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## Biblical commentaries of Irinei Klement'evskii

### Komentarze biblijne Ireneusza Klemientijewskiego

**Streszczenie:** rosyjski biskup prawosławny z XVIII wieku, Ireneusz Klemientijewskij, był autorem licznych komentarzy biblijnych. W tych obszernych tekstach często nie była wymagana żadna interpretacja, aby zrozumieć poszczególne wersety. Poza przedstawieniem historycznego kontekstu dla jakiegoś biblijnego wydarzenia, komentarze będące rzeczywistymi interpretacjami są dość rzadkie. Ireneusz Klemientijewskij był bardziej nauczycielem niż uczonym i oryginalnym interpretatorem. Pragnął, by jego uwagi uznysłowiły czytelnikowi prawdziwość wypowiedzi biblijnych pisarzy. Powtarzanie lub przeredagowanie czegoś, co zostało stwierdzone w danym wersecie, nie było tak naprawdę komentarzem, lecz medytacją, modlitwą, kazaniem. Ireneusz opublikował także w trzech małych tomach swoje kazania z których wiele wygłosił na dworze carskim. Podkreślał w nich w szczególności rolę rozumu, opatrności Bożej i pozycję monarchy. Jego *Traktat teologiczny* zawiera refleksje nad czterema ostatecznymi rzeczami: śmiercią, sądem ostatecznym, piekłem i niebem. Opublikował również wiele przekładów autorów patrystycznych z łaciny i greki.

**Słowa kluczowe:** prawosławie, komentarze biblijne, kazania, rzeczy ostateczne

### Библейские толкования Ирины Клементьевского

**Аннотация:** Ириной Клементьевский, русский православный епископ XVIII-го века, был автором многочисленных библейских толкований. В этих обширных текстах часто не требуется толкования для понимания отдельных стихов. В дополнение к представлению исторического контекста для библейских событий толкования, которые являются истинными интерпретациями, встречаются довольно редко. Ириной был более учителем, чем ученым и оригинальным толкователем. Он хотел, чтобы его толкования информировали читателя об истине заявлений библейских писателей. Повторение или переписывание того, что было указано в данном стихе, на самом деле не было толкованием, а медитацией, молитвой, проповедью. Ириной тоже опубликовал свои проповеди в трех небольших книжках, многие из которых он проповедовал в царском дворе. Он подчеркнул в них, в частности, роль разума,

божественного провидения и позиции монарха. Его «Богословский трактат» содержит размышления о четырех последних вещах: смерти, окончательном суде, аде и небе. Он тоже опубликовал много переводов патристических авторов с латинского и греческого языков.

**Ключевые слова:** православие, библейские комментарии, проповеди, последние вещи человека

Ivan Andreevich Klement'evskii (1753-1818), was a well-educated Orthodox ecclesiastic. In 1774, he became a monk and assumed the name of Irinei. He was a member of the Synod, an archbishop of Tver, and an archbishop of Pskov, Livonia, and Courland. He was also a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Irinei authored numerous biblical commentaries, published a few volumes of his sermons, many of them preached in the court, and also many translations of patristic authors from Latin and Greek.<sup>1</sup> Since he was considered to be "one of the most illustrious shepherds of his times,"<sup>2</sup> it is worth seeing what he had to say in his commentaries and sermons.

### Biblical commentaries

Irinei published many voluminous commentaries using primarily patristic commentaries as his models and also commentaries published by Catholic ecclesiastics.<sup>3</sup> In these commentaries, usually one verse, sometimes several verses are followed by Irinei's comments. Here are typical examples.

*"If Abraham was righteous as the result of works, he would have a reason for praise, but not with God. If any praise can be ascribed to Abraham for his good works, this praise is low and of little value, since it is outward, political (!) and coming from people, but not from God who requires of us inner holiness and good state of the heart. And if Abraham was righteous only by outward appearance, he does not deserve anything from God, since such righteousness is imperfect, it does not free from sin and does not reconcile with God" (Rom. 4:2/118).<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> More details in Косьма Череев, *Биографии тверских иерархов*, Тверь: В типографии губернского правления 1859, pp. 143-147; Н.И. Григорович, Ириней, архиепископ псковский, *Русский архив* 1869, no. 7-8, cols. 1103-1126; Григорий П. Первухин, *О Тверских иерархах*, Тверь: Типо-литография Н. М. Родионова 1901, pp. 155-157; Александр А. Яковлев, *Записки*, Москва: Печатня А.И. Снегиревой 1915, pp. 41-45.

<sup>2</sup> Филарет Гумилевский, *Обзор русской духовной литературы*, Санкт-Петербург: И.Л. Тузов 1884, p. 422.

<sup>3</sup> "The first edition of commentaries of the Psalter is almost a literal translation of Bellarmino: out of 2194 comments Irinei took over 854 comments without any change and the remaining 1340 comments in most cases only with some omissions of some places in the comments and sometimes with insertions and replacements with comments of Theodoret and Calvin. If in the first edition Bellarmino occupies the prominent place, in the second edition the prominence belongs to Calvin," В. А. Андреев, *О Толковании на Псалтирь Ириния, архиепископа Псковского*, Москва: Синодальная типография 1908, pt. 1-2, p. 13. Andreev planned to show the extent of borrowings from other authors (pt. 4, 1910, p. 66), but part 5 of his work apparently was never published.

<sup>4</sup> *Послание святого апостола Павла к римлянам*, Москва: В Типографии Компании Типографической 1787; *Послание святого апостола Павла к евреям*, Москва: В Типографии Компании Типографической 1787; *Толкование на Псалтирь*, Москва: В Синодальной Типографии 1882<sup>7</sup> [1791], vols. 1-2; *Толкование на двенадцать пророков*, Санкт-Петербург: при Святейшем Прави-

"[Abraham] was awaiting a city having foundations the builder and maker of which is God. Abraham not only magnanimously endured restless wandering and not only was he convinced that the promise of God will be fulfilled for his progeny, but he also awaited a better and more perfect city, i.e., the heavenly existence, in which he hoped to have full contentment and sweet peace after so many misfortunes, and [the city] which he was not supposed to abandon like before he abandoned the land of his fathers" (Heb. 11:10/185).

"*Salvation is from God and on Your people is Your blessing.* He closes the psalm with the usual exclamation ascribing to God, as to the cause of all good, salvation and blessing given not only to him, but to the all people. As though he said: only to You, Lord, I owe my salvation. May be on myself and on Your people, that is, on Your chosen Israel, Your blessing, both temporary and eternal, heavenly and spiritual" (Ps. 3:9/1.15).

"*The Shepherd of Israel! listen, you who lead Joseph like a flock.* The prophet begins the psalm from calling God and prays that [He] hears the prayer and looks at His people. *The Shepherd of Israel! Listen.* As though he said: You, oh God, Who directs and tends to the people of Israel, listen to the prayer that I send about them. Then he repeats the first part and means the second: *you who lead Joseph like a flock.* That is: You, who tends to the people, that stems from Joseph, like to the flock of sheep – listen to the prayer that I send in the name of Israel and of Joseph about this people" (Ps. 79:2/2.31).

"*Then came magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans and astrologers, but when I told them my dream, they could not interpret it.* Nebuchadnezzar clearly admits here that he called in vain to himself magicians and enchanters. It follows from it that all their teaching was false, since in spite of all their efforts none of them could satisfy the wish of the monarch" (Dan. 4:4/52v).

[Priests] "*should say, have mercy on your people, Lord.* The prophet does not leave anything here to the priests except their coming to the mercy of God, as though he said that because people cannot defend themselves here by anything and they would completely deceive themselves if they presented something to excuse themselves, they should put all their hope in the mercy of God" (Joel 2:17/40v-41).

Most of comment are longer, sometimes much longer. The point is that these comments are really rephrasing what particular verses say, most often in a more verbose fashion. No new insight is given and, as such, these comments are not really comments. A subtitle in two of his commentaries states that they were publically lectured, and in four instances the text retains the interjection Сл. (слушатели, listeners, Rom. 8:12/223, 8:18/229, 8:38/251, 9:15/268) and thus these commentaries somewhat resemble Chrysostom's homilies, but they are sermons rather than lectures, so that, most of the time, a particular commentary is a sermonette in which a particular verse is used as

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тельствующем Синоде 1804-1809, vols. 1-6; *Толкование на пророка Даниила*, Москва: В Синодальной Типографии 1816 (Irinei's translation of Theodoret of Cyrus/Cyrrhus' commentary is followed, with separate pagination, by Irinei's own commentary based on the work of some unspecified "new interpreters" mentioned in the subtitle). In the present article, a Biblical reference is followed by a page number from a particular commentary.

a theme, the theme which is repeated sometimes more than once using different phrasings.<sup>5</sup> In fact, such a repetition is for Irinei a virtue. As he stated, "David, just like other Prophets, has a habit to repeat something twice [should be: once] so that one part of a verse was explained by the other [part]. ... such repetition in the Sacred Scripture is often used as kind of ornamentation proper to the holy Prophets" (Ps. 1:1/1.2; 18:5/1.108). Also, "one and the same matter is repeated and inculcated to be more clearly and more firmly ingrained in memory" (36:8/1.252) and for "better confirmation in the truth" (124:1/2.324). And thus, repetition is used to beautify a text and to make listeners remember the message better, the latter being rather more important. There is a lot of it in Irinei's commentaries filling hundreds of pages. In many cases he commented a verse, then the next verse turned out, in his words, to be a repetition of the one just commented and yet the repetition is also commented so that the reader gets the same message four times. Moreover, in many cases, Irinei stated that something is clear and yet his comments followed. The result of this may be that instead of making the reader remember a message better, the attention of the reader could be easily dulled by such redundancies and the message could be lost on the reader.

Irinei's commentaries could be most helpful as commentaries when Old Testament allusions are explained, after, say, a quotation is given or an event is mentioned for which the context may not be altogether clear. In this respect, Irinei's commentary on chapter 10 of the book of Daniel is particularly useful. This part of the commentary reads as a historical treatise which links events mentioned in Daniel's prophecy with historical events and personalities, particularly from the history of Egypt – from Ptolemy I to Ptolemy VI Philometor, and Syria – from Antioch I to Antioch IV.

In several places Irinei did try to provide a commentary, although it may not be altogether satisfactory. Here are some examples.

The difficult phrase "from faith to faith" from Paul's statement, "justice of God in Him is revealed from faith to faith," is explained to mean that justice is accepted by faith and "we come from faith of the Old Testament to the faith of the New Testament, since our ancient Forefathers living in the New Testament were justified, just like us, by faith, i.e., based on merits of Christ, with this difference that they believed in the coming Messiah, and we believe with the one who has [already] come" (Rom. 1:17/26). The explanation does not quite fit the context, but it would be difficult to provide something better.

"Those who sinned without the law, will perish without the law" is rendered to mean that pagans "will be judged not according to the written law, but according to the natural law; therefore, their judgment will be somewhat lighter than for the Jews" who will be judged according to the written law. However, the different levels of punishment are not in this verse; also, this does not quite explain why Paul said that pagans will *perish* without the law (Rom. 2:12/55), apparently, the written law, since the natural law written in human hearts cannot be erased by sin (Ps. 4:7/1.19).

When Paul spoke about relying on the law, Irinei stated that the Jews do not need any "secular or secondary books" to teach them what to do (Rom. 2:17/58). This, how-

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<sup>5</sup> Commentaries on the Romans and the Hebrews "as prepared for the public preaching ... do not have a strongly scientific character"; Irinei "was concerned only in clear presentation of the thoughts of the sacred text and its popular presentation," С[тефан М.] Сольский, *Обозрение трудов по изучению Библии в России, Православное Обозрение* 1869, April, p. 570.

ever, may be a self-defeating statement; why write Biblical commentaries, which are secondary books, if the law of conduct is spelled out in the Bible all the more that "the law of God without your effort directs you and guides you to recognize in what lays the Holy and beneficial will of God" (2:17/59)? If so, why should anyone read Irinei's large commentaries?

A true Jew is someone with circumcised heart in the spirit/Spirit, not in the letter; Irinei overinterpreted it by saying that such circumcision is for someone who believes in Christ (Rom. 2:29/72); however, in view of the law being inscribed in everyone's heart, such circumcision is possible to everyone, not just to Christians.

The statement that there is no one good is rendered as "the entire man from the head to the feet was stricken by the original sin like by a supremely vile leprosy, so that nothing remained in him which would not be infected"; however, human essence became sinful, but it did not become sin, reason became blind, but not blindness (3:12/87). This sounds very profound, but what does it mean: sinful, but not sin, blind, but not blindness? That there is some sinlessness and vision in them, after all? And so, something would still remain unaffected by the original sin.

Paul said that Adam is an image of Christ which is explained that "Adam spread over his sons his original sin, and Christ spread over his [spiritual] progeny the truth and eternal life" (Rom. 5:14/153); is this really the meaning of the image here? All the more then Irinei also said that God poured through Christ His blessing, i.e., His truth was spread over His progeny, whereas Adam transferred his sin (5:15/154).

A difficult statement: "the law entered so that the sin was multiplied" - which was very important to Luther - was toned down to: the law entered to show us multiplicity of our sins (Rom. 5:20/158), which does not quite lead to the conclusion included in this verse, "whereby grace was multiplied."

When Irinei stated that "if we kill the soul with sin, then He dies in us; and if we are resurrected through repentance and improvement, He is resurrected in us" (Rom. 6:4/164), should this be taken literally or metaphorically? Is the soul killed? Is Christ repeatedly killed and repeatedly resurrected? Paul only said that we are killed and resurrected like Christ and Irinei himself stated that "after his resurrection Christ does not die any more" (6:7/168). On the other hand, Irinei could see his statement as an extension of the concept of bloodless sacrifice.

"Our old man" is considered to be "our original sin" and simply "Adam" since "when Adam lives in us, then lives and rules in a person the old man, old birth, flesh, nature, death, sin and devil" (Rom. 6:6/166); does it mean that everyone before conversion was possessed by the devil?

There is a rather confusing analogy that Paul used: when the first husband dies, the widow is free to marry another man; similarly, when a person is made dead to the law, the person can unite with Christ (Rom. 7:1-6). The triple: woman-first husband-second husband corresponds according to Irinei to the triple: the self-the law-Christ (7:4/183). If so, the dying aspect becomes confusing: in the first triple, the first husband dies, in the second, the self dies, whereby "the wonderful Apostolic likeness," the analogy between the two triples is broken. In the light of the previous discussion in the epistle it appears that the second triple should be: the self-the old man-Christ: the dead first husband corresponds to the old man, a subject of the law, who becomes dead in a person, and then the "widowed" person, the new man, can be united with the second husband, who is Christ.

In this way, there is even a closer connection between the husband who dies and the old man who also dies: both just die; the self, on the other hand, although it is said to die, still exists to be united with Christ; only the sinful side of it dies, i.e., the self dies to the law.

Paul's statement, "the Holy Spirit intercedes for us in inexpressible sighings" is interpreted as the Holy Spirit not interceding Himself, but inducing believers to pray generating in them heartfelt sighings (Rom. 8:26/239). However, it is rather risky to interpret a sentence "A does B" as really meaning "A does not do B".

The phrase "all Israel will be saved" means, "great part from the Hebrew nation" will convert and be saved (Rom. 11:26/322). Is "all" the same as "great part"?

Irinei first insisted that Melchizedek was mortal (Heb. 7:3/99); however, he also made a supposition that Melchizedek was taken alive to the eternal life like Elijah and Enoch; in fact, such a supposition was not new (cf. Second book of Enoch), but it was seldom made by Christian authors (7:8/104; the supposition was not repeated in Ps. 109:4/2.265-266).

Irinei understood Paul's statement that because of his faith, Enoch did not see death as meaning that Enoch was taken to heaven "alive with soul and body" (Heb. 11:5/179); however, he did not address the problem of possible conflict with another of Paul's statements that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50) and John's statement that no man ascended to heaven (J. 3:13).

May sinners return to hell (Sheol) – return since "they came from there just as the sin itself also came from there" (Ps. 9:18/1.49); did they really come from there?

The statement that God caused that the bottom of the sea was shown and the foundations of the world were revealed is interpreted as the reference to the crossing of the sea, the help "once manifested by heavens to the Hebrew church," but Irinei provided no explanation to the more interesting phrase "the foundations of the world" (Ps. 17:16/1.94-95).

God is merciful with the merciful, He is devious with the devious – Irinei did not spare words to interpret the first phrase, but ignored the puzzling second phrase (Ps. 17:27/1.97).

"We know that David was endowed with such meekness that he was afraid to spill one drop of blood unless fulfilment of some duty and most necessary need required it" in which "David carried the image of Christ" (Ps. 17:41/102). Would Uriah fall under the case of necessity? Or killing-off one third of Moabites (2 Sam. 8:2; see also 1 Sam. 27:11)? David "did not love anything more than to spare the repenting people, just like Christ." How about repenting Shimei (2 Sam. 19:18-19)? Technically, David did not execute him, but he did pass that task to Solomon (1 Kings 2:8-9).

David said, a people I did not know serve me, alien people will submit to me; people I did not know. The statement becomes even more puzzling as Irinei saw here a reference to the future kingdom of Christ; he also said that "since David carries the image of Christ, then God gave under his rule distant peoples that were before unknown to David in respect to their mores" (Ps. 17:44-45/104-105). David spoke about the people currently under his rule and yet unknown to him, not about other peoples, curiously, unknown to him mores.

A difficult phrase, "in your light we see light" is made to mean, "to see God Himself Who is the source of light and [who is] the inaccessible and unwaning light" (35:10/247), which explains nothing.

A psalm says that enemies of David will be thrown into the deepest pit, to which Irinei added, "into the gehenna of eternal fire where all the thrown down will live and die eternally. Since they always live in suffering to always die and will never find the end of death that they wish" (Ps. 54:24/382). However, this interpretation can hardly be derived from this psalm.

In one psalm, in the Hebrew version, there is a reference to God among the gods, the reference Irinei omitted (57:2/391); why the gods? Elsewhere he did say that judges are called gods "since they are put by God and to them is delivered the highest judging power which in proper sense belongs only to God" (81:1/2.44-45). However, by the same token, all rulers should also be called gods, all managers, all overseers, all caretakers, all creators, all artists, all teachers, all fathers, etc. (cf. 85:8/2.71).

A harsh statement that the just will bathe his hands [in Hebrew: feet] in the blood of the sinner Irinei interpreted very unconvincingly as saying that the just will really "cleans himself from the similar sins and punishment. Since under the name of blood frequently in the Sacred Scripture sin and punishment for vices is meant" (Ps. 57:11/1.395). A similar harsh phrase made elsewhere was left without a comment (67:24/1.457). He softened the harshness of the statement that the psalmist hates those who hate God by saying that it is a hatred of their deeds rather than their persons (138:21-22/2.384).

Irinei considered leviathan to be not "a simple viper," but "a large viper" as referring to the pharaoh because of the large size of Egypt "over which he ruled like leviathan or a big whale" (73:14/1.523); however, this is a rather unconvincing reference and also, viper or whale hardly fits the description of the leviathan given in Job 41.

"From Your prohibition, God of Jacob, the one mounting the horse falls into slumber" is curiously overinterpreted to mean "the irritated God wants to punish with eternal death both the devil as the rider and the sinning man as the horse that by a vile way allowed the devil to mount himself and wanted to be ruled by him" (Ps. 75:7/1.533).

Particularly challenging were certain portions of the Book of Daniel. How does one interpret seventy sevens/weeks? What are the end times? Various numbers of days? For Irinei, for example, 2300 days is the time from the desecration of the temple to its purification (Dan. 8:26/139v) and these are the literal 24-hour days not years or months as some say "who made themselves ridiculous by their computations" (8:14/133). 1290 days should be taken to mean that suffering will have an end (12:11/215v-216) and Irinei did not provide his own interpretation of 1335 days (12:12/216). God will send a savior 490 years after the establishment of Jerusalem (9:24/158). Verse 9:25 refers to Cyrus' liberation of the Jews which is indicated by seven sevens/weeks that compose 490 years; 62 weeks begin with the sixth year of the rule of Darius to the baptism of Christ, after which preaching of the Gospel began (9:25/160). One last week is for the salvation of people after the coming of Christ. (9:27/162). The desolation of the temple refers to the rejection of Christ by Israel, "the rejection of the true beautification of the temple, that is, the only begotten Son of God" (9:27/162v). And yet, by a reference to the statement of Christ recorded by Matthew, Irinei apparently saw in the desolation of the temple an event signaling the apocalyptic end times (9:27/163). Last days are for Irinei the days of renewal of the church during the coming of Christ which includes seventy sevens, i.e., 490 years (10:14/170). In all this, Irinei studiously avoided references to the Book of Revelation and its representation of the apocalyptic end times. Only at the end did he mention briefly the universal resurrection (12:2/209).

When discussing Antioch IV's deeds and misdeeds, Irinei mentioned that Antioch, a blasphemer, was considered to be an image of the antichrist (11:21/187v), but did not commit himself to this view. When there is a rather abrupt change of tone in verse 10:36, Irinei again mentioned that some interpreters saw here Antioch, some the antichrist who is either the pope or "Turkish false prophet." Rabbis also disagree here "so that their interpretations more obscure the truth than explain it." "We won't sin by saying that this [verse] refers to the Roman empire" (11:36/197v). Elsewhere, however, he said, that the antichrist for centuries ruled over the temple by which the Ottoman empire should be understood and other "false members of the church, most of all heretics and persecutors" (Joel 4:17/79), which seems to dilute the concept of the antichrist as presented in the New Testament, and yet it did not prevent him from saying in yet another place that the antichrist must come before the day of the last judgment (B 135).

After the call to repentance, Joel stated that "who knows, maybe God will have mercy"; Irinei tried to remove the uncertainty of such a promise by saying that Joel did not introduce here any doubt, "but he only wants ... to wake up carefree people from sleep and eradicate from them [their] negligence and laziness" (Joel 2:14/35); however, this explanation hardly removes this uncertainty.

God will show "signs on heaven and earth, blood, fire and pillars of smoke; the sun will turn into darkness and the moon into blood": Joel "speak about blood, darkness and smoking smoke, which without a doubt is taken in figurative sense about the sad state of affairs" (Joel 3:3-4/55v) and the words about the sun and the moon refer merely to the call "that people wake up from their sleep" (4:15/76); however, whenever these verses are quoted in the NT, they appear to be understood rather literally about phenomena preceding the coming of "the day of the Lord" which Irinei traditionally interpreted as the second coming of Christ (3:4/56).

It several places, a commentary would be welcome, but it was not provided.

When Paul stated that the circumcised are justified by faith, the uncircumcised through faith (Rom. 3:30/113-114), is this just a stylistic difference, by/through faith or is there something more to it? Irinei simply ignored the issue of this difference.

A difficult verse states that there was sin before the law, but the sin does not count as sin when there is no law (Rom. 5:13/150); quite obviously the written law is meant here since the natural law is inborn. Why punish Cain or Sodom, why the flood if this was before the written law? Also, verses 5:12 and 14 do say that *all* people sinned before Moses and had to die eventually. Irinei did not address these problems.

The expression of heaping coals of fire onto an enemy's head is interpreted as inducing enemy's love by one's own love and loving behavior (Rom. 13:20/361); it is an interpretation forced to fit the context, but even though this is a proverbial expression (Prov. 25:21-22), it still remains unclear, why fire, why coal and why the head.

There is no comment on the statement that Christ was perfect through suffering (Heb. 2:10/28). How was He imperfect before? When Paul said that Christ was perfected, Irinei wrote that through His humility Christ "showed in all supremely perfect obedience" (5:9/76); so, in what sense was Christ imperfect before? Disobedience?

When Paul said that the Word of God divides the soul from the spirit and the joints from marrow, Irinei only commented that the Word can reach the innermost parts of the heart as it is able to reach marrow hidden in bones (Heb. 4:12/60). Why divide joints and marrow? Why divide the soul from the spirit? Irinei did not address these



issues, the latter being rather interesting since it suggests the tripartite division of the human being: the body, spirit, and soul.

Paul mentioned "two immutable things" as to which God cannot lie, but Irinei did not say how these two things should be understood (Heb. 6:18/95).

Paul said that the ark of the covenant contained three items; Irinei did not address the problem that according to the Old Testament (1 Kings 8:9), it contained only the tables of stone (Heb. 9:4/132-134). The problem could be solved by supposing that all the three items were in the ark, but two of them were taken out later.

Paul spoke about the impossibility of animal offerings to remove sins and Irinei saw here a reference to the goat offerings for sins of the priest and for sins of people (10:4/156, 10:11); he did not comment on the impossibility mentioned by Paul and, on the other hand, the effectiveness of the Old Testament offerings (e.g., Lev. 4:26, Num. 29:5). An apparent contradiction could be resolved by seeing the latter as just a *condition* of remission of sins, not considering these offerings by themselves to have such a power.

No philological explanation was given for why these particular words – *mene, tekel, parsin/upharsin* – were written on the wall. Irinei basically repeated the interpretation provided by Daniel (5:25-28/85).

The gift of prophecy is not only the gift of foreseeing the future, but also the gift of interpretation of Scriptures (Rom. 12:6/341); the gift of teaching is also the gift of "interpretation of the word of God" (343). Thus, it appears, that Irinei ascribed to himself the office of a prophet and a teacher. However, as he added, this gift should be exercised according to "the principles of the Orthodox church" (342). For the most part, there is nothing theologically objectionable in Irinei's comments. However, at least at one point he may not have been quite in line with Orthodoxy.

Irinei stated that "all those predestined (предустановлены) for the eternal life were written [in the book of life] before the creation of the world" (Ps. 68:29/477) and that those "who are called according to God's eternal decision to the knowledge of the Gospel," which sounds like a statement on predestination (Rom. 8:28/241) all the more that he also mentioned "an important dogma of predestination (предопределение) (Rom. 9:19/273, 9:23/276), a dogma that is emphatically rejected by the Orthodox church.<sup>6</sup> It is not helpful in that respect when Irinei only reworded Paul's sentence, "whom He foreordained those He called" into "whom he from eternity chose to his glory, those he called to the heavenly kingdom in particular time through evangelical preaching"; he seems to have solved the problem by saying that "in the number of the called there are many who will not listen to this call" (8:30/243). Does this solve the problem of predestination? God said that He loved Jacob and hated Esau which is interpreted to mean that this was done not because of a decree but "under the condition of faith in Christ which, since God foresaw it in Jacob, so he predestined him to the inheritance of life" (9:13/267), which explains this predetermination very little. Irinei just referred here to "the depth of God's mysteries hidden in the bottomlessness of His supreme wisdom" (9:15/268). When Paul said that salvation depends on God's will alone, not on human efforts, Irinei said that "the desire [of those serving God to be saved] is a big sign of predestination. On the other hand, he mentioned Socrates as an example of a philosopher

<sup>6</sup> Филарет [Гумилевский], *Православное догматическое богословие*, Санкт-Петербург: Издание И.Л. Тузова 1882, vol. 2, p. 9.

who strove for salvation and yet he was condemned since he “did have true knowledge of God” (9:16/269). Why was his desire to be saved a sign of prospective salvation that not extended to him? Could not the statement on salvation depending only on God be applied to Socrates? After all, Socrates was sometimes considered a Christian before Christ. “Obscure places of the Scripture should be explained with other [places that are] clearer,” when it says that God hardened the heart of pharaoh, hardening should be understood as leaving pharaoh in his hardened state (9:18/271); it is ingenious, but the shift of meaning is quite significant. Through natural reason, faith in Christ cannot be reached since the teaching about Christ is a mystery hidden from the human reason (10:14/293).

Most of the time no interpretation is required to understand particular verses. Even in the Book of Daniel, for the most part, explanations of dreams and visions are included in this Book. Although Irinei used primarily the Septuagint version of the Bible, he also included the Hebrew reading, although not at all times. However, in only isolated places did he refer to the original Greek or Hebrew. For instance, in his 1000-page explanations of the Psalms, a Greek word appears only once, and Hebrew words five times. Except for providing historical context for some Biblical event, commentaries that are actual interpretations are fairly rare. It is significant that very frequently Irinei stated that something is clear and yet he made some remarks of that anyway. At one point he stated that “the prophet does not say here anything new; he only confirms again what he said above; however, he does not multiply words here without reason, since he wants not only to teach, but also convince” (Joel 1:11/10v). Irinei was more a teacher in his commentaries than a scholar and original interpreter. He wanted by his remarks to engrave a message in the heart of the reader, convince the reader about the truthfulness of statements made by Biblical writers. On some words of the psalmist he observed that “these words need not as much explanation, as [they need] pious meditation and imitation” (Ps. 26:8-9/167). Repeating or rewording of something which was stated in a particular verse was not really a commentary but a meditation, a prayer, a sermon, a way of inscribing this verse in one’s own heart. This is particularly clear in the Psalms which are mainly prayers of joy, of contrition, of wonderment, of reverence. And apparently this is the way they were taken by the public – a book of meditations on the Psalms rather than commentaries on them – since in 1903 the 9<sup>th</sup> edition came out.<sup>7</sup>

### Sermons

Biblical commentaries channeled the presentation of topics by the content of verses being discussed, and Irinei did not veer from the topic at hand the way Chrysostom often did in his homilies/commentaries. Irinei had a somewhat freer hand in his sermons in which topics were presumably selected by him. He published them in three slim volumes. It appears that there were three areas which were frequently mentioned in these sermons: the role of reason, God’s providence, and the position of the monarch.

Man is created in the image and likeness of God by being endowed with reason and will (Ps. 8:6/1.40). The truths of faith can be known through common sense. It is enough to have pure heart, and reason given by God will lead us to them. Observation of the world compels us to admire its size and orderliness, to admire riches of the earth (P 30).<sup>8</sup> “From

<sup>7</sup> Андреев, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> The following references to Irinei’s books are used:

the makeup of the world, its order, beauty, and harmony the natural man knows that there is someone supremely wise and omnipotent who created all these things" (P 4; cf. Rom. 1:20/29). This should be enough to lead people to the belief in Eternal, Living, Omnipotent God, the Creator of all these marvels. Common sense tells people that such a marvelous order cannot be a work of a mere accident. They thus acknowledge the existence of the first cause, the Creator of all, God (P 31). There is nothing in the world without a cause, so reason says that there is a cause by which we are in the world and a cause of our temporal existence (S 69). Reason then leads us to serving this God (P 31). "There is nothing more proper to a rational being as having an understanding of God that is fitting His majesty and glory"; the better this understanding is the greater is our respect for God (49).

Reason does not begin with a blank slate as the peripatetics and scholastics would have it. Many pagans were virtuous people, so, the law is written in their hearts (Rom. 2:15/57). The knowledge of the Most High Being is the first rule of the true faith of all faiths in general and "it is drawn on the heart of each man with the hand of the Creator of all himself" (P 75). If savages can sense such a need, what excuse have those who sense in themselves an active spirit, see their wonderfully working body, see multitude of things created for their convenience, and yet are willing to live without God? (76). What excuse have those who see the wonders of the world, its orderliness and beauty (77)? Idolatry is the result of the weakness of reason and of ignorance, atheism is the result of pride (78).

Reason can lead to the acknowledgment of God's existence and His attributes, but can it lead to Christ? I chose, said Irinei, Christianity from among many faiths since my reason discovers in it signs of its veracity. First, miracles of Christ were performed to show that He was sent by God (P 32). Consider also the character of witnesses, who did not spare their lives to proclaim their beliefs (33). Reason may ask about the mystery of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, of the God-Man, but it is unable to answer it (34). In case of a doubt, an answer is: it is written. It is written that in God "there is a together and without mixing one union of [God's] being and one trinity of persons" (35; not to be too punctilious: where is it written?)

Common sense and reason appear to be a result of natural faith, but revelation is necessary to provide the truths to which reason by itself cannot arrive. Natural faith should not be rejected, but it is limited and after the fall it cannot make people pious (P 72). Reason is a great gift of God, but it should be submitted to faith based on revelation (Pr 10). Some truths of faith surpass the capacity of reason to comprehend. Who says that it is contradictory that the Savior is God and man (P 70) should think if he understands how the soul lives in the body. The union of man and God will remain a mystery (71). In fact, an attempt to surpass the purview of reason may be dangerous; for example, investigating why God saves some and condemns others is not only futile but also lawless, since God's reasons are inscrutable (Rom. 11:33/330).

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В - *Богословский трактат, или, Христианское разсуждение о четырех последних человека: I. о смерти, II. о суде, III. о муках геенских, IV. о радостях небесных*, Санктпетербург: Печатаны в Типографии Святейшаго Правительствующаго Синода 1795; included is his translation of Gregory Nazianzus' funeral speech.

Р - *Поучительныя слова*, Ярославль 1785.

Pr - *Продолжение поучительных слов*, Санктпетербург: В Типографии Святейшаго Синода 1794.

S - *Собрание поучительных слов*, Санктпетербург: В Типографии Святейшаго Синода 1791.

Faith should thus have an upper hand over reason, but it can be undermined by it, and the spirit of the age – the age of enlightenment – pits reason against faith. “Teachings of our age, political opinions” serve our egoism and pride. The holy faith is considered obsolete (P 29). Lawlessness was never so strong as it is today because faith was never as weak as it is today. Let’s pray to God that faith will be revived. We should also revive it through “pure and firm reasoning” (56).

The second area of interest for Irinei was God’s providence and closely related to it the problem of theodicy.

God is a providential God and has control over all His creation (S 84). “Nothing happens by accident in this world, but everything that happens depends on hidden and supremely wise providence of God” (Dan. 4:32/69). We don’t know reasons why God rules over us, but we know that God is as good as He is wise so that all His designs and actions are for human happiness (P 13).

The question is that if God cares so much about humans, why so much suffering and evil?

God does not do anything evil; He only allows it to happen to make something good out of it (Rom. 3:8/83). Also, “this world was not created only for us”; there are also other people. If we see some disorder, then this was done for the benefit of others. “God would not be Good if he left bad actions without bad consequences,” so, human actions must be good to avoid such consequences (P 16). It is true that good people suffer, but 1. we don’t know who is really virtuous; 2. even a virtuous person would not say that he did not commit any sin; 3. some virtuous people encounter obstacles and are not reaching the goal of their actions and are unhappy; but is anyone perfectly unhappy who in spite of all obstacles did not lose his way? (17)

The third area of Irinei’s interest was the social order and the position of the emperor.

“God did not create [anyone as] a Minister or a Colonel or a Courtier of a merchant, but He created man without titles and without ranks, consequently all inequality that is set among people is not natural but is of mental nature” (P 86). Of mental nature? Maybe at birth. Upbringing, education, and the social position of parents introduce inequality. Because of God’s providence, the initial equality turns into inequality. “By putting us in the theater of this world the Supremely wise Creator gave to everyone particular role.”<sup>9</sup> To interact well with others, “nature ... poured in our hearts mutual love” (83). It is much better to have any authority in society than none at all “when all people are equal and they pluck out the eyes of one another” (Dan. 4:9/56). The social inequality is a good thing, since differences between people strengthen the need for cooperation; the rich should care for the poor, and the poor should work to be paid; the educated should care for the ignorant, the ignorant should be grateful to the educated (P 86). The union of the lord and the subject should be based on mutual benefit. The lord should improve material and spiritual conditions of his subjects (87). And hence an exclamation: “Servants (рабы)! God made you servants: submit yourself to this calling without grumbling. Your duty and

<sup>9</sup> Cf.: “the visible world is like theater that presents to us the invisible glory of God; it is like a mirror in which we clearly see representations of God’s supreme wisdom” (Rom. 1:20/29); “God created this world in the likeness of a theater to show living people the love which He has had for the humankind” (Ps. 87:13/2.85).

calling! is to work without laziness through all the days of your life for the benefit of your lords, to be obedient to them in all things, to be pure of heart and thankful, to be satisfied with all they provide, not stealing and not hiding, but rather protecting in all dangers their life, health, honor, and riches" (91).

Such a call to submission should not be surprising. Choosing someone to the position of authority does not depend on us, but on God, who has known ahead of time what faculties people should have and so people are obligated to submit to such a decision of God (S 127). But there are people who are against such a decision – which seems to be an allusion to the French revolution. This is a result of immaturity or of greed (128). "There is no other case in which God's providence would be better revealed as in the choice of the Ruler" (136). People have various desires; thus, for order, there must be one will in society that rules over all people; thus, God's providence put rulers over people, rulers who are images of God's Majesty (Pr 16). The ruler is like a head in the body, like the sun in the world. He is a protector of the church, faith, worship of God, and Orthodoxy. He protects our possession, happiness, and peace (17).

All authorities are not perfect, and God appears to be the only rescue to the subjects in the case of the misuse of power. If "by God's permission" authorities are unjust, cruel, oppressing, and persecuting, then "we should endure without bitterness this injustice (365) submitting this situation to God" for Him to address the issue (Rom. 13:3/365-366). No mutiny, no rebellion, surely no revolution.

Even acknowledging the elevated position of the empress on the Russian throne, Irinei went beyond the call of duty praising her as an example of "Evangelical patience and courage" (S 76). "The subordinates are happy because the love of the authorities is the principle of their duties and the love of the subordinates is the perfect satisfaction for the authorities. This is the truth of God's supreme wisdom before which disappear all imaginary reason concerning inequality! The truth securing the universal happiness of the inhabitants of the world! Russia is fortunate to see the sanctity of the Gospel in the lawgiving of our EMPRESS" (150). Her will is the will of God, her plans are holy since God is holy who proclaims through her His sentences (Pr 89). Thank God that He "made Her heart to be the chosen vessel of virtues, among other the first is the purest faith" (31). Catherine was elevated by God to the throne "to reveal to the world his truth in its full light" (153). "All works of Your IMPERIAL MAJESTY are pleasing to God," Irinei said (73), and again: Catherine, "all Your plans and undertakings are based on the Your Lord the Savior. Your wisdom comes from there; since all your works are aimed at the glory of God, at the happiness of subjects and at the glory of Your age. Blessed You are in the generation of generations since flesh and blood did not reveal it to you, but your Father who is in heaven"; in this, Irinei applied Christ's words directed to Peter, thereby made Catherine an equal of the pope (Pr 11). The listener could only cringe when hearing an ecclesiastic extolling Catherine as a model of piety and virtue for all to imitate.

### **The four last things**

Irinei's philosophical and theological reflections are strewn rather chaotically across his commentaries and sermons. It appears that the only somewhat systematic presentation is in his *Theological treatise* in which he stated that many authors wrote about the last things, but this did not hinder him to wrote something about this too (B 7). What he wrote is also a set of reflections on the four last things with an overwhelming

number of Biblical verses and a very large number of quotations from various authors.

“Death, judged for itself, is the most bitter torture.” Fear of death is useful since it bars a person from sin (B 10, 28). Many holy men were afraid of death. (16). We should be afraid of death, particularly unexpected, and should constantly think about it (20). Thus, we should constantly spiritually mortify ourselves by fighting bad desires, overcome our own will, desire only God, and do repentance (21). Thinking about death leads to staying away from evil, leads to repentance, to thinking about one’s own weakness, to putting aside worldly cares, to the desire to be pleasing to God (29), and to the consolation by the Holy Spirit (30). In a word, *memento mori*, so frequently promoted by the Russian ecclesiastics, and, as Irinei said, live each day as though it were your last day (35).

The judgment of God is terrible since there is no higher instance; also, nothing can be hidden from God, He can see every last sin (B 80). All saints were afraid of the judgment of God (113). Afterwards, the world will be renewed; the earth will shine like gold, water like crystal, air like the sky/heaven, fire like the stars, the moon will always be full like the sun and the sun 7 times brighter and so will the stars; the sun will always stand in the east, the moon in the west since the sky will not move (138). After the last judgment, people can end up either in hell or in heaven.

There will be different levels of suffering in hell (B 144) which is located in the center of the earth (170). Irinei proposed to picture in one’s mind a naked man inside an oven with blazing fire – that is hell (149). The fire of hell is much hotter than the natural fire, but there is also frost that is colder than the natural frost and so it is with other tortures of hell: hunger, thirst, fear, cries (153). Fire will torment sinners according to their sins; in different places of hell there are fires of different intensities (155). Other tortures to be expected in hell are biting by worms, stench (156), the sight of demons and those whose bodies are half-eaten by worms and are covered with snakes and frogs (157); hunger (158); thirst (159); binding of hands and legs; the darkness (160); the location and structure of hell (161); the separation from God; sadness; illness, and fear (162).

In heaven, a person will be pleased with the beauty of one’s own body shining like the sun (B 215). Bodies of dead saints smelled pleasantly; thus, bodies of the saved will smell well (B 220). The spiritual body will have the body which will be perfectly controlled by the spirit (222) so that it will be able to penetrate through things like a wall and quickly move from one place to another so that there will be no need for any means of transportations (223). In heaven, people are rewarded according to their merits (228). People will never get old (233), they will be around 30 years old as some fathers say. There will be no sickness, there will be perfect freedom and constant joy (234).

And this was really the main interest of Irinei: the last things, the ultimate destination of humans: heaven or hell. The decision about how to live and thus how to be judged by God during last judgment must not be delayed. This is what Irinei was preaching in his sermons in various guises and this is what he was also preaching in his commentaries. Therefore, his voluminous commentaries should not be judged as a great achievement in Biblical hermeneutics, but primarily as reflections on the Biblical text which should serve the most important purpose: salvation.

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