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## **Holy letters and syllables<sup>1</sup>: The function and character of Biblical authority in the second century**

This article deals with the function and character of Biblical authority in the second century, as represented in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyons and Clement of Alexandria.

Biblical writings were important to the church in the second century.

They were of such influence that they left their mark on the writing-style of Ignatius, Irenaeus and Clement. This was not only expressed by Biblical language, and an almost singular attention towards Biblical subjects, but also by thousands of Bible references.

These Bible passages mainly referred to books of the New Testament, although one out of every three references in the works of Irenaeus and Clement concerned the Old Testament. The Scriptures that appeared highest on the scale of use were: Genesis, Psalms, Isaiah, Matthew, Luke, John, Romans and the first letter to the Corinthians.

### **1. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH**

Ignatius lived in Syria's capital. Antioch was one of the main cities of the Roman empire.<sup>2</sup> According to tradition he was on his way to martyrdom in Rome, accompanied by imperial soldiers. On his way to the eternal city he wrote at least seven letters.

#### **1.1 No proof needed**

What interests a modern reader the most is that the writings of this church leader lack something. Nowhere Ignatius tries to prove the authority of Biblical writings or writers. Passages from the Scriptures are used in an argumentative sense, but the Scriptures are beyond proof. Technically spoken it is possible that Ignatius did this in lost writings, but this is not very probable for three reasons.

##### *1.1.1 Not out of context*

In the first place Ignatius never does qualify the contents of Biblical writings. Whenever he refers to them, he never restricts the meaning of these sayings.

The possibility of cultural or historical restrictions is unknown to the man from Syria. Remarks like, "Yes, it might have been thus, but we do it this way" are not part of his

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vocabulary. This being said, one can hardly accuse Ignatius of overlooking the Biblical context of the quoted passages. Rather surprisingly, none of the 37 references to specific Bible passages<sup>3</sup> show any significant deviation from the Scriptural meaning of the text. The contrary could have

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<sup>1</sup> From the patristic doctoral thesis (1996) *Heilige Letters en Lettergrepen, de Functie en het Karakter van Schriftgezag in de Tweede Eeuw, zoals dit naar voren komt in de werken van Ignatius van Antiochië, Irenaeus van Lyon en Clemens van Alexandrië*. Bloemfontein: The University of the Orange Free State.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Roman historian Tacitus, *Historiae II.78*. Cf Tacitus 1969. *Annals and Histories* (ed of J Jackson), Volume 1-V. London: William Heinemann.

<sup>3</sup> Cf Zuidam, BA 1996. *Heilige Letters en Lettergrepen*. UOFS, p 145-154.

been expected, as Ignatius mainly cites passages indirectly. He quotes the Scriptures, but seldom uses introductory formulas like “Paul SAID” or “It is written”.

The fact that he doesn't cite out of context, pleads for his knowledge of the Biblical writings. Even when the circumstances differ from the Biblical situation, usually a common principle is at stake. In other words: Ignatius does not make ill use of the Scriptures.

### 1.1.2 Readers

In the second place, the letters of this church leader presuppose a receiving situation that would have welcomed an intellectual defence of the Scriptures and Biblical writers.

Adherents to Docetism could easily have asked questions like, “How do we know that Jesus’ body really died and drunk and ate afterwards?”

But in his answer Ignatius only refers to revelation as an authoritative fact: God and his servants told us so, and in the same way I, Ignatius, minister this information to you.<sup>4</sup>

God’s information was beyond questioning. The man from Antioch considered himself a servant of revelation. Whether it was transmitted orally or by pen, is of less concern for the principle. But where it arrived in writing, the *ὅτι* or *ὥς γέγραπται* was the absolute norm and the end of all disagreement. Without any explanation he can refer to it. It reminds one of another leader of the early church, defending the apostle Paul. The core of his argument is: God revealed Himself to Paul, so he must be right.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.1.3 Not many direct

Only two times the *ὅτι* or *ὥς γέγραπται* can be found in the seven letters.<sup>6</sup>

This hesitancy to quote from the Scriptures in a very direct way might satisfactorily be explained by the circumstances of Ignatius. He was a prisoner on his way to martyrdom in Rome.<sup>7</sup> Not only did he have to build on his memory, but the continual presence of Roman soldiers must have made the local Christians and Ignatius careful not to refer to the Scriptures too openly. Those days when the imprisoned Christian could ask for books and parchments were over.<sup>8</sup> After Nero (64 AD) and Domitian (81-96 AD) Christianity was considered as a religion that endangered the empire. As Christianity was officially prohibited. Ignatius and his contemporaries had to be careful with exposing Biblical literature.

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<sup>4</sup> What would have been hidden otherwise, is disclosed by God. It can be accepted or rejected, but there’s no sense in arguing. Cf Bauer, W & Aland K & B 1988. *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament 6 völlig neu bearbeitete Auflage*. Berlin: *ἀποκάλυπτω ἀποκάλυψις* De Gruyter: (blz 184) *φανερῶω* (p 1700, 1701); *χρηματίζω* (p 1765, 1766).

<sup>5</sup> Cf Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III.15.1.

<sup>6</sup> See *Ad Eph.* V.3 to James 4:6 and *Ad Magn.* XII.1 to Proverbs 18:17. Cf Kirsopp Lake 1977. *The Apostolic Fathers, Volume I*, in The Loeb Classical Library London William Heinemann.

<sup>7</sup> Not always as been done justice to this. According to some Ignatius seems to have been occupied with writing a Church Dogmatic, instead of a few hurried letters on his way to martyrdom This misconception is shown by remarks like: “What Ignatius has notoriously failed to give is any account of a rite to ordination.” See Brent, A. 1992. The Ignatian Epistles and the Threefold Ecclesiastical Order, in *The Journal of Religious History, Part 17*, p27. Ignatius had other worries to concern.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. 2 Tim 4:13

The age of the “traditores”, people who handed over the Scriptures to the Romans, had begun.<sup>9</sup>

#### 1.1.4 Authority intensified

Ignatius uses about two out of every five references to the Bible to prove something.

The authority of the books referred to is emphasised. His readers were to accept statements “just because the Bible says so”.

The church leader does not use this method in the letter to his fellow overseer Polycarp from Smyrna. No proof texts from the Scriptures can be found here.

Initially this is explained by the character of the letter to a friendly colleague, who has a sufficient knowledge of the Biblical writings. But if one takes a closer look, there is no great difference with the other six letters. Four times Ignatius quotes the Scriptures in an imperative sense, which intensifies the authority of the passages. In other words, he cites admonitions from Biblical literature. The passages have become part of Ignatius’ style to such an extent that they can not even be classified as proof texts formally.

### 1.2 One tradition of revelation

The church leader from Syria emphasised the unity of Biblical tradition. He was by no means a proponent of “smart lessons from other religious traditions”.

Ignatius only knew one authoritative standard: that of the Prophets, the Lord and the Apostles. He just uses the Bible. On his way to martyrdom, this was the only tradition of importance left to him.

While Ignatius refers to the Scriptures, he is especially concerned with the Person of the Lord Jesus. The overseer lays great emphasis on the historicity of Jesus’ life on earth. He was from the seed of David (Ad Eph.XVIII.2, XX.2; Ad Tral.IX.1; Ad Smyrn.I.1); was baptised by John (Ad Ad Smyrn.I.1),<sup>10</sup> suffered and died on the cross under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch (Ad Magn.XI.1; Ad Tral.IX.1; Ad Smyrn.II.1); was raised from the dead on Sunday (Ad Magn.IX.1) and ate and drank after his resurrection (Ad Smyrn.I.2).

The reality of facts like these Ignatius stresses by words like “truly”.<sup>11</sup>

The certainty of the revelation about the Lord Jesus extended even to matters of astronomy.<sup>12</sup>

The church leader reckoned with the scriptural character of the New Testament revelation.<sup>13</sup>

But Ignatius was very much concerned with believers under the Old Covenant as well. In everything the Prophets did or wrote, they had been well pleasing in God's sight.<sup>14</sup> Though only twelve percent of the Bible references in the seven letters refer to the Old

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<sup>9</sup> Mallinckrodt, H H 1983. *Latijn-Nederlands Woordenboek*. Aula-boeken 24. Utrecht/Antwerpen: Uitgeverij Het Spectrum, p 312.

<sup>10</sup> Cf Matt 3:15: οὕτω γὰρ πρέπον ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην. Ignatius has got: βεβατισμένον ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου, ἵνα πληρῶθῃ πᾶσα δικαιοσύνη ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ.

<sup>11</sup> Exempli gratia: *Ad Smyrn.I.1*: ἀλήθως ὅτινα ἐκ γένου Δαυὶδ κατὰ σάρκα.

Cf Rom 1:3: γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ κατὰ σάρκα. See also *Ad Magn.XI.1* and *Ad Tral.IX.1-2*.

<sup>12</sup> cf. Hofmann. 1985. The Authority of Scripture and Apostolic Doctrine in Ignatius of Antioch, in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Part 28 p 77.

<sup>13</sup> Cf Ign *Ad Smurn. V.1. VII.2*.

<sup>14</sup> Cf *Ad Magn. VIII.2, IX.2*.

Testament Scriptures, the representatives of this covenant are not treated with inferiority at all.<sup>15</sup>

### 1.3 Biblical language

In the writings of Ignatius one can ascertain a style of scriptural writing, that becomes even stronger with Irenaeus and Clement. This shows itself in the vocabulary, in about forty Bible references in seven letters, but also in the identification of the author with heroes and writers of the Bible. Especially the apostle Paul left his mark on the man from Antioch. Not only does Ignatius regularly refer to his letters, but he even identifies himself with the exemplary apostle.<sup>16</sup>

### 1.4 Deviation

Though Ignatius used the Scriptures and the revelatory tradition of the Prophets, the Lord and the Apostles as extremely authoritative, he helped to create a dilemma that would trouble the church for centuries to come.

The man from Antioch wanted to give revelation a helping hand, thus restricting the fruits of it.

It reminds one of Uzza who tried to support the ark of the covenant because the oxen shook it.<sup>17</sup> Ignatius' helping hand consisted of office and church organisation.<sup>18</sup>

The Bible also contains teachings about the organisation of the congregations. That was not the mistake. Organisation and discipline are not secular, but might well feature as a material side of a spiritual cause. Unfortunately, the man from Syria disturbed this concept. Seemingly contrary to New Testament doctrine he made one oversee the centre of congregational life.

Christians who celebrated holy communion at home from the very first,<sup>19</sup> were not allowed to do anything without the bishop's approval. Probably Ignatius had a good motive and an honest purpose. Possibly he wanted to secure the progress of God's revelation and kingdom. Nevertheless, this was a step towards a serious restriction of the many graces the Lord had dispersed to the church. The use and potential of many a God given talent or office was discouraged in the Name of the Lord and with formal adherence to the authority of the Scriptures. The historic context seemed to impel Ignatius. He made his plan, and thereby foreshadowed the dilemma between office and revelation, that would play a central role in the historic panorama of the next millennia.

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<sup>15</sup> Stellt doch der Verfasser selbst die Evangelien mit den prophetischen Schriften in eine Reihe, ja hebt sie ausdrücklich hervor, und sieht in ihnen den Herrn, dessen Leiden und Auferstehung sie darlegen, gleichsam verleiblicht. Es lässt sich daher nur sagen, dass bei Ignatius eine rechte Erkenntniss des eigenthümlichen Werths, der dem geschriebenen apostolischen Worte eignet, nicht hervortritt," says Graul, K 1860. *Die Christliche Kirche an der Schwelle des Irenäischen Zeitalters, als Grundlage zu einer kirchen- und dogmengeschichtlichen Darstellung des Lebens und Wirkens de h. Irenäus*. Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, p 121. See also a summary of Kleivinghaus, J 1948. *Die theologische Stellung der Apostolische Väter zur alttestamentlichen Offenbarung*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Verlag, p 111, 112.

<sup>16</sup> In Ad Tral. XX.3 Ignatius identifies himself with Paul's words from 1 Cor 9:27. Likewise Ignatius uses 1 Cor 4:4 in Ad Rom. V.1.

<sup>17</sup> 2 Sam 6:6.

<sup>18</sup> Eg Jay, EG 1981. From Presbyter-Bishops to Bishops and Presbyters, Christian ministry in the second century: a survey. *The Second Century*. Vol 1, part 3, p 125-162.

<sup>19</sup> Act 2:46, see also Rom 16:5, I Cor 16:19, Col 4:15 and Phil vs 2

Irenaeus was a second century scholar who lived in the South of France during his public life. He seems to be born and raised in Asia Minor,<sup>20</sup> where he made the acquaintance of Polycarp of Smyrna.<sup>21</sup> Irenaeus wrote five books against Gnostic heretics.

## 2.1 Style

Irenaeus is aptly referred to as the man of one book.<sup>22</sup>

His writings are a network of Biblical references, which provides sufficient proof for the statement that they became part of his personal writing style.

At many a place Irenaeus calls the books of the Old and New Testament “Scripture”.<sup>23</sup> Irenaeus quotes the Old Testament 720 times, showing a preference for Isaiah, Psalms, Genesis, Exodus, Jeremiah and Deuteronomy.

About 1 050 times he refers to books of the New Testament, amounting to 60% of his Biblical references. Matthew, Luke, John, I Corinthians, Romans and Acts are beloved sources.<sup>24</sup>

## 2.2 Standard

Irenaeus used the Scriptures as a measuring rod to discard the Gnostic teachings<sup>25</sup> as heresy. As the church leader was convinced that the Scriptures taught the truth since they

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come from God, he could use them in his polemics. Revelation was the final authority. Not as a jump in irrationality, but because not all truth in creation is subject to reliable human research. Do

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<sup>20</sup> Eusebius speaks about “ἐν τῇ κάτω Ἀσία”, (H.E.V.iv.1).

<sup>21</sup> Irenaeus narrated his youth to Florinus: “εἶδον γὰρ σε παῖς ἔτι ὢν ἐν τῇ κάτω Ἀσία παρὰ Νοκάρπῳ.” (Eusebius H.E. V.xxiii.5, cf Laemmer, H 1862. EUSEBIOU TOU PAMFILOU, EKKLESIASTIKES HISTORIAS, BIBLOI DEKA, Graecum textum, collatis qui in Germaniae et Italiae bibliothecis asservantur codicibus et adhibitis praestantissimis editionibus recensuit atque emendavit, latnam hendrici valesii versionem passim correctam subiunxit, apparatus criticum apposuit, fontes annotavit, prolegomena et indices adiecit. Sumtibus Librariae Hurterianae, Scaphusiae. At another place he wrote about Polycarp: “ἐν τῇ Σμύρνης ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐπισκοπος ὢν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐώρακαμεν ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ ἡμῶν ἡλικίᾳ” (Eusebius H.E. IV.xxi.3).

<sup>22</sup> Used for clarity’s sake. Historically spoken, it would be better to say: a man of one kind of Books

<sup>23</sup> The references to Biblical contents as scriptura or γραφή, are discussed by Hoh, J 1919. Die Lehre des hl. Irenäus über das Neue Testament (gekrönte Preisschrift, Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen, Münster i.W., VII. Band 4/5 Heft). Münster Westfalen: Verlag der Aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, p 62-75.

Hoh counts 135 general references to Biblical literature as γραφή, of which 57 to books of the Old Testament. “Ergebnis: Der Name γραφή kommt für ntl und atl Schriften vor. Eine γραφή ist eine hl. Sache, ein Gotteswort, also ist diese Bezeichnung bei ntl Schriften ein Beweis für die Gleichstellung derselben mit dem AT. Das Fehlen des Ausdrucks (bij NT-geschriften) kann nichts beweisen, weil selbst das AT nicht in die Regel γραφή Schriften genannt wird. Sehr häufig heißen die atl. und die ntl Schriften τὰ λόγια τοῦ Κυρίου.”, p75.

See also *Adv. Haer. I praef.I*; 1.8.1.

<sup>24</sup> Cf Zuiddam BA 1996. Heilige Letters en Lettergrepen. UOFS, p 214-229.

<sup>25</sup> “Gefährlich ist die Gnosis für Irenaeus, weil sie die heiligen Schrift pervertiert. So tarnt sie ihr unchristliches Fundament, so übt sie ihre Verführer macht in den christlichen Gemeinden aus. Deshalb ist die Ablehnung der gnostischen Schriftinterpretation eine der wichtigsten Aufgaben der irenäischen Polemik, ” says Bengsch, A. 1957. *Heilsgeschichte und Heilswissen, eine Untersuchung zur Struktur und Entfaltung des theologisch Denkens im Werk “Adversus Haereses” des hl von Irenäus von Lyon.* (Erfurter Theologische Studien Band 3) Leipzig: St Benno-Verlag GMBH, p 22.

you trust God's revelation or not?, was a final question that settled the authority of the apostle Paul.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.3 Unity of revelation

The unity of the Bible's message<sup>27</sup> by Prophets and Apostles was for Irenaeus guaranteed by the one Father God.<sup>28</sup> The same God spoke to Moses and the other Prophets. Even Christ was present everywhere in the books of Moses: with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob and Moses.<sup>29</sup> Irenaeus did not even slightly hesitate to assure that the words of Moses had in fact been words of Christ Himself. According to the man from Lyons the same applied to all the other Prophets.

## 2.4 Dictated

The French church leader emphasised that it was by God's will that the words of the Prophets and Apostles were put in writing, to function as the pillar and the ground of truth for the faith<sup>30</sup> of Christians following.<sup>31</sup>

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To do such thing, the Apostles had received perfect knowledge from the Holy Spirit.<sup>32</sup> Before its arrival, they did not even write one letter down.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Irenaeus confronts his readers directly with the revelation that God had given to Paul on the road to Damascus, *Adv. Haer. III.15.1*. He continues: *Neque enim contendere possunt Paulum non esse apostolum, quando in hoc sit electum; neque Lucam mendacem esse possunt ostendere, veritatem nobis cum omni diligentia adnuntiantem: Fortassis enim et propter hoc operatus est Deus plurima Evangelium ostendi per Lucam, quibus necesse haberent omnes uti; ut sequenti testimonio eius, quam habet de actibus et doctrina apostolorum, omnes sequentes, et regulam veritatis inadulteratam habentes, salvari possint.*

<sup>27</sup> "Die das gesamte theologische Denken des Irenäus beherrschende und bezeichnende Idee ist der Gedanke der Einheit: ein Gott, ein Christus, eine Kirche, ein Evangelium. Irenäus zitiert sehr oft die γραφή des Alten Testaments, die Schriften sind a *Verbo Dei et Spiritu eius* gesprochen, mit Hilfe des Weissagungsbewieises soll die Zuverlässigkeit und Wahrhaftigkeit der apostolischen Botschaft von Jesus Christus erwiesen werden. Neben dem Gesetz und den Propheten führt Irenäus auch sehr oft die Evangelien und die Apostel als γραφή an," according to Frank, I 1971. *Der Sinn der Kanonbildung, eine historisch-theologische Untersuchung der Zeit vom 1. Clemensbrief bis Irenäus von Lyon*. Freiburger Theologische Studien, neunzigster Band. Freiburg: Herder, p 201.

<sup>28</sup> Irenaeus summarised the continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Covenant as follows: "Propter quod et nove Deum colere docebantur, sed non alium Deum" (*Adv. Haer. III.10.2*).

<sup>29</sup> Cf *Adv. Haer. IV.2.3*.

<sup>30</sup> *Quod quidem tunc praeconaverunt, postea vero per Dei voluntatem in Scripturis nobis tradiderunt, fundamentum et columnam fidei nostrae.* Cf I Tim 3:15.

<sup>31</sup> "Was die Apostel zuerst gepredigt und dann nach dem Willen Gottes niedergeschrieben haben, das sollte Fundament und Säule unseres Glaubens sein. Die apostolische Tradition enthält die ganze Wahrheit, denn die Apostel hatten die vollkommene Erkenntnis aus der Kraft des Heiligen Geistes, den sie nach der Auferstehung des Herrn empfangen hatten," according to Bengsch, A 1957. *Heilsgeschichte und Heilswissen, eine Untersuchung zur Struktur und Entfaltung des theologischen Denkens im Werk "Adversus Haereses" des hl. Irenäus von Lyon* (Erfurter Theologische Studien, Band 3). Leipzig: St Benno-Verlag GMBH, p 63.

<sup>32</sup> Irenaeus includes Biblical authors who couldn't claim apostleship themselves, but ministered in Apostolic company. Luke and Marc were examples of this "dependent canonicity". See Sundberg, AC 1964. *Dependent Canonicity in Irenaeus and Tertullian*, in Cross, FL (ed) *Studia Evangelica*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag. Part II: The New Testament Message, p 403-409.

<sup>33</sup> Only when one disregards clear statements like these it is possible to assume, "Though he is so eminently a Biblical theologian, he has no definite doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible," like Lawson (1984) supposes in *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus*. London: The Epworth Press, p 25. Although Irenaeus did probably not intend to describe a certain theory of inspiration, his view may be easily derived from *Adversus Haereses*. Lawson acknowledges this



The Scriptures were perfect because they were dictated by the Word of God and his Spirit.<sup>34</sup>

This enabled Irenaeus to apply the words of Revelation about “add” and “take away”<sup>35</sup> directly on the transmission of holy apostolic writ in the church.<sup>36</sup>

Historically speaking it was no more than a logic development that the Christian generation after the Apostles would appreciate their writings even more than during the lifetime of the special disciples of the Lord.<sup>37</sup>

## 2.5 Truth essential

For Irenaeus it was not so much the written form, but the truth which the Scriptures contained, that was essential. Truth can also be transmitted by other than scriptural means. This is shown from the church leader’s discussion of the question if it is necessary to possess apostolic writings to live a godly life. In principle it does not matter whether God’s truth is confessed and lived with apostolic documents or not. Irenaeus did in no way deny the trustworthiness of the latter. For him it was one truth, guaranteed by the Creator of the universe, that could make use of diverse channels of transmission.

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## 2.6 Careful use

Irenaeus objected against a superficial use of Biblical literature.

He exposed people who took isolated parts from the Scriptures to serve the purpose of their particular philosophy.<sup>38</sup> He also made a careful distinction between commandments and allowances. The man from Lyons acknowledged the problem that lies are sometimes covered by quotations from the Bible. It looks scriptural from the outside, but the surprise lies within. Irenaeus did not have problems with man's capability to grasp revelation. Revelation and understanding were side's of one medal. Though Irenaeus set a few conditions that enabled man to share in the

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later in his studies, by saying, “Had Irenaeus lived in later times he would probably have been an upholder of the doctrine of literal inspiration”, p 32.

<sup>34</sup> Cf Erasmus, Desiderius. *Opus eruditissimum, divi Irenaei episcopi Lugdunensis in quinque libris digestum, in quibus mire retegret et contutur veterum haereseon impias ac portentotas opiniones, ex vetustissimorum codicum collatione quantum licuit Des. Erasmi Roterdami opera emendatum. Additus est index rerum observatu dignarum.* Frohen, Basileae MDXLVIII (1548), p 116, 9th line, Cap.XLVII: “Credere autē haec talia debemus deo, qui & nos fecit, rectissime scientes, quia scriptureae quidem perfecte sunt, quippe a verbo dei & Spiritu eius dictate.”

<sup>35</sup> Rev 22:18, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Adv. Haer. IV.33.8: *custodita sine fictione Scripturarum tractatione plenissima, neque additamentum neque ablationem recipiens, et lectio sine falsatione, et secundum Scripturas expositio legitima et dilligens et sine periculo et sine blasphemia.*

<sup>37</sup> “Für Christen waren von Anfang an apostolische Schriften Bücher, denen man Beachtung und Hochschätzung schuldete, denn die Begleiter des Herrn und berufenen Apostel waren die höchsten Autoritäten der alten Christenheit, geistgegabt in vorzüglicher Weise. Dies ist ganz Ir. Meinung: III.1.1: *non enim per alios sipoitionem salutis nostrae cognovimus, quam per eos per quos evangelium pervenit ad nos, quod quidem tunc praeconaverunt, postea vero per Dei voluntatem in scripturis nobis tradiderunt*”, summanzes Hoh (1919) in *Die Lehre des hl. Irenäus über das Neue Testament* (gekrönte Preisschrift, Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen, Münster i.W., VII. Band, 4/5 Heft). Munster Westfalen: Verlag der Aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, p178, 179.

<sup>38</sup> “Die Gefährlichkeit der Gegner liegt nach Irenäus vor allem in der Ähnlichkeit ihrer Schriftauslegung, in der sie aus den verschiedenen Texten eine eigene Lehre zusammenflicken und diese den Worten der Heiligen Schrift anpassen, um glaubwürdig zu klingen,” states Torisu, Y 1991. *Gott und Welt, eine Untersuchung zur Gotteslehre des Irenäus von Lyon* (Studia Instituti Missiologici Societatis Verbi Divini). Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, p 33.

claritas of the Scriptures: an upright faith and a set of mind that was not ruled by sin. The Holy Spirit played the role of indispensable connection in the process of acquiring truth from God.<sup>39</sup>

## 2. 7 Admonition

The Bible must be read! The man from Lyons admonished his readers to diligent study of the Scriptures. Church attendance was a must as well. Irenaeus advised to visit congregational meetings regularly, as this is the place to be edified and fed with the truth<sup>40</sup> of the "Lord's Scriptures", as he called them.<sup>41</sup>

In Irenaeus' thinking the church does not function as an independent "living voice", being able to change truth for believers from day to day, while claiming guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>42</sup> This line of thought is comprehensible from a post-enlightenment perspective, but strange to the overseer from southern France. The legitimacy of church doctrine is established by truth and therefore in accordance with the Scriptures.<sup>43</sup> Therefore Irenaeus can not and does not use the authority of the church as a gab to do away with unwelcome admonitions from the Scriptures.

## 3. GOD'S WORD BY HUMAN MOUTH

Clement was a teacher in Alexandria, the capital city of Egypt. Clement was a learned man, well bred in Greek culture.<sup>44</sup> He seemed to have travelled a lot, and taught Christianity and

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its implication in a local school. Except for his teaching office, Clement seems to have been an elder in the local church.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.1 View of the Scripture

Clement had an exceptionally clear view of the authority of the Scriptures.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> In *Adv. Haer. IV.33.7* Irenaeus teaches that it is the Holy Spirit who grants knowledge of truth.

<sup>40</sup> That is why Irenaeus is able to speak about "*charisma veritatis*" in connection with overseers, see *Adv. Haer. IV.26.2*.

<sup>41</sup> Irenaeus speaks about "*dominicus Scripturas*", see *Adv. Haer. I/30.6*. In the light of the old custom to talk about the "Day of the Lord" (*dies dominica*), it is probable to translate with "the Lord's Scriptures". See Lawson, J 1948. *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus*. London: The Epworth Press, p 24.

<sup>42</sup> Lawson (1948) made this unfortunate mistake in *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus*. London: The Epworth Press, p 105-111, 293.

<sup>43</sup> "Immer wieder kommt er auch auf Texte des Evangeliums zu sprechen, um an ihnen die Wahrheit des kirchlichen Glaubens zu demonstrieren," says Jaschke, HJ 1980. *Irenäus von Lyon "Die ungeschminkte Wahrheit"* (Etudes irénéennes, livre 2). Roma: Academia Alfonsiana, p 106.

<sup>44</sup> "Das Ziel, das Klemens klar vor Augen stand, war, den christlichen Glauben mit Hilfe der hellenischen Bildung zu einer wissenschaftlich fundierten, allseitigen Weltanschauung auszugestalten." Cf *Klemens von Alexandria und sein hellenisches Christentum*. Nachrichten von der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen aus dem Jahre 1943, Philologisch-Historische Klasse. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1943, p 175.

<sup>45</sup> Cf Eusebius *H.E. VI.xi.6*.

<sup>46</sup> The quotations in this article are from the edition of Fridericus Sylburgius 1592. *KLEMENTOS ALEXANDREOS, TA EURISKOMENA, Clementis Alexandrini Opera quae exstant, Diversae Lectiones, et Emendationes, partim ex veterum scriptis, partim ex huius aetatis doctorum iudicio, seorsum in fine additae: et Indicestres; duo Latini, Auctorum & Rerum memorabilium; tertius Graecus, Verborum & Phraseon notabilium*. Heidelberg: Ex Typographeio Hieronymi Commelini.



The main line of his argument was that God spoke through<sup>47</sup> human mouth.<sup>48</sup> The result of this were the Scriptures. The character of their authority was based on the Lord speaking, because He had every right to be trusted and obeyed. This authority functioned mainly in an educating role. God was the divine Educator of man and taught him to walk the line of salvation.<sup>49</sup>

Clement identified the Scriptures with God's educational speaking. The Scriptures are suitable to promote a godly life, as they convey numerous principles and admonitions for specific situations.<sup>50</sup>

### 3.2 Quotations

Literally thousand of Bible quotations can be found in the writings of the man from Alexandria.<sup>51</sup> Every complete preserved book of his usually contains at least 150 references to Biblical literature. Even where Clement made use of an extra Biblical source like Philo of

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Alexandria, his focus is on the Scriptures.<sup>52</sup> Nearly 1 300 times he refers to the the Old Testament. Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs and Isaiah were his favourite books.

The New Testament was cited 2 300 times. Especial Matthew, Luke, John, 1 Corinthians Ephesians and Hebrews reached high on this hit parade.

Why were the Scriptures of such importance to the man from Egypt?

### 3.3 Reality

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<sup>47</sup> Greek: διὰ. This expression is common in Clement's Παιδαγωγός. The references are so numerous that the reader is only referred to Παιδαγωγός 91. In this short passage Clement tells us about God speaking through Ezechiel, through Solomon, through Jeremiah, through the same Prophet, through Moses and through Isaiah. Everywhere Clement stresses God speaking and using a human vessel in the form of a Prophet. He clarifies regularly: "Therefore David sings a Psalm, that is the Spirit through him" (Παιδαγωγός 87.3).

Usually Apostolic writings are not quoted in this way, but with reference to the specific person, as "the Apostle says", or as "Scripture says" (see Παιδαγωγός, 80.1). But in principle Clement regards them as the speech of the Lord Jesus, provided by the Holy Spirit. "And I don't say too much if I state: the feet with ointment refer to the Apostles, a prophecy of an ointment with an agreeable fragrance, as they shared in the Holy Ghost ... Apostles, by whom He arrived at the end of the earth, when they preached Him" (Παιδαγωγός II, 61-62). Although it does not prevail, the expression of God speaking through the Apostles does occur, for instance in Προτρεπτικός III.94. I.

<sup>48</sup> Προτρεπτικός 8.3: αὐτὸς ἐν Ἑσαΐα ὁ Κύριος λαλῶν αὐτὸς Ἑλία ἐν σόματι προφητῶν αὐτὸς. See also Παιδαγωγός III.87.4 and III.94.1.

<sup>49</sup> Προτρεπτικός 88.1.

<sup>50</sup> Προτρεπτικός, III.94-97.

<sup>51</sup> Cf Zuiddam, BA 1996. *Heilige Letters en Lettergrepen*. UOFS, p 278-296.

<sup>52</sup> In his κατὰ τὴν ἀλητῆ φιλοσοφίαν γνωστικῶν ὑπομνημάτων στροματεῖς, Clement mainly collected utterances of people he admired or deemed worthy of citing.

But even then his interest is focused on the Scriptures. Philo seems to have been used merely for this intend "Throughout all the varying purposes for which Philo is used, one constant manifested itself clearly: namely, the focus on Biblical texts. This phenomenon is not, however, a question of Clement's intentions in adapting Philo but is related to his criteria for selecting material from him. The question of intentions approaches the problem of borrowing from a broader contextual setting, while the problem of selection emerges from a narrower focus on the transported material itself. In both the sustained and the isolated passages, again and again Biblical quotations form part of the material taken over from Philo. The presence of a Biblical background, in fact, appears to be a key element in Clement's selection," according to Van den Hoek, JL 1988. *Clement of 'Alexandria and his use of Philo in the Stromateis, An Early Christian reshaping of a Jewish model*, een wetenschappelijke proeve op het gebied van de Godgeleerdheid, proefschrift ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de Katholieke Universiteit te Nijmegen. Leiden: EJ Brill, p 220.

God literally spoke through the writers of the Bible. For Clement it was the voice of the Saviour and the Holy Spirit that sung the Psalms of David.<sup>53</sup> Clement would even have said: “Sing,” because this voice was a present reality in his life, as anywhere in history.<sup>54</sup> When Clement read about Moses and the burning bush, he heard the voice of the Saviour. The Prophets took up their speech, but it was the Lord who spoke through their mouths.

### 3.4 No myth.

Though Clement knew very well to distinguish between myth and history, he regarded Biblical history as the latter. Narratives like that about the column of fire in the desert, were more than pious fairy tales with a nice religious educational.

Clement identified the Prophets with words of God. He called them foundation of truth.<sup>55</sup> Not that truth was confined to the Scriptures. Part of it could be found and recognised anywhere in the world. But as reliable and sufficient knowledge about God and his purposes was not available elsewhere, only the Scriptures were the foundation of truth.<sup>56</sup>

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Everything in them was utterly reliable, because it was spoken by the mouth of the Lord the Holy Spirit. The Spirit used humans and their language, but the result was not damaged by sinfulness or fallibility. Although church tradition in a broader sense suffered this fate, the same could not be said about the holy Scriptures.<sup>57</sup> Clement was not a Gnostic.

<sup>53</sup> Προτρεπτικός 8.3, Παδαγωγός 1.7.1: τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα ἑψάλλεν.

<sup>54</sup> “Seine absolute Autorität besteht nicht in einem abgeschliffenen Begriffe; sie ist eine lebendige GröÙe, die in der von den heiligen Schriften repräsentierten Überlieferung zu den Menschen spricht: der λόγος, nämlich selber, der die lebendige παράδοσις; der göttlichen Weisheit in heiligen Schriften vom νόμος; bis zum ἀπόστολος, herabführt,” according to Kutter, H 1897. *Clemens Alexandrinus und das Neue Testament*. Giessen: J Ricker'sche Buchhandlung, p 101.

<sup>55</sup> Προτρεπτικός 77.1.

<sup>56</sup> Timothy, HB 1973. *The Early Christian Apologists and Greek Philosophy, exemplified by Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria*. Assen: Van Gorcum, p 60, “The way of truth (according to Clement) is one, which from every side, like a perennial river, receives tributary streams. Falsehood has innumerable bypaths by comparison, the Greek philosophical and other sects having disrupted this unity, each boasting as the truth the portion of truth that has fallen to its lot.”

<sup>57</sup> “Aber andererseits die Tradition, womit er selbst mit der ersten Christenheit verbunden sein will, ist eine von der ursprünglichen, die heilzeiten Gottes verbindenden durchaus verschiedene. Kurz ausgedrückt, die gegenwärtige παράδοσις ist nur noch der Nachklang, der Abendganz der Tradition des Herrn. In dem soeben Gesagten liegt nun auch der Unterschied der Beurteilung der heiligen Schriften von der übrigen kirchlichen Litteratur. Die heiligen Schriften sind, immer diejenigen, welche die παράδοσις in sich tragen (cf oben: γνῶσις ἐν γραφαῖς παραδιδουμένη), die übrigen dagegen nur solche, welche, wenn auch in der Richtung der Paradoxe sich bewegend, doch nicht mehr Träger derselben sind. Für Clemens sind, wie gesagt, eigentlich alle Schriften, auch die heiligen, als Schriften gleichgültig. Darum kan er einmal sagen, Gott brauche keine γραφή einem ἄνδρῳ, er sei selber dieser Bund (Strom I, 29,182); wichtig ist ihm allein der κύριος, der Stifter und Erhalter der Heilsökonomie Gottes. Schriften nun, welche in die Offenbarungszeiten derselben gehören, nehmen Teil am κύριος selber, bringen gleichsam κύριος-Wesen selber zum Ausdruck und heissen deshalb - γραφαὶ κυριακαί; als echte Denkmäler der κύριος-Stiftungen sind die unantastbare, heilige Schriften. Schriften dagegen, die ausserhalb der Offenbarungszeit stehen, charakterisieren sich eben dadurch als Schriften zweiten Grades, mögen sie noch so sehr Offenbarungsstoff gleichsam in sich tragen,” states Kutter, H 1897. *Clemens Alexandrinus und das Neue Testament*. Giessen: J Ricker'sche Buchhandlung, p 104, 105. Kutter refers both to Old and New Testament Scriptures, “Wenn es ferner unmittelbar vor dieser Stelle heisst Strom.VI, 15,125: Gesetz und Prophetie seien durch den κύριος geworden und beide hätten ἐν παραβολαῖς durch ihn geredet.”

### 3.5 Verbatim

Clement did not take God speaking through the Bible in a general sense.

He was very specific about it. God spoke through the mouth of Prophets and Apostles verbatim.<sup>58</sup> Even the letters and the syllables were regarded as holy by the scholar of Alexandria.<sup>59</sup>

Clement accepted the authority of the Scriptures, as their contents came from God.<sup>60</sup> Not because he had a sophisticated theory to establish the need of their acceptance.

This is why he was able to quote a passage from the Scriptures about its reliability to vindicate its trustworthiness.<sup>61</sup> The function of Biblical authority thus extends to being proof in argument, and is not limited to an educational role.<sup>62</sup>

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### 3.6 Hermeneutics

Spirit of the Lord was not only important for securing God's voice in the Scriptures, but He was concerned with the explanation of the Bible as well.<sup>63</sup> In this hermeneutic process the Holy Spirit made use of the Scriptures.<sup>64</sup> Clement thus preceded the reformed formula that *sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpret*.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The function and character of Biblical authority in the second century AD, as represented by the writings of Ignatius, Irenaeus and Clement was that of revelation. Its authority was not *established* by human reason, but *acknowledged* by human reason. This authority was not limited, because the church lived with an experience of revelation. Without any help from ecclesiastical decisions on canon, she recognised the voice of God in Biblical writings. This made revelation the final authority for life and reason. Ultimately, the Scriptures came from an almighty Creator God, who guaranteed unity of truth in the universe. The early church identified the words of the Scriptures

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<sup>58</sup> Προτρεπτικός 87.1: τὰ ἱεροποιοντα καὶ θεοποιοῦντα γράμματα

<sup>59</sup> Προτρεπτικός 87.2. ἐξ ὧν γραμμάτων καὶ συλλαβῶν τῶν ἱερῶν, συγκεκριμένος γραψᾶς, τὰ συντάγματα.

<sup>60</sup> “Die παράδοσις τοῦ κυρίου sind die γραφαὶ κυριακαὶ selber. Es ist daher unstatthaft, Überlieferung und Schrift zu trennen,” is Kutter's (1897) conclusion in *Clemens Alexandrinus und das Neue Testament*. Glessen: J Ricker'sche Buchhandlung, p 152.

<sup>61</sup> 2 Tim 3:16 in Προτρεπτικός 87.2. See also Allenbach, J ao. 1975 (centre d'analyse et de documentation patristiques) *Biblia Patristica, index des citations et allusions Bibliques dans la littérature patristique, vol. I des origines à Clément d'Alexandrie et Tertullien*. Paris: Éditions du centre national de la recherche scientifique, p 514.

<sup>62</sup> De Even, a veteran source critic like M Mees acknowledges the use of the Scriptures for proof in *Die Zitate aus dem Neuen Testament bei Clemens von Alexandrien*, Dissertation Pöpstl. Bibelinstitut 1966. Typis Pontificiae Universitatis Gregoriana, Rom 1970, p169. Die inspirierte Schriften dienen nach Cle, rel, zur Beweisführung. Dagegen sollte hier wohl in 3, 16 (II/225/820) das aus der LXX bekannte << ἐλεγμα >> stehen, wie es S,C,A,1739,81, G, pc, bewahrt haben. Es geht darum, den anderen zu überzeugen.”

<sup>63</sup> Προτρεπτικός 84.2: εἰ θέλεις μαθεῖν, τὸ ἅγιον σοὶ πνεῦμα ἐξηγήσει

<sup>64</sup> “Thus it comes about that, a generation before Origen, Clement appears as the first Christian theologian to grasp the full extent of the problem of hermeneutics. He does not imagine that it can be solved purely externally by appealing to particular ecclesiastical rulings or norms – a method which in fact simply destroys the Scriptures and denies it real influence. He is fully familiar with the inevitable circle in which all understanding of Biblical truth, by its very nature, must move. The word of the Holy Spirit can be known only with the help of that Spirit; it is essential that we should have received the ‘Church’s guideline’, the guideline of truth, or the truth itself, that is, the Logos of God, who speaks to us in the Scripture,” observes H von Campenhausen (1969) in *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power* (Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht). London: Black, p 202, 203

with words of God, not only in closed Christian circles, but also in confrontation with gentiles and heretics.