

Similarly, Dr. Smith has exercised a Chadderton-like role in the resurgence of the Reformed faith and the Southern Presbyterian tradition in the United States. He developed the Bible department at Belhaven for the training of men for the Southern Church (PCUS). He introduced us to the Southern Presbyterian Worthies. As Dr. Willborn avers later in this book: "With the publication of *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology* in 1962, Morton Howison Smith turned the attention of a new generation to the riches of Southern Presbyterian history and theology."¹⁴ He was a major participant in the founding of two Reformed seminaries. He was one of the primary architects of the government, structure, and operation of the Presbyterian Church in America. Probably no other professor of Systematic Theology in the twentieth century has taught as many men as he has in the last forty years: hundreds of men have learned the Reformed faith from him. Directly and indirectly through his students he has been used to bring an untold number of Churches to a clearer understanding of the Reformed faith. Even many who do not share his convictions on confessional subscription are more reformed than they might otherwise have been because of his ministry. His students are ministers, missionaries, and professors. At least three of his former students are Presidents of Seminaries.

The final chapter is yet to be written. Our prayer is that he will live to see the Revival and Reformation of the Second Southern Presbyterian Church (the PCA), the conversion of his children, and the greater usefulness of his spiritual sons throughout the world.

We thank you, O God, for this man—a man You raised up for our times. Your sons and friends salute you, Morton Howison Smith. Soli Deo Gloria!

The Covenant Idea in Irenaeus of Lyons: An Introduction and Survey

Chapter 2

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According to Irenaeus, there were several distinct covenants made by God. His estimate of their number varies. Sometimes he reckons four (Adam, Noah, [Abraham], Moses, Christ; more often only two. He regards the study of the differences between these as a legitimate subject for churchly (i.e., orthodox) Gnosis. There is both agreement and difference. Yet the difference is only relative, since the two are "of the same nature."

W. A. Brown, *The Essence of Christianity*, 64.

In the second half of the second century the theological concept of God's covenant with his people enjoyed renewed currency among Christians. The coming of Christ was now regarded as the establishment of the 'new covenant' prophesied in Jer. 31:31-34.

W. Kinzig, *Καὶνὴ διαθήκη: The Title of the New Testament*, 522.

ταῦτά σοι τὰ γράμματα προεπεψέμεθα τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν καὶ κοινῶν Εἰρηναῖον διακομίσει καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν ἔχειν σε αὐτὸν ἐν παραθέσει ἡλιωτῆν ὄντα τῆς διαθήκης Χριστοῦ¹

"The Martyrs of Lyons," in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.4.2

¹"We have asked our brother and companion, Irenaeus, to bring this letter to you and we beg you to hold him in esteem, for he is zealous for the covenant of Christ."

¹Trans. Kirsopp Lake, *The Loeb Classical Library*.

¹⁴See chapter 12.

Dr. Morton H. Smith, as an outstanding historical and systematic theologian in the line of the old Southern Presbyterian tradition, is of course a covenant theologian.² By that, we mean that he embraces and expounds the classic bi-covenantal theology of the *Westminster Confession*. To elaborate, this covenant or federal theology is the gospel set in the context of God's eternal plan of communion with his people, and its historical outworking in the covenants of works and grace (as well as in the various progressive stages of the covenant of grace). Covenant theology explains the meaning of the death of Christ in light of the fullness of the biblical teaching on the divine covenants, undergirds our understanding of the nature and use of the sacraments, and provides the fullest possible explanation of the grounds of our assurance.

To put it another way, Covenant theology is the Bible's way of explaining and deepening our understanding of: (1) the atonement [the meaning of the death of Christ]; (2) assurance [the basis of our confidence of communion with God and enjoyment of his promises]; (3) the sacraments [signs and seals of God's covenant promises—what they are and how they work]; and (4) the continuity of redemptive history [the unified plan of God's salvation]. Covenant theology is also an hermeneutic, an approach to understanding the Scripture—an approach that attempts to biblically explain the unity of biblical revelation.

Covenant Theology is a blending of both biblical and systematic theology. If biblical theology is the thematic survey of redemptive history, with an emphasis on the theological development—era to era—of whatever *loci* are being studied, then covenant theology could rightly be called "biblical biblical theology." That is, covenant theology recognizes that the Bible itself structures the progress of redemptive history through the succession of covenants.

It is systematic theology in that it recognizes the covenants as a fundamental architectonic or organizing principle for the Bible's theology.

²I am personally indebted to Dr. Smith as my teacher. While a student at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, I had the opportunity to study "The Theology of the Westminster Standards" with him, as well as his introductory course on "Apologetics." As a family friend, I had the privilege of spending many hours in delightful fellowship and conversation with Dr. Smith from my seminary years well into my late twenties. His knowledge of the Southern Presbyterian tradition is, of course, magisterial. His ecclesial involvement, commitment and influence make him one of the key figures in late twentieth century North American Presbyterianism. I wish here to express to him thanks for his kind and wise tutelage and friendship. It is an honor to participate in a volume recognizing his ecclesiastical and academic accomplishments.

Thus it proceeds to integrate the biblical teaching about the federal headships of Adam and Christ, the covenantal nature of the incarnation and atonement, the continuities and discontinuities in the progress of redemptive history, the relation of the Jewish and Christian scriptures, law and gospel, into a coherent theological system.

Covenant theology is central, not peripheral, to the biblical story. When Jesus wanted to explain the significance of his death to his disciples, he went to the doctrine of the covenants (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, 1 Corinthians 11). When God wanted to assure Abraham of the certainty of his word of promise, he went to the covenant (Genesis 12, 15, and 17). When God wanted to set apart his people, ingrain his work in their minds, tangibly reveal himself in love and mercy, and confirm their future inheritance, he gave the covenant signs (Genesis 17, Exodus 12, 17, and 31, Matthew 28, Acts 2, Luke 22). When Luke wanted to show early Christians that Jesus' life and ministry were the fulfillment of God's ancient purposes for his chosen people, he went to the covenant of grace and quoted Zacharias' prophecy which shows that believers in the very earliest days of 'the Jesus movement' understood Jesus and his messianic work as a fulfillment (not a 'Plan B') of God's covenant with Abraham (Luke 1:72-73). When the Psalmist and the author of Hebrews wanted to show how God's redemptive plan is ordered and on what basis it unfolds in history, they went to the covenants (Psalms 78 and 89, Hebrews 6-10).

Covenant theology is not a response to dispensationalism. It existed long before the rudiments of classical dispensationalism were brought together in the nineteenth century. Covenant theology is not an excuse for baptizing children, nor merely a convention to justify a particular approach to the sacraments (e.g., modern paedocommunionism and baptismal regenerationism). Covenant theology is not sectarian, but an ecumenical Reformed approach to understanding the Bible, developed in the wake of the magisterial Reformation, but with roots stretching back to the earliest days of catholic Christianity and historically appreciated in all the various branches of the Reformed community (Baptist, Congregationalist, Independent, Presbyterian, Anglican, and Reformed). Covenant theology cannot be reduced to serving merely as the justification for some particular view of children in the covenant (covenant successionism), or for a certain kind of eschatology (preterism), or for a specific philosophy of education (whether it be homeschooling or Christian schools or classical schools). Covenant theology is bigger than that. It is

more important than that. As the great English Baptist preacher C. H. Spurgeon once said:

The doctrine of the covenant lies at the root of all true theology. It has been said that he who well understands the distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, is a master of divinity. I am persuaded that most of the mistakes which men make concerning the doctrines of Scripture, are based upon fundamental errors with regard to the covenant of law and of grace.³

Covenant theology flows from the trinitarian life and work of God. God's covenant communion with us is modeled on and a reflection of the intra-Trinitarian relationships. The shared life, the fellowship of the persons of the Holy Trinity, what theologians call *perichoresis* or *circumincessio*, is the archetype of the relationship the gracious covenant God shares with his elect and redeemed people. God's commitments in the eternal covenant of redemption find space-time realization in the covenant of grace.

COVENANT THOUGHT AND THEOLOGY IN THE PATRISTIC ERA

The covenant idea was more significant in the writings of particular early ante-Nicene theologians than has generally been admitted in patristic research or general surveys of the history of the covenant idea in the Christian tradition. Indeed, even a brief survey of the covenant vocabulary in the theological writings of the early ante-Nicene period demonstrates a significant usage and development, and modification of the covenant concept as it is found in the OT and NT writings and in early Judaism. Investigation reveals that the covenant idea functions in several arenas of early Christian thought. It is employed (1) to stress moral obligations incumbent upon Christians; (2) to show God's grace in including the Gentiles in the Abrahamic blessings; (3) to deny the reception of these promises to the Israel of the flesh, that is, Israel considered merely as an ethnic entity; (4) to demonstrate continuity in the divine economy; and (5) to explain discontinuity in the divine economy.

³Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Sermons on the Covenant* (Wilmington, DE: Cross Publishing, 1980), 5.

In reviewing the role of early Christian covenant thought in these areas, one will find that (1) the pre-Nicene theologians usually take OT covenant passages (not NT passages) as the starting point in their applications of the covenant concept to Christian living; (2) the early Christian use of the covenant idea evidences that they understood the covenant to be both unilateral and bilateral, promissory and obligatory, to bring divine blessings and entail human obedience; (3) these writings also show that, from the very earliest times, Christian authors (following OT and NT examples) have employed the covenant concept as a key structural idea in their presentations of redemptive history; (4) contrary to the suggestions of previous studies, there is no evidence of a gap in the usage of the covenant idea after the era of the NT writings; (5) the covenant idea was closely linked to the early Christian self-understanding as the people of God; (6) the covenant idea is not monolithic in the thought of the authors surveyed. It is employed with differing emphases and takes on varying shades of meaning in their respective writings; (7) genetic connections in specific usages of the covenant idea can be found in different pre-Nicene authors (e.g., the idea of an Adamic universal moral law, from Justin to Irenaeus to Tertullian).

If one reviews the role of the covenant idea in the writings of the NT, the Apostolic Fathers, and Justin Martyr, as well as in Josephus and Philo, in order to provide background for comparison and contrast with subsequent theological reflection on the covenants in Christian theology (thus helping to insure that later categories and ideas are not being intruded or imposed upon the patristic material), and then considers, in turn, the covenant idea in Melito, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, and Novatian, inventorying in each the specific employments of the covenant idea, one gains a bird's-eye view of the covenant idea in ante-Nicene theology. Such a view also reveals the significance of this theological locus for their overall systems.

The study of this subject is significant for at least these following reasons: (1) It confirms current research on the Jewish matrix of early Christianity, from a vantage point not yet exploited. (2) It provides greater detail of the early Christian covenant thought which is now being acknowledged to have been influential on the sixteenth-century Reformers (such as Bullinger and Calvin) and their seventeenth-century successors (such as the Westminster divines). (3) It fills a significant lacuna in the history of ideas. (4) It challenges the viability of the interpretive schema of what is being called "the new perspective(s)" on Paul, by giv-

ing a fuller account of the earliest pre-Nicene and post-NT covenant thought in relation to soteriology and spheragistics.

AN INTRODUCTION TO IRENAEUS AS COVENANT THEOLOGIAN

In his seminal article "The Covenant Idea in the Second Century," Everett Ferguson suggests that "Irenaeus was a 'covenant' theologian." He makes clear what he intends by that designation when he says: "the covenant scheme of the interpretation of holy history became the foundation of Irenaeus' theological method."⁴ Nevertheless, the Irenaeian contribution to second-century covenant theology remains a generally unrecognized and relatively neglected subject, in spite of the recent work of Baqç,⁵ Ferguson, Kinzig⁶ and others,⁷ in spite of Irenaeus' significance as a second-century Christian theologian,⁸ and in spite of the on-

⁴ Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea in the Second Century," *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and Early Church Fathers*, ed. W. E. March (San Antonio, Trinity University Press, 1980), 144.

⁵ Baqç has made a splendid contribution to the discussion of Irenaeus' theology with his *de lancienne à la nouvelle Alliance selon S. Irenée*. His work counters the opinions of earlier source critics of Irenaeus (in particular Hamack) and argues for the literary and theological unity of *Adversus Haereses*. The theological unity of the work, according to Baqç, is built upon the concept of the unity of God and the consequent unity of the covenants in salvation history; see P. Baqç, *de Lancienne à la nouvelle Alliance selon S. Irenée* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1978), pp. 41-46, 153-161, 235-240 and especially 290-293.

While Baqç's work concentrates on book four of *Adversus Haereses* and is not intended to oppose the importance of the idea of "recapitulation" (or any other theme for that matter) in Irenaeus' thought, it does serve to make clear the significance of "covenant" in his argument for the unity of God and salvation history. This aspect of Irenaeian thought had been virtually overlooked in most of the work on his writings before Baqç.

⁶ See W. Kinzig, *Novitas Christiana*, and also *Erbin Kirche* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 1990), 78-96.

⁷ Among them, W. C. van Unnik, see "H κατινὸν διαθήκη—a Problem in the early history of the Canon," in *Studia Patristica* 4 (1959): 225.

⁸ Irenaeus has been described as the "most considerable Christian theologian" of his time [F. L. Cross, *The Early Christian Fathers* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1960), 110]; see also, A. Cunningham, "Saint Irenaeus" in *AAE* (online), and J. Quasten, *Patrology*, 4 vols. (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1950), 1:287. B. Altaner says, "Irenaeus is the most important of the second century theologians and in a certain sense the Father of Catholic dogmatics," in *Patrology*, trans. H. C. Graef (Edinburgh-London: Nelson, 1960), 150.

going interest in Irenaeian theology.⁹ Indeed, W. C. van Unnik complains that it is "remarkable that so little attention is given to this theme [covenant] in the descriptions of Irenaeus' theology."¹⁰ It will be our purpose to survey the covenant thought of Irenaeus in this chapter. We will review his use of covenant terminology and his covenantal program of salvation history, as well as certain passages concerning the covenants in his writings. First, we will deal with a few preliminary issues.

IRENAEUS AND THE TITLE OF THE NT

J. N. D. Kelly has argued that "the first writer to speak unequivocally of a 'New' Testament parallel to the Old was Irenaeus" and "after Irenaeus's time... the fully scriptural character of the specifically Christian writings was universally acknowledged, and the description of them as the 'New Testament' (a title harking back to St. Paul's designation of the Jewish Scriptures as 'the old covenant') came into vogue."¹¹ W. C. van Unnik, while questioning the conclusiveness of Kelly's claim that

⁹ Irenaeus' theology has been the subject of a number of major works in the last century. Early this century, Aulén, in his famous *Christus Victor*, put Irenaeus in the theological spotlight by suggesting that Irenaeus' presentation of the central ideas of the Christian faith provided the basis for a *via media* (between "objective" and "subjective" views) in the construction of a theology of the atonement. Aulén saw Irenaeus' theology of the atonement as revolving around the idea of Christ's triumph over the forces of sin, death and Satan, which in turn was part of the larger idea of "recapitulation." Aulén's work assured that *recapitulatio* would be considered by subsequent students to be Irenaeus' "most comprehensive theological idea" [see *Christus Victor*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 37 (orig. ET 1931)], and consequently Irenaeus' covenant thought has been ignored. J. Lawson reviewed Irenaeian theology in his *The Biblical Theology of St. Irenaeus* (London: Epworth Press, 1948), see esp. 140ff. all but ignoring Irenaeus' contribution to second-century covenant theology. G. W. Wengert continued the focus on recapitulation in his book *Man and the Incarnation*, trans. R. Maekenzie (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959). A. Benoit, in *Saint Irenée: Introduction à l'étude de sa théologie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1960) discusses Irenaeus' relation to the OT, but neglects the covenant idea. Only F. R. M. Hitchcock, in *Irenaeus of Lugdunum: A Study of His Teaching* (Cambridge: CUP, 1914), and Auguste Luneau, *L'Histoire de salut chez les Pères de l'Église* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1964) give much attention to the significant role of the covenants in Irenaeus' history of salvation.

¹⁰ van Unnik, "H κατινὸν διαθήκη," 225.

¹¹ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 56.

Irenaeus was the first writer to speak unequivocally of a "New" Testament, generally confirms Kelly's assessment of Irenaeus' importance in the development of this terminology.¹² Significantly, however, he expands on and modifies Kelly's view¹³ of the origin of the use of the term *καὶνὴ διαθήκη* for the Christian Scriptures, linking this terminology to Irenaeus' covenant theology and insisting the NT idea of *διαθήκη* is not Hellenistic ("testament") but rather "covenant."¹⁴ The background of *καὶνὴ διαθήκη* for Irenaeus, according to van Unnik, is the Old Testament prophetic promise of a "New Covenant."¹⁵ With Irenaeus, says van Unnik, "it is remarkable that *διαθήκη* has here always the biblical notion of 'covenant' and never any relation to 'testament.'"¹⁶ He concludes:

In this climate were the Gospels and Apostolic writings first styled "books of the *καὶνὴ διαθήκη*".... This rich title was generally accepted. But soon afterwards it lost its dynamic weight and became nothing more than just a title.... In the West the translation *testamentum* and not *foedus* for *διαθήκη* had, as far as I can see, very serious consequences. In the Greek speaking world *διαθήκη* was soon misunderstood as "testament" and a change in outlook robbed it of its influence.¹⁷

This view has been recently challenged by W. Kinzig who gives some evidence of a testamentary usage of *διαθήκη* by Irenaeus (cf. *Adversus Haereses* [AH] 5.9.4).¹⁸ Whatever are the precise origins of *διαθήκη* becoming employed as a scriptural title, even Kinzig (as we have already seen) does not deny that the development and prevalence of covenant thought in the second century are necessary preconditions for its eventual service as a designation for the Scriptures. In this foundational work, Irenaeus played an undoubted role.

¹² van Unnik, "H *καὶνὴ διαθήκη*," 217; see also H. von Campenhausen, *Formation of the Christian Bible*, trans. J. A. Baker (London: A. & C. Black, 1972), 264-265.

¹³ He points out that it is improbable that Irenaeus took the term from Paul because Irenaeus never quotes from 2 Corinthians 3:14, "H *καὶνὴ διαθήκη*," 220-221.

¹⁴ van Unnik, "H *καὶνὴ διαθήκη*," 225.

¹⁵ van Unnik, "H *καὶνὴ διαθήκη*," 222-225.

¹⁶ van Unnik, "H *καὶνὴ διαθήκη*," 225.

¹⁷ van Unnik, "H *καὶνὴ διαθήκη*," 226-227.

¹⁸ Kinzig, *Καὶνὴ διαθήκη: Title of the NT*, 519-544, esp. 524-525; and D. van Damme, *Pseudo Cyprian, Adversus Iudaeos. Gegen die Judenchristen. Die älteste lateinische Predigt* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1969), 46-50.

Furthermore, it has been argued that Irenaeus' stress on the essential unity of salvation history paved the way for the consolidation of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Writings into the Christian Bible. Greer says, "In this way [by speaking of the differing economies of the same God], Irenaeus offers a Christian transformation of the Hebrew Scriptures that makes them wholly integral to a Christian Bible."¹⁹ Irenaeus argued against Marcion's rejection of the Hebrew Scriptures, as will be seen later, by stressing the unity of the old and new covenants. Hence it can be argued that the church's bipartite Bible is, at least in part, a legacy of Irenaeus' covenant theology.²⁰

THE PASTORAL CONTEXTS OF IRENAEAN COVENANT THEOLOGY

Of Irenaeus' many works, we have but two: *AH* and *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* [DAP]. They were written for different pastoral purposes, yet display a unified picture of Irenaeus' covenant thought. DAP was only recently re-discovered in an Armenian manuscript retrieved in 1904.²¹ It is a shorter, non-polemical, catechetical work²² that was written to Irenaeus' "beloved Marcianus" and largely confirms the positive teaching contained in *AH*. In it, Irenaeus "explains Christian doctrine and then proves it from Old Testament prophecies."²³ DAP was divided into a hundred chapters in Harnack's translation. The following outline follows that scheme of division. The first three chapters form an introduction which, among other things, commends the rule of faith. Chapters 4-42 constitute the first of two major divisions of the work, setting forth essential content of the Christian faith. This section may be subdivided into two parts: chapters 4-16 which treat of God, creation and the fall, and chapters 17-42 which recount the history of redemption. The second major division, which is made up of chapters 42-100, is con-

¹⁹ R. A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 154.

²⁰ Campenhausen, *Formation of the Christian Bible*, 209.

²¹ s.v., "Irenaeus," *EEC*, 1:413.

²² J. P. Smith, while acknowledging its catechetical use, has drawn attention to the apologetic function of the work. See Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. J. P. Smith (New York: Newman Press, 1952), 20-21.

²³ M. T. Clark, s.v., "Irenaeus," *EEChr*, 472.

cerned with Old Testament proof of New Testament revelation. It, too, may be subdivided into two sections. Chapters 42-85 set forth the old covenant promises and prophecies about Christ. Chapters 86-100 show the progress and superiority of the new covenant. *DAP* is significant as a brief outline of Irenaean salvation history, and the covenant theology of *AH* can be seen both implicitly and explicitly in *DAP*.

AH is Irenaeus' epic refutation of the various schools of Gnosticism.²⁴ In the preface to *AH* I, we have the author's own words concerning the treatise's purpose and plan:

Et quemadmodum nos elaboravimus, olim quaerenti tibi discere sententiam eorum, non solum facere tibi manifestam, sed et subministratorem dare, ut ostenderemus eam falsam, sic et tu efficaciter reliquis ministrabis secundum gratiam quae tibi a Domino data est, ut iam non abstractantur homines ab illorum suadela, quae est talis... (AH I. Pref-

²⁴ It is, perhaps, appropriate to mention a few words about the organization of *AH*. A number of authors have charged *AH* with being disorganized. For instance, Altaner says, "These five books [of *AH*] are no more a homogeneous work than the apologies of Justin; the individual parts grow gradually by way of enlargements and addition," *Patrology*, 151. Cross suggests that *AH* "strikes the reader as untidy, chiefly because Irenaeus did not write it on any prearranged plan," *The Early Christian Fathers*, 111. Quasten corrects the misconception that *AH* was not based on a prearranged plan but nevertheless states: "The whole work suffers from a lack of clear arrangement and unity of thought. Prolixity and frequent repetition make its perusal wearisome. The reason for this defect is most probably that the author wrote the work intermittently.... But it seems that the project was designed from the beginning, because the author refers already in the third book to his later remarks about the Apostle Paul, which follow only in the fifth book.... But it would appear that Irenaeus inserted additions and enlargements from time to time," *Patrology*, 1:289. While granting that the work is frequently wordy and repetitious, and that it bears the marks of additions and enlargements, it is not terribly difficult to argue for its basic unity. Baqg has done this so successfully with book four that one reviewer wonders why no one else has picked up on this unified structure (M. Donovan, "Irenaeus in Recent Scholarship," in *SCe* 4:4 [1984]: 223.) The broad outline of the work is apparent: the first two books concern the exposition of the Gnostics' own doctrines and the last three books supply the positive Catholic response intermingled with some polemical sparring. Books three and four are most obviously unified by the themes of the oneness of God and the over-arching unity of the Covenants (or economies). The necessity of setting forth the Gnostic teachings, then, explains why the first two books might seem disjointed from the rest of the work. The concept of covenantal unity is apparent in the arrangement of the remainder. A complete outline of the work, along the lines of what Baqg has done with book four, would make the thematic unity of *AH* more apparent. Once the significance of the idea of covenant is recognized for the structure of *AH*, its unity of thought becomes clearer.

ace.3)...²⁵

Irenaeus, then, hopes to help his friend's ministry by providing him with the polemical ammunition to deal with the heretics. Hence, we have Irenaeus' reason for engaging himself in the project. According to Daniélou:

The form of Gnosticism which Irenaeus was particularly concerned to combat in his principal work, the *Adversus Haereses*, was that of a disciple of Valentinus, the teacher Ptolemaeus. By great good fortune a work by the latter on the meaning of the O.T., the *Letter to Flora* has survived. In it he begins by asserting that so far no one has rightly understood the Law of Moses. One school of thought attributes it to God the Father himself (here he is apparently thinking of the Catholics), and another ascribes it to the Devil (this, no doubt, is meant to represent the views of Marcion, but it is a caricature of his thought). Both these extreme views he sweeps aside.²⁶

Whatever external differences were maintained between the various Gnostic factions, they shared a common ground in their rejection (to different extents) of the God of the Old Testament and his words. For the Gnostic, there was essential discontinuity between the God of the old covenant and the new, and hence between the religion of the old covenant and the new. "This is the central thesis of Gnosticism," according to Daniélou, "the contrast between the inferior god, the god of creation and the god of the Old Testament, who is the righteous god, and the god of redemption and of the New Testament, who is the good god."²⁷

In order to repudiate the Gnostics' main premise, Irenaeus had to demonstrate conclusively that the one true God was both creator and redeemer, the God of the old and the new covenants. In *AH* (and particularly in the fourth book), Irenaeus set about the task of defending the concept of the unity of God by manifesting the unity of the Hebrew

²⁵ "Finally, as I (to gratify your long-cherished desire for information regarding the tenets of these persons) have spared no pains, not only to make these doctrines known to you, but also to furnish the means of showing their falsity; so you will, according to the grace given you by the Lord, prove an earnest and efficient minister to others, that men may no longer be drawn away by the plausible system of these heretics, which I now proceed to describe." *ANCL* trans. 1:316 (slightly modified).

²⁶ J. Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, vol. 2: *A History of Early Christian Doctrine* (London and Philadelphia: Darton, Longman and Todd, and Westminster Press, 1973), 221.

²⁷ Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, 224.

Scriptures and teaching with the Christian Scriptures and teaching, against the Gnostics' assertions of incongruity. It is of significance that in so doing, Irenaeus chose to use the idea of covenant to stress the unity and continuity of OT and NT religion and revelation. According to Irenaeus, the old covenant Scriptures looked forward to the Christ and the church of the new covenant Scriptures. The commands of the old covenant, as epitomized in the Decalogue, since they were functional before Moses (AH 4.15.1; 4.16.3), remain authoritative in the new covenant (AH 4.16.1). Christ does not contradict the Ten Words. He fulfills and expands them (AH 4.13.1). Any incidental differences between the covenants are explained by Irenaeus as accommodation on the part of God to the weaknesses of his people, in order to help them mature in their faith (AH 4.16.5). Indeed, covenant thought is apparent throughout Irenaeus' argument. As Ferguson says: "Against the attacks of Marcion and the Gnostics, the only hope of salvaging the old Bible was to acknowledge different eras. The covenant scheme of the interpretation of holy history became the foundation of Irenaeus' theological method."²⁸

For instance, Irenaeus defends the idea that both covenants (old and new) come from one and the same God by means of the story of the scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13:52). This scribe will bring forth out of his treasure things new and old. What does this mean? Irenaeus explains: *Ea autem quae de thesauro profertur nova et vetera sine contradictione duo testamenta dicit, vetera quidem, quae ante fuerat legisdato, novum autem, quae secundum Evangelium est conversatio, [ostendit] (AH 4.9.1).*²⁹ The covenants are means by which men make progress in their belief. Irenaeus puts it this way:

*Novo enim Testamento cognitio et praedicato per prophetas, et ille qui illud dispositurus erat secundum placitum Patris, praedicabatur, manifestatus hominibus, quemadmodum voluit Deus: ut possint semper proficere credentes in eum, et per testamenta maturescere perfectum salutis (AH 4.9.3).*³⁰

²⁸ Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea," 144.

²⁹ "Now, without contradiction, He means by those things which are brought forth from the treasure new and old, the two covenants; the old, that giving of the law which took place formerly; and He points out the new, that manner of life required by the gospel. ANCL trans. 1:472.

³⁰ "For the new covenant having been known and preached by the prophets, He who was to carry it out according to the good pleasure of the Father was also preached, having been revealed to men as God pleased; that they might always make progress through be-

It is because of this covenantal unity, which reflects the oneness of God, that Irenaeus can say *Moyse litterae verba sim Christi (AH 4.2.3.)*³¹ In light of these and many other passages in Irenaeus, it is not surprising that Kelly says:

The fullest statement... of the orthodox position [on the relationship between the Testaments] is to be found in Irenaeus, one of whose favorite themes is that the Law of Moses and the grace of the New Testament, both adapted to different sets of conditions, were bestowed by one and the same God for the benefit of the human race.³²

Hence, it is clear that the idea of covenant is of central importance to Irenaeus' response to the Gnostics in AH. The significance of Irenaeus' covenantal view of history lies in his stress on the essential unity and continuity of salvation history.

THE MEANINGS OF δαθήκη IN IRENAEUS

There has been some discussion of the range of meaning that δαθήκη bears in Irenaeus.³³ We may suggest three ways it is used: in a relational sense (a divine-human relationship with blessings and obligations), in an historical sense (an era typified by a particular stage of divine-human relations), and in a testamentary sense (a divine will).

The most common meaning of δαθήκη [testamentum] in Irenaeus is that of a divine-human relationship with attendant commitments and favors.³⁴ This sense is apparent in AH 4.9.3 where Irenaeus asserts that both the new covenant and Christ were preached by the OT prophets *ut possint semper proficere credentes in eum, et per testamenta maturescere perfectum salutis.*³⁵ Clearly, δαθήκη/testamentum does

lieving in Him, and by means of the covenants, should gradually attain to perfect salvation." ANCL trans. 1:472 (slightly modified).

³¹ "The writings of Moses are the words of Christ." ANCL trans. 1:464.

³² Kelly, *Doctrines*, 68.

³³ See Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea," 145; van Damme, *Pseudo-Cyprian, Adversus Iudaeos*, 46-50; van Unnik, "H καὶ νῆ δαθήκη," 225; Kinzig, "Καὶ νῆ δαθήκη: Title of the NT," 525.

³⁴ Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea," 145; and van Unnik "H καὶ νῆ δαθήκη," 225, both concur on this point.

³⁵ "So that they might always make progress by believing in Him, and through the historical covenants, to attain to complete salvation."

not here refer to a legal disposition (which would seem to have nothing to do with spiritual maturation), nor does it denote an era of redemptive history (which again would seem to have little subjective influence on the perfecting of humanity). Irenaeus means, here and elsewhere, by covenant: a special kind of divine-human association (with behavior requirements on the human side and bountiful promises on the divine side), carefully designed and modified by God from time to time for the sake of restoring and confirming his image in his people. This is confirmed in the same context when Irenaeus compares the old and new covenants, offering descriptions of each: *vetus quidem, quod ante fuerat, legis datus; novum autem, quae secundum Evangelium est conversatio, ostendit* (AH 4.9.1).³⁶ The idea of the new covenant as "manner of life required by the gospel" points to this first, relational definition.

The second way *διαθήκη/testamentum* is employed in Irenaeus is as a designation of an era (or eras) or the grand redemptive economy. For instance, in AH 4.11.3, while stressing the greater blessings of the new covenant Irenaeus declares: *sic ergo et posterioribus majorem, quam quae fuit in veteri Testamento, numerationem gratiae attribuit unum et idem Dominus per suum adventum*.³⁷ Irenaeus' temporal references in the context (greater grace for those of a later time) suggests that he means by *veteri Testamento* (Old Testament) a specific era of salvation history.

Finally, hints of a testamentary sense of *διαθήκη/testamentum* can also be found in Irenaeus.³⁸ In AH 5.9.4 Irenaeus says:

*Propter hoc autem et Christus mortuus est, uti testamentum Evangelii apertum et universo mundo lectum primum quidem liberos faceret servos suos, post deinde heredes eos constitueret eorum quae essent eius, hereditate possidente Spiritu, quemadmodum demonstravimus: hereditate enim possidet ille qui vivit, hereditate autem acquiritur caro.*³⁹

³⁶ "The old indeed, that giving of the law which previously took place, he reveals as new, that manner of life in accordance with the gospel," ANCL, slightly modified.

³⁷ "Thus, therefore, has the one and the same Lord granted, by means of His advent, a greater gift of grace to those of a subsequent period, than what He had given in the Old Testament epoch," ANCL, slightly modified.

³⁸ *pace* van Unnik.

³⁹ Kinzig translates: "Therefore Christ died that the open testament (will) of the gospel read in the wide world should first set his servants free, and then should make them heirs of all his possessions, the Spirit inheriting them, as we have shown. For he who lives inherits, and it is the flesh which is acquired as inheritance." "Καὶ τὴν διαθήκην :

The legal language of inheritance, possessions, reading of a document, and setting servants free strongly suggests a common testamentary reading of *διαθήκη/testamentum* in the passage. We add only that the latter two meanings are not common—even rare—in Irenaeus.

AN OVERVIEW OF IRENAEAN SALVATION HISTORY

In AH 1.10.1, in the midst of his extensive account of the vagaries of Gnosticism, Irenaeus pauses to present a compendious statement of the Christian faith: a list of the central elements of Christian teaching. Irenaeus declares that the church believes in God, the Father Almighty, the creator; in Christ Jesus, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit. Then Irenaeus declares that the Holy Spirit proclaimed through the prophets: *dispositiones Dei et adventam et eam quae est ex virgine generationem et passionem et resurrectionem a mortuis et in carne in caelos ascensionem dilecti Jesu Christi Domini nostri et de caelis in gloria patris adventum eius ad recapitulanda universa*.⁴⁰

That Irenaeus should begin with the economies of God and include the recapitulation of all things in Christ in this account of the church's faith should come as no surprise in light of our previous observations. We should recognize that Irenaeus is not here simply claiming that this summary reflects the beliefs of his contemporaries. He is asserting that this faith has been received "from the apostles and their disciples" (AH 1.10.1). Irenaeus goes on to say that the good teacher will expound to his pupil "the means and economy of God in humankind's salvation," which includes explaining *quare testamenta multa tradita humano generi, adnuntiare, et quis sit uniuscuiusque testamentorum character, docere* (AH 1.10.3).⁴¹ An understanding of the covenants was, for Irenaeus, part of the very foundation of the faith. The centrality of the covenant idea in Irenaeus' thought, then, is apparent even in his summarization of Chris-

Title of the NT," 525.

⁴⁰ "The dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his future manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father 'to gather all things in one.'" ANCL trans. 1:330.

⁴¹ "why it was that more covenants than one were given to mankind; and teach what was the special character of each of these covenants." ANCL trans. 1:331.

tian truth.

Irenaeus emphatically asserts the apostolic origins of his covenant theology. At one point he appeals to the teaching of a presbyter who was a "disciple of the apostles." He says: *Huiusmodi quoque de duobus Testamentis senior Apostolorum discipulus disputabat, ab uno quidem et eodem Deo utraque ostendens* (AH 4.32.1).⁴² Furthermore, claims Irenaeus, this presbyter's covenantal approach to salvation history and argument for the unity of God reflect not simply one strand of the apostolic tradition but the entirety of it:

Apostoli enim omnes duo quidem Testamenta in duobis populis fuisse docuerunt, unum autem et eundem esse Deum, qui disposuerit utraque ad utilitatem hominum, secundum quod Testamenta dabantur qui incipiebant credere Deo, ex ipsa demonstravimus Apostolorum doctrina in tertio libro (AH 4.32.2).⁴³

Against the abbreviated redemptive program of the Gnostics, Irenaeus urged the unity of the covenants in the economy of God and credited the idea to apostolic teaching.

Though several of Irenaeus' predecessors used the term "covenant" (notably Clement of Rome, Barnabas, Justin and Melito), Irenaeus is apparently the first of the second-century Christian theologians to use the plural: *διαθήκαι/testamenta*. The idea of covenant, of course, also plays a more significant role in the structuring of his account of redemptive history than it did in the writings of his forerunners. Everett Ferguson observes that "with Irenaeus the various covenants were integrated as progressive and ordered phases in a total, organic history of salvation."⁴⁴

As has been noted previously, Irenaeus' theology of redemptive history was articulated in his great conflict with the Gnostics. Against their conception of redemptive history, which disassociated Christ's work from what had come beforehand, Irenaeus urged a diametrically opposing plan. He presented a view that he claimed to represent the true apos-

⁴² "After this fashion also did a presbyter, a disciple of the apostles, reason with respect to the two covenants, proving that both were truly from one and the same God." ANCL trans. 1:505.

⁴³ "For all the apostles taught that there were indeed two covenants among the two peoples; but that it was one and the same God who appointed both for the advantage of those men (for whose sakes the covenants were given) who were to believe in God, I have proved in the third book from the very teaching of the apostles." ANCL trans. 1:506.

⁴⁴ Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea," 148.

toxic doctrine concerning God and the history of salvation (AH 4.32.2). Irenaeus argued for the unity of God and for the unity of redemptive history. The God of the old covenant era was the same as the God of Christianity (AH 4.11.3). The faith of God's people of old was the same faith as those living in the blessed time of the gospel (AH 4.9.1), and the writings of the old covenant were the precious possession of the church of Christ, for they set forth his advent and "preached beforehand" his words (AH 4.2.3). Hence, Irenaeus' task in overthrowing the Gnostic idea of God and salvation history, was twofold. To effectively demonstrate the unity of God and his redemptive plan, Irenaeus had to establish the similarity between the various stages of the overall economy for which he was arguing, as well as explain the differences in these administrations. To accomplish this task he did two things. First, he appropriated the oldest form of early Christian apologetic, the proof of Christ by prophecy, and adapted it to the need of the hour. It was common practice for the Christian apologete to appeal to Christ's fulfilling of the OT prophecies as proof of his claims, particularly in debate with Jews (Justin provides a good example in *Dialogue with Trypho*). Irenaeus took the argument and reversed its direction (as later would Tertullian), thus adapting an argument originally employed for Jewish evangelism to the cause of anti-Gnostic polemics. Whereas formerly the church had appealed to the *testimonia* as proof of Christ's claims, Irenaeus appealed to the church's appeal to the *testimonia*. He argued: If Christ and his apostles cited the old covenant writings as divine and authoritative for the Christian religion, and taught that the God of Israel is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, then this must be the case. If then one is true to Christ and the apostles' instruction, he will acknowledge this unity of God and Old Testament revelation. The argument was particularly effective against the Gnostics who would desire to be seen as faithful to the teachings of Christ and the apostles (especially Paul). Secondly, Irenaeus gave a detailed exposition of redemptive history based on the covenants. This covenantal approach to God's economy he learned from "a certain presbyter, a disciple of the apostles," and the apostles themselves (AH 4.32.1,2).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Kinzig has noted the potential two-edged polemical application of the church's second-century covenant thought in the debate with the Jews and Marcionites: "The theologians of the Greater Church realized that the Marcionite division of the Bible into Old and New Testaments came in handy because, ironically enough, it could be understood not only in an anti-Jewish, but also an anti-Marcionite sense, once the concept of a bipar-

Irenaeus says in one place that there are "four general covenants which have been given to humanity" (*AH* 3.11.8) and in *DAP* speaks of covenants with Noah (*DAP* 22), Abraham (*DAP* 24) and David (*DAP* 64), as well as the promise of the new covenant (*DAP* 90). By combining these two lists alone, we can identify six covenants which, arranged chronologically, cover the whole of redemptive history: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the new covenant. This does not exhaust Irenaeus' covenantal terminology by any means. He speaks of the "first covenant" (*primum habuissent Testamentum*, *AH* 3.12.15) referring to the old covenant commands. He calls the Noahic covenant a "covenant with the whole world" (*DAP* 22). Irenaeus describes the Abrahamic covenant as the "covenant of circumcision" (*testamentum circumcisionis*, *AH* 3.12.11). He refers to the "old covenant" (*veteri testamento*, *AH* 4.15.2) and it is not always clear whether he intends to apply this title exclusively to the Mosaic administration or to the whole of the old covenant economy. He uses the designation "two covenants" (*duo testamenta*, *AH* 4.9.1) in reference to the old and new covenants. On one occasion he denominates the new covenant as the "gospel covenant" (*testamentum Evangelii*, *AH* 5.9.4). Of course, his special descriptive designation of the new covenant was "new covenant of liberty" (*libertas nouum Testamentum*, *AH* 3.12.14). In addition to this covenant terminology, he also uses the related nomenclature of the economy such as "new economy of liberty" (*AH* 3.10.4), the "economy of the Law" (*AH* 3.11.7) and the "Mosaic economy" (*AH* 3.10.2 and 3.12.15).

When Irenaeus uses *δὲ ἀθήκη*/*testamentum* in connection with a reference to an era in redemptive history, he generally uses it to refer to a specific period or administration in God's economy. Occasionally he seems to use "old covenant" to designate the whole period of God's redemptive work up to the first advent of Christ, but he apparently never employs *δὲ ἀθήκη*/*testamentum* in the singular to indicate the whole redemptive plan of God—though he may use "the covenants" in this way (*AH* 3.12.12). His most common designation of that plan is "economy" (*dispositio*) or "universal economy" (*universam dispositionem*), which in function is not dissimilar to the sixteenth-century Protestant idea of the Covenant of Grace.

the canon had been developed. The concept allowed for an emphasis both on the continuity between the old covenant and the new (against Marcion) and on the discontinuity (against the Jews), "Καὶ νῦν δὲ ἀθήκη: Title of the NT," 543-544.

According to Irenaeus' design, the history of redemption is as follows. Humanity was created in a state of innocence (*DAP* 11). Adam and Eve were given a command to keep. If they obeyed they would remain immortal, but if they disobeyed they would die (*DAP* 14,15). Adam and Eve, at the prompting of Satan, rebelled against God and fell away in sin (*DAP* 16). The consequence of their fall for humankind is made evident in Cain's murder of Abel (*DAP* 17). God sent the flood as a just judgment on a wicked world (*DAP* 19), but spared Noah and his family. God made a covenant with Noah which, among other things, contained a promise of the incarnation of Christ (*DAP* 22). God's blessing was then given to Shem, which was eventually carried on to Abraham (*DAP* 21, 23, 24). God revealed Himself to Abraham and led him from Mesopotamia to Judea, where He reckoned Abraham's faith to him as righteousness (*DAP* 24). Abraham's promise included land and descendants, and when Isaac was born (and Jacob to Isaac afterward) it was not only partial fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, but God's blessing of Shem being extended to them (*DAP* 24). Abraham was given the Covenant of Circumcision as a sign (*AH* 4.16.1) and a seal of the faith he had while uncircumcised (*DAP* 24). In this he became a type of the two covenants and of the two peoples that will enter into the one faith of Abraham (*AH* 4.25.3). Abraham, then, is the father of all who believe under both covenants (*AH* 4.23.1). During a famine 75 members of Jacob's household migrated to Egypt, where in 400 years they grew to 660,000 people—but were cruelly oppressed. By means of the blood of the Passover (which showed forth Christ's passion) they were freed from Egypt (*DAP* 25). The Exodus was a type of the "exodus" that the church would make from among the Gentiles (*AH* 4.30.4). At Sinai, Moses established the Economy of the Law (*AH* 3.12.15) and God wrote the Ten Words with His own hand (*DAP* 26). These Ten Words remain in force in the new covenant (*AH* 4.16.4), but the "laws of bondage" do not (*AH* 4.16.5). After wandering in the desert because of sin, Israel was given an additional book of commandments by Moses called Deuteronomy in which are many prophecies about Christ, the Jews, the calling of the Gentiles, and the Kingdom (*DAP* 28). After Joshua brought Israel into Canaan, God sent them prophets. They admonished the people and announced that the Lord Jesus Christ would come, according to the flesh, as the son of David (who was himself a son of Abraham) to sum up all things in himself (*DAP* 30). Through the incarnation, Jesus took on our flesh so that we might "overcome through Adam what had stricken us

through Adam" (*DAP* 31). In Christ, Adam was saved (*AH* 3.23.1). In Christ, the seed of woman crushed the serpent's head (*AH* 5.21.1). In Christ, God's promise to Shem was realized (*DAP* 22). In Christ, the promise of Abraham was fulfilled (*DAP* 35). In Christ, the promise to David of an everlasting king was fulfilled (*DAP* 36). In one sense Christ's work of recapitulation was realized in his first advent (*AH* 4.34.2) but in another sense it continues on to and will culminate in his second advent (*AH* 4.33.1).

Irenaeus' covenant theology operates in and around his history of redemption. A covenantal line can be clearly traced from Adam to Noah to Shem to Abraham to Moses to David to Christ. But even though he speaks of a number of specific covenants,⁴⁶ he is most concerned to articulate a theology of the two covenants: the old—the giving of the law which took place formerly; and the new—the way of life required by the gospel (*AH* 4.9.1). There were differences in these covenants. Nevertheless they evidence an essential unity. Irenaeus explains:

Plus est enim, inquit, templo hic. Plus autem et minus non in his dicitur quae inter se communionem non habent et sunt contrariae naturae et pugnant adversus se, sed in his quae ejusdem sunt substantiae et communitant secum, solum autem multitudine et magnitudine differunt, quemadmodum aqua ab aqua et lumen a lumine et gratia a gratia (*AH* 4.9.2).⁴⁷

This unity of the covenantal plan of God is manifested in a number of ways. The believer's code of life is the same in both covenants (*AH*

⁴⁶ One of the most frequently discussed and intriguing passages regarding the covenant in Irenaeus' writings is found in *AH* 3.11.8: *Et propter hoc quatuor data sunt testamenta humano generi: unum quidem ante cathysmum sub Adam, secundum vero post cataclysimum sub Noe, tertium vero legislatio sub Moysse, quartum vero quod renovat hominem et recapitulat in se omnia, quod est per Evangelium, elevans et penningerans homines in caeleste regnum.* The later Greek texts differ from the old Latin, giving "Noah," "Abraham," "Moses," and "Gospel" as the four covenants. The Latin text is usually considered the most accurate here. It has some affinities with Melito's list in *PP* 83. Whatever one's textual decision, the only covenants brought into question—Abraham and Adam—are attested elsewhere in Irenaeus implicitly if not explicitly.

⁴⁷ "He declares: For in this place is One greater than the temple. But 'greater' and 'less' are not applied to those things which have nothing in common between themselves, and are of an opposite nature, and mutually repugnant; but are used in the case of those of the same substance, and which possess properties in common, but merely differ in number and size; such as water from water, and light from light, and grace from grace." *ANCL* trans. 1:472.

4.12.3). The ten words are equally binding in each covenant. Christ did not abolish these commands, but extended and fulfilled them (*AH* 4.13.1). The way of salvation is the same in the old and the new covenants (*AH* 4.21.1). There were differences between the covenants as well. Men's faith in God has been increased in the new covenant and along with it God's punishment for those who despise the advent of the Word of God (*AH* 4.28.2). God has granted a greater gift of grace in the new covenant (*AH* 4.11.3). In the new covenant the Jews cease to be the exclusive people of God, but men from all nations are gathered to him (*AH* 4.17.5). God's covenantal plan is unified but never static. It is always pressing on to a goal: the summing up of all things in Christ (*AH* 4.32.2).

UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN SALVATION HISTORY

In its stress on continuity and progress in salvation history, Irenaeus' covenant theology leaves, perhaps, its most distinctive mark. Against the Gnostics, Irenaeus argued for the unity of God and his plan of redemption, but this left him with the task of explaining certain phenomena in revelation that seemed to contradict this unity. How could the law be compatible with the gospel? Were not the ethical standards given by Moses different from those enunciated by Christ? On these issues Irenaeus brought to bear his theology of the covenants, which allowed him to explain both unity and diversity in redemptive history. So effective was his covenantal response that Irenaeus moved beyond explanation and articulated a theology of the rich complexity of God's economy. For Irenaeus, there is never merely similarity but rather deliberate continuity in the covenants; never merely diversity but rather designed progress from old to new. The continuity in God's plan originates in God himself. One and the same God is the author of both covenants (*AH* 4.32.1), and so there is a manifest unity in God's plan. The reason for progress in the divine economy resides in the nature of persons as created beings. That which is created must, by definition, have a beginning and middle, addition and increase (*AH* 4.11.2). Therefore God accommodated himself to human capacity. The covenants were "fitted for the times" (*AH* 3.12.11) and through them God adjusted men to salvation (*AH* 4.14.2). In this way, Irenaeus explained the difference and harmony

in the covenants (AH 3.12.12).

Irenaeus gave great attention to expounding the themes of continuity and progress from the revelation possessed by the church: the books of the old covenant, the Gospels, and the Epistles. Indeed, revelation itself is in continuity. The writings of Moses are the words of Christ (AH 4.2.3). The Scriptures do not contradict themselves but are perfectly consistent (AH 4.28.3). The Decalogue remains in force in both covenants (AH 4.15.1). There are sacrifices in both covenants (AH 4.18.2). The old covenant sacrifices did not save people, rather the consciences of the offerer made the sacrifice acceptable worship (AH 4.18.3). The same is the case in the new covenant. The sacrifice of the new covenant is the Lord's Supper (AH 4.176.5). All believers offer this sacrifice and hence are levites and priests (AH 4.34.3). In Abraham, God has prefigured the two covenants (AH 4.25.3). Abraham represents both "the people" (Jewish believers before the advent) and the church (all believers since Christ's advent). Abraham's seed is the church and the promise to Abraham belongs to the church (AH 4.8.1). But "the people" and the church are so similar that Irenaeus can call them "the two churches" and "the older and younger church" (AH 4.31.2). In fact, there is one people of God in all ages (AH 4.23.1; 5.32.2; 5.34.1).⁴⁸

Discontinuity is just as important in God's economy as unity or continuity (AH 4.9.3). Yet, covenantal progress does not contradict covenantal continuity. Indeed, the very fact that we can compare the economies of God in terms of "greater" and "lesser" proves that the covenants are the same in substance, because one cannot compare things that have nothing in common (AH 4.9.2). Faith has increased in the new covenant (AH 4.28.2). God has given greater grace in the new covenant (AH 4.9.3; 4.11.3). Though the Gnostics characterize the God of the old covenant as a God of wrath and the Christian God as the God of love, Irenaeus says that God's wrath has increased under the new covenant in potency and duration (AH 4.28.1). The Decalogue remains in the new covenant but "the laws of bondage" are abrogated (AH 4.16.5). These laws, peculiar to the Mosaic administration (as distinct from the Ten Words, which according to Irenaeus existed before Moses), were given as types for the people's instruction and as bondage because of the people's sin (AH 4.16.5). Because Christ has fulfilled the law these peculiar Mosaic laws

are no longer needed (AH 4.4.2). Therefore the new covenant may be characterized by "freedom" as opposed to "bondage." In the new covenant, Gentile believers have replaced the Jews as "the people" of God (AH 4.17.5). As for charges concerning the incompatibility of the practices of some Old Testament saints with new covenant standards, Irenaeus explains them as types (AH 4.31.1-2). Finally, we note (again) that the progress of the covenants is progress towards a fixed goal: the consummation (AH 4.34.2).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Irenaeus' teaching on the covenants has received very little attention from those who have studied his theology.⁴⁹ But we have seen, even in this brief survey, that it is a theme of no small significance in the writings of this great theologian of the second century. A. A. Woolsey suggests that "Irenaeus was one of the clearest expositors of the covenant amongst the fathers."⁵⁰ It seems then that Irenaeus' fellow Christians in Lyons spoke precisely and appropriately (and perhaps with a little prescience) when they described him as "zealous for the covenant of Christ" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.4.2). W. C. van Unnik comments on this lacuna in Irenaeus studies:

⁴⁸ Only E. Ferguson (in "The Covenant Idea") and A. A. Woolsey (in "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought") have deliberately concentrated on the subject of Irenaeus covenant theology. Woolsey's survey, though brief (three pages), accurately concludes: "Here, then, in outline is the 'covenant theology' of one of the early church fathers. Several points are worth underlining. Irenaeus regarded the covenant relationship between God and man as a divine arrangement, involving a condensation by God to man's capacity and condition. He saw the covenant as the central factor in the unfolding of salvation history. While there were different expressions of covenant, the covenant in Christ was requisite for the saints of all ages, with one way of salvation for the church going back to the time of Adam. Irenaeus distinguished between the mere letter of the law and its spirit. He identified both the natural law, the moral law and the love of God with the righteousness of God. Ceremonial laws were abrogated with the coming of Christ, but the moral law continued in force and has a continuing function in the lives of those who have been liberated by the gospel as a means of testing the reality and strength of their faith. The covenant of grace, therefore, while unilateral in its initiation and accomplishment, had for Irenaeus a strong bilateral and ethical emphasis in its outworking in Christian experience." "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought," 1:204.

⁵⁰ Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought," 1:202.

⁴⁸ Contra L. V. Crutchfield, "Israel and the Church in the Ante-Nicene Fathers," *BS* 144 (1987):254-275, esp. 256-257, 266-269.

In reading the passages where Irenaeus deals with the New Covenant one notices that he is using general notions with a typically polemical application viz. to show to the Gnostics who rejected the O.T. that it is the same God in both. It is a fundamental part of his theology as may be seen from the *Epidexis* where he gives the positive exposition. This combined with the fact that he is called "zealous for the covenant of Christ" makes it the more remarkable that so little attention is given to this theme in the descriptions of Irenaeus' theology. It is too important to be dealt with in a chapter on the relation between the two parts of the bible by way of introduction as is generally done.⁵¹

This expression ("zealous for the covenant of Christ"), according to van Unnik, is unique in patristic literature.⁵² In any case, it is certainly a most apposite denomination for Irenaeus. We may summarize some of the emphases of his covenant theology as follows.

First, Irenaeus understood *δὲ ἀθεὶ κτῆ* primarily as a relationship between God and his people (what van Unnik calls the "Hebraic" sense) (*AH* 4.9.3). This relationship was so essential to the purposes of the divine economy that *δὲ ἀθεὶ κτῆ* often serves him to delineate the main eras of redemptive history (*AH* 4.11.3). He is also fond of speaking of covenants in the plural (*AH* 4.32.2). Hence, covenant (rather than testament or disposition) is the primary sense of *δὲ ἀθεὶ κτῆ* in Irenaeus.

Second, with the NT writers and Justin, Irenaeus sees the incarnation and work of Christ as fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, and the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah (*AH* 4.13.1; *DAP* 24, 90). In contrast, Melito nowhere makes this connection explicitly in his extant writings.

Third, the covenant concept is of major significance in Irenaeus' presentation of redemptive history (*AH* 1.10.1,3). He perhaps makes more of the covenants than any of his contemporaries. He emphasizes both continuity and discontinuity when relating the old (Mosaic and Abrahamic) and new covenants (*AH* 4.11.3).

Fourth, the linkage of the covenant idea with forgiveness of sins is not as prominent in Irenaeus as it is in the NT and Justin. Irenaeus does, however, affirm the graciousness of the divine economy, especially in stressing the divine adaptation of the various covenants for the education and glorification of humanity (*AH* 3.11.8; 3.12.11-12).

Fifth, Irenaeus (like Clement and Barnabas) employs covenant

thought in the service of moral exhortation, and his obdiential emphasis is unmistakable (*AH* 4.15-16).⁵³

Sixth, Irenaeus stands with the NT, Melito, and Justin over against Barnabas and the Gnostics in his view of Israel's reception of the old covenant (*AH* 4.15.2).

Seventh, like Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Justin, and Melito, Irenaeus makes a strong appeal to the OT in establishing covenant thought (in the standard manner of second-century *demonstratio evangelica*).

Eighth, the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New covenants are mentioned or alluded to in writings of the NT, Barnabas and Justin (note: Melito never explicitly does so in *PP*). Irenaeus refers to these frequently and additionally to covenants with Adam and Noah (*AH* 3.11.8; *DAP* 22).

Ninth, Irenaeus links natural law and moral law (epitomized in the Ten Words), and sees this law both as extant prior to Moses (indeed, like Melito, Irenaeus speaks of God's giving of the law to Adam), and binding in the new covenant as well as the old (*AH* 4.15.1; 4.16.3).

⁵³ See also Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 1:203-204. Even J. W. Baker sees this,

Bullinger and the Covenant, 23. Consequently, D. A. Stoute is quite obviously wrong when he claims that there is no discussion of mutual obligations in the patristic teaching on the covenant, "The Origins and Early Development of the Reformed Idea of the Covenant," 23.

⁵¹ van Unnik, "H καὶ νῆ δὲ ἀθεὶ κτῆ," 225.

⁵² van Unnik, "H καὶ νῆ δὲ ἀθεὶ κτῆ," 212-213.

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