

## Heretics, Scripture, and Tradition

*“Such, then, is their system, which neither the prophets announced, nor the Lord taught, nor the apostles delivered, but of which they boast that beyond all others they have a perfect knowledge. They gather their views from other sources than the Scriptures; and, to use a common proverb, they strive to weave ropes of sand, while they endeavor to adapt with an air of probability to their own peculiar assertions the parables of the Lord, the sayings of the prophets, and the words of the apostles, in order that their scheme may not seem altogether without support. In doing so, however, they disregard the order and the connection of the Scriptures, and so far as in them lies, dismember and destroy the truth. By transferring passages, and dressing them up anew, and making one thing out of another, they succeed in deluding many through their wicked art in adapting the oracles of the Lord to their opinions.”* Irenaeus<sup>1</sup>

Irenaeus:<sup>2</sup> Heretics follow neither scripture nor tradition.

*1. When, however, they are confuted from the Scriptures, they turn round and accuse these same Scriptures, as if they were not correct, nor of authority, and [assert] that they are ambiguous, and that the truth cannot be extracted from them by those who are ignorant of tradition. For [they allege] that the truth was not delivered by means of written documents, but viva voce: wherefore also Paul declared, “But we speak wisdom among those that are perfect, but not the wisdom of this world.” And this wisdom each one of them alleges to be the fiction of his own inventing, forsooth; so that, according to their idea, the truth properly resides at one time in Valentinus, at another in Marcion, at another in Cerinthus, then afterwards in Basilides, or has even been indifferently in any other opponent, who could speak nothing pertaining to salvation. For every one of these men, being altogether of a perverse disposition, depraving the system of truth, is not ashamed to preach himself.*

*2. But, again, when we refer them to that tradition which originates from the apostles, [and] which is preserved by means of the succession of presbyters in the Churches, they object to tradition, saying that they themselves are wiser not merely than the presbyters, but even than the apostles, because they have discovered the unadulterated truth. For [they maintain] that the apostles intermingled the things of the law with the words of the Savior; and that not the apostles alone, but even the Lord Himself, spoke as at one time from the Demiurge, at another from the intermediate place, and yet again from the Pleroma, but that they themselves, indubitably, unsulliedly, and purely, have knowledge of the hidden mystery: this is, indeed, to blaspheme their Creator after a most impudent manner! It comes to this, therefore, that these men do now consent neither to Scripture nor to tradition.*

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<sup>1</sup> Irenaeus (lived 120-202 AD), “How the Valentinians Pervert the Scriptures to Support Their Own Pious Opinions”, *Irenaeus Against Heresies*, Book 1, Chapter 8, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325, Volume 1, Rev. Alexander Roberts, D.D. and James Donaldson, LL.D. (editors) (06 January 1885). The Master Christian Library, Version 5, AGES Software (1997).

<sup>2</sup> Irenaeus (lived 120-202 AD), “The Heretics Follow Neither Scripture Nor Tradition”, *Irenaeus Against Heresies*, Book 3, Chapter 2, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325, Volume 1, Rev. Alexander Roberts, D.D. and James Donaldson, LL.D. (editors) (06 January 1885). The Master Christian Library, Version 5, AGES Software (1997).

Jerome (lived 342 – 420 AD) also commented on heretical use of Holy Scripture.<sup>3</sup> “This way of acting is common to the Manichaeans, the Gnostics, the Ebionites, the Marcionites, and the votaries of the other eighty heresies, all of whom draw their proofs from the pure well of the Scriptures, not, however, interpreting it in the sense in which it is written, but trying to make the simple language of the Church’s writers accord with their own wishes.”

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<sup>3</sup> Jerome (lived 342-420 AD), “From Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis, in Cyprus, to John, Bishop of Jerusalem”, *Letters of St. Jerome*, Letter 51, Chapter 4, in The Principal Works of St. Jerome, Hon. W. H. Fremantle, M.A. and Rev. G. Lewis, M.A. (translators) (1892), in The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 6, Philip Schaff (editor), The Master Christian Library, Version 5 (1997).