

## **The Paschal Controversy and the Emergence of the Fourfold Gospel Canon**

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As every textbook on the subject affirms, the story of the New Testament canon begins with Irenaeus' renowned proclamation of the fourfold Gospel canon. Amidst the storm of Irenaeus' fulminations against the inventions of the heretics, a burst of enduring light shines forth: the church acknowledges four Gospels, neither more nor fewer in number. The hypothesis that the Paschal Controversy provided an impetus for the emergence of the fourfold Gospel canon has long intrigued scholars, and yet very little evidence in support of this theory has been amassed.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the author will attempt to demonstrate that this thesis is not only chronologically possible but theologically probable. In the first section, we shall see that contrary to the conclusions of many modern scholars, Irenaeus does not transmit a firmly established tradition but forges a

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<sup>1</sup> Theodor Zahn avers: 'Am deutlichsten erhellt die unbedingte und gleichmäßige Anerkennung der 4 Evv. in der Kirche Asiens aus dem Osterstreit, welcher wahrscheinlich schon um 165 innerhalb der asiatischen Kirche selbst ausbrach und sodann um 190 die gesamte Kirche von Edessa bis Lyon in Aufregung versetzte' (*Geschichte des Neutestamentlichen Kanons* [Erlangen, 1888], 1:180; see also Johannes Leiboldt, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* [Leipzig, 1907], 1:144–49). Adolf von Harnack and Hans von Campenhausen confirm that the doctrine most probably first emerged in Asia Minor (*Die Entstehung des Neuen Testaments und die wichtigsten Folgen der Neuen Schöpfung* [Leipzig, 1914], 49; *Die Entstehung der christlichen Bibel* [Tübingen, 1968], 202). Concerning the Paschal Controversy, William R. Farmer also writes: 'So far as is known, there was no other moment in Church history when it is more likely that the fourfold Gospel canon was, in principle, implicitly agreed upon' (*The Formation of the New Testament Canon: An Ecumenical Approach* [Mahwah, 1983], 72).

new dogma in *Adversus Haereses* III 11.8. We therefore conclude that the fourfold Gospel canon emerged during the approximate time frame during which the Paschal Controversy was most alive. In the second section, the author will offer a few points of evidence that intimate that the Paschal Controversy was in fact also a debate over the authority of the Gospels, a debate in which Irenaeus had been embroiled at least ever since he had penned the *Adversus Haereses*.

The question of whether Irenaeus developed the doctrine of the fourfold Gospel canon or merely transmitted an already established tradition was first posed well over a century ago. In his magisterial investigation of the history of the New Testament canon, Theodor Zahn affirmed that the fourfold Gospel had been delivered by the apostles themselves and incorporated into the life of the church at her very founding.<sup>2</sup> It was Adolf von Harnack then who countered this analysis and proposed that the development of the canon was not in fact due to the orthodox but to Marcion, and accordingly then the canon could not have emerged before the mid-second century at the very earliest.<sup>3</sup> De Bruyne's research on the Anti-Marcionite Prologues eventually persuaded Harnack that the fourfold Gospel canon probably emerged sometime between 160 and 180 A.D., for these prologues appear to introduce a Roman edition of the Gospels published antecedently to Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*.<sup>4</sup> Hans von Campenhausen deduced the

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<sup>2</sup> *Geschichte des Neutestamentlichen Kanons*, 1:171. Zahn avers that the adoption of the fourfold Gospel canon among the orthodox was settled 'seit unvordenklicher Zeit' (*ibid.*, 1:161).

<sup>3</sup> For Harnack's specific arguments against Zahn's theory, see Harnack's *Das Neue Testament um das Jahr 200* (Freiburg, 1889), 45.

<sup>4</sup> D. Donatien de Bruyne confidently affirms: 'La conclusion inévitable est: ces prologues furent composés pour une édition catholique des quatre Évangiles, provoquée par l'édition marcionite de l' "Évangile"

same conclusion, noting that although the fourfold Gospel canon is dogmatically defended by Irenaeus, any such notion is conspicuously absent from the writings of Justin Martyr.<sup>5</sup>

However, another stream of scholarship would argue that the fourfold Gospel canon emerged far earlier. Edgar J. Goodspeed contended that the unique status of the four apostolic Gospels was widely acknowledged around 115-125 A.D.:

So while we find Paul, Clement, and Polycarp using the oral gospel; Matthew and Luke using Mark; Ignatius, Barnabas, and the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles using Matthew; and Marcion using Luke, most of the books written toward the middle of the second century or soon after it show acquaintance with the fourfold gospel.<sup>6</sup>

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unique. Ce dangereux hérétique falsifiait un Évangile et rejetait les trois autres. Ses erreurs troublaient beaucoup d'esprits à Rome. L'Église romaine devait riposter, donner une édition des quatre Évangiles' (Les plus anciens prologues latins des Évangiles : *Revue Bénédictine* 40 [1928], 193-214, at 211; see also A. v. Harnack, *Die ältesten Evangelien-Prologe und die Bildung des Neuen Testaments : Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* [1928], 322-41).

<sup>5</sup> *Die Entstehung der christlichen Bibel*, 201-2. In opposition to Campenhausen's allegation that Irenaeus was 'compelled to break his own trail' (*The Formation of the Christian Bible*, transl. J. A. Baker [Philadelphia, 1972], 199), Martin Hengel writes: 'Man muß hinzufügen, daß auch der Vier-Evangelien-Kanon keine ganz junge "Erfindung" ist oder gar von Irenäus stammt' (*Die johanneische Frage* [Tübingen, 1993], 17). André Benoit had also argued earlier that Irenaeus' argument should not be perceived as a proof for the fourfold Gospel canon but rather 'une justification *a posteriori*' (*Saint Irénée: introduction à l'étude de sa théologie* [Paris, 1960], 117).

<sup>6</sup> *The Formation of the New Testament* (Chicago, 1926), 37; see also *id.*, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Chicago, 1937), 314. Nevertheless, John Knox soon challenged Goodspeed's position,

In recent studies, a very early date is still preferred by many scholars. T. C. Skeat postulates that the fourfold Gospel canon was the product of a ‘massive propaganda campaign’, an initiative that supposedly prompted Irenaeus’ pronouncement.<sup>7</sup> Persuaded by the papyrological arguments of T. C. Skeat and David Trobisch, Graham N. Stanton conjectured that the fourfold Gospel emerged in conjunction with the development of the codex in the years immediately preceding 150 A.D.<sup>8</sup> Irenaeus played essentially no role in the formation of the doctrine of the fourfold Gospel canon, Stanton asserts, but rather advanced a tradition that had been forged far earlier: ‘By the time Irenaeus wrote in about 180 AD, the fourfold Gospel was very well established.’<sup>9</sup> The dating of the emergence of the fourfold Gospel canon is a matter of debate, but a number of scholars conclude that

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reasoning: ‘Justin wrote in Rome. He might be expected, therefore, to reflect the usages of the Roman church to which Irenaeus, Tertullian, and the Muratorian writer are also devoted. A fair inference seems to be that in that church, at least, the fourfold Gospel, which was well established in A.D. 175, was not established in 150’ (*Marcion and the New Testament* [Chicago, 1942], 150). Kenneth L. Carroll reaffirmed Knox’s critique of Goodspeed and concluded: ‘The fourfold gospel was an answer to Marcion and not an aid’ (*The Creation of the Fourfold Gospel: Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 37 [1954-5], 75).

<sup>7</sup> Theodore Cressy Skeat, *The Oldest Manuscript of the Four Gospels?: New Testament Studies* 43 (1997), 1-34, at 31. Skeat had already arrived upon the conclusion that Irenaeus appropriated rather than developed the doctrine of the fourfold Gospel in a prior study (*Irenaeus and the Four-Gospel Canon: Novum Testamentum* 34 [1992], 194-9, at 198).

<sup>8</sup> Stanton surmises: ‘The ability of the codex to hold four gospels seems to have been appreciated at the very time when four gospels were being brought together in some second century circles’ (*The Fourfold Gospel: New Testament Studies* 43 [1997], 317-46, at 339).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

the doctrine appeared even before Irenaeus drafted *Adversus Haereses* III 11.8 and therefore also before the Paschal Controversy.

### *1. Irenaeus as the Architect of the Fourfold Gospel Canon*

The present author maintains that the fourfold Gospel canon did not emerge before Irenaeus, and this verdict is warranted by the fact that Irenaeus advocates no particular order for the four Gospels. In fact, Irenaeus presents the Gospels in no less than three separate sequences. Furthermore, the order Irenaeus prefers is not the sequence that has become canonical but rather Matthew, Luke, Mark, and John – and this arrangement almost certainly reflects the order of the Gospels in the manuscript to which Irenaeus referred when writing book three of the *Adversus Haereses*. The first of the three sequences professed by Irenaeus is the order that eventually became canonical. In a paragraph cited by Eusebius and the author of practically every patrology since the fourth century, Irenaeus records:

Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also

had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, although Irenaeus once lists the Gospels in the traditional sequence, his preferred order is actually Matthew, Luke, Mark, John. Irenaeus' famed declaration in *Adversus Haereses* III 11.8 comes at the end of a protracted argument extending from III 9.1 to III 11.9. In this section, Irenaeus contends that each of the Gospels proscribes a principal heresy and that only the orthodox are able to embrace the doctrines encompassed by all four apostolic Gospels. Irenaeus here systematically examines the introductory chapters of Matthew, then Luke, then Mark, and then John, concluding that the Evangelists refute the schemes of the Ebionites, Marcionites, Gnostics, and Valentinians respectively. It is apparent that Irenaeus had access to a manuscript of the four Gospels when writing these pages of his treatise, for his citations of the Gospels are copious and lengthy. Irenaeus commences his exposition by quoting the preaching of John the Baptist from *Matthew* 3:7-9 and then avers: 'He did not declare to them another God, besides him who made the promise to Abraham; John, the forerunner of Christ, of whom Matthew again says, and Luke likewise. ...'<sup>11</sup> Very surprisingly then, although Irenaeus begins by copying out *Matthew* 3:3, he continues his citation by inserting the less-abridged, parallel tradition found in *Luke* 3:4-6. It would seem clear that, after flipping forwards in his codex and verifying that *Luke* also quoted *Isaiah* 40:3ff., Irenaeus actually reproduced this passage from *Luke* rather than immediately turning

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<sup>10</sup> *Adv. Haer.* III 1.1 (ANF I 414); Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* V 8.2-4. This is also the order known to Clement of Alexander (*ibid.* III 24.6-7; VI 14.5-7).

<sup>11</sup> *Adv. Haer.* III 9.1 (ANF I 422).

back to *Matthew*. And, when Irenaeus resumes his exegesis of *Matthew*, he specifically signals his return to the reader.<sup>12</sup>

After finishing his discussion of *Matthew*, Irenaeus next considers not *Mark*, as one would anticipate, but *Luke*. Since his quotations are again extensive and follow the sequence of the text, it is clear that Irenaeus simply read the first chapter of *Luke* from the manuscript of the Gospels before him and transcribed the verses that he considered relevant to his argument. He first copies out *Luke* 1:6, 1:8-9a, 1:9b, and 1:15-7 before flipping back in his codex to *Matthew* 11:9 and 11:11.<sup>13</sup> Continuing his exposition of *Luke*, Irenaeus then copies out *Luke* 1:26, 1:30, 1:32-3, 1:46-7, 1:54-5, 1:78-9, 1:68-75, and 1:76-7 before flipping forwards to *John* 1:29-30 and 1:15-6.<sup>14</sup> After quoting a number of Old Testament passages,<sup>15</sup> Irenaeus then returns to the Gospels and cites *John* 1:14 – a verse from the very page at which he had left his Gospel book open.<sup>16</sup> Irenaeus' exposition of *Mark* is curt, and although he pulls quotations only from the very beginning and ending of the Gospel, his quotations are considerable and quite likely transcribed

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<sup>12</sup> 'Iterum autem de ... dicens Matthaëus ait. ... [Then again Matthew ... says ...]' (*Adv. Haer.* III 9.2 [ANF I 422; SC 211, 102]). Irenaeus then quotes *Matthew* 2:13, 2:15, and 1:23, followed by citations from *Psalms* 131:10-1, 75:2-3, and *Numbers* 24:17. Again Irenaeus informs the reader when he returns to Matthew (*Adv. Haer.* III 9.2).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* III 10.1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* III 10.2-3.

<sup>15</sup> *Gen.* 49:18; *Is.* 12:2; *Ps.* 97:2; *Lam.* 4:20.

<sup>16</sup> *Adv. Haer.* III 10.3. Before completing his discourse on *Luke*, Irenaeus quotes the following verses, uninterrupted by citations from other books: *Luke* 2:11, 2:13-4, 2:11, 2:14, 2:20, 2:22-4, 2:28-32, and 2:38 (*ibid.* III 10.4-5).

from a manuscript.<sup>17</sup> Irenaeus finally considers the evidence from *John*, and his quotations from this Gospel again follow the sequence of the text almost exactly.<sup>18</sup> There can be no doubt that Irenaeus' citation of the Gospels in the order *Matthew, Luke, Mark*, and *John* was anything less than perfectly intentional, for he concludes his argument by clearly reaffirming this order:

So firm is the ground upon which these Gospels rest, that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them, and, starting from these documents, each one of them endeavors to establish his own peculiar doctrine. For the Ebionites, who use Matthew's Gospel only, are confuted out of this very same, making false suppositions with regard to the Lord. But Marcion, mutilating that according to Luke, is proved to be a blasphemer of the only existing God, from those passages which he still retains. Those, again, who separate Jesus from Christ, alleging that Christ remained impassible, but that it was Jesus who suffered, preferring the Gospel by Mark, if they read it with a love of truth, may have their errors rectified. Those, moreover, who follow Valentinus, making copious use of that according to John, to illustrate their conjunctions, shall be proved to be totally in error by means of this very Gospel, as I have shown in the first book.<sup>19</sup>

It is at this point entirely clear that Irenaeus intended to exegete the Gospels in this order and that he depended upon a manuscript of the Gospels. It is therefore most

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<sup>17</sup> Irenaeus quotes only *Mark* 1:1-3 and 16:19 (*ibid.* III 10.6).

<sup>18</sup> Irenaeus quotes *John* 1:1-5, 1:10-1, 1:14, 1:6-7, 1:18, 1:47, and 1:49 (*ibid.* III 11.1-6). Finally, he quotes *Matth.* 12:18-21 before formally closing up his exposition of the four Gospels (*ibid.* III 11.6).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* III 11.7 (ANF I 428).

probable that his codex presented the Gospels in this order.<sup>20</sup> But this conclusion is demonstrated from another passage in the *Adversus Haereses*. When Irenaeus avers that the Gospels are unanimous in their contention that the knowledge of the Father comes exclusively through the Son, he cites *Matthew* 11:27 and then writes: ‘Thus has Matthew set it down, and Luke in like manner, and Mark the very same; for John omits this passage.’<sup>21</sup> It is quite unmistakable that Irenaeus checked the Gospels one by one, flipping forward in his manuscript in order to see whether this tradition was recorded by each of the Evangelists.

Thus far we have seen that Irenaeus presents the Gospels in at least two separate sequences. But we find yet another sequence in Irenaeus’ most explicit discussion of the fourfold Gospel – *Adversus Haereses* III 11.8. In this passage, Irenaeus arranges the Gospels in the following order: *John, Luke, Matthew, and Mark*. One may account for this odd order upon realizing that Irenaeus associated each of the Gospels with one of the four living creatures from the vision in Revelation 4:7. In *Adversus Haereses* III 11.8, Irenaeus expounds the theological themes of each of the Gospels and argues that John corresponds to the lion, Luke to the calf, Matthew to the man, and Mark to the flying

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<sup>20</sup> T. C. Skeat believes that the first fourfold Gospel codex dates to the ‘late second century’ (*The Oldest Manuscript of the Four Gospels?*, 1-34, at 30). This conclusion is based on his research demonstrating that P<sup>4</sup>, P<sup>64</sup>, and P<sup>67</sup> were all originally from the same codex. He concludes that this codex therefore represents the oldest known codex of the four Gospels. If Skeat is correct, it would be entirely plausible that Irenaeus would have possessed a Gospel codex in which the Gospels were arranged in the non-traditional order: Matthew, Luke, Mark, and John.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Sic et Matthaeus posuit, et Lucas similiter, et Marcus idem ipsum: Johannes enim praeterit locum hunc’ (*Adv. Haer.* IV 6.1 [ANF I 467-8; SC 100, 2, 438]).

eagle. It is inconceivable that Irenaeus could have failed to present the four Gospels in their correct order in this passage – precisely the passage in which he sets out the doctrine of the fourfold Gospel canon – assuming, that is, that Irenaeus maintained that one particular order of the Gospels was correct in the first place. The only conclusion that the present author can draw is that Irenaeus did not in fact advocate any particular order for the four Gospels, and this is significant evidence that the doctrine of the fourfold Gospel canon was at this time – at least in the eyes of Irenaeus – not a firmly established tradition.<sup>22</sup> Because the doctrine of the fourfold Gospel was not an established tradition during the time at which Irenaeus penned *Adversus Haeresus* III 11.8, his declaration is indeed a significant milestone in the history of the formation of the New Testament canon.

## *2. Irenaeus as the Champion of Peace in the Paschal Controversy*

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<sup>22</sup> One could argue that Irenaeus presents a fourth order of the Gospels too: ranking the apostolic Gospels first (*Matthew* and *John*) and the Gospels composed by the disciples of the apostles second (*Luke* and *Mark*) (see *Adv. Haer.* III 15.3 and III 21.3). This division between apostolic Gospels and Gospels of the disciples of the apostles finds precedence in Papias, if one finds Charles E. Hill's theory compelling that III 24.5-13 of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* represents material originally culled from Papias (What Papias Said about John (and Luke): A 'New' Papiian Fragment: *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 [1998], 582-629). A further evidence that Irenaeus' idea of canonicity was not fully worked out is that, when attempting to differentiate between the canonical Gospels and the spurious ones, Irenaeus says 'spurious' or 'apocryphal' to denote the false, but he has no other word than 'Gospel' to denote the canonical ones (*Adv. Haer.* I 19.2). Irenaeus' metaphor of canonicity is that of the trees in the garden of paradise. Christians may eat of every tree in the garden (i.e., from every 'Scripture of the Lord') but are not to eat from heretical sources (*ibid.* V 20.2 [ANF I 548]).

Irenaeus was not only instrumental in limiting and identifying the fourfold Gospel canon, but he also proved to be the champion of peace in the Paschal Controversy.<sup>23</sup> The altercation that erupted between Bishop of Rome Victor I and Polycrates of Ephesus occurred approximately a decade after Irenaeus had already argued for the uniqueness of the four apostolic Gospels in *Adversus Haereses*, and therefore it would be problematic to postulate that Irenaeus formulated his doctrine of the fourfold Gospel canon in response to the Paschal Controversy.<sup>24</sup> However, Irenaeus acknowledges that the debate had arisen before his time, even during the days of Polycarp of Smyrna.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, one could conclude that Irenaeus anticipated the Paschal Controversy as he penned *Adversus Haereses*, especially since we know that Irenaeus' communication with Victor of Rome

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<sup>23</sup> The Paschal Controversy primarily concerned the dating of the celebration of Easter. Following the tradition of *Matthew* and the Synoptic Gospels, the Roman churches maintained that Jesus died on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, but churches in Asia Minor, following the tradition in the Gospel of John, claimed that Jesus died on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan (see August Strobel, *Ursprung und Geschichte des frühchristlichen Osterkalenders* [Berlin, 1977], 14). While the Synoptic Gospels record that Jesus celebrated the Last Supper as a normal Passover meal and was crucified on Passover day (*Matth.* 26:2, 17, 27:62; *Mark* 14:12, 15:42; *Luke* 22:7, 23:54), *John* records that the Last Supper was celebrated not as the Passover meal but the evening before (*John* 13:1-2). According to *John's* portrayal then, Jesus died the day before Passover, i.e., the day the Passover lambs were to be slain (*John* 19:31).

<sup>24</sup> In *Adversus Haereses* III 3.3, Irenaeus lists the bishops from Peter to the present day, ending with Eleutherius, the bishop of Rome immediately preceding Victor. It is therefore certain that Irenaeus wrote *Adversus Haereses* before the altercation between Polycrates of Ephesus and Victor of Rome.

<sup>25</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* IV 14.1, V 24.16-7. Melito of Sardis stated too that there was an outbreak of the Paschal Controversy in Laodicea in ca. 165 A.D. (*ibid.* IV 26.3).

represented not a single epistle but rather an entire correspondence.<sup>26</sup> But, if there is a slight chronological discrepancy between the climax of the Pascal Controversy and the appearance of Irenaeus' proclamation of the fourfold Gospel canon, there are significant theological ties linking the Paschal Controversy to the definition of the equal authority of the four apostolic Gospels. First of all, a number of clues indicate that the nature of the debate concerned the variances in the traditions of the four Gospels.<sup>27</sup> Apollinaris of Hierapolis alleges, for example, that those who oppose the Quartodecimans base their position upon the *Gospel of Matthew* and fail to consider the other Gospels.<sup>28</sup> In addition,

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<sup>26</sup> Photius recounts the controversy as follows: "At that time Victor was pope of Rome, whom Irenaeus frequently exhorted by letter not to excommunicate any members of the Church on account of a disagreement about Easter" (*Bib.*, 120 [*The Library of Photius*, transl. John Henry Freese [London, 1920], 211]).

<sup>27</sup> It is important to understand that the Paschal Controversy was then not understood as a direct clash between the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John, but rather a conflict between traditions handed down by the apostles and codified in their respective Gospels. Socrates (*Hist. Eccl.* V 22) and Sozomen (*Hist. Eccl.* VII 19) portray the conflict as between the tradition handed down by John to the churches of Asia Minor and the tradition handed down by Peter and Paul to the Roman churches. Both historians assume that both traditions were historical. Norbert Brox concludes concerning these passages from Sozomen and Socrates: 'Es ist nicht recht glaubhaft, daß dieser Konflikt später konstruiert worden ist: Es steht die eine apostolische Tradition gegen die andere' (Tendenzen und Parteilichkeiten im Osterfeststreit des zweiten Jahrhunderts: *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 83 [1972], 291-324, at 294).

<sup>28</sup> Apollinaris writes: 'There are, then, some who through ignorance raise disputes about these things ... and say that on the fourteenth day the Lord ate the lamb with the disciples, and that on the great day of the feast of unleavened bread He Himself suffered and they quote Matthew as speaking in accordance with their view. Wherefore their opinion is contrary to the law, and the Gospels seem to be at variance with them' (*Chron. Pasch.*, pf. [ANF VIII 772]).

the Quartodeciman position is virtually always supported with specific reference to the tradition of the Apostle John.<sup>29</sup> It would therefore seem probable that the four apostolic Gospels were not received as of absolutely equal authority during this time in church history. As Eusebius describes the controversy, although Irenaeus is sympathetic with the churches in Asia Minor, he stands dogmatically with the Roman church. But Norbert Brox has argued compellingly that Irenaeus was in fact convinced of the orthodoxy of the churches in Asia Minor, for Irenaeus' summary of the conflict between Polycarp and Anicetus actually implies the correctness of Polycarp.<sup>30</sup> Brox points out that Irenaeus does not set Polycarp and Anicetus on an equal footing concerning the apostolicity of their respective positions but rather states that, while Polycarp could not persuade Anicetus to accept the apostolic teaching, neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp *not* to hold to the apostolic teaching.

Furthermore, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that Irenaeus himself was a Quartodeciman.<sup>31</sup> We know from Pseudo-Justin Martyr's *Quaestiones et Responsiones ad Orthodoxos* that Irenaeus had indeed written a treatise on Easter; clearly the issue was

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<sup>29</sup> See Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* V 24.3.

<sup>30</sup> N. Brox writes: 'Die römische, sonntägliche Osterfeier ist für ihn nachapostolisch, was aus Gründen des Friedenswillens so nicht ausgesprochen wird, aber indirekt dasteht' (Tendenzen und Parteilichkeiten im Osterfeststreit des zweiten Jahrhunderts [1972], 300).

<sup>31</sup> According to Gerard Rouwhorst's studies, the Quartodeciman position was actually the historical one: 'Everything indicates that the Quartodeciman Passover dates back to the beginning of Christianity in Asia, that is, to apostolic times' (Liturgy on the Authority of the Apostles, in: *The Apostolic Age in Patristic Thought*, ed. A. Hilhorst, SVigChr 70 [Brill, 2004], 63-85, at 67). A. Strobel collaborates: 'Die quartadecimanische Feier setzt ohne Zweifel eine älteste urchristliche Praxis fort' (*Ursprung und Geschichte des frühchristlichen Osterkalenders*, 1977, 18).

very important to him.<sup>32</sup> But, when Irenaeus states that Jesus suffered on the very day of the Passover, he unambiguously identifies himself as standing with the Quartodeciman position of the Asian churches:

Of the day of his passion, too, he was not ignorant; but foretold him, after a figurative manner, by the name given to the Passover; and at that very festival, which had been proclaimed such a long time previously by Moses, did our Lord suffer, thus fulfilling the Passover.<sup>33</sup>

Irenaeus also affirms explicitly that the Apostles taught that the church should not split over the celebration of feast days and new moon festivals.<sup>34</sup> We therefore can read Irenaeus' theory of Scripture and tradition as very possibly arising from the context of the Paschal Controversy:

Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary, in that case, to

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<sup>32</sup> Irenaeus, *Frg.* 7 (ANF I 569).

<sup>33</sup> *Adv. Haer.* IV 10.1 (ANF I 473); see also *ibid.* IV 33.12. Alistair Stewart-Sykes also draws the conclusion that Irenaeus was a Quartodeciman from this passage (*The Lamb's High Feast: Melito, Peri Pascha and the Quartodeciman Paschal Liturgy at Sardis* [Brill, 1998], 152). Polycrates informs us that Melito was a Quartodecimian, and Melito gives evidence of this when he writes that Jesus was being slain at the precise moment that the Passover was being celebrated (*Pass.*, 79).

<sup>34</sup> *Frg.* 38 (ANF I 575)]; see also *Adv. Haer.* IV 33.7, in which context Irenaeus strongly condemns schism in the church.

follow the course of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the churches ... ? Since, therefore, the tradition from the apostles does thus exist in the church, and is permanent among us, let us revert to the scriptural proof furnished by those apostles who did also write the Gospel. ...<sup>35</sup>

Irenaeus' logic is straightforward: the Scriptures must adjudicate variances in the interpretation of the apostolic traditions handed down to the local churches. Although Irenaeus does not mention the Paschal Controversy, this is quite possibly the crisis that inspired his cautiously devised theory. According to Eusebius' record of the Paschal Controversy, Irenaeus was the champion who eventually achieved peace in this highly volatile situation. Irenaeus was also the first to work out the theology of the fourfold Gospel. Based on the fact that Irenaeus had not received an already-forged theory of the fourfold Gospel canon but rather formulated it himself, the most probable conclusion is that Irenaeus developed his theology of the equal authority of the apostolic Gospels in response to the crisis of the Paschal Controversy.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* III 4.1, III 5.1 (ANF I 417).