

# The Origins of John's Gospel

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# Irenaeus and the Authorship of the Fourth Gospel

Lorne Zelyck

It is widely acknowledged that Irenaeus considered the Fourth Evangelist to be the Apostle John,<sup>1</sup> yet Richard Bauckham has consistently argued that Irenaeus distinguished John, the son of Zebedee, from John, the disciple of the Lord.<sup>2</sup> The former is an apostle and member of the Twelve, while the latter is the aged, Beloved Disciple who authored the Fourth Gospel and was associated with Ephesus where he was buried.<sup>3</sup> This distinction coincides with Bauckham's erudite analysis of other Asiatic traditions in the second century, and it challenges the consensus view that has "commonly been assumed and sometimes argued," but is now "vigorously contested."<sup>4</sup> In support of the consensus view, and as a response to Bauckham, this essay will argue that Irenaeus does not make this distinction and that he identifies the Apostle John as the author of the Fourth Gospel, which provides legitimacy and authority to Irenaeus's own arguments against his opponents.<sup>5</sup>

- 1 J.N. Sanders, *The Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943), 5; R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (AB 29, 29A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 1:xxxviii; C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: SPCK, 1978), 101; M. Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (London: SCM, 1989), 3; R.A. Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 124; E. Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 176; C.E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 96; A.J. Köstenberger and S.O. Stout, "The Disciple Jesus Loved: Witness, Author, Apostle—A Response to Richard Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*," *BRR* 18 (2008): 209–231, esp. 223–225; B. Mutschler, "John and His Gospel in the Mirror of Irenaeus of Lyons," in *The Legacy of John* (ed. T. Rasimus; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 319–343, esp. 323; D.J. Unger, trans., *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies*, Book 3 (New York: Newman, 2012), 123 n. 7.
- 2 Bauckham first made this argument in "Papias and Polycrates on the Origin of the Fourth Gospel," *JTS* 44 (1993): 24–69, esp. 67–69; however, it has been reiterated in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 452–471, and *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 70–72. Bauckham's conclusions have been followed by P. Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 252–258.
- 3 This argument was previously made by C.F. Burney, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1922), 138–142; J.J. Gunther, "Early Identifications of Authorship of the Johannine Writings," *JEH* 31 (1980): 407–427, esp. 418–419.
- 4 Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 458.
- 5 I have omitted a critical discussion of the sources and historical reliability of Irenaeus's claims,

### Three “Johns”

Irenaeus identifies three “Johns” in *Against Heresies*—John Mark, John the Baptist, and John the Apostle. It is necessary to elucidate how Irenaeus describes these individuals so that their identities are not conflated or confused.

#### *John Mark*

In support of the claim that Luke faithfully transmitted Paul’s teachings, Irenaeus notes that Luke was a constant traveling companion of Paul and then paraphrases material from Acts 15–16: “For he says that when Barnabas, and John who was called Mark, had parted company from Paul, and sailed to Cyprus, ‘we came to Troas’” (*Adv. Haer.* 3.14.1). This is the only time John Mark is mentioned, and Irenaeus is certainly dependent on Acts 15:37 to identify this “John.”<sup>6</sup>

#### *John the Baptist*

Quoting Matt 11:11 in *Adv. Haer.* 3.10.1, Irenaeus mentions “John the Baptist” and refers to him as “John” seven times in the chapter. Irenaeus also identifies him as “the forerunner” twice in 3.9.1 and once in 3.11.4, where he also refers to him as “John” four times. Quotations from the Gospels are attributed to “John” (the Baptist by implication) (1.3.5; 3.9.1; 3.10.2) and “John the Baptist” (4.4.3; 4.7.2; 5.17.4; 5.32.2).<sup>7</sup> Irenaeus twice mentions the “baptism of John” (1.21.2; 3.14.3) and indicates that the “law terminated with John [the Baptist]” (4.4.2).

When Irenaeus refers to “John” without an epithet, how can we be sure that this is “John” (the Baptist) and not another “John”? There are three criteria available to determine that the “John” to which Irenaeus refers is “John” (the Baptist).

- (1) *The association of “John” with an epithetic John.* In 3.10.1, Irenaeus refers to “John” three times before quoting Matt 11:11, which mentions “John the Baptist.” It is reasonable to conclude that, based on the context, Irenaeus is referring to the same person and “John” is simply an abbreviated form of “John the Baptist.”

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as well as their relationship with other early Christian authors, in order to focus on the claims of Irenaeus himself, which is what Bauckham has called into question.

6 All quotations of *Against Heresies* are from A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, and A.C. Coxe, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1: Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus* (repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994); the Greek and Latin texts are from A. Rousseau, ed., *Irénée de Lyon: Contre Les Hérésies* (SC 100, 153, 211, 264, 294; Paris: Cerf, 1965–1982).

7 The identity of the referent is placed in parenthesis and is based on this author’s interpretation.

- (2) *Assumed knowledge of the biblical text.* Irenaeus attributes a quotation of Luke 3:17 to “John” in 1.3.5, and then refers to “John” six times before a reference to “John the Baptist” is introduced in 3.10.1. This suggests that Irenaeus assumed his audience was familiar with the biblical text and knew that the “John” who spoke the words of Luke 3:17 was John the Baptist, even before he is identified with the epithet.<sup>8</sup>
- (3) *Quotations attributed to the same “John.”* Irenaeus attributes a quotation of Matt 3:7–9 to “John” in 3.9.1, but a quotation of Matt 3:9 is attributed to “John the Baptist” in 5.32.2, which indicates that the “John” of 3.9.1 is the same person as “John the Baptist” in 5.32.2.

These three criteria are useful in that they help us identify “John” with “John the Baptist,” and they also reveal that Irenaeus regularly refers to “John” instead of the epithetic “John the Baptist.” Yet when Irenaeus refers to “John” without an epithet (outside the above examples where it is to John Mark or John the Baptist), it is impossible to prove that he is referring to anyone other than the Apostle John.

### *John the Apostle*

Irenaeus identifies the Apostle John as “John” (the son of Zebedee), “John, the disciple of the Lord,” and the author of the Fourth Gospel. Despite the varying epithets and descriptions, it is apparent that Irenaeus is referring to the same individual.

#### 1 “John” (the Son of Zebedee)

Irenaeus never refers to a person called “John, the son of Zebedee” in *Against Heresies*. A certain “John” is grouped with James and Peter at the Transfiguration (2.24.4), and these three are also associated with all the events of Jesus’ ministry (3.12.15). Irenaeus also pairs a “John” with Peter in a paraphrased account of Acts 3–4 (3.12.3–5). Does Irenaeus differentiate these Johns—one “John” who is a member of the inner three and another “John” who is a ministry partner of Peter? Bauckham agrees that these passages are “unequivocal references to John the son of Zebedee,”<sup>9</sup> but it must be emphasized that Irenaeus only refers to an individual named “John” without explicitly stating that he is the son of Zebedee. Although Irenaeus does not indicate that he is quoting

8 Furthermore, Irenaeus must have assumed that his audience was familiar with the biblical text and able to recognize that “John, the disciple of the Lord” (3.11.1) is “John” (the disciple of the Lord) (3.11.2), but not “John” (the Baptist) (3.11.4) who is “John the forerunner” (3.11.4).

9 Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 458. See also Gunther, “Authorship,” 418.

any particular text, Bauckham has made the logical assumption that Irenaeus is following the biblical text (see criterion 2 above), which indicates that John, the son of Zebedee, is a member of the inner three and presumably is the same John who ministered with Peter in Acts.

The term “Zebedee” only occurs once, and this is when Irenaeus states that his opponents indicate there is a second baptism because of Jesus’ response to the question posed by the mother of the “sons of Zebedee” (1.21.2). Irenaeus does not indicate that this is John and James, but this is the logical conclusion if it is again assumed that he is following the biblical text (Matt 20:20–28; Mark 10:35–45).

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Irenaeus identifies the “John” who is grouped with Peter and James, paired with Peter, and one of the “sons of Zebedee” as “John” (the son of Zebedee). It is important to note that in all three groupings, Irenaeus considers “John” (the son of Zebedee) to be an apostle. Peter, James, and John are “the apostles, whom the Lord made witnesses of every action and of every doctrine” (3.12.15); Peter and John are “the apostles” who preached to the people, were dismissed by the chief priests, and “returned to the rest of their fellow-apostles and disciples of the Lord” (3.12.4–5); and “the apostles” that “left the ship and their father, and followed the Word” (4.5.4) is surely a reference to James and John—the sons of Zebedee (Matt 4:21–22; Mark 1:20).

It must be emphasized that Irenaeus only refers to this apostle as “John.” Based on the knowledge of the biblical text, Irenaeus expects his audience to know that the Apostle John is the son of Zebedee.

## 2 John, the Disciple of the Lord

However, one runs into identification problems when Irenaeus attributes traditions and epithets to “John” that are not found in the biblical text. Three examples will show how this problem is specifically related to the identification of “John” (the disciple of the Lord).

First, in response to his opponents’ claim that Jesus’ ministry lasted only a year, Irenaeus takes an overly literal interpretation of John 8:57 and concludes that Jesus was over forty years old when he suffered. His argument is as follows:

Now, that the first stage of early life embraces thirty years, and that this extends onwards to the fortieth year, every one will admit; but from the fortieth and fiftieth year a man begins to decline towards old age, which our Lord possessed while He still fulfilled the office of a Teacher, even as the Gospel and all the elders testify; those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord, (affirming) that John conveyed

to them that information. And he remained among them up to the times of Trajan. Some of them, moreover, saw not only John, but the other apostles also (*Quidam autem eorum non solum Iohannem, sed et alios apostolos uiderunt*), and heard the very same account from them, and bear testimony as to the (validity of) the statement.

*Adv. Haer.* 2.22.5

Irenaeus not only appeals to “the Gospel,” which is presumably John 8:57 (see 2.22.6), but also the testimony of all the elders in Asia who claim that “John, the disciple of the Lord” and the “other apostles” testified that Jesus was over forty years old when he suffered. The association of “John, the disciple of the Lord,” who is also referred to as “John,” with the “other apostles” indicates that Irenaeus considered him to be an apostle.

Second, this association is also apparent in the letter to Victor, bishop of Rome (preserved by Eusebius), concerning the Quartodeciman controversy. Irenaeus claims that Polycarp’s practice was based on the traditions of “John the disciple of our Lord, and the other apostles with whom he had associated” (Ἰωάννου τοῦ μαθητοῦ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν, καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἀποστόλων οἷς συνδείτρι-ψεν) (*HE* 5.24.16).

Third, Irenaeus defends the succession of apostolic tradition throughout the Asiatic churches and indicates that he has heard from others a tradition told by Polycarp:

There are also those who heard from him [Polycarp] that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, “Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.” And Polycarp himself replied to Marcion, who met him on one occasion, and said, “Do you know me?” “I do know you, the first-born of Satan.” Such was the horror which the apostles and their disciples (οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτῶν || *Apostoli et horum discipuli*) had against holding even verbal communication with any corrupters of the truth ... Then, again, the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles.

*Adv. Haer.* 3.3.4

The coupling of “John, the disciple of the Lord” and Polycarp with “the apostles and their disciples” indicates that Irenaeus considered “John, the disciple of the Lord” to be one of “the apostles” and Polycarp to be one of “their disciples.”

Irenaeus also identifies “John” and Paul as the apostles who deposited the apostolic tradition in the church of Ephesus. The association of “John, the disciple of the Lord,” who is also referred to as simply “John,” with “the other apostles” indicates that Irenaeus considered him to be an apostle.<sup>10</sup>

These three examples reveal that Irenaeus considered the Apostle John to be “John, the disciple of the Lord.” However, it has also been shown that Irenaeus considered the Apostle John to be “John” (the son of Zebedee). If the following formula is fundamentally coherent:  $a = b$ ,  $c = b$ ,  $a = c$ , then (a) “John” (the son of Zebedee) who is (b) an “apostle” must be equated with (c) “John, the disciple of the Lord” who is also (b) an “apostle,” unless of course, Irenaeus thought there were two apostles named “John” or the category of “apostle” (see below) extends beyond the Twelve.

### 3 The Apostle “John, the Disciple of the Lord” is Not the Same as the Apostle “John, the Son of Zebedee”?

Bauckham has argued that “John, the disciple of the Lord” is not “John, the son of Zebedee,” since the latter is never associated with the former. He states: “We should add that none of these references to John the son of Zebedee [see above] apply to him Irenaeus’s characteristic identifying epithet for the author of the Gospel of John: ‘the disciple of the Lord.’”<sup>11</sup> Yet this is a straw-man argument. First, as already noted, Irenaeus never refers to “John, the son of Zebedee”; he simply refers to “John.” Identifying “John” with “John” (the son of Zebedee) is an interpretive decision based on the comparison of Irenaeus’s description of “John” with the biblical text’s description of “John.” Second, “the disciple of the Lord” is an epithet that never refers to one person in the biblical text. Therefore, it is impossible to associate “John, the son of Zebedee” with “John, the disciple of the Lord” because the former is only found in the biblical text and not in *Against Heresies*, while the latter only exists in *Against Heresies* and not in the biblical text.

In order to determine if Irenaeus identifies “John, the son of Zebedee” with “John, the disciple of the Lord,” we may apply the three criteria used to identify “John” with “John” (the Baptist), but they are not entirely helpful in these instances.

The first criterion, the association of “John” with an epithetic John, produces skewed results. As the above examples show, Irenaeus can refer to “John, the

10 Eusebius twice reiterates Irenaeus’s account of the bathhouse incident in *Ecclesiastical History*. In 3.28.6, he paraphrases Irenaeus and refers to the “apostle John,” but in 4.14.6–7, Eusebius follows Irenaeus more closely and refers to “John, the disciple of the Lord.”

11 Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 459.

disciple of the Lord” as “John”—the same way he refers to “John” (the son of Zebedee). Since the epithet “the son of Zebedee” does not exist, it can be argued that every occurrence of “John” refers to “John, the disciple of the Lord” because there is no other option (except “John” [the Baptist]). “John” (the son of Zebedee) cannot ever be associated with the epithet “John, the son of Zebedee,” while “John” (the disciple of the Lord) can always be associated with “John, the disciple of the Lord.” It is impossible to prove that “John” refers to anyone except “John, the disciple of the Lord,” unless the second or third criteria are employed (such as in 2.24.4; 3.12.3–5, 15, where it refers to “John” [the son of Zebedee]).

The second criterion, assumed knowledge of the biblical text, is also irrelevant for the identification of “John” in the examples above (2.22.5; 3.3.4). Although we are able to resort to the biblical text to confirm that the “John” grouped with Peter and James was the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, this option is unavailable, since Irenaeus recounts traditions that are not recorded in the biblical text. We are unable to resort to the biblical text to determine if Irenaeus is recounting an event of “John” (the son of Zebedee) but applying to him the epithet, “the disciple of the Lord.”

The third criterion, quotations attributed to the same “John,” is unhelpful because the above examples are the sole occurrences of these traditions in *Against Heresies*. We are unable to determine if Irenaeus attributes the source of these traditions to anyone other than the Apostle, “John, the disciple of the Lord,” who is also referred to as “John.”

Since it is impossible to prove the association of “John” (the son of Zebedee) with “John, the disciple of the Lord,” it is a moot argument to claim that Irenaeus distinguishes them because he never associates them.<sup>12</sup> Irenaeus identifies both “John” (the son of Zebedee) and “John, the disciple of the Lord” as an apostle, so the burden of proof is on those who would seek to differentiate the Apostle John.

#### 4 Author of the Fourth Gospel

Irenaeus also indicates that the Apostle John is the author of the Fourth Gospel. Bauckham appears to concede this point when he states, “If we look for any possible clues that Irenaeus identified John ‘the disciple of the Lord’ with John the son of Zebedee, one of the Twelve, the only evidence that is even possibly relevant is Irenaeus’s references to John the author of the Gospel as

<sup>12</sup> One plausible way Irenaeus could have explicitly identified “John” (the son of Zebedee) as “John, the disciple of the Lord” would have been to attribute the words of “John” (the son of Zebedee) from the biblical text (Mark 9:38, 10:35, 37, 39, 13:4; Luke 9:49, 54) to “John, the disciple of the Lord.” However, Irenaeus does not quote these passages.

‘the apostle’ or as one of a group called ‘the apostles.’<sup>13</sup> Yet this is a red-herring. The identification of “John” (the son of Zebedee) with “John, the disciple of the Lord” is not dependent on the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. Without referring to the authorship of the Fourth Gospel, the previous examples have shown that Irenaeus considers “John” (the son of Zebedee) and “John, the disciple of the Lord” to be an apostle.

However, Irenaeus does attribute the authorship of the Fourth Gospel to the Apostle John, whom he refers to as “John, the disciple of the Lord” or simply “John.” In *Adv. Haer.* 1.8.5, Irenaeus describes how Ptolemaeus<sup>14</sup> exegetes the prologue of the Fourth Gospel in order to reveal the Ogdoad. Irenaeus indicates that Ptolemaeus is referring to the teachings of “John, the disciple of the Lord,” and Ptolemaeus’s teaching begins like this: “John, the disciple of the Lord, wishing to set forth the origin of all things, so as to explain how the Father produced the whole, lays down a certain principle ...” The rest of the pericope records Ptolemaeus’s quotation and interpretation of John 1:1–5, 14. All the quotations of John 1:1–5, 14 are simply attributed to “John,” but the introductory remark indicates that this is “John, the disciple of the Lord” (see criterion 1). In *Adv. Haer.* 1.9.1, Irenaeus points out their hermeneutical errors, and in 1.9.2, he repudiates Ptolemaeus’s exposition of John 1:1–5, 14, which claims that “John” was not speaking about Jesus but rather the primary Ogdoad and other Pleromic beings. Irenaeus then paraphrases John 1:1–5 and states:

Thus it is that, wresting from the truth every one of the expressions which have been cited, and taking a bad advantage of the names, they have transferred them to their own system; so that, according to them, in all these terms John makes no mention of the Lord Jesus Christ. For if he has named the Father, and Charis, and Monogenes, and Aletheia, and Logos, and Zoe, and Anthropos, and Ecclesia, according to their hypothesis, he has, by thus speaking, referred to the primary Ogdoad, in which there was as yet no Jesus, and no Christ, the teacher of John. But that the apostle (ὁ ἀπόστολος || *Apostolus*) did not speak concerning their conjunctions, but concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, whom he also acknowledges as the Word of God, he himself has made evident. For, summing up his statements respecting the Word previously mentioned by him, he further declares, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14)

13 Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 461.

14 The conclusion to 1.8.5, “Such are the views of Ptolemaeus,” is only extant in the Latin version.

... Learn then, you foolish men, that Jesus who suffered for us, and who dwelt among us, is Himself the Word of God. For if any other of the Aeons had become flesh for our salvation, it would have been probable that the apostle (τὸν ἀπόστολον || *Apostolum*) spoke of another ... But flesh is that which was of old formed for Adam by God out of the dust, and it is this that John has declared the Word of God became.

*Adv. Haer.* 1.9.2–3

Irenaeus attributes the same passages that his opponents misinterpret to “the apostle” twice and “John” once. Since Ptolemaeus attributes John 1:1–5, 14 to “John, the disciple of the Lord” (1.8.5), and Irenaeus paraphrases these passages and attributes them to “John” and “the apostle” (1.9.2–3), it is evident that “the apostle” who authored John 1:1–5, 14 can be referred to as either “John” or “John, the disciple of the Lord.”<sup>15</sup>

When one examines how Irenaeus introduces quotations of John 1:1–5, 14 (see criterion 3), he regularly attributes the quotation to either “John” or “John, the disciple of the Lord,” but never to “the apostle” outside 1.9.2–3.<sup>16</sup> Yet it is presumptuous to conclude that every time Irenaeus attributes a quotation from the Fourth Gospel to “John, the disciple of the Lord,” he is somehow distinguished from the Apostle John. Furthermore, this mitigates Bauckham’s claim that “Irenaeus’s characteristic identifying epithet for the author of the Gospel of John [is] ‘the disciple of the Lord.’”<sup>17</sup> Although Irenaeus considers the author of John 1:1–5, 14 to be the Apostle John, he can simply refer to him as “John” before introducing a quotation of John 1:3 (see 3.8.3), without a proximal relationship to “John, the disciple of the Lord.” The nearest previous reference to “John” is to “the apostle” in 3.3.4, and “John, the disciple of the Lord” is not mentioned until 3.11.1. Irenaeus does regularly refer to the author of the Fourth Gospel as “John, the disciple of the Lord,” but this is not entirely characteristic since he also refers to him as “the apostle” and “John.”

15 In *Epid.* 43, Irenaeus attributes a quotation of John 1:1–3 to “His disciple John.” In *Epid.* 31, Irenaeus states that “the Word was made flesh,” but does not indicate that he is quoting a source, yet in *Epid.* 94, he also attributes a quotation of John 1:14 to “His disciple John.”

16 In five instances, Irenaeus does not specify the source of his quotation (1.22.1, John 1:3; 3.10.2, John 1:14; 3.16.2, John 1:14; 3.21.10, John 1:3; 3.32.1, John 1:3 [introduced with “as we read in the Gospel”]; 5.1.3, John 1:13–14). In three instances, these passages are simply attributed to “John” or the Gospel of John (3.8.3, John 1:3; 3.11.2, John 1:14; 3.11.8, John 1:1, 3), and in five instances, these passages are attributed to “John, the disciple of the Lord” (1.8.5, see above; 2.2.5, John 1:3; 3.11.1, John 1:1–5 [paraphrase]; 3.11.3, John 1:14; 5.18.2, John 1:1–3, 10–12, 14).

17 Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 459.

## The Apostles

It has so far been shown that Irenaeus explicitly and implicitly indicated that the author of the Fourth Gospel is the Apostle John, whom he can refer to as either “John” or “John, the disciple of the Lord.” Bauckham is willing to allow for the possibility that Irenaeus identified the author of the Fourth Gospel as an apostle, but then argues that Irenaeus does not consider “the apostles” to be limited to the Twelve. Rather, this broad category includes: Paul, Barnabas, the Seventy, and John the Baptist.

### *Paul*

Bauckham states: “‘the apostles’ for Irenaeus are not just the Twelve, as his frequent references to Paul as ‘the apostle’ make absolutely clear ...”<sup>18</sup> However, this is not only the opinion of Irenaeus; it is a claim found within the biblical text. Irenaeus is simply following the biblical text, which indicates that it is the Twelve that are apostles, and that Paul, who is not a member of the Twelve, is also an apostle (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1). This is a biblical paradox that cannot be attributed to Irenaeus—is it the name of Judas, Paul, or Matthias that will be engraved on the twelfth foundation stone of the celestial city’s wall (Rev 21:14)?

### *Barnabas*

Bauckham briefly states: “Barnabas is also for Irenaeus an apostle (3.12.14), as he was for Paul (1 Cor 9:1–6).”<sup>19</sup> It is entirely unclear how Bauckham arrives at this conclusion. Irenaeus simply narrates the events of Acts 15 where Paul and Barnabas went to the apostles in Jerusalem (3.12.14). Nothing in this pericope indicates that Barnabas is an apostle.<sup>20</sup>

### *The Seventy*

Bauckham also indicates: “The Seventy whom Jesus sent out in addition to the Twelve are also apostles.”<sup>21</sup> In 2.21.1, Irenaeus is mocking his opponents’ claim that the Duodecad of pleromic beings was signified by the Twelve apostles, and he attempts to outwit their number-crunching with his own.

Irenaeus questions the logic of identifying “the apostles” with the Duodecad only, since there is a Tricontad of pleromic beings. He questions why, if the

18 Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 462.

19 Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 462.

20 Bauckham omits this example in *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*.

21 Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 462.

number of apostles is representative of one portion of the Pleroma, did Jesus not appoint eight and ten other apostles to indicate the Ogdoad and Decad, so that the entire pleromic Tricontad may be identified?<sup>22</sup> The obvious conclusion is that Jesus did not call eighteen other apostles because the apostles are not symbolic representations of the Pleroma. To show the absurdity of their claim, Irenaeus states: “For (He made choice of no such other number of disciples; but) after the twelve apostles, our Lord is found to have sent seventy others before Him (Luke 10:1). Now seventy cannot possibly be the type either of an Ogdoad, a Decad, or a Triacontad” (2.21.1). In order to show that his opponents do not attribute meaning to “seventy” but are primarily interested in the numbers “eight, ten, and twelve,” totaling thirty, he continues, “But if the twelve apostles were chosen with this object, that the number of the twelve Aeons might be indicated by means of them, then the seventy also ought to have been chosen to be the type of seventy Aeons; and in that case, they must affirm that the Aeons are no longer thirty, but eighty-two in number” (2.21.1).

Irenaeus never explicitly indicates that the Seventy are in fact apostles, rather, this is as close as he gets—a mocking interpretation of a hypothetical situation whereby numbered groups represent pleromic beings.<sup>23</sup> He indicates that, if the twelve apostles represent Aeons, then his opponents should conclude that the Seventy (never called apostles) also represent Aeons, so that there would be eighty-two Aeons, if they were being consistent. However, Irenaeus’s point is that his opponents’ pleromic cosmology is inconsistent, but not that he considers the Seventy to be apostles. It is difficult to agree with Bauckham that Irenaeus “leaves no possible doubt that he considered the Seventy to be apostles like the Twelve.”<sup>24</sup>

### *John the Baptist*

Lastly, Bauckham concludes that Irenaeus considered John the Baptist to be an apostle.<sup>25</sup> In 3.9.1, Irenaeus sets out to prove that the prophets and apostles proclaimed the same God. He continues this argument to 3.11.4 where the primary issue is the validity of the witness of “John” (the Baptist). Irenaeus states the issue and provides a response: “John, therefore, having been sent by the

<sup>22</sup> Irenaeus elucidates his opponents’ pleromic cosmology in 1.1.1–1.2.6.

<sup>23</sup> Irenaeus does not associate the Seventy with the Twelve apostles in 3.13.2, but states, “For why did the Lord send the twelve apostles to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, if these men did not know the truth? How also did the seventy preach, unless they had themselves previously known the truth of what was preached?”

<sup>24</sup> Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 462.

<sup>25</sup> Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 462.

founder and maker of this world, how could he testify of that Light, which came down from things unspeakable and invisible? For all the heretics have decided that the Demiurge was ignorant of that Power above him, whose witness and herald John is found to be. Wherefore the Lord said that He deemed him ‘more than a prophet’ (3.11.4). The issue is: How could “John” (the Baptist), who was an emissary of the Demiurge, speak about the true God? Irenaeus responds with a quotation of Matt 11:9//Luke 7:26 which indicates that he was “more than prophet”; he was more than an emissary of the Demiurge.

In order to validate the witness of “John” (the Baptist), Irenaeus explains that he was “more than a prophet,” which, based on the ordering of offices listed in 1 Cor 12:28, must mean that he was an “apostle.” “For all the other prophets preached the advent of the paternal Light, and desired to be worthy of seeing Him whom they preached; but John did both announce (the advent) beforehand, in a like manner as did the others, and actually saw Him when He came, and pointed Him out, and persuaded many to believe on Him, so that he did himself hold the place of both prophet and apostle. For this is to be more than a prophet, because, ‘first apostles, secondarily prophets;’ but all things from one and the same God Himself” (3.11.4). It is difficult to imagine that his exegesis would have been convincing to his opponents (or allies!), but it still does not indicate that Irenaeus considered John to be in the same category as the Twelve. If Irenaeus used the term “apostle” functionally and wanted to validate John’s role as an eyewitness, then there is nothing to suggest that Irenaeus considered him to be categorically linked with the Twelve. This appears to be the rationale behind Irenaeus’s explanation that the prophets preached about the “paternal Light” which they had not seen, as John had done until he saw the light himself, and then, like the twelve apostles, he too became an eyewitness to the “advent of the paternal Light” and proclaimed what he saw.

This interpretation aligns with Irenaeus’s repeated emphasis that John the Baptist is a reliable witness to Jesus (see 3.10.5). In 3.10.1, Irenaeus quotes Matt 11:9 and applies it to “John.” “For whom, then, did he prepare the people, and in the sight of what Lord was he made great? Truly of Him who said that John had something even ‘more than a prophet,’ and that ‘among those born of women none is greater than John the Baptist;’ who did also make the people ready for the Lord’s advent, warning his fellow-servants, and preaching to them repentance, that they might receive remission from the Lord when He should be present, having been converted to Him, from whom they had been alienated because of sins and transgressions” (3.10.1). Irenaeus again identifies “John” (the Baptist) as “more than a prophet,” but there is nothing in this pericope

to indicate that he considered “John” (the Baptist) to be an apostle. Rather, he is a reliable witness who warned “his fellow-servants” of the advent of the Lord. Furthermore, while Luke 1:41 indicates that John leaped in Elizabeth’s womb when she heard the greeting of Mary, Irenaeus interprets this event and indicates that John “recognizing the Lord, saluted with leaping” (3.16.4). This indicates that Irenaeus is able to interpret biblical passages in a way that emphasizes the stature of John the Baptist as a reliable witness. Therefore, it is probable that Irenaeus’s inference that John the Baptist was an apostle is simply related to his function as a reliable witness to Jesus, not that he is categorically equivalent to the twelve apostles.

### *The Twelve*

When one evaluates Irenaeus’s use of “apostle,” it consistently refers to the Twelve. Judas is the twelfth apostle, since there are “twelve apostles mentioned by name in the Gospel” (2.20.4). Irenaeus refers to “the election of the apostles, for of these there were twelve” (1.3.2), and his opponents recognize there are twelve apostles and that Jesus appeared to the ten apostles after his resurrection, since Thomas (and obviously Judas) were absent (1.18.3). Irenaeus clearly considers the Twelve to be “the apostles” when he recounts the election of Matthias. “The Apostle Peter, therefore, after the resurrection of the Lord, and His assumption into the heavens, being desirous of filling up the number of the twelve apostles, and in electing into the place of Judas any substitute who should be chosen by God, thus addressed those who were present [see Acts 1:16–17; Ps 69:25, 109:8] ... [and] thus leading to the completion of the apostles, according to the words spoken by David” (3.12.1). Irenaeus considered the apostles to be the Twelve, and after the defection of Judas, the election of Matthias was the “filling up of the number of the twelve apostles” which provided “the completion of the apostles.” If Irenaeus considered apostleship to be a broad category, it is difficult to understand how the election of the twelfth apostle would provide “the completion of the apostles.”

### *The Apostles and Disciples*

It should also be noted that Irenaeus consistently refers to the same individuals as apostles or disciples.<sup>26</sup> John is the “disciple of the Lord,” but all of the (twelve)

<sup>26</sup> One cannot assert that a disciple is not an apostle, without qualification. Irenaeus indicates that Judas is “the twelfth in order of the disciples” and then states that “Judas the traitor is the twelfth in order, is agreed upon by all, there being twelve apostles mentioned

apostles are categorically disciples of the Lord. Irenaeus claims that some of the Carpocratians “declare themselves similar to Jesus; while others, still more mighty, maintain that they are superior to his disciples, such as Peter and Paul, and the rest of the apostles (τινάς δὲ καὶ διαφορωτέρους τῶν ἐκείνου μαθητῶν, οἷον Πέτρου καὶ Παύλου καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἀποστόλων || *qui sunt distantes amplius quam illius discipuli, ut puta quam Petrus et Paulus et reliqui apostoli*), whom they consider to be in no respect inferior to Jesus” (1.25.2). Irenaeus himself also categorizes the apostolic Gospel authors as disciples:

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, in which they recorded the doctrine regarding God, pointing out that our Lord Jesus Christ is the truth (John 14:6), and that no lie is in Him (1John 2:21). As also David says, prophesying His birth from a virgin, and the resurrection from the dead, “Truth has sprung out of the earth” (Psalm 85:11). The apostles, likewise, being disciples of the truth, are above all falsehood (*Et apostoli autem discipuli Veritatis existentes extra omne mendacium sunt*).

*Adv. Haer.* 3.5.1

All the apostolic authors of the Gospels are “disciples of the ‘truth’ (= Lord Jesus Christ)” and proclaim the same doctrine, but it is noteworthy that the Gospel passage Irenaeus alludes to is from John, the disciple of the Lord. He does not make a categorical distinction between the authorship of John and the other Gospels or the disciple of the Lord and the disciples of truth; all are apostles.

### The Apostolic Authority of John, the Disciple of the Lord

It is necessary to clarify why Irenaeus regularly refers to the author of the Fourth Gospel as “John, the disciple of the Lord.” As a general claim, Irenaeus attributes the canonical Gospels to the apostles (2.6.1; 3.5.1; 3.11.9), but when he desires to draw attention to their apostolic authority, it is somewhat odd that he does not explicitly identify the Fourth Evangelist as an apostle. In order to refute his opponents, Irenaeus appeals to the writings of: “Matthew the apostle” (3.9.1); “Luke also, the follower and disciple of the apostles” (3.10.1); “Mark, the

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by name in the Gospel” (2.21.4). Just because Irenaeus refers to John as “the disciple of the Lord,” it cannot be argued that he is therefore not an apostle.

interpreter and follower of Peter" (3.10.5); and "John, the disciple of the Lord" (3.11.1). Matthew is "the apostle," Luke and Mark are the followers of Paul and Peter (see 3.21.3)—the "blessed apostles" (3.3.3), but John is simply "the disciple of the Lord."<sup>27</sup> Irenaeus reveals the significance of this epithet in 3.1.1 where he draws attention to the apostolic authority of the Synoptic Gospels, and then indicates: "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>28</sup>

### *John Has an Intimate Knowledge of Jesus*

The identification of "John, the disciple of the Lord" with the Beloved Disciple (whom Irenaeus refers to as the one "who also leaned upon His breast"; see John 13:25; 21:20) may indicate that Irenaeus thought that the epithet "disciple of the Lord" carried greater apologetic weight than "the apostle." Bauckham correctly asserts that "the disciple of the Lord" epithet "conveys his special closeness to Jesus, both historically during Jesus' ministry and theologically in his Gospel. Probably, like the modern term 'Beloved Disciple,' it is an abbreviated allusion to the Gospel's more cumbersome phrase: 'the disciple Jesus loved.'<sup>29</sup> Instead of always referring to the Apostle John as the author of the Fourth Gospel, it is probable that Irenaeus used the epithet "the disciple of the Lord" to indicate that he is the most intimate of all the apostles, and therefore, an authoritative and reliable witness to Jesus.<sup>30</sup>

27 In order to validate that Isa 7:14 refers to a "virgin" instead of a "young woman," Irenaeus appeals to the apostles responsible for the Gospels, which includes John; he states: "For the apostles, since they are of more ancient date than all these [heretics], agree with this aforesaid translation; and the translation harmonizes with the tradition of the apostles. For Peter, and John, and Matthew, and Paul, and the rest successively, as well as their followers, did set forth all prophetic [announcements], just as the interpretation of the elders contains them" (3.21.3).

28 Irenaeus uses this same detail to identify the author of the Apocalypse: "But when John could not endure the sight (for he says, 'I fell at his feet as dead'; that what was written might come to pass: 'No man sees God, and shall live'), and the Word reviving him, and reminding him that it was He upon whose bosom he had leaned at supper, when he put the question as to who should betray Him, declared: 'I am the first and the last, and He who lives, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of death and of hell'" (4.20.11).

29 Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 459.

30 See Mutschler, "John and His Gospel," 321–322.

### *John Established the Rule of Truth*

The apostolic authority of John, the disciple of the Lord, is foundational to Irenaeus's own authority as an exegete and heresiologist.

First, John established the apostolic rule of truth, particularly the articulation of the one creator God.<sup>31</sup> In opposition to his opponents, Irenaeus claims, "The rule of truth which we hold, is, that there is one God Almighty, who made all things by His Word, and fashioned and formed, out of that which had no existence, all things which exist. Thus says the Scripture, to that effect 'By the Word of the Lord were the heavens established, and all the might of them, by the spirit of His mouth' (Psalm 33:6). And again, 'All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made' (John 1:3)" (1.22.1). The doctrine of the one creator God was clearly handed on by the apostles: "The Universal Church, moreover, through the whole world, has received this tradition from the apostles" (2.9.1), and "The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith" (1.10.1). But Irenaeus emphasizes that "John, the disciple of the Lord, preaches this faith" and "The disciple of the Lord therefore desiring to put an end to all

31 In the *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*, Irenaeus also describes the "rule of faith" that "the elders, the disciples of the apostles, have handed down to use" (*Epid.* 3). After describing the role of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (*Epid.* 4–5), he summarizes: "And this is the drawing-up of our faith, the foundation of the building, and the consolidation of a way of life. God, the Father, uncreated, beyond grasp, invisible, one God the maker of all; this is the first and foremost article of our faith. But the second article is the Word of God, the Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, who was shown forth by the prophets according to the design of their prophecy and according to the manner in which the Father disposed; and through Him were made all things whatsoever. He also, in the end of times, for the recapitulation of all things, is become a man among men, visible and tangible, in order to abolish death and bring to light life, and bring about the communion of God and man. And the third article is the Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied and the patriarchs were taught about God and the just were led in the path of justice, and who in the end of times has been poured forth in a new manner upon humanity over all the earth renewing man to God" (*Epid.* 6). On Irenaeus and the rule of truth, see V. Ammundsen, "The Rule of Truth in Irenaeus," *JTS* 13 (1912): 574–580; J. McRay, "Scripture and Tradition in Irenaeus," *ResQ* 10 (1967): 1–11; E. Osborn, "Reason and the Rule of Faith in the Second Century AD," in *The Making of Orthodoxy* (ed. R. Williams; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 40–61, esp. 48–51; R.M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London: Routledge, 1997), 46–53; T.C.K. Ferguson, "The Rule of Truth and Irenaeian Rhetoric in Book 1 of 'Against Heresies,'" *VC* 55 (2001): 356–375; R.J.R. Paice, "Irenaeus on the Authority of Scripture, the 'Rule of Truth' and Episcopacy," *Churchman* 117 (2003): 57–71, 133–152; A. Stewart, "'The Rule of Truth ... which He Received through Baptism' (*Haer.* 1.9.4)," in *Irenaeus* (ed. P. Foster and S. Parvis; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 151–158.

such doctrines, and to establish the rule of truth in the Church, that there is one Almighty God, who made all things by His Word, both visible and invisible; showing at the same time, that by the Word, through whom God made the creation, He also bestowed salvation on the men included in the creation; thus commenced His teaching in the Gospel: [John 1:1–5 quotation]” (3.11.1). In the seven instances that Irenaeus explicitly refers to the “rule of truth” (1.9.4; 1.22.1; 2.27.1; 3.11.1; 3.12.6; 3.15.1; 4.35.4), this is the only occurrence where he attributes it to a specific person, which manifests John’s authority.

### *John’s Authority Validates Irenaeus’s Own Authority*

Second, the apostolic authority of John is foundational to Irenaeus’s own authority, which he traces back most importantly through Polycarp, but also through Papias and other eyewitnesses of “John, the disciple of the Lord.”

#### 1 Polycarp

The letter to Victor has already been discussed (see above), but it is useful to recall that Polycarp’s tradition was based on that of “John the disciple of our Lord, and the other apostles” (HE 5.24.16), with John being singled out.

In another letter preserved by Eusebius (HE 5.20.1–8), Irenaeus writes to Florinus to dissuade him of the errors of the Valentinians by appealing to the authority of Polycarp and his relationship to John:

These doctrines, the presbyters who were before us, and who were companions of the apostles, did not deliver to you. For when I was a boy, I saw you in lower Asia with Polycarp, moving in splendor in the royal court, and endeavoring to gain his approbation. I remember the events of that time more clearly than those of recent years. For what boys learn, growing with their mind, becomes joined with it; so that I am able to describe the very place in which the blessed Polycarp sat as he discoursed, and his goings out and his comings in, and the manner of his life, and his physical appearance, and his discourses to the people, and the accounts which he gave of his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord (καὶ τὴν κατὰ Ἰωάννου συναναστροφὴν ὡς ἀπήγγελλε, καὶ τὴν μετὰ τῶν λοιπῶν τῶν ἑωρακῶτων τὸν Κύριον). And as he remembered their words, and what he heard from them concerning the Lord, and concerning his miracles and his teaching, having received them from eyewitnesses of the ‘Word of life’ (1John 1:1), Polycarp related all things in harmony with the Scriptures. These things being told me by the mercy of God, I listened to them attentively, noting them down, not on paper, but in my heart. And continually, through God’s grace, I recall them faithfully. And I am able to bear witness

before God that if that blessed and apostolic presbyter (ἀποστολικὸς πρεσβύτερος) had heard any such thing, he would have cried out, and stopped his ears, and as was his custom, would have exclaimed, O good God, unto what times hast thou spared me that I should endure these things? And he would have fled from the place where, sitting or standing, he had heard such words.

*HE 5.20.4–7*

Although Irenaeus and Florinus were both eyewitnesses to the teachings of Polycarp, Irenaeus's authority is based on not only his impeccable memory, but also the fact that Polycarp (a companion of the apostles, specifically John) had never taught or would ever endure these Valentinian doctrines.

In a similar manner, Irenaeus also appeals to the succession of apostolic teaching through Polycarp to combat Marcion and other heretics:

But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth ... having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles (ταῦτα διδάξας ἀεὶ ἃ καὶ παρὰ τῶν ἀποστόλων ἔμαθεν || *haec docuit semper quae ab apostolis didicerat*), and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time, — a man who was of much greater weight, and a more steadfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics.

*Adv. Haer. 3.3.4*

Irenaeus then recounts from “those who heard from him [Polycarp] that John, the disciple of the Lord” confronted Cerinthus at the bathhouse in Ephesus (see above).

In a final example, Irenaeus indicates that “a presbyter, a disciple of the apostles,” which is likely a reference to Polycarp,<sup>32</sup> maintained that “there was no other God besides Him who made and fashioned us” (4.32.1). Although his opponents claim otherwise, Irenaeus argues that “if any one believes in [only] one God,” which he supports with quotations of Gen 1:3, John 1:3, and Eph 4:5, 6, “then shall every word also seem consistent to him, if he for his part

32 Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 356; J. Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 62.

diligently read the Scriptures in company with those who are presbyters in the Church, among whom is the apostolic doctrine, as I have pointed out" (4.32.1). Surely Irenaeus would place himself in this group due to his relationship with Polycarp, which validates his own interpretations against his opponents.

The apologetic motif of these examples is clear. Irenaeus is able to condemn the teachings of "Valentinus, Marcion, and the rest of the heretics," since it does not align with the testimony of "all the Asiatic churches,"<sup>33</sup> but more importantly, it does not agree with the teaching of "John the disciple of our Lord, and the other apostles," who handed it down to Polycarp, who handed it down to Irenaeus. Universality and antiquity are not the only criteria of authenticity for Irenaeus, since his own authority is just one step removed from the apostles, specifically John, through the testimony of Polycarp.<sup>34</sup>

## 2 Papias and Other Eyewitness

While Polycarp is the most important authoritative source for Irenaeus, he also confirms that his interpretations are validated by Papias and other eyewitnesses of John. In order to bolster his claim of an eschatological, renewed creation, Irenaeus claims that "the elders who saw John, the disciple of the Lord, related that they had heard from him how the Lord used to teach" regarding the abundant production of vines; a non-biblical saying of Jesus (5.33.3). He also indicates that "these things are borne witness to in writing by Papias,<sup>35</sup> the hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp" and "the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until

33 Irenaeus appeals to apostolic authority, so that the "Gospel of Truth" can be outright rejected, since it is "totally unlike those which have been handed down to us from the apostles" (3.11.9), and even though the opponents use the "words of the apostles," their interpretations are false, since they proclaim something "which neither the prophets announced, nor the Lord taught, nor the apostles delivered" (1.8.1).

34 Behr, *Irenaeus*, 66.

35 Eusebius's rejection of chiliasm leads him to claim: "The same writer [Papias] gives also other accounts which he says came to him through unwritten tradition, certain strange parables and teachings of the Saviour, and some other more mythical things. To these belong his statement that there will be a period of some thousand years after the resurrection of the dead, and that the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this very earth. I suppose he got these ideas through a misunderstanding of the apostolic accounts, not perceiving that the things said by them were spoken mystically in figures. For he appears to have been of very limited understanding, as one can see from his discourses. But it was due to him that so many of the Church Fathers after him adopted a like opinion, urging in their own support the antiquity of the man; as for instance Irenaeus and anyone else that may have proclaimed similar views" (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.11–13).

the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles" (5.33.4). Irenaeus can appeal to the authority of John through the elders, which is also validated by Papias and presumably by the church in Ephesus.

As mentioned above, Irenaeus's interpretation of the length of Jesus' ministry was based on "those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord," who also "saw not only John, but the other apostles also, and heard the very same account from them" (2.22.5). Similar to the role of Polycarp for his response to Valentinus, Marcion, and other heretics, Irenaeus traces his own authority through these other witnesses against Ptolemaeus: "Whom then should we rather believe? Whether such men as these, or Ptolemaeus, who never saw the apostles, and who never even in his dreams attained to the slightest trace of an apostle" (2.22.5)? Again, Irenaeus can claim that his own authority is just one step removed from the apostles, specifically John, through the testimony of these eyewitnesses.

### Conclusion

In *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, Bauckham has made a convincing argument that the author of the Fourth Gospel was the Beloved Disciple whom Irenaeus equated with "John, the disciple of the Lord." However, his argument is weakened by the assertion that Irenaeus distinguished the disciple, "John, the disciple of the Lord," from the apostle, "John" (the son of Zebedee)—an assertion that is impossible to prove. It has been shown that Irenaeus knew three Johns: John Mark, John the Baptist, and the Apostle John who is referred to as "John" (the son of Zebedee), "John," and "John, the disciple of the Lord." Furthermore, Irenaeus considered the apostles to be the Twelve, and he probably used the epithet "the disciple of the Lord" to refer to the Fourth Evangelist because it carried greater apologetic weight by identifying him as the Beloved Disciple—the apostle who had the most intimate relationship with Jesus and provided reliable eyewitness testimony. Finally, it is inconceivable why Irenaeus would appeal to John, via his personal acquaintance with Polycarp and other eyewitnesses of John, and also would pair him with "other apostles" if he knew that John was not an apostle. In order to oppose the fallacious expositions of the Valentinians and any others who "made copious use of that according to John" (3.9.7), it was necessary for Irenaeus to validate and emphasize the authority of his own interpretations and traditions by tracing them back to the author of the Fourth Gospel, the apostle John, who was the disciple of the Lord.