.7), and *naturaliter invisibilis* (4.24.2) yet also becoming *visibilis* (ὄρατός) and *palpabilis* (ψηλαφητός), amount to the notion of the Logos as the Father’s eternal self-definition and self-manifestation, which is the prototype of Adam and the paradigm of the historical and physical self-manifestation in the Incarnation. Irenaeus’ view of Christ as eternal form of God and paradigm of Adam comes to the fore in *Epid.* 11. This text, writes Giulea,

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56: “Denn er ist selbst das Wort des allmächtigen Gottes, welches in unsichtbarer Gestalt in uns über die ganze Welt verbreitet ist ...”; *Irénee de Lyon, Démonstration de la prédication apostolique*. Introduction, traduction et notes par Adelin Rousseau (SC 406; Paris: Cerf, 1995) 130 (Latin), 131 (French), 272 (Greek): *Quoniam autem ipse este Verbum Dei omnipotentis quod secundum invisibilem aspectum communiter-extensum-est* (συμπαρεκτείνω) *in universo mundo ...*; “et, parce que lui-même est le Verbe du Dieu tout-puissant, Verbe qui, *au plan invisible*, est coextensif à la création toute entière ...”; Καὶ ἐπειδὴ αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος ὁ κατὰ τὸ ἀόρατον συμπαρεκτείνόμενος πάση τῇ κτίσει ... Cf. Rousseau’s note on *Adv. haer.* 5.18.3: “*secundum invisibilem aspectum* paraît n’être rien d’autre qu’une traduction quelque peu maladroit du grec κατὰ τὸ ἀόρατον” (SC 152:298-299); Behr, *St Irenaeus of Lyons, On the Apostolic Preaching*, 62, 108n. 100: “And since He is the Word of God Almighty, who *invisibly* pervades <...> the whole creation ...; Erevan 3710 has ‘us,’ which is not in Galaqta 54; thus Smith translates: ‘who in *His invisible form* pervades us universally in the whole world.’”

- 15 Giulea, “Noetic Form,” 270: “The term used for ‘form’ ... means ‘aspect,’ ‘appearance,’ ‘look,’ ‘sight,’ ‘image,’ or ‘spectacle’; even ‘vision,’ ‘phantom,’ in a religious sense; or ‘theory,’ ‘idea,’ in a more philosophical meaning. Consequently, the term denotes a visually or mentally perceptible reality, and its meaning is sensibly different from ‘manner,’ ‘way,’ as Rousseau rendered it in his Greek retroversion ...”
- 16 Ochagavía, *Visibile Patris Filius*, 91. See A. Orbe, *Hacia la primera teología de la procesión del Verbo: Estudios Valentinianos* (2 vols.; Rome: Gregorian, 1958) 1/1.407; 1/2:659: “En el fondo, Orígenes, s. Ireneo y Tertuliano, sostienen lo mismo: la invisibilidad o incognoscibilidad del Hijo. El Padre es lo invisible del Hijo, el Hijo lo visible del Padre. Bien entendido, en sus relaciones personales, y con anterioridad a la Encarnación.”
- 17 Ochagavía, *Visibile Patris Filius*, 92: “Does this antecedent visibility imply that the Word *in seipso* was considered as inferior to the Father? Not necessarily. It can merely mean that He was never considered *in seipso*, but always in view of the manifestation to creatures ...”

deserves special attention since the author states in this chapter that Jesus made use of his form (ἄπει) when he created Adam: “He gave his frame the outline of his own form (υπετηδονιωδην ρηιρυν υφωρωαρητωσ ἄπει), that the visible appearance too should be godlike (Υουνηωδωδπει).”<sup>18</sup> In a literal translation, as Smith shows, the sentence means: “For the formation [i.e., of the human being] He outlined His own form, that also what would be seen should be deiform.”<sup>19</sup> The Armenian word ἄπει is not taken over from the famous expression “image and likeness” (լերաբարաւորով ու նմանութեամբ) of Gen 1.26, nor from the biblical word “image” (պատկեր) used in Gen 1.27, but simply means “form,” “shape,” “figure,” “model,” a term equally used in geometry with the meaning of “geometric figure.”<sup>20</sup>

Irenaeus writes that, although “in times long past” (ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεν χρόνοις) the Logos who was the prototype for the creation of mankind “remained as yet invisible” (ἔτι γὰρ ἀόρατος ἦν ὁ λόγος), the restoration of disfigured humanity occurred through the visible Logos (διὰ τοῦ βλεπομένου λόγου).<sup>21</sup> As Orbe notes in his perceptive discussion,<sup>22</sup> the context makes it clear that the opposition between ἀόρατος and βλεπόμενος points here to the Incarnation of the Logos. Clearly, then, ἀόρατος here does not describe the status of Logos *in himself*, but in contradistinction to the Incarnation. Before the Incarnation the Logos is ἀόρατος to creation, while in relation to the Father he is precisely ὁρατός and καταληπτός (*Adv. haer.* 3.11.5) as the Father’s μέτρον (*Adv. haer.* 4.4.2). In other words, the Incarnation is the physical manifestation of the Son’s preexistent noetic reality (because the latter delineates in Adam the shape of the incarnate Christ),<sup>23</sup> and the crucifixion on Golgotha manifests the Logos’ eternal and

18 Irenaeus, *Epid.* 11 (PO 12/5:15; trans. Smith, 54).

19 Smith, *Irenaeus*, 148-49.

20 Giulea, “Noetic Form,” 270-271.

21 Iren. *haer.* 5.16.2 (SC 153:216). Cf. Justin, *apol.* 63.4-16: “formerly (πρότερον) the Logos ... but now (νῦνδὲ) having become man; formerly (πρότερον) in the shape of fire ... but now (νῦνδὲ) having become man by a virgin.” The comparison between Justin and Irenaeus at this point contradicts Behr’s strict verdict that Justin “makes this second God an inhabitant of the universe, sharing in its time and subject to change, temporalizing God” (Behr, *The Way to Nicaea* [Crestwood, N.Y.: SVS Press, 2001] 106).

22 Orbe, *Estudios Valentinianos* 1/2:656 n. 3a.

23 Orbe, *Estudios Valentinianos* 1:407 n. 31. See also Ochagavía, *Visibile Patris Filius*, 91-92; J. Fantino, *La théologie d'Irénée: Lecture des Ecritures en réponse à l'exégèse gnostique. Une approche trinitaire* (Paris: Cerf, 1994) 303, 349.



all-encompassing “being-stretched-out-crosswise” throughout the cosmos.<sup>24</sup> The implication for our understanding of the Irenaean view of theophanies is drawn out by Giulea as follows:

the prophets contemplated God not directly but indirectly, in the pre-incarnate Christ, and this in an “invisible manner” (*rationem invisibilem*). They perceived the Logos in this way either as the Lord of hosts (therefore as the glorious humanlike figure which biblical theophanies portray surrounded by glory and angels), or, using a biblical anthropomorphic expression, “just as any one might speak to his friend,” but only the back parts (*Adv. haer.* 4.20.9).<sup>25</sup>

### 1.3 Behr on the Scriptural Christ and His Exegetical Preexistence

A very different approach to theophanies, which is founded on a particular interpretation of Irenaeus and is part of a larger theological framework for understanding early Christian thought, has emerged over the last two decades with the scholarship of John Behr.

Behr rejects the views of Orbe and Ochagavía about the Son as pre-creationally “‘visible’ in a way that the Father is not” and the notion of the Logos in some way visible in Old Testament theophanies; “his preexistence and eternity is scriptural.”<sup>26</sup> Perhaps “exegetical preexistence” would be a more fitting term, since Behr holds that “for Irenaeus, the crucified Jesus Christ, the Gospel of the apostles, was present prior to the Passion as the veiled content of the Scripture.”<sup>27</sup> Lashier also speaks about “the literary character” of theophanic visions,<sup>28</sup> by which he means that “insofar as Christ is ‘seen’ in his fullness prior to the incarnation, he is ‘seen’ in the scripture that testifies about him.”<sup>29</sup> This has important implications for understanding Irenaeus’ thinking about the Logos/ “Son in the beginning” in the famous passage of *epid.* 43: whereas

24 Among the relevant Irenaean passages are the following: *Adv. haer.* 3.22.3 (the demiurgic Logos formed [προετύπωσεν] Adam as *typus futuri* /τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος, and preexists as the future saving agent [*salvans*] of the creature-yet-to-be). See Adelin Rousseau’s commentary ad. loc. in SC 210:371-372; Idem, “Le Verbe ‘imprimé en forme de croix dans l’univers’: A propos de deux passages de saint Irénée,” in *Armeniaca: Mélanges d’études arméniennes*, ed. M. Djanachian (Venice: St. Lazare, 1969) 67-82; D. Wanke, *Das Kreuz Christi bei Irenäus von Lyon* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000) 304-328.

25 Giulea, “Noetic Form,” 272.

26 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 115, 230 (emphasis mine); 239.

27 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 119-120.

28 Lashier, *Irenaeus on the Trinity*, 127.

29 Lashier, *Irenaeus on the Trinity*, 128.



for Orbe, Ochagavía, Giulea, and others, the Logos is God's pre-creational self-manifestation and the paradigm of creation,<sup>30</sup> whose cosmic being-stretched-out-crosswise is mirrored by the Crucifixion, for Behr the "paradigm" of Adam must be the *incarnate* Jesus Christ.<sup>31</sup>

It is quite striking that Behr's interpretation of Irenaeus echoes his own conception about what constitutes Christian theology and his emphasis on the literary dimension of the Gospel.<sup>32</sup> In other words, when Behr ascribes to the bishop of Lyons the notion of Christ's "scriptural preexistence," Irenaeus starts sounding suspiciously like John Behr.

This initial suspicion is compounded by the observation that the distinction between Irenaeus' faithfulness to the apostolic kerygma and Justin's alleged grave distortion of the latter is unknown to ancient Christian sources but constitutes a very important element in Behr's account of Christian origins. Indeed, in the chapter on Justin, in the chapter on Irenaeus, in the concluding remarks of *The Way to Nicaea*, as well as in the companion volume *The Nicene Faith*, Behr states that "the contrast between Justin and Irenaeus regarding the relationship between the Word and God in many ways parallels that between

30 Ochagavía (*Visibile Patris Filius*, 95-110) pushes these considerations into very speculative territory: Irenaeus would suggest that the Logos was generated by God's will in view of creation and especially in view of creating man in the Image of God. For a critique of this view and its textual basis, see Rousseau, "La doctrine de saint Irénée sur la préexistence du Fils de Dieu dans Dém. 43," *Mus* 84 (1971): 5-42, esp. 11-13, 39-42; see also the extensive criticism in Lashier, *Irenaeus on the Trinity*, 139-143.

31 "It is important to note the literalism of Irenaeus' understanding of τύπος, as an imprint or impression. As a type of Christ, 'Adam does not simply prefigure Christ, but bears in his own body the lineaments of the incarnate Son of God'" (Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004] 58, quoting D. Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction* [London: T&T Clark, 2010] 100); similarly, Ysabel de Andia, *Incorruptibilité et divinisation de l'homme chez Irénée de Lyon* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1986), 73-74 and Fantino, *La théologie d'Irénée*, 217.

32 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 14-15: "The Gospel is not fixed in a particular text, but ... is an interpretative relationship to the Scriptures; the relationship with God is, in a broad sense, *literary* ... [what came to be orthodox or normative Christianity] ... is an interpretative text-based religion ... committed to understanding Christ by engaging with Scripture on the basis of the canon of truth and in the context of tradition (παράδοσις)." See also Behr, *Nicene Faith* 1:16: "Christian theology, as established as normative by the end of the second century, on the basis of the way in which the Gospel was proclaimed from the beginning, and then reaffirmed by Nicaea and Constantinople, is an exegetical enterprise, reflecting on the revelation of God in Christ through the engagement with the Scriptures ..."

Arius and the Council of Nicaea.”<sup>33</sup> Behr ranges Justin (whose bold and theologically dubious speculations would have appeared quasi-Valentinian to the Christians in Rome<sup>34</sup>) together with the author of the *Refutation of all Heresies*, Paul of Samosata’s critics, and later Arianism, whereas Irenaeus, like Ignatius, Hippolytus, and Origen, is said to hold on to “a theology that retains its confessional and kerygmatic character.”<sup>35</sup> Just as Justin’s theology of theophanies amounts to “a mythical biography of the Word,”<sup>36</sup> “an odd mixture of mythology and metaphysics” that “temporalizes the eternity of Christ,”<sup>37</sup> so also are the critics of Paul of Samosata, the author of the *Refutation of all Heresies*, and the opponents to Nicaea guilty of producing “an odd mixture of metaphysics and mythology,”<sup>38</sup> an “attempt to temporalize God and mythologize theology.”<sup>39</sup> Like Justin, they are shifting the subject of reflection from Jesus Christ to the Logos, “a subject whose identity, as subject, remains continuous, while appearing in diverse forms and acting in diverse manners,”<sup>40</sup> and “presum[e] to give, from an unspecified vantage point, an account of the life of the Trinity, and then to narrate their dealings with creation.”<sup>41</sup> Behr even sees an “odd mixture of metaphysics and mythology” in the thought of John Zizioulas!<sup>42</sup>

33 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 239. The difference between Justin and Irenaeus “would be played out a couple of centuries later between the Arians ... and Athanasius” (*Way to Nicaea*, 104); also *Way to Nicaea*, 106 n. 27; *Nicene Faith* 1:16 n. 48: “contrasts between Justin and Irenaeus similar to those between the non-Nicenes and Nicenes are noted.”

34 Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyon: Identifying Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): Justin Martyr “was a strange and an audacious teacher” (42), whose “discourse would have seemed strange and exotic to other Christians in Rome” (42), perhaps because this “philosophically inclined teacher” did not seem to them very different from the Valentinians. Indeed, the Ptolemaeus praised in the Second Apology (2 *Apol.* 2.10, 13) was “very likely” “none other than the Valentinian author of the Letter to Flora” (43), which explains, “if this is so,” why the Roman Christians did not call upon him to combat the Valentinians: naturally, “they had suspicions regarding Justin himself and his *Apologies*, prompting him him to distance himself explicitly from the Valentinians in his *Dialogue ...*” (43)—an endeavor that must not have been successful, given that “most of Justin’s works were not preserved, and were not known beyond their titles even to Irenaeus or Eusebius” (44).

35 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 239.

36 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 161.

37 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 239.

38 Behr, *Nicene Faith* 1:16; 2:480.

39 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 240.

40 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 238-239.

41 Behr, *Nicene Faith* 2:480.

42 Behr, *Nicene Faith*, 16. The allusion to Zizioulas is transparent enough: “a philosophical enterprise, attempting to articulate a fundamental ontology, whether of being or of communion, or both.”

The weaving together of the comparison between Justin and Irenaeus with the Christological debates of the third and fourth centuries and, emphatically but unnecessarily, with the work of a twentieth-century Orthodox theologian reveals the contours of a particular theological framework for understanding the Christian faith; it is not surprising that critics of Behr (regardless of the validity and pertinence of their criticism) have rarely impugned his Patristics scholarship but have focused instead on its theological presuppositions.<sup>43</sup>

Whatever one may think of Behr's own theology, my concern here is that it seems to have led to a misinterpretation of Irenaeus, positing a radical contrast to Justin Martyr—for which one finds no echo in Christian tradition and no support in the texts—and transforming the bishop of Lyon into an improbable exception among his theological peers.

## 2 Irenaeus in Context

“To say that only the *incarnate* Son was visible and comprehensible does not explain the context of the Irenaeian controversy with the Valentinian Gnostics and the disciples of Marcion. In fact, they all agreed on this point.”<sup>44</sup> This observation by Ochagavía (reprising the argument made by Orbe) highlights the importance of taking into account Irenaeus' polemical context. It is important, however, that we also consider Irenaeus' place among his “proto-Orthodox” predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. We must, specifically, examine how consonant the bishop of Lyons is with the views expressed by Justin, Melito, Tertullian, or Clement of Alexandria on the very important exegetical and doctrinal point of theophanies.

### 2.1 *Looking Back: Exegesis of Theophanies before Irenaeus*

Melito of Sardis, one of Irenaeus' predecessors, and Theophilus of Antioch, probably one of his main sources,<sup>45</sup> both read the Old Testament through a christological lens. Theophilus affirms that it was not “the God and Father of

43 The most acerbic critique (perhaps understandable since it was intended as a defense of Zizioulas) is that Behr is unduly dependent on the “grammatical ontology” of postliberal theology: A. Brown, “On the Criticism of *Being as Communion* in Anglophone Orthodox Theology,” in D. Knight, ed., *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) esp. 46-48, 72-76.

44 Ochagavía, *Visible Patris Filius* 94; Orbe, *Estudios Valentinianos* 2:657-658.

45 On Theophilus as a source for Irenaeus see the fundamental study by F. Loofs, *Theophilus von Antiochien “Adversus Marcionem” und die anderen theologischen Quellen bei Irenaeus* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1930).

the universe” who was present in paradise and conversed with Adam, but “the Logos of God, who is also his Son”; and Melito identifies the one who guided Israel in a pillar of fire, fed his people manna from heaven and water from the rock, and gave the Law on Horeb, with the Son, the firstborn of God, the Crucified One.<sup>46</sup> It is, however, Justin of Neapolis who is generally credited with actually “inventing” what is called “the argument from theophanies” in the heat of his anti-dualistic polemic.<sup>47</sup> Even if one follows more recent scholarship in its view that “Justin was essentially building upon a line of christological argument already available,” and “reflects an approach to the Old Testament that had been a feature of devotion to Jesus during the first decades of the Christian movement,”<sup>48</sup> it remains certainly true that Justin offers the most extensive articulation of this early Christian appropriation of the Hebrew Scriptures. This christological interpretation of Old Testament theophanies, exemplified by Melito and Justin, results in “a coherent narrative leading from Genesis to Jesus, a christologically re-written Bible in which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as Moses and the prophets are ‘men of Christ,’ and in which the readers are invited to inscribe themselves by following Justin’s own example.”<sup>49</sup>

We know that “in the thirty years after Justin’s death and before writing *Adversus haereses*, Irenaeus learned much more and extended his thought in constructions that Justin never achieved and perhaps never would have. But the answer to the question, ‘What did Irenaeus learn from Justin?’ should

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- 46 Theophilus of Antioch, *Autol.* 2.22 (Grant, 62/63, 64/65); Melito, *Peri Pascha* 84-85 (sc 123: 108): “He it was who led you into Egypt, and guarded you there and sustained you [Gen 46:3-4]. He it was who lit up your way with a pillar, and sheltered you with a cloud [Ex 13:21; Ps 77:14; 104:39]. He cut the Red Sea open and led you through [Exodus 14:15; Ps 135:13-14] and destroyed the enemy [Ps 135:15]. He it is who gave you manna from heaven [Exod 16:4-35], who gave you drink from a rock [Exod 17:4-7; Ps 135:16], who gave you the law at Horeb.” English translation in A. Stewart-Sykes, *Melito of Sardis On Pascha and Other Material Related to the Quartodecimans* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2001) 61.
- 47 G. Aeby, *Les missions divines de saint Justin à Origène* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1958) 6 n. 1; B. Kominiak, *The Theophanies of the Old Testament in the Writings of St. Justin* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1948) 4; D.C. Trakatellis, *The Pre-existence of Christ in the Writings of Justin Martyr: An Exegetical Study with Reference to the Humiliation and Exaltation Christology* (Missoula: Scholars, 1976) 59, 85; O. Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr’s Proof-Text Tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile* (Leiden: Brill, 1987) 208-209, 211-212, 422, 424.
- 48 L. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003) 577. See also B.G. Bucur, “Justin Martyr’s Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies and the Parting of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism,” *TS* 75 (2014) 34-51, esp. 45-47.
- 49 Bucur, “Justin Martyr’s Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies,” 36-37.

be, 'All that he could, and probably all that Justin had to teach him.'<sup>50</sup> On the question of theophanies, however, scholars are debating to what extent Irenaeus simply follows, refines, or completely modifies the approach of his predecessor.

## 2.2 *Justin versus Irenaeus? Scholarly Assessments*

### 2.2.1 A "Prophetic Turn" in Irenaeus' Exegesis of Theophanies?

Adolf Harnack and Jules Lebreton concur in their assessment of the "striking advance" and "enormous progress" that Irenaeus has made beyond Justin (although, Harnack notes, "it is still a mythological history").<sup>51</sup> Articulated in as neutral a way as possible, the difference between the two is that the bishop of Lyon "exalts the prophetic value of ancient theophanies," insisting "on the figurative and prophetic character of these visions," and interprets theophanies as "preludes to the Incarnation": a series of "preparations" and "portents" or "promises" and "outlines," in themselves partial and imperfect, "of the great revelation."<sup>52</sup> As explained by Albert Houssiau,

Irenaeus departs from Justin's solution. Instead of simply transposing the *visible-invisible* antithesis to the eternal relations between the Word and the Father, he has recourse to the notion of prophecy as knowledge of the future;

Irenaeus has solved the problem of Old Testament visions not by attributing them to the Son, as to another God, more visible than the Father,

50 M. Slusser, "How Much Did Irenaeus Learn From Justin?," *StPatr* 40 (2006) 515-520, at 520. See also Slusser, "The Heart of Irenaeus' Theology," in *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy*, ed. S. Parvis and P. Foster (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress) 133-140; Lashier, *Irenaeus on the Trinity*, 25-26; M.C. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption* (Leiden: Brill, 2008) 17: "Since the days of J.A. Robinson's introduction to his translation of the *Epideixis*, the influence of Justin on Irenaeus has been universally acknowledged ... As regards the theological influence of Justin on Irenaeus, scholarly consideration here has traditionally centred on the quotation at AH 4.6.2 ... [c]oncentration on this particular passage, admittedly of importance given that Irenaeus ascribes it directly to him, nonetheless draws scholarly attention away from the large number of less explicit parallels between the two authors."

51 A. Harnack, *A History of Dogma*, tr. N. Buchanan (New York: Dover, 1961) 2:305; Jules Lebreton, *Histoire du dogme de la Trinité des origines au Concile de Nicée*, 2 vols. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1928) 2:597.

52 Lebreton, *Histoire du dogme de la Trinité*, 467, 596, 597. For a more extensive discussion, see Aeby, *Les missions divines*, 44-49; Albert Houssiau, *La Christologie de saint Irénée* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1955) 80-104.

but by insisting on the figurative and prophetic character of these visions;

He reduces the vision of God in the Old Testament to a mere prophecy (*une simple prophétie*) of the future vision of the Son and the Father ... If one is to speak of a vision of God in the Old Testament, it would only refer to prophecies (*il ne s'agit là que de prophéties*) of the future vision, whether in the Incarnation or in the Father's final glory ...

Irenaeus certainly admits the anticipations of the human presence of the Word in certain biblical theophanies, but for him these are merely symbolic representations (*ne sont ... que des représentations symboliques*) of the future reality.<sup>53</sup>

But scholars are not in agreement over whether Irenaeus believes theophanies to *also* have a prophetic element, or to *only* be prophetic (Behr);<sup>54</sup> whether Irenaeus assumes, as Justin does, that the patriarchs and prophets had an actual experience of encountering the Word of God (Orbe, Ochagavía)<sup>55</sup> or proposes a “merely” literary approach to theophanies, in which the christophanic element is a matter of exegesis (Behr, Lashier).

Very often the discussion of theophanies and their interpretation by Justin and Irenaeus betrays a clear and sometimes explicitly acknowledged theological bias. For Lebreton, Justin's approach to theophanies is subordinationistic and fails to maintain the unique significance of the Incarnation, whereas Irenaeus gives this exegesis “a much more acceptable form” (and for the reader's complete edification, Lebreton also points to an article that clarifies the issue in the unerring light of Thomas Aquinas's theology!).<sup>56</sup> Basil Studer, in his magisterial study dealing with Augustine's theology of theophanies, refers critically to Irenaeus' exegesis of theophanies as “far *too realistic*”—too realistic, that is, if one takes Augustine's very different treatment of theophanies as the criterion of theological correctness.<sup>57</sup> Behr, finally, radicalizes the “prophetic turn” in Irenaeus' interpretation of theophanies and posits a sharp opposition between

53 Houssiau, *Christologie*, 87, 92, 88, 127.

54 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 114 (emphasis added): for Irenaeus “all scriptural theophanies and visions are prophetic, pointing forward to Christ ...”

55 E.g., Ochagavía, *Visible Patris Filius*, 92: “the Word was *actually present* in the ancient economies ... To say that He did all that ‘only in prophecy’ seems to do violence to the realistic language of our author.”

56 Lebreton, *Histoire du dogme de la Trinité*, 2:467; 2:598 and n. 1.

57 B. Studer, *Zur Theophanie-Exegese Augustins: Untersuchung zu einem Ambrosius-Zitat in der Schrift ‘De Videndo Deo’* (Rome: Herder, 1971) 82.

Justin and Irenaeus, which is to be understood in terms of heresy (Justin) and orthodoxy (Irenaeus):

the contrast between Justin and Irenaeus regarding the relationship between the Word and God in many ways parallels that between Arius and the Council of Nicaea.<sup>58</sup>

Rather than presenting, as did Justin, a biography of the Word, describing the *continuity* of the Word's activity, *from* a history recorded in Scripture (the "Old Testament") *to* a history of the Incarnate Word recorded in the Gospels, Irenaeus' emphasis is on the identity between the Word of God in and through Scripture and the Word preached concisely, as become flesh, by the apostles.<sup>59</sup>

### 2.2.2 Is Irenaeus Criticizing Justin at Adv. haer. 4.20.5?

Following Minns, Behr states that

Irenaeus departs from Justin's position, where the Word is a second God able to manifest *himself*, to reiterate the earlier position, that the Son reveals the Father ... To suppose, as Justin had done, that the Son was distinct from the Father as 'another God,' one who, unlike the God of all, is able to come into contact with created reality, would simply undermine Irenaeus' theology—Christ would no longer be manifesting the Father, we would no longer be looking upon the one true God, and so would not be brought into communion with him.<sup>60</sup>

58 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 239; cf. *Way to Nicaea*, 104: The difference between Justin and Irenaeus "would be played out a couple of centuries later between the Arians ... and Athanasius" (*Way to Nicaea*, 104); 106n. 27; *Nicene Faith* 1:16 n. 48: "contrasts between Justin and Irenaeus similar to those between the non-Nicenes and Nicenes are noted."

59 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 129, emphasis original.

60 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 114; cf. *Apostolic Preaching* 110-111 n. 127. See Minns, *Irenaeus*: "His solution was to say that the Son reveals, 'makes visible,' not his own divinity, not the divinity of a second order God, but precisely the divinity of the one and only God ... To suppose that the Son's divinity is distinct from and subordinate to that of the Father would be to vitiate one of the most characteristic features of Irenaeus's theology: his belief that when human beings cast eyes on Jesus, they cast eyes on the one and only God" (61); "what mattered to Irenaeus was that God was visible in Jesus. Any suggestion of a discontinuity between Jesus and the eternal God had therefore to be countered" (51); "he would not allow that the Son is in any sense a lesser god than the Father, for the essential divinity of Christ is fundamental to his understanding of the work of Christ" (64).



Both Minns and Behr think that Justin is the likely target of Irenaeus' critical reference to certain Christian writers "totally ignorant of the nature of prophecy."<sup>61</sup> On closer inspection, this assertion appears completely unfounded.

The text invoked as proof that Irenaeus rejected Justin's approach to the Old Testament reads as follows:

Wherefore the prophets, receiving the prophetic gift from the same Word, announced His advent according to the flesh ... These things did the prophets set forth in a prophetic manner; but they did not, as some allege, [proclaim] that He who was seen by the prophets was a different [God] (*alterum esse eum qui a prophetis videretur; ἄλλον εἶναι τὸν ὑπὸ τῶν προφητῶν ὁρώμενον*), the Father of all being invisible. Yet this is what those declare, who are altogether ignorant of the nature of prophecy.<sup>62</sup>

The paragraph preceding the reference to "some" who say that "He who was seen by the prophets was a different [God]" shows quite clearly that Irenaeus' target here is a dualistic theology:

There is therefore one God, who by the Word and Wisdom created and arranged all things; but this is the Demiurge who has granted this world for the human race, and who, as regards His greatness, is indeed unknown to all who have been made by Him ...; but as regards His love, He is always known through Him by whose means He ordained all things. Now this is His Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, who in the last times was made a man among men ...<sup>63</sup>

Against dualists, Irenaeus states that the creator of heaven and earth is, indeed, the only God ("There is therefore one God who ... created and arranged all things: the Demiurge who has granted this world for the human race"); that the radical transcendence of the deity, which his opponents are right in claiming about the supreme god, truly applies to the creator ("this is the

61 Minns, *Irenaeus*, 62 (cited approvingly by Behr, *Apostolic Preaching*, 110-111 n. 127): "Indeed, he might have had Justin in mind when he wrote: 'those who say that, since the Father of all is invisible, it was another who was seen by the prophets are totally ignorant of the nature of prophecy' (AH 4.20.5)."

62 Iren. *haer.* 4.20.4-5 (SC 100/2:634, 636).

63 Iren. *haer.* 4.20.4 (SC 100/2:634).

Demiurge ... who, as regards His greatness, is indeed unknown”);<sup>64</sup> that transcendence and immanence are not characteristics of two opposed deities, but coexist paradoxically in the one God, who, in himself, is radically other and unknown, yet radically intimate with his creature, by virtue of his love (“the Demiurge ... as regards His greatness, is indeed unknown to all who have been made by Him ... but as regards His love, He is always known”); and that God’s eternal self-revelation occurs through the Logos (“as regards His love, He is always known *through Him by whose means He ordained all things*”).

It is clear that, read in its context, *Adv. haer.* 4.20.5 has nothing to do with Justin’s Logos as “second god,” but is concerned with radical dualism. Minns, however, finds Justin’s language of two gods incriminating and states that, by speaking of theophanies as manifestations of the second God, Justin had made it nearly impossible for Irenaeus to follow his theology: [Irenaeus] “could hardly deny to the heretics the right to distinguish between two gods and then approve of Justin’s saying that there are two gods.”<sup>65</sup>

I find this linking of Justin’s language of “first god” and “second god” to Marcionite and Gnostic dualism puzzling. Despite the use of “two gods” language, what scholars today tend to call “binitarian monotheism” (e.g., memra-theology of the Targums; the Middle-Platonism of Numenius; Philo’s Logos-theology, or the “binitarian” tendency of much early Christian literature) is phenomenologically unrelated to “dualism”—that is, to oppositional ditheism.<sup>66</sup> There is no relation between the language of two gods in Justin (and in any text that could be labeled “binitarian”) and the language of two gods in dualistic systems; as such, there is no reason to suppose that Irenaeus

64 *Iren. haer.* 4.6.4 (SC 100/2:444). The “higher” God posited by Gnostics can only be a fantasy: (1) because the true God can only be revealed by the Son, and since the Son only revealed the Creator God; (2) because it is the heretics, not the Son, who dare preach an allegedly “higher” God (*incognitum Deum audentes annuntiare*).

65 Minns, *Irenaeus*, 60.

66 I see no need to belabor this point, already thoroughly examined in scholarship. The “genetic” derivation of both radical dualism and christological monotheism from Jewish binitarian (“two Powers”) theologies was advocated by G. Quispel starting in the 1950’s and reprised by his disciple J.E. Fossum as well as by Alan F. Segal; in my opinion, it has been definitively put to rest by I.-P. Culianu. See Quispel, “Der Gnostische Anthropos und die jüdische Tradition” and “The Origins of the Gnostic Demiurge,” both republished in his *Gnostic Studies*, 2 vols. (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut in het Nabije Oosten, 1974) 1:173-95; 2:13-20; Fossum, (“The Origin of the Gnostic Concept of the Demiurge,” *ETL* 61 (1985) 142-52; Segal, *Two Powers In Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity And Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977) 244-266; Culianu, *The Tree of Gnosis* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992).

had Justin in mind when he criticized those who allege “that He who was seen by the prophets was a different [God]” than the Father of all.

### 2.2.3 Justin Sometimes Sounds Like Irenaeus

Aside from the christological interpretation, Justin also discusses in great detail the christological “fulfillment” of prophecies (carrying on the Gospel of Matthew), and elaborates “typological” readings of the Old Testament similar to those of Barnabas. Thus, the forbidden Tree of Paradise, the oak of Mamre, Moses’ staff and outspread arms, the Paschal lamb, the brazen serpent, and Elisha’s axe head are all types of the Cross; Joshua, Jacob, Noah, Jonah, Melkisedek, and Isaiah are types of Christ; the flood and the circumcision are types of baptism; the two scapegoats are a type of Christ’s first and second comings. This is all well-known,<sup>67</sup> although scholars disagree on whether this kind of typological reading in Justin is consonant with (Skarsaune) or divergent from (Behr) Irenaeus’ repeated statements about Christ’s presence in the Old Testament Scriptures.<sup>68</sup>

Less discussed is Justin’s notion of theophanies as “pre-announcements” (προκερύγματα) of the Incarnation. Consider the following double exegesis of the Peniel theophany (Genesis 32) in the *Dialogue with Trypho*:

Accordingly the name *Israel* signifies this: *A man who overcomes power*. For *Isra* is a man overcoming, and *El* is power. And that Christ would act so when He became man was foretold by the mystery of Jacob’s wrestling (διὰ τοῦ μυστηρίου τῆς πάλης) with Him who appeared to him, in that He ministered to the will of the Father, yet nevertheless is God, in that He is the first-begotten of all creatures. For when He became man, as

67 See K. Grubbe, “Die typologische Schrifterklärung Justins des Märtyrers,” *Der Katholik* 2 (1880) 139-159; J. Daniélou, *Message évangélique et culture hellénistique aux IIe et IIIe siècles* (Tournai: Deselée et Cie, 1961) 185-195.

68 See Skarsaune, “Scriptural Interpretation in the Second and Third Centuries,” writing in reference to the *Demonstration* and *Adv. haer.* 4.26.1 (*absconsus vero in Scripturis thesaurus Christus*): “If one compares Irenaeus’ scriptural proof in the *Proof* as a whole with Justin’s, the basic similarity in hermeneutical approach is evident.... As in Justin, the whole of the Old Testament is here (*AH* 4.26.1) subsumed in the category of prophecy, prediction; what is sought in the Old Testament is mainly prophetic oracles. This corresponds to the ‘testimony’ approach” (426-427). By contrast, Behr refers to *haer.* 4.10.1 (*inseminatus ubique in Scripturis ejus Filius Dei*) and concludes that, although the bishop of Lyon “has taken further what had already been partially carried out by Ignatius and Justin,” in his discussion of the nature of prophecy, “Irenaeus modifies Justin’s imagery of the seeds of the Word being inseminated in all men” (Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 117).

I previously remarked, the devil came to Him—i.e., that power which is called the serpent and Satan—tempting Him, and striving to effect His downfall by asking Him to worship him.... But since our Christ was to be numbed, i.e., by pain and experience of suffering, He made a previous intimation (προκήρυξιν ἐποίησε) of this by touching Jacob's thigh, and causing it to shrink.... proclaiming thereby that all who through Him have fled for refuge to the Father, constitute the blessed Israel.<sup>69</sup>

Let us note, first, that Justin reads Genesis 32 as a christophany by proposing his usual identification of Jacob's mysterious adversary, the "Lord," with the Logos. Yet this christophany is also "a mystery" (μυστήριον) pointing to the future: it is a pre-announcement (προκήρυγμα) of the Passion. This second reading is not focused on the christological identity of the divine character, but on the patriarch as "pre-announcement" of Christ: Jacob is "Israel," decoded as "man who strives with power,"<sup>70</sup> and so is Christ, who would overcome "that power which is called the serpent and Satan"; the mystery of Christ's battle with the devil is intimated "by the mystery of the fight" (διὰ τοῦ μυστηρίου τῆς πάλης).

Some of the details in this interpretation require closer attention. *Both characters* (Jacob and his adversary) are seen as somehow corresponding to Christ, yet the correspondence between Jacob and Christ and that between the adversary and Christ cannot be logically held together and rely on distinct types of symbolization: in the first case, Jacob's adversary *was* Christ (direct identification), in the second, the adversary *represented* Satan and Jacob *represented* Christ.

It seems that in this text Justin's christological exegesis of theophanies, characteristic of Justin, has here been enriched with a prophetic dimension; it is hard to see how Irenaeus' theology would differ from this interpretation.

#### 2.2.4 Irenaeus Sometimes Sounds Like Justin

Conversely, some of Irenaeus' statements about theophanies are reminiscent of Justin.<sup>71</sup> At *Dem* 44-46 one reads that "the Son of God drew near to speak

69 Just. *Dial.* 125.3-5 (ANF; Bobichon 1:520, 522).

70 This reading assumes that Jacob's adversary was an evil "power," just as Jesus' adversary is "that power which is called the serpent and Satan." Origen endorses the same interpretation: Jacob received heavenly assistance in the form of an angel, striving *together* with him *against* the adversary and *towards* God (*Or. princ.* 3.2.5 [SC 268:176, 178]; cf. *Hos* 12:4-5, LXX: ἐνίσχυσε πρὸς Θεὸν καὶ ἐνίσχυσε μετὰ ἀγγέλου).

71 For a convenient listing of the relevant Irenaean passages and some very insightful observations, see Ochagavía, *Visibile Patris Filius*, 44-54.

with Abraham at Mamre ... Now two of the three were angels; but one was the Son of God, with whom Abraham spoke, pleading on behalf of the inhabitants of Sodom" (44); "Jacob sees him in a dream ... standing upon the ladder" (45); "this is he who in the bush spoke with Moses" (46). And in *Adversus haereses*, "the Son, who had also been talking with Abraham, had received power to judge the Sodomites for their wickedness";<sup>72</sup> "the Son of God is implanted everywhere throughout his writings: at one time, indeed, speaking with Abraham, when about to eat with him; at another time ... bringing down judgment upon the Sodomites; and again when He becomes visible and directs Jacob on his journey, and speaks with Moses from the bush."<sup>73</sup>

In his interpretation of *Epid.* 44-45, Behr argues that Irenaeus only writes of Christ appearing to Abraham and Moses *after* he has narrated the biblical history, culminating in Christ;<sup>74</sup> in other words, it is only after one has arrived at Christ that one can re-read Scriptures retrospectively and discover "how Jesus Christ was present throughout"—namely, by "being spoken of, in anticipation, by the prophets."<sup>75</sup> By contrast, Skarsaune thinks that these chapters offer "a masterly short summary of Justin's complicated argument on the Genesis theophanies in *Dial.* 56-60 ... If Justin made an original contribution by his theophany argument, Irenaeus shows us how this was soon included in the dossier of Christological proof-texts."<sup>76</sup> Indeed, the bishop of Lyon is clearly reminiscent of Justin, even though he notes that the anthropomorphic manifestation at Mamre also indicates the future incarnation, that the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah points to the future judgment of the world (44), and that "all such visions signify the Son of God speaking with mankind and being amongst them" (45).

72 Iren. *haer.* 3.6.1 (SC 211:66).

73 Iren. *haer.* 4.10.1 (SC 100/2:492).

74 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 106. Cf. Houssiau, *Irenée*, 84-85: "Les apparitions de Dieu et ses relations avec Abraham, Noé, Adam, Jacob et Moïse ne sont par rappelées ici comme preuves de la préexistence du Fils de Dieu, mais comme prophéties de sa venue future ... *Le Fils de Dieu semé dans les Écritures*, c'est donc l'annonce prophétique dans l'Ancien Testament ..."

75 Behr, *Way to Nicaea*, 113.

76 Skarsaune, "The Development of Scriptural Interpretation in the Second and Third Centuries—Except Clement and Origen," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation. I/1: Antiquity*, ed. M. Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996) 372-450, at 425.

### 2.3 *Looking Forward: Exegesis of Theophanies among Irenaeus' Readers*

#### 2.3.1 Theophanies and the Incarnation: Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria

It seems that two scholarly directions can be discerned on the question of how Irenaeus compares and contrasts theophanies (or rather christophanies) and the Incarnation. Antonio Orbe and scholars in his lineage see a very close link between theophanies—understood as Logophanies or Christophanies—and the Incarnation, as well as between the associated experiences of prophecy and apostolic discipleship.<sup>77</sup> Other scholars, however, view the Incarnation as the unique revelation of God through his Word and all else as retrospective interpretation of prophetic texts.<sup>78</sup> On this assumption, “[w]ithout 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.”<sup>79</sup> It is in this scholarly camp that the alleged contrast between the non-physical visibility of theophanies and the physical visibility of the Incarnation, is affirmed with great insistence.<sup>80</sup>

A first observation that should be made is that the “real presence” of the Logos in the anthropomorphic theophanies of the Old Testament does not—*pace* Behr and Lashier—undermine the uniqueness or distinctiveness of the Incarnation. Not only is such a relativization of the Incarnation *not* the intention

77 “The revealing activity of the Word did not begin only with the Incarnation, but it started from the very beginning of creation, taking on different forms and various ways: the economies or dispositions ... for Irenaeus Christ Himself took part in the theophanies ... He was seen by those who saw Him, not always under the same aspect, but according to the variety of the economies” (Ochagavía, *Visibile Patris Filius*, 69, 56); P. Fermandois, *El concepto de profecía*, esp. 35-36, 177-191 (“Presencia del Verbo en la profecía”); D. Scordamaglia, *Il Padre nella teologia di Sant'Ireneo* (Rome: Pontificia università gregoriana, 2004) 157 n. 98-99.

78 See Behr, “Irenaeus on the Word of God,” 163-167: “The unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the Incarnation of the Word ...”; *Way to Nicaea*, 105: “the revelation of God in the Incarnate Word is the last, even if the most important, in a series of discrete revelations”; *Nicene Faith* 1:2: “The Passion of Christ stands as the definitive moment in the revelation of God, the eschatological apocalypse, which unlocks the Scriptures, and so enables Christians, retrospectively, by the continued contemplation of the exalted Christ who is still the coming one, to participate in this work, embodying or incarnating the presence of God in this world through their own witness or *martyria*.”

79 Lashier, *Irenaeus on the Trinity*, 129 n. 149.

80 Lashier, *Irenaeus on the Trinity*, 126; 129 n. 149: “for Irenaeus, the theophanic visions are decidedly not physical appearances of the Logos, but rather prophetic appearances ...”; “the theophanic/prophetic visions are nonphysical”; “the theophanic appearances were prophetic and not physical.”

of scholars who insist on a certain experiential reality of theophanies,<sup>81</sup> but the question is already known to and addressed by early Christian thinkers.<sup>82</sup>

More importantly, the assumption of a physical/non-physical duality is questionable in the context of second-century Christianity. In the multi-storied spiritual universe described by Clement of Alexandria, for instance—who is here committing to writing oral traditions inherited from earlier authoritative teachers<sup>83</sup>—“neither the spiritual and intelligible beings, nor the archangels, nor the *protocists*, not even [Christ] himself, are without form, without shape, without frame, and bodiless (ἄμορφος καὶ ἀνείδεος καὶ ἀσχημάτιστος καὶ ἀσώματός); rather they do have both individual form and body (καὶ μορφήν ἔχει ἰδίαν καὶ σῶμα) ...”<sup>84</sup> The corporality of the spiritual beings is characterized by progressive subtlety, in proportion to their rank among spiritual beings. This type of subtle corporality is entirely relative: the beings on any given level can be described at the same time as “bodiless,” from the perspective of inferior ranks, and “bodily,” from the perspective of superior levels of being.<sup>85</sup> A more extensive and rigorous discussion of this type of incorporeality and of the “luminous,” “ethereal,” and “astral” or “angelic,” bodies in the afterlife occurs in

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- 81 Ochagavía, *Visibile Patris Filius*, 93: “If the Word is *actually present* in theophanies ... does this mean an encroachment upon the uniqueness of the Incarnation? Not necessarily.... It is certainly true that the Incarnation constitutes the definitive and most characteristic mission of the Son: the assumption of a human nature in a forever indissoluble unity. Irenaeus, however, ... sees the fitness and also the necessity of many anticipations of the definitive event that took place in Jesus Christ.”
- 82 The distinction between the *species* of theophanies, brought about by will, and an actual creature *born* on earth is used to distinguish the appearance of the Son in the theophanies from His body after the Incarnation: when Abraham meets the Logos at Mamre under “the appearance (*species*) of the truth which was prefigured was assumed [by God] for the purpose of being seen [*ad visum*]”: he was seen as a man, but not born as a man (*visus ... in homine, non natus*); soon, however, that which was seen would also be born (Hilary, *Trin.* 5:17 [SC 448:124]). Ambrose (*De Myst.* 25 [SC 25bis:168, 170]) is at pains to mark the difference between *species*-as-appearance, when the Holy Spirit descends over the Jordan waters in *specie columbae*, and *species*-as-reality when Phil 2:7 states that Christ appearing—by birth—as a man (*specie inventus ut homo*).
- 83 *Ecl.* 27.1-7 (GCS 17: 144); *Strom.* 1.11.1 (SC 30: 51); *Strom.* 1.14.1 (SC 30: 53); cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *EH* 6.13.9.
- 84 *Exc.* 10.1.
- 85 *Exc.* 11.3: “Thus, compared to the bodies here, such as the stars, they are bodiless and shapeless; yet, compared to the Son, they are measured and sensible bodies. Likewise is the Son in regards to the Father.”



Origen.<sup>86</sup> It would be quite strange if Irenaeus' thought differed so starkly from that of other pre-Nicenes as to treat the question of created bodies' physicality or non-physicality in either/ or terms.

Clement of Alexandria is a reader of Irenaeus<sup>87</sup> and holds, broadly speaking, the same anti-Gnostic and anti-Marcionite views as the bishop of Lyons. He also knows and affirms the tradition of reading biblical theophanies as actual, straightforward manifestations of the Logos to the patriarchs and prophets.<sup>88</sup> The likelihood that Clement parted ways with Irenaeus on the exegesis of theophanies is quite low.

### 2.3.2 Jesus on Sinai and Moses on Tabor: Irenaeus and Other Early Christian Writers

When Irenaeus wrote that “the prophets ... did not openly behold the actual face of God, but the dispensations (οἰκονομίας) and the mysteries through which man should afterwards see God,”<sup>89</sup> I doubt he intended to turn the visionary experience of the prophets into mere biblical “texture” for the construction of our Christian exegetical imagination. In the immediately preceding section, Irenaeus writes:

86 See H. Crouzel, “Le thème platonicien du ‘véhicule de l’âme’ chez Origène,” *Did* 7 (1977) 225-38; L.R. Hennessey, “A Philosophical Issue in Origen’s Eschatology: The Three Senses of Incorporeality,” in *Origeniana Quinta* ed. R.J. Daly (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992) 373-80; H.S. Schibli, “Origen, Didymus, and the Vehicle of the Soul,” *Origeniana Quinta*, 381-91; Giulea, “Origen’s Christology.”

87 According to C. Roberts (*Manuscript, Society, and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* [London/New York: Oxford University Press, 1979] 53), *Adversus Haereses* was circulating in Egypt “not long after the ink was dry on the author’s manuscript.”

88 In the *Paedagogue* (1.7.56-57-1.7.60.1 [SC 70:210, 212, 214, 216]), Clement explicitly identifies the Logos, “our pedagogue, the holy God Jesus” (ὁ δὲ ἡμέτερος παιδαγωγὸς ἅγιος θεὸς Ἰησοῦς) with the “Lord” who appeared to Abraham (Gen 17:1), who appeared to Jacob on top of the ladder and in the nightly struggle (Genesis 28: 32), who led Israel out of Egypt and guided the people through the desert, who gave the Law through his servant Moses (Exod 20:2; Deut 32:10-12), who enjoined Israel to “fear God” (Deut 6:2), and who spoke to the prophets, in the course of such theophanies as are recorded in Isaiah 6 and Jeremiah 1. The difference between the Logos present in Old Testament theophanies as “that hidden angel, Jesus” (ὁ μυστικὸς ἐκείνος ἄγγελος Ἰησοῦς) and the incarnate Logos is, quite simply, that the incarnate Logos was born (*Paed.* 1.7.59.1 [SC 70:214, 216]). This theology, which obviously represents the common tradition to which Clement felt bound, is then used in the very next section as an argument against “those who believe that the just [God] is not the good [God]” (*Paed.* 1.8.62.1-74.4 [SC 70:222-42]).

89 Iren. *haer.* 4.20.10 (SC 100/2:656).

[Exod 33:20-22] signifies two things, namely that it is impossible for man to see God, and that man will see Him in the latter times on the summit of the rock, thanks to God's wisdom: that is in His coming as man. And it is for this reason that he conferred with him face to face on the top of the mountain [at Transfiguration], while Elijah was also present (as the Gospel relates), thus fulfilling in the end the ancient promise (*restituens in fine pristinam repromissionem*, ἀποκαταστήσας ἐν τῷ τέλει τὴν πρότερον ἐπαγγελίαν).<sup>90</sup>

According to the Exodus passage discussed by Irenaeus, Moses requests to see the divine glory more intimately. God accepts (Exod 33:19) to manifest himself to Moses—by parading in his glory (παρελεύσομαι πρότερός σου τῇ δόξῃ μου) and by proclaiming the divine name (κύριος) before the prophet, who will be sheltered by God's hand, and by showing him his back parts (τὰ ὀπίσω μου)—but affirms the impossibility of a more complete revelation: “You shall not be able to see my face (μου τὸ πρόσωπον); my face (τὸ πρόσωπόν μου) shall not appear to you” (Exod 33:20, 23). If it is in the vision on the mountain of the transfiguration—incidentally, Matthew 17:9 calls it ὄραμα, just like τὸ ὄραμα τὸ μέγα of Exod 3:3—that “the ancient promise is fulfilled,” it is because Irenaeus assumes that the Christ on Tabor is the very one who summoned Moses on Sinai. The same holds true for Elijah, of course, whose theophanic experience on Horeb/ Sinai Irenaeus mentions immediately after that of Moses.<sup>91</sup>

The bishop of Lyons is not the only early Christian writer to interpret God's refusal of a face-to-face vision as a *postponement* and a promise of a future vision, which was to be fulfilled at the Transfiguration. For Tertullian also, the “Face of God,” which Moses desired to see, is in fact the Son. Indeed, it is the Son of God who “was visible before the incarnation” (*ante carnem*) inasmuch as he “was seen ... by prophets and patriarchs and Moses himself.”<sup>92</sup> To be sure, the Son's apparitions to patriarchs and prophets, including Moses, were always somewhat veiled and imperfect—in *speculo et aenigmate et visione et somnio*. The reason is that they occurred “according to men's capacity, not according with the fullness of his divinity (*secundum hominum capacitates, non secundum plenitudinem divinitatis*),” since “the Son also on his own account (*suo nomine*), is, as Word and Spirit, invisible even now by the quality of his substance (*ex substantiae conditione*).”<sup>93</sup> Old Testament theophanies are revelations from

90 Iren. *haer.* 4.20.9 (SC 100/2:656-657).

91 Iren. *haer.* 4.20.9 (SC 100/2:656).

92 Tert. *prax.* 14 (Evans, 106 /150).

93 Tert. *prax.* 14 (Evans, 104/149, 106/150).

the Father effected, in anticipation of the Incarnation, by the Word-to-be-made-flesh (*sermo qui caro erit futuro*). A more perfect vision of the Face of God—i.e., of the Son—than was available to Moses on Sinai was reserved for Tabor:

Therefore, since for Moses he reserves for the future (*servat ... in futurum*) the sight of himself and conversation with himself face to face (for this was fulfilled [*adimpletum est*] afterwards when he withdrew into a mountain, as we read in the Gospel that Moses was seen talking with him), it is clear that always aforetime God—that is, the Son of God—was seen in a mirror and an enigma and a vision and a dream, both by prophets and patriarchs and Moses himself till that time.<sup>94</sup>

Tertullian offers the same interpretation elsewhere: Exodus 33 is a *promise* given on Sinai, which is fulfilled on Tabor, when Moses finally contemplates the Face of God, the Son, in the glory of the Transfiguration:

And if we call to mind the promise (*commemoremur promissionis*) to Moses, here it will be seen fulfilled. For when Moses asked to have sight of the Lord, and said, *If now I have found grace in thy sight, manifest thyself to me, that I may knowledgeably see thee* [Exod 33:13] what he looked for was that aspect in which he was to live his human life, which as a prophet he was aware of—but God's face, he had already been told, *no man shall see and live*—and God answered, *This word also which thou hast spoken, I will do it for thee* [Exod 33:20]. And again Moses said, *Shew me thy glory*: and the Lord answered, concerning the future, as before, *I will go before <thee> in my glory* [Exod 33:18-19] and what follows. And at the end, *And thou shall see then my later parts* [Exod 33:23] not meaning his loins or the calves of his legs, but the glory he had asked to see, though it was to be revealed to him in later times. In this glory he had promised to be visible to him face to face, when he said to Aaron, *And if there shall be a prophet among you, I shall be known to him in a vision, and shall speak to him in a vision, not as to Moses: to him I shall speak mouth to mouth, in full appearance*, the full appearance of that manhood which he was to take upon him, *and not in an enigma*" [Num 12:6-8].<sup>95</sup>

94 Tert. *prax.* 14 (Evans, 105/150).

95 Tert. *marc.* 4.22.14-15 (Evans, 2:382/383-384/385).

Even though, in his well-known discussion of the Transfiguration in the *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen is more interested in other matters (e.g., the Word as revealed in proportion to the ability of the recipients, the Scriptures as garments of the Word), he nevertheless continues to echo the traditional interpretation of Exodus 33 as a promise fulfilled on Tabor:

But perhaps the voice from the cloud says to Moses and Elijah, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased, hear Him,” as they were desirous to see the Son of man, and to hear Him, and to behold Him as He was in glory.... The disciples, *having understood that the Son of God had been holding conference with Moses*, and that it was He who said, “A man shall not see My face and live” (Exod 30:20) ... humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God.<sup>96</sup>

This linking of Sinai and Tabor, at once exegetical and experiential, carried on in orations and hymns of the Transfiguration across the centuries, East and West.<sup>97</sup> It is clear that for a significant strand of early Christian tradition—and, very likely too for Irenaeus—discerning the reality of God in the transfigured Christ and the radiant face of Christ in “the dispensations (οικονομίας) and the mysteries through which man should afterwards see God” is not only a matter of exegesis; there is in these early Christian texts an undeniable claim to transfigurative encounters of the patriarchs and prophets with the Logos.

### 2.3 *Christological Exegesis of Theophanies in Later Tradition*

A growing segment of scholarship on Christian origins has documented the presence, in the writings of the New Testament, of what is often termed “YHWH Christology” or “Christology of Divine Identity.”<sup>98</sup> The christological

96 Or. *Comm. Mt.* 12.42-43 (GCS 40:166-167, trans. ANF).

97 See in this respect Bucur, “Matt 17:1-9 as a Vision of a Vision: A Neglected Strand in the Patristic Reception of the Transfiguration,” *NeoT* 44 (2010) 15-30.

98 Fossum, “Kyrios Jesus as the Angel of the Lord in Jude 5-7,” *NTS* 33 (1987) 226-43; D.B. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul’s Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992); C.A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) esp. 51-123, 187-200; Idem, “The Real Presence of the Son Before Christ: Revisiting an Old Approach to Old Testament Christology,” *CTQ* 68 (2004) 105-26; *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, ed. C.C. Newman, J.R. Davila, G.S. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*; R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); S.J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of*

exegesis of Old Testament theophanies—that is, the identification of the “Lord Jesus” with Israel’s LORD in theophanic texts such as Genesis 18, 28, 32; Exodus 3, 19, 24; Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1; Daniel 7—gained prominence in the second century and was crucial for fashioning an increasingly distinct symbolic universe among early Christians. As I have tried to show in a series of studies, it played an important role in anti-Jewish, antidualistic, and antimonarchian polemics. Even if marginalized during the great christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries in favor of a more precise and nuanced “technical” vocabulary, the tradition of reading Old Testament theophanies as “Christophanies” entered the bloodstream of Byzantine festal hymnography, irresistibly commanding the gaze of the iconographer, the ready pen of the hymnographer, the amazing tales of the hagiographer.<sup>99</sup>

The simplest and most compelling explanation for the data presented above is that Irenaeus shares in this exegetico-theological tradition of his predecessors and contemporaries. The theological differences among various early Christian thinkers in this respect consist in their extension of the same exegesis—not “invented” by Justin, but inherited from earlier tradition—to different polemical, apologetical, and theological contexts.

### Conclusions

Irenaean scholarship on the question of theophanies and their interpretation is characterized by significant disagreements and proposes very different assessments of Irenaeus’ thought. To a large extent, the disagreement is a

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*Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); S.M. McDonough, *Christ as Creator: Origins of a New Testament Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University, 2009); C. Tilling, *Paul’s Divine Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); R. Rheume, *An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of the Son’s Relationship to the Father in John’s Gospel: God’s Equal and Subordinate* (Lewiston/ Lampeter: Mellen, 2014); C. Fletcher-Louis, *Jesus Monotheism, Volume 1: Christological Origins. The Emerging Consensus and Beyond* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015).

- 99 Bucur, “Justin Martyr’s Exegesis of Old Testament Theophanies and the Parting of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism,” *TS* 75 (2014) 34–51; “Clement of Alexandria’s Exegesis of Old Testament Theophanies,” *Phronema* 29 (2014) 63–81; “God Never Appeared to Moses’: Eusebius of Caesarea’s Peculiar Exegesis of the Burning Bush Theophany,” *DGJBR* (forthcoming); “Dionysius East and West: Unities, Differentiations, and the Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies,” *Dionysius* 26 (2008) 115–38; “Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies in Byzantine Hymnography: Rewritten Bible,” *TS* 68 (2007) 92–112; “Sinai, Zion, and Tabor: An Entry into the Christian Bible,” *JTI* 4 (2010) 33–52.

matter of placing the bishop of Lyons in the proper theological context. Orbe and Ochagavía bolstered their reading of Irenaeus by showing that it accounts for the polemical (anti-Valentinian and anti-Marcionite) context of *Adversus haereses*. For my part I have added a number of early Christian writers into the discussion and compared Irenaeus to Justin, Melito, and Theophilus before him, and Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria after him. Given that all these pre-Nicene writers interpret theophanies as christophanies, I think it vastly more likely that Irenaeus held more or less the same, rather than a strikingly different, interpretation of this fundamental Christian tradition.

I have argued, first, that the oft-repeated judgment according to which Irenaeus' treatment of theophanies offers a theological corrective to—and even an explicit rebuttal of—Justin of Neapolis' Logos-theology, does not do justice to the texts of either author. Irenaeus certainly pays more attention to the prefigurative aspect of theophanies by linking theophanies very closely to the Incarnation. Nevertheless, there is no warrant to understand Irenaeus' view of theophanies as *exclusively* prophetic; or for the assertion that Irenaeus' christological exegesis of the Old Testament posits a strictly exegetical, “literary preexistence” of the Logos, such that prophetic visions are neither visionary nor prophetic, but a *retrospective* Christian reading of the Old Testament through the lens of the Cross and Resurrection; or for the speculatively reconstructed second-century context of a putative theological opposition between Justin and Irenaeus. I also remain unconvinced that Justin was a dubious figure, rather than as the anti-Marcionite polemicist that Irenaeus quotes approvingly and reverently.

The christological exegesis of biblical theophanies—the straightforward identification of the Old Testament Κύριος with the New Testament Κύριος Ἰησοῦς—was one of the strategies by which early Christians set out to metabolize the Scriptures of Israel and render them into their Old Testament. As such, it was a crucial element in early Christianity's process of theological self-definition and held great importance for some of the major Christian writers of the second and third centuries, who exploited its rich theological, apologetical, and polemical potential. There is no question that Irenaeus of Lyons participated fully in this exegetical and theological tradition.