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ENTHRONED UPON THE CHERUBIM: IRENAEUS'S GOSPEL SYMBOLISM AND ITS CHRISTOLOGICAL, BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL, AND CODICOLOGICAL RAMIFICATIONS

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> It is not possible that there be more Gospels in number than these, or fewer. By way of illustration, since there are four zones in the world in which we live, and four cardinal winds, and since the Church is spread over the whole earth, and since *the pillar and bulwark* of the Church is the Gospel and the Spirit of life, consequently she has four pillars, blowing imperishability from all sides and giving life [*vivificantes*] to men. From these things it is manifest that the Word, who is Artificer of all things and *is enthroned upon the Cherubim and holds together all things*, and who was manifested to men, gave us the fourfold Gospel, which is held together by the one Spirit. Just as David, when petitioning His [Christ's] coming, said, *You who are enthroned upon the Cherubim, shine forth*. For the Cherubim, too, had four faces (τετραπρόσωπα).[1]

It is safe to say that, despite having launched an array of creative exegetical and artistic traditions, Irenaeus's arguments for the fourfold Gospel, in particular his famous comparison between the four Gospels and the four living creatures of Ezek 1:10 and Rev 4:7, have not won him the universal admiration of modern exegetes.[2] To many, it appears that the second-century bishop made

1. Irenaeus, *Haer*. 3.11.8 (Unger, ACW)

2. Calling forth phrases like "tortured insistence" (Gamble, *New Testament Canon*, 32); "implausible, even as humor" (Funk, "Once and Future New Testament," 543); "early . . . but unfortunate" (Swete, *Apocalypse*, 72); "quaintly antique logic" (Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 4); "even in the ancient world . . . not the most convincing line of argument" (McDonald, *Biblical Canon*, 291); "curious arguments" (Lienhard, "Canons," 64). The record of scowls could go on.

clever, but perhaps too clever, attempts to find suitable natural and scriptural analogues for his fourfold Gospel. Given the long-term effects, both real and imagined, that have accrued from Irenaeus's deliberations on the fourfold Gospel, the historical/exegetical background for his correlations of the cherubim and the Gospels are surprisingly under-studied. The present essay seeks to expose the exegetical foundations for these correlations, and some of their prehistory in early Christian thought. It then turns to consider more closely Irenaeus's Christological and Biblical-theological elaborations on the living creatures and the Gospels. Finally, it will explore the relationship between these correlations and the arrangements of the books in early Gospel codices.

1. *The Exegetical/Christological Foundation of the Comparison*

1.1 *Christ as the One Seated above the Cherubim*

Irenaeus's comparisons between the four Gospels and the four living creatures in *Haer*. 3.11.8 rest upon a prior exegetical conclusion. That conclusion is that the Old Testament depiction of God as "he who is enthroned above the cherubim" from Ps 80:1 (79:2 LXX) is a depiction not of God the Father, or of God unspecified, but specifically of Christ.[3] It is "the Word," the "Artificer of all things," who is "enthroned upon the Cherubim and holds together all things." So, just as the four cherubim uphold the throne of Christ and give glory to him (*Epid*. 10), so do the four Gospels.

The conception of God as enthroned upon the cherubim had a long history in Israel. It is first met in Exod 25:22, where God told Moses to make the ark with two cherubim: "And there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel."[4] As the ark of the covenant of Yahweh makes its way to its final resting place in the tabernacle in Jerusalem, it is called

3. See also his reference to Ps 99:1 in *Haer*. 4.33.13.

4. Cf. the "cherubim of glory" in Heb 9:5. Images of cherubim were also woven into the curtains of the tabernacle (see Exod 26:31; 36:8; 2 Chr 3:14).

"the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts who sits above the cherubim" (1 Sam 4:4; cf. 2 Sam 6:2).

The theme then emerges in the Psalms. Psalm 79:2 LXX begins with the petition "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim **(**ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῶν χερουβιν**)**, shine forth (ἐμφάνηθι)." As recorded in both 2 Kgs 19:15 and Isa 37:16, King Hezekiah addressed the LORD under this title in prayer: "O LORD, the God of Israel, who art enthroned above the cherubim, Thou art the God, Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. Thou hast made heaven and earth."

The conception reaches its zenith in the elaborated visions of Ezek 1 and 10.[5] Instead of just two cherubim, we read that Ezekiel beheld "four living creatures," who in Ezek 10 are called cherubim, each of whom had four faces, beside each of whom was a wheel. Above the creatures was the likeness of a throne, "and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance" (Ezek 1:26).

The depiction of the LORD as enthroned above the cherubim is established in the praises, prayers, and the architecture of Israel's worship from the Pentateuch through the Prophets. This complex of Old Testament images of the heavenly quartet, we shall now see, had a vibrant presence in the Christian piety of at least three pre-Irenaean authors who hail from or have strong ties to Asia Minor.[6]

1.2 *The Epistula Apostolorum*

The *Epistula Apostolorum*, an Asian work probably from the first half of the second century,[7] praises Christ as "Power of the heav-

5. See also in the additions to Daniel (Dan 3:55 LXX): "Blessed are you who look into the depths, sitting over the cherubim (καθήμενος ἐπὶ χερουβιμ), and to be praised and highly exalted forever."

6. By comparison, Origen seems to know nothing of this exegetical tradition, from his homilies on Ezekiel (see Pearse, ed., *Origen of Alexandria*).

7. On Asia Minor as provenance, see Schmidt and Wajnberg, *Gespräche Jesu*; Hill, "*Epistula Apostolorum*." Francis Watson (*Apostolic Gospel*, 11) affirms the Asianic provenance but dates the work later, to ca. 170, based primarily on a definitive identification of the plague mentioned in *Epistula Apostolorum*

enly Powers, who sits above the Cherubim [and Seraphim][8] at the right hand of the throne of the Father" (*Ep. Apos.* 3:3–4).[9] Here, as in Irenaeus, it is emphatically Christ who sits above the cherubim (Ps 79:2 [98:1 LXX]) at the right hand of the throne of the Father. The title "Power of the heavenly Powers" seems to derive from the refrain in Ps 79:5, 8, 15, 20 LXX, "O Lord, the God of mighty powers" (κύριε ὁ θεὸς τῶν δυνάμεων). The *Epistula Apostolorum*'s expression is also interesting for its wedding of the Christological interpretation of the one seated above the cherubim to the divine summons "sit at my right hand" from Ps 109:1 (110:1 MT), which of course the New Testament takes as spoken to Jesus the Christ.

1.3 *Justin*

Justin, too, is familiar with the exegesis which identifies Christ as the one seated above the cherubim. In *Dial.* 37.2–3, he claims that the divine figure in Ps 98:1 (99:1 MT) is the coming king.

> And in Psalm Ninety-eight the Holy Spirit reprimands you and announces that he whom you refuse to recognize as your king is *the King and Lord of Samuel, Aaron, Moses*, and of every other man. Here are the words of that psalm: *The Lord has reigned, let the peoples be angry. He that sits on the cherubim; let the earth be moved*.[10]

34, 36 as the "Antonine Plague" of 165–170. This is of course possible but, based on a good deal more of the "extant evidence," not quite as probable as an earlier date, just before 150 (see Hill, "*Epistula Apostolorum*"). Not for the first time, Watson (*Apostolic Gospel*, 11n24) has misread an argument and felt free to publish imagined motives. In any case, the Ep. Apos. appears to predate Irenaeus's *Against Heresies*.

8. Most MSS have "and Seraphim," according to Watson (*Apostolic Gospel*, 222), and only MS A omits it. Watson decides for "Cherubim" alone as original because "the pairing of Cherubim and Seraphim appears to be relatively late," even though "'Seraphim and Cherubim' occurs in Origen" (222). The inclusion of Seraphim would signify a reading of Isa. 6, and the comingling of elements from the cherubim vision of Ezek 1 and the seraphim vision of Isa 6 is witnessed already in Rev 4:6–8.

9. The translation of Watson, *Apostolic Gospel*, 45.

10. The translation in Slusser, ed., *Justin Martyr*.

Deeply offended by Justin's exegesis, Trypho then accuses the Christian of blasphemy for claiming that the divine depictions pertain to a crucified man (*Dial*. 38). But for Justin, as for the author of the *Epistula Apostolorum*, the one who sits upon the cherubim is none other than Jesus Christ.

Justin does not directly mention the cherubim of Ezek 1:10 in his extant writings. But he is familiar with the Christological exegesis we are considering, for, in keeping with his own exegesis of Ps 98:1, Justin is convinced that the figure who is in the likeness of a man, above the cherubim in Ezek 1:10, is Jesus. In *Dial*. 126.1, he chides Trypho, "if you had known who he is who at one time is called *angel of great counsel* and *Man* by Ezekiel." The "man" here is clearly the human form "above" the cherubim in Ezek 1:5 LXX ("the likeness of a man was over them" ὁμοίωμα ἀνθρώπου ἐπ᾽ αὐτοῖς) and Ezek 1:26, "and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man" (καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ ὁμοιώματος τοῦ θρόνου ὁμοίωμα ὡς εἶδος ἀνθρώπου). For Justin, this is another manifestation of Christ, seated above the cherubim.[11]

1.4 *Melito of Sardis*

The extract known as Fragment 15 is not securely attributable to Melito; a different form of this fragment is transmitted in some Syriac manuscripts under the name of Irenaeus. The close similarities in style and wording to Melito's *Peri Pascha* and verified fragments of his other works, however, weigh strongly in his favor. After surveying the evidence, Stuart Hall decides cautiously for Melito as its author.[12] If this is correct, the Fragment is probably either from Melito's *On the Faith* or his *Extracts* and was written probably a decade or so before Irenaeus's magnum opus. The Fragment is a collection of testimonies to Christ "from the law and the prophets," though it also gathers material from the Gospels. Lines 66 and 67 call Christ

> the Charioteer of the Cherubim,

11. This will be further substantiated by Irenaeus's similar exegesis in *Haer*. 4.20.10 as we shall see below.

12. Hall, *Melito of Sardis*, xxxviii.

the chief of the army of angels.[13]

As with the *Epistula Apostolorum*, the reference to the cherubim appears to rely on Ps 79:2 LXX, as the mention of Christ as the chief of the host of angels seems to draw from the psalm's refrain, "O Lord, the God of mighty powers," repeated in vv. 5, 8, 15, 20 LXX (though an allusion to Josh 5:14–15 is possible). The "charioteer" idea, however, while it might possibly be constructed on the basis of Christ simply being seated above the cherubim, or from the "riding" or "flying" mentioned in Ps 17:11[14] (18:10 MT) and 2 Sam 22:11,[15] more likely denotes a dependence on Ezekiel's vision in Ezek 1:15–21, which reports wheels beneath the four living creatures and portrays the throne as a chariot. This Ezekielian image is famously the basis for Jewish Merkabah mysticism, meditation on the heavenly chariot-throne.[16] Christ as "Charioteer of the Cherubim" likely reflects the interplay of multiple Old Testament texts to create a striking and memorable image.

1.5 *Irenaeus*

When Irenaeus, in *Haer*. 3.11.8, then, invokes Christ as the one "enthroned upon the cherubim" and then cites David's petition "You who are enthroned upon the Cherubim, shine forth" just before he gives his analogy of four living creatures and four Gospels, he is not simply dressing up an anxious analogy with serendipitous biblical ornamentation. The movement of thought went the other way. The existing Christological interpretation of the one en-

13. Hall's translation; see *Melito of Sardis*, 83n68, which also gives Richard's reconstruction of the Greek: ὁ ἡνίοχος τῶν χερουβίμ, ὁ ἀρχιστράτηγος τῶν ἀγγέλων (Richard, "Témoins grecs").

14. "And he mounted on cherubs and flew: he flew on the wings of winds" (translations of the LXX are from *The Lexham English Septuagint*: καὶ ἐπέβη ἐπὶ χερουβιν καὶ ἐπετάσθη ἐπετάσθη ἐπὶ πτερύγων ἀνέμων).

15. "And he mounted upon the cherubim and flew, and he was seen upon the wings of the wind" (καὶ ἐπεκάθισεν ἐπὶ Χερουβιν καὶ ἐπετάσθη καὶ ὤφθη ἐπὶ πτερύγων ἀνέμου).

16. At Qumran, 4Q385 frag. 4–6; see 1 En 14:8–25; 71:5–11; 2 En 22; see also 3 En ("The vision which Ezekiel saw . . . the gleam of the chariot and four living creatures"); see P. Alexander's excellent introduction, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch"; Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*.

throned upon the cherubim became the springboard for comparing the four cherubim to the four Gospels. We can see that the comparison grew from the soil of a well-attested exegetical tradition, known among Christian interpreters in at least Asia Minor and Rome.[17] The connection is explicit in *Haer*. 3.11.8 as Irenaeus introduces the comparison with the four Gospels.[18]

> From these things it is manifest that the Word, who is Artificer of all things and *is enthroned upon the Cherubim and holds together all things*,[19] and who was manifested (φανερωθείς) to men, gave us the fourfold Gospel (τετράμορφον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον), which is held together by the one Spirit. Just as David, when petitioning His [Christ's] coming, said, *You who are enthroned upon the Cherubim, shine forth* (ἐμφάνηθι; Ps. 80:1b [LXX 79:2].[20]

When David implored the enthroned one to "shine forth," he was petitioning the manifestation, the coming, of the Christ. And it is this Christ, the Word, the Artificer[21] of all things, who, after his manifestation, has given us the fourfold Gospel, held together

17. The influence of Ezekiel's cherubim throne vision is seen in at least two more places in the writings of Irenaeus. In *Dem*. 10, he refers to the "Powers" of the Word and of Wisdom (i.e., Christ and the Holy Spirit), "which are called Cherubim and Seraphim," likely denoting (as with the *Epistula Apostolorum* and Melito) a dependence on the refrain of Ps 79, and a Christological interpretation of the one who sits above the cherubim. And in *Haer*. 4.20.10 (see below), he refers again to Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim and above them "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord."

18. *Haer*. 3.11.8 is very fortunately preserved in Greek, the Fr. 11 from Anastasius Sinaita, *Quaestio 144* and the so-called "Grand Notice," a passage copied into several Gospel or catena MSS from the eleventh–sixteenth centuries (see Rousseau and Doutreleau, SC 210, 108), which the Latin by and large translates closely.

19. Cf. Wisd 1:7; Isa 40:22 LXX "It is he that comprehends (ὁ κατέχων) the circle of the earth." Irenaeus's thought here is anticipated by Athenagoras, *Embassy*, 6.3 ("since we cherish that being as God by whose Word all things are made and by whose Spirit all things are held in being") and 13.2 ("upholding all and overseeing all things"). Cf. also Origen, *De princ*. 1.3.5.

20. Irenaeus, *Haer*. 3.11.8 (Unger, ACW) (emphasis original)

21. The word is τεχνίτης, and it had been used in 1.8.1 for the "skillful artist" who created out of precious jewels a beautiful image of a king, which was destroyed by re-arranging the gems into the shape of a dog or a fox.

by the one Spirit. The fourfold Gospel appears to be the Word's ongoing manifestation to men.

We saw above that Justin had pointed Trypho to the one called "Man" in Ezekiel, referring to the one in the form of man in Ezek 1:5, 26. Irenaeus's treatment of this text in *Haer*. 4.20.10 is lengthier and more sophisticated. When Ezekiel beheld "*the likeness of a throne* above them, and on the throne *a likeness as of man's appearance* (Ezek 1:26) . . . he added, *This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord*, lest anyone should think that he saw God perfectly in these things" (Ezek 1:28b [2:1 LXX]).[22] What Moses, Elijah, and Ezekiel, "who had all many celestial visions" saw was not God the Father, but "similitudes of the splendor of the Lord, and . . . things to come."

A major reason for Irenaeus's careful avoidance of the thought that Ezekiel saw God (the Father) perfectly is that the Lord said in John's Gospel: "No one has ever seen God; the Only-begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (John 1:18). Irenaeus cited this statement once in *Haer*. 4.20.6 and twice in 4.20.11, along with Exod 3:20, "'But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live,'" just before and after treating several Old Testament theophanies. He also cited the same Johannine pronouncement in 3.11.6, just before his treatment of the fourfold Gospel in the likeness of the four living creatures in 3.11.8. This declaration functioned as a primary hermeneutical guide for interpreting the Old Testament theophanies in general, and Ezekiel's vision in particular.[23] The same Gospel even provided a pattern for later readers by interpreting Isaiah's vision of the Lord of hosts (Isa 6:1–13) as a vision of Jesus (John 12:41, "Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him"), an exegesis followed by Irenaeus.[24] Irenaeus is the only one to state the principle and its Johannine anchor, but it is

22. Irenaeus, *Haer*. 4.20.10 (Unger, ACW).

23. "So the Prophets did not see God's very face openly but the economies and mysteries by which man would see God" (Irenaeus, *Haer*. 4.20.10 [Unger, ACW]).

24. Irenaeus, *Haer*. 4.33.11 (Unger, ACW), "Some of them [i.e., the prophets] saw him in glory and beheld his glorious mode of life *at the right of* the Father"; see also 4.20.8.

operative no less in other second-century Christian exegetes like Justin, Melito, and the author of the *Epistula Apostolorum*. These interpreters took John 1:18 to heart and concluded that Old Testament theophanies, even the heavenly visions of God seen by prophets, were revelations of Christ or similitudes of his appearing, given by Christ himself in his capacity as revealer of God.

The point of this section is to show that when Irenaeus in *Haer*. 3.11.8 composed his comparison of the four Gospels to the four cherubim, he was first of all enlarging upon a robust tradition of Christian biblical interpretation that had preceded him. This tradition understood Christ as the divine Person enthroned upon the cherubim in the Psalms of David, numinously present above the ark of the covenant in tabernacle and temple and encountered in Ezekiel's inaugural vision by the river Chebar.

2. *The Four Living Creatures as Images of Christ's Πραγματεία*

What is the symbolism of the cherubim's faces? In Irenaeus's mind the faces do not represent, as Origen would later suggest, the human faculties (Origen, *Hom. Ezek.* 1). Nor do they or their counterparts in Rev 4:6–8 simply represent, as in many modern interpretations, the animate creation, or the fulness or the excellence of the created world.[25] Instead, they depict aspects of the person and work of Christ, as bearing his chariot-throne. It is their Christ-bearing function that makes them fitting subjects of comparison with the four written Gospels.

Irenaeus had introduced the Gospels as a known group of four in *Haer*. 3.1.1. This is a historically oriented section in which he narrates how the church has received the faith and the plan of salvation from those very men through whom the Gospel itself has

25. E.g., on Ezekiel, Allen (*Ezekiel 1–19*, 31) says, "As supernatural beings, they are mediators of Yahweh's powerful being. Yet, as his supernatural servants, they also represent the concerted best that each of his orders of animate creation can separately contribute to his glory." On Revelation, Swete says, "The four forms suggest whatever is noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in animate Nature" (*Apocalypse*, 71), which is closely reprised in Ford, *Revelation*, 75: "symbolic of creation and the divine immanence. They are what is noblest (lion), strongest (ox), wisest (man), and swiftness (eagle)."

come down to us, first (in its Scriptural form) from Matthew, then from Mark and Luke, then John. After a lengthy excursus occasioned by his opponents' attacks on these Scriptures in preference to their own "tradition," he comes back to the testimony of the Gospel writers to the "first principles of the Gospel" in 3.9.1. Here beginning with Matthew (3.9.1–3), he then treats Luke (3.10.1–4), then Mark (3.10.5), and then John (3.11.6). In the next section, Irenaeus observes, "the authority of these Gospels is so great that the heretics themselves bear witness to them, and each one of them tries to establish his doctrine with the Gospels as a starting point" (3.11.7).[26] Despite the heretics' protestations, then, proofs drawn from these Gospels are validated even by the heretics themselves. Though Irenaeus has been working with the four Gospels throughout his volumes, to this point he has felt no need to defend the idea that there are four and only four of them. This argument only comes in 3.11.8, and the next section, 3.11.9, discloses the reason why: some of the heretics "destroy the form of the gospel by falsely introducing either more faces to the Gospel than the aforementioned, or fewer."[27] Because of this, Irenaeus has to insist at the beginning of 3.11.8:

> It is not possible that there be more Gospels in number than these, or fewer. By way of illustration, since there are four zones in the world in which we live, and four cardinal winds,[28] and since the Church is spread over the whole earth, and since *the pillar and bulwark* of the Church is the Gospel and the Spirit of life, consequently she has four pillars, blowing imperishability from all sides and giving life [*vivificantes*] to men. From these things it is manifest that the Word, who is Artificer of all things and *is enthroned upon the Cherubim and holds together all things*, and who was manifested to men, gave us the fourfold Gospel, which is held together by the one Spirit. Just as David, when petitioning His [Christ's] coming, said, *You who are enthroned*

26. For a convenient chart listing the heretics and their use of the Gospels, see Mutschler, "Irenäus und die Evangelien," 229.

27. As mentioned, Unger's translation in the ACW series italicizes citations. But it missed that Irenaeus is citing John's words in this section (note the "he says"). I have thus italicized them.

28. Cf. Ezek 37:9 and Rev 7:1, which, however, have four angels: κρατοῦντας τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀνέμους τῆς γῆς.

> *upon the Cherubim, shine forth*. For the Cherubim, too, had four faces (τετραπρόσωπα),[29] and their faces are images of the dispensation (εἰκόνες τῆς πραγματείας) of the Son of God.

Irenaeus comes to his analogy between the Gospels and the heavenly beings from the belief that Christ is the one enthroned upon the cherubim—and this ties him directly to Ezekiel, whose prophecy plays a larger role in Irenaeus's thought in this passage than is often appreciated. For instance, Hort noted that Irenaeus's mention here of the "four cardinal winds" and the four pillars "blowing imperishability from all sides and giving life to men" come from reflection on Ezek 37:9, "And he said to me, 'Prophesy to the spirit! Prophesy, son of man, and say to the spirit, "This is what the Lord says; 'Come from the four winds, and blow into these corpses, and they will live (ζησάτοσαν).'"'"'"[30] Just as the spirit in Ezekiel will come from the four winds to breathe life-giving breath on the corpses, so the Spirit now blows imperishability through the four pillars of the Gospel to make people live.

The close similarity of Ezekiel's cherubim to the four living creatures in John's vision in Rev 4:6–8 assured a natural transfer of symbolic significance from the former to the latter. Irenaeus thus immediately slides into John's presentation:

> *For the first one*,[31] he says, *was like a lion*, symbolizing His powerful, sovereign, and kingly nature (τὸ ἔμπρακτον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡγεμονικὸν καὶ βασιλικὸν χαρακτηρίζον). *The second was like a calf*, symbolizing His ministerial and priestly rank (τὴν ἱερουργικὴν καὶ ἱερατικὴν τάξιν εμφαῖνον). *The third animal had a face like a man*, which manifestly describes His coming as man. *The fourth is like a flying eagle*, manifesting the gift of the Spirit hovering over the Church. (*Haer*. 3.11.8)

Irenaeus is knowingly citing John in the Apocalypse, for he inserts "he says" (φησίν), but he does not identify the source, and his shift from Ezekiel to John is abrupt. These irregularities, T. C.

29. Literally, "are four-faced." This is from Ezek 1:6, 10. The "too" means both the Gospel and the cherubim are four-faced (τετράμορφον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, the four-formed Gospel).

30. Robinson, "Selected Notes," 156.

31. Here, and with the other introductions below, I have added italics to the cited words which Unger has not.

Skeat thought, proved that Irenaeus was somewhat carelessly copying from an intermediary source and had skipped some material. This earlier source, Skeat reasoned, must then have already related the four Gospels to the vision of Ezekiel and to Revelation.[32] But this hardly seems like proof. Because of what we have seen of the Asian Christological exegesis that preceded Irenaeus, we certainly cannot rule out the possibility that the connections between the four Gospels and Ezekiel's four cherubim had been made before him. But it is easier to believe that Irenaeus simply neglected to mention John (whom he had cited and will continue to cite throughout his work) than an otherwise unknown, intermediary source.

Irenaeus's abrupt switch from Ezekiel's vision of the living creatures to John's is more likely because he is anticipating the application he will draw in the next section to the activity of the Son of God in salvation history. This activity, as he perceives it, followed the order of presentation in John's vision of the animals in the Apocalypse.

To be emphasized here is how the Christological interpretation of the one enthroned upon the cherubim led to Christological interpretations of the cherubim themselves. Before he relates the cherubim to the Gospels, Irenaeus first teaches that these figures who support the divine throne illustrate aspects of Christ's πραγματεία, his dealings, his operations, his careful working among mankind. It is, first of all, the cherubim, not the Gospels, that set forth "images of the πραγματεία of the Son of God." Before he reaches the end of 3.11.8, Irenaeus will deliver two more analogies based on the four cherubim: for one of which the order of Revelation is important, for the other the order of Ezekiel.

32. Skeat, "Irenaeus and the Four-Gospel Canon," 198. For Skeat, this source was a "defence of the Four-Gospel Canon," and it "must have originated at a date early enough to be used as a source by Irenaeus—say, perhaps, not later that [*sic*] 170 or thereabouts."

2.1 *The Lion. Effectual Working, Leadership, Royal Power: John*

> *For the first one*, he says, *was like a lion*, symbolizing His powerful, sovereign, and kingly nature (τὸ ἔμπρακτον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡγεμονικὸν καὶ βασιλικὸν χαρακτηρίζον) (*Haer*. 3.11.8)

At this point, Irenaeus is still speaking of the visionary depictions of the living beings themselves (not the Gospels). The one in the form of the lion represents the "powerful, sovereign, and kingly nature" of Christ. It is only after briefly noting how each of the four beings symbolizes the workings of the Son of God, that Irenaeus then turns to the Gospels:

> Now, the Gospels harmonize (σύμφωνα/*consonantia*) with these [animals] on which Christ Jesus *is enthroned*. For the Gospel according to John narrates the generation which is from the Father, sovereign, powerful, and glorious (ἡγεμονικὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ πρακτικὴν καὶ ἔνδοξον γενεάν). It runs thus, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*; and *all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made*. On this account this Gospel is full of all confidence (παρρησίας/*fiducia*), for such is its characteristic (*persona*) (*Haer*. 3.11.8)

The Gospel symbolism is logically secondary to the symbolic witness each heavenly being itself bears to Christ; nevertheless, the four Gospels positively harmonize with them. It is important to note that the comparison between the living beings and the Gospels is not, for Irenaeus, a first-order referentiality. Later expositors, like Victorinus, will flatly state, "The four animals are the four Gospels (*Comm. Rev*. 4.3) . . . The animal similar to the lion is the Gospel according to John (4.4)," etc.[33] For Victorinus and many others,[34] the Gospels (or the evangelists) are the direct referents of the visionary forms. This is typically assumed to be Irenaeus's meaning as well, but it is not. The four living beings

33. Translations of Victorinus's commentary are taken from Weinrich, ed., *Latin Commentaries on Revelation*, 1–22.

34. E.g., Apringius of Beja, *Explanation of the Revelation* 4:7, "*The first living creature was like a lion*. Most of our interpreters say that this signifies the person of Mark, the Evangelist" (see Weinrich, *Latin Commentaries on Revelation*, 41).

and the four Gospels bear witness to the Son of God, and they do so in ways that "harmonize"[35] with one another.

Like the lion-cherub, the Gospel according to John narrates Christ's sovereign, powerful and glorious generation from the Father. Irenaeus's association of the lion with John is, of course, not the one we are most accustomed to. After the time of Jerome, particularly in the West, the dominant paradigm has the lion representing Mark and the eagle John (more on this below). But Irenaeus, who is the first we know of to make the associations, confidently links John to the lion and Mark to the eagle.

This unique "generation" of the Word made flesh, his divine origin, is of course one of the hallmarks of John's Gospel, recognized by every interpreter, and its importance for early Christian theology can hardly be overstated.[36] If divine generation, power, and glory are well symbolized by the lion, then the lion-cherub is indeed "consonant" with the Gospel according to John: "for such is its *persona*."

Unger translates the word *persona* here as "characteristic" (i.e., "for such is its characteristic"). This portion is missing from the Greek of Fragment 11 but Rousseau and Doutreleau's restoration of the word πρόσωπον is surely correct. This is the same word Irenaeus had already used to describe the faces of the cherubim, as τετραπρόσωπα καὶ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν εἰκόνες τῆς πραγματείας τοῦ Υἱου τοῦ Θεοῦ (lines 183–84).

The (singular) Gospel too is four-faced, for in 3.11.9 he will charge that some heretics "destroy the form of the gospel by falsely introducing either more faces (πρόσωπα) to the Gospel than the aforementioned, or fewer." The repeated reference to "faces" indicates again that the comparison was grounded upon Ezekiel's vision, where each living creature is said to be four-faced. And "face" seems to have an application to each of the written Gospels

35. The word is σύμφωνα, which the Latin translator appropriately rendered as *consonantia*. The two foursomes agree or "make the same sound;" they each set forth these truths about the Son of God.

36. For Justin alone, see Hill, *Johannine Corpus*, 316–37; more generally, Wiles, *Spiritual Gospel*; Hill, "Gospel of John."

themselves, as Irenaeus finds the character of each Gospel at its "face," that is, at its beginning.[37]

2.2 *The Ox. His Sacrificial and Sacerdotal Order: Luke*

> *The second was like a calf*, symbolizing His ministerial and priestly rank (*Haer*. 3.11.8)

Again, the calf or ox (μόσχος) of Rev 4:7 signifies not, in the first place, a Gospel, but *Christ's* sacrificial and sacerdotal activity. It also becomes a fitting symbol for Luke's presentation of Christ in his Gospel. Further down in 3.11.8, Irenaeus explains:

> The Gospel according to Luke, since it has a priestly character (ἱερατικοῦ χαρακτῆρος ὑπάρχον), began (ἤρξατο) with Zacharias the priest as he was offering incense to God. For the fatted calf which would be slaughtered when the younger son would be found was already being prepared.

Again, Irenaeus finds the priestly character of the Gospel according to Luke clearly discernable at its opening (its face), where in the very first episode Luke tells the story of the priest Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, ministering in the temple. Luke even uses word μόσχος, as Irenaeus says, when, upon the return of the prodigal, the father orders the slaughter of the fatted calf to make a celebratory feast (Luke 15:27, 30). Luke is the only Evangelist to use the word, its only other NT occurrences being in Heb 9:12, 19, where the calf[38] is a sacrificial animal meant for burnt offerings and sin offerings in the Levitical system (Exod 24:6; Lev 16:6).

2.3 *The Man. His Advent as a Human Being: Matthew*

> *The third animal had a face as of a man*, which manifestly describes His coming as man (*Haer*. 3.11.8).

37. The connection of the "face" of each Gospel and its beginning is clearly assumed in Victorinus, *Comm. Rev.* 4.4, and made explicit by Jerome in his *Comm. Ezek.* 1.10, "The *face* means the beginning of the Gospels."

38. μόσχος being used interchangeably with ταῦρος in this passage.

Irenaeus sees in Revelation's third living creature a manifest description of the advent of the Word of God as a human being. Further down in 3.11.8, he shows how it also fittingly depicts the character of Matthew's Gospel:

> Matthew narrates His generation inasmuch as He is man (τὴν κατὰ ἄνθρωπον αὐτοῦ γέννησιν ἐξηγεῖται). *The book,* he writes, *of the generation* (γενέσεως) *of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham* [Matt. 1:1]; and again, *the birth* (ἡ γέννησις) *of Christ took place in this way* [Matt. 1:18]. This Gospel, then, belongs to the human form (ἀνθρωπόμορφον) and so throughout the Gospel the humble and meek man is retained.

More than all the other Gospels, Matthew, according to Irenaeus, emphasizes Jesus' humanity, as is seen in the Evangelist's very first words. Irenaeus keenly aligns the human face of the third living creature with Matthew's commencement of his Gospel with the human "generation" (γενέσεως) or genealogy of Jesus and moving right on to an account of his human birth. This forms a nice complement to Irenaeus's description of John as relating Christ's divine and "glorious generation (γενεάν) from the Father." "Anthropomorphic" describes Matthew's entire Gospel, for "throughout the Gospel the humble and meek man is retained."

2.4 *The Flying Eagle. The Gift of the Spirit*

> *The fourth is like a flying eagle,* manifesting (σαφηνίζον) the gift of the Spirit hovering over the Church (*Haer.* 3.11.8)

At first sight, the depiction of the fourth living creature as a flying eagle seems to have to do not with the Son of God per se but with the Spirit. But by stressing the Spirit as "gift,"[39] Irenaeus already hints that he has in mind a connection to Christ's work in "baptizing with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 3:16), and in "pouring out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2:33). This in fact becomes plain later in the chapter when, expanding on the activity of the Lord, he says, "Finally, having become man for us, He sent the gift of

39. Earlier in 3.11.8, the four-formed Gospel itself is Christ's gift, held together by the one Spirit.

the heavenly Spirit upon the entire earth, covering us with His pinions."

For Irenaeus, the flying eagle, symbolizing "the gift of the Spirit hovering over the Church," fittingly applies to Mark's Gospel because

> Mark began (τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐποιήσατο) with the prophetical Spirit which came down to men from on high. *The beginning* (Ἀρχὴ), he says, *of the Gospel…as it is written in Isaias the prophet*, pointing out the winged image [i.e., the eagle] of the Gospel (τὴν πτερωτικὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ εὐαγγελίου δεικνύων). For this reason he made a compendious and cursory (σύντομον καὶ παρατρέχουσαν) announcement [of the Gospel], for it has a prophetic character[40] (*Haer*. 3.11.8)

Note it is not simply the Spirit but "the prophetical Spirit" who comes down from on high. The flying eagle fittingly depicts Mark's Gospel, for he begins with the prophetical Spirit speaking through Isaiah. Further, Irenaeus describes "the prophetic character" of writing as being "concise and cursory (σύντομον καὶ παρατρέχουσαν)," [41] and this, he says, is also Mark's.

These early observations on Mark's style are noteworthy and perceptive and have even extracted some praise from scholars. In a letter to B. W. Bacon dated April 10, 1919, James Hardy Ropes, then Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard, wrote

> The two words σύντομον and παρατρέχουσαν admirably characterize Mark and are also very appropriate to the incisive brevity and habit of touching on salient points which are commonly found (although the former not always) in prophecy. Of course, the actual *use* of these two methods by Mark and by the prophets seems to us to show striking differences, but nevertheless the remark of Irenaeus is ingenious and not without real insight and sound observation.[42]

40. Better, "For this is the prophetic character" (προφητικὸς γὰρ ὁ χαρακτὴρ οὗτος). Irenaeus is asserting that these qualities are typical of the prophetic style.

41. "παρατρέχουσαν] rapid, as contrasted with dwelling on a matter" (see Robinson, "Selected Notes," 156).

42. These comments are taken from handwritten excerpts Ropes made from the letter, which I discovered in a copy of Stieren's edition of Irenaeus (vol. I), which once belonged to Ropes. This volume was first owned by Ezra Abbot

Irenaeus has already drawn fruitful analogies between the four living creatures, the work of Christ, and the character of each Gospel. In his correlations we can see the now familiar threefold office of the incarnate, *human* Christ: *prophet*, *priest*, and *king*.[43] But Irenaeus sees more benefit flowing from the visions of the four living creatures, and this surplus treats us to some of his rich biblical theology.

3. *The Gospels and Biblical Theology*

In the last two portions of *Haer*. 3.11.8, Irenaeus offers two more biblical-theological lessons taught by the four cherubim that uphold the heavenly throne. The first is an expansion on the "activity" (πραγματεία) of the Lord in his dealings with mankind which he had mentioned earlier as symbolized by the four living creatures.

3.1 *The Activity the Lord in Redemptive History*

The sequence of this messianic activity is significant, for we see that its stages play out historically in the order in which the living creatures are mentioned, not in Ezekiel but in Revelation. This, again, is probably why Irenaeus chose to use Revelation's descriptions in the immediately preceding section.

> Now the Word of God Himself used to speak (προσωμίλει), in virtue of His divinity and glory, with the patriarchs[44] who lived before Moses' time. And those who lived under the Law, He used to assign a

Jr. and was then purchased by the Harvard Divinity School in 1884. It was subsequently obtained by someone with the initials J. H. I. in March of 1888, from whose legacy it passed into the hands of Ropes in 1902. It is now held in the Roger Nicole Collection at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, having been acquired by Professor Nicole at an unknown time. The handwriting on the note matches the inscription by Ropes at the front of the volume (emphasis original).

43. See Unger, ACW, Book 3 (150n45).

44. On Christ speaking to Abraham and Abraham rejoicing to see Christ's day, see *Haer*. 4.5.3–5; 4.7.1–4

> priestly and ministerial function.[45] Finally, having become man for us, he sent the gift of the heavenly Spirit upon the entire earth, covering us with His pinions. Therefore, such as was the economy (πραγματεία/*dispositio*) of the Son of God, such also was the form (ἡ μορφή) of the living beings; and such as was the form of the living beings, such was also the character (ὁ χαρακτήρ) of the Gospel. And (καί) as the living creatures are fourfold (τετράμορφα), so also the Gospel is fourfold (τετράμορφον); and fourfold also is the Lord's economy (πραγματεία/*dispositio*) (*Haer*. 3.11.8)

Irenaeus concludes with a three-way analogy, and really, a double three-way analogy. It is not simply that the activity of the Lord, the living creatures, and the Gospels are all *fourfold*,[46] an analogy which Irenaeus mentions second. He begins with another analogy: "such as was the economy (πραγματεία)[47] of the Son of God, such also was the form (ἡ μορφή) of the living beings; and such as was the form of the living beings, such was also the character (ὁ χαρακτήρ) of the Gospel." The πραγματεία of the Lord is what is paramount, and this πραγματεία is symbolized both by the *visual form* of the heavenly beings (lion, ox, man, and eagle) and by the corresponding *character* of the fourfold Gospel. This particular three-way analogy, as already mentioned, plays upon on the presentation in Rev 4:7, for the epochs of the Lord's activity symbolized unfolded in the same sequence as the four living creatures are presented in Rev 4.7: by his divinity and glory with the patriarchs; his priestly and ministerial order under the law; his incarnation for us; and his giving of the heavenly Spirit to superintend the church. Each is portrayed by the creatures and by the character of the Gospels.

45. τάξιν in the Greek fragment, but Latin *actum*, standing for a presumed πρᾶξιν. Unger decides for the latter ("function" above), but Robinson ("Selected Notes," 156) finds that a previous occurrence of τάξιν was rendered correctly as *ordinatio* by the Latin translator. Thus, it is likely that the translation *actum* here was based on a misreading or a corrupted text.

46. Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 509, who writes, "the four heavenly creatures as a group provide Irenaeus with exactly what he needs, a vivid and memorable image of fourfoldness."

47. See Briggman, "Re-evaluating Angelomorphism," 589, who suggests "that πραγματεία refers to aspects of, or moments in, the economy of the Son."

But Irenaeus has not yet finished his analogies. The Ezekielian order has still to yield its fruits.

3.2 *The Four Universal Covenants, and Gospel Order*

> And for this reason four principal (καθολικαί) covenants were given to the human race (*Haer*. 3.11.8)

Irenaeus then lists those four universal covenants, though here there is a problem in the transmission of the text. The surviving form of the Greek fragment names covenants under Noah, Abraham, Moses, and "of the Gospel through our Lord Jesus Christ," but this appears to be corrupt. Most editors and translators seem to believe (and I agree) that the Latin preserves the original better here,[48] and it has covenants with Adam, Noah, Moses, and the new covenant. Since Irenaeus qualifies these covenants as καθολικαί,[49] Adam[50] seems perhaps more likely than Abraham. Also suspect about the Greek version is that it gives signs for the first two covenants (rainbow; circumcision), but not for the last two, and it lacks the very Irenaean flourish at the end (the last clause in the citation below). Unger's translation (using the Latin identifications) is as follows.

> And for this reason four principal covenants were given to the human race: the first, of (ἐπί) Adam before the deluge; the second, of (ἐπί) Noe after the deluge; the third, the law (ἡ νομοθεσία) under (ἐπί) Moses; and the fourth, which renews man and recapitulates in itself all

48. See the reasons given in SC 210.286. The *ANF*, Unger (ACW), and the French of SC 211 all follow the Latin. Rousseau, however, thought we should retain the order of the Greek (SC 211.494–495, which refers to SC 406, "Appendice V: Les quatre alliances," 385–88).

49. *Generi* in the Latin. Cf. the reference to the Noahic covenant in *Dem.* 22, "But after the flood God established a covenant for the whole world, and for all living beasts, and for men."

50. For more of Irenaeus's reflections on the role of Adam in his transgression, and as the object of redemption by Christ, see *Haer*. 3.23.1–8; *Dem*. 15–17.

> things,[51] that is, which through the Gospel raises up and bears men on its wings to the heavenly kingdom. (*Haer*. 3.11.8)

Immediately we see that the four principle or universal covenants do not follow the same *sequence* as Revelation. The fourth covenant (the same in Greek and Latin) is certainly the eagle—bearing mankind on its wings into the heavenly kingdom and picking up on the "winged" aspect of the Gospel. For Irenaeus, this would be Mark. The third, the giving of the law under Moses (also the same in both versions) would be the sacerdotal ox, meaning Luke. The second, as Noah introduces the patriarchal period which Irenaeus previously identified as the time of Christ interacting in a royal and divine manner, like the lion, would be John. And, that the first covenant, under Adam the first man, should correspond to the human face (Matthew), makes excellent sense.[52]

What this means is that, for Irenaeus, while the Son's fourfold activity in redemptive history flowed in the order of John's four living creatures, the four principal, divine covenants came in the order of the four faces of the cherubim in Ezek 1:10: man, lion, ox, and eagle.[53]

4. *Ezekiel's Cherubim and Gospel Sequencing*

Into his discussion of the number and character of the fourfold Gospel Irenaeus has profitably incorporated John's vision of the four living creatures in the Apocalypse, finding biblical-theological significance in John's sequencing. But the more primary, foundational role of Ezekiel, along with Ps 79 and the other thematical-

51. Shades of Eph 1:10 here, "as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι) all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."

52. Even the Greek order would seem to require the same identifications. In this case, Abraham would most likely represent the patriarchs and thus be matched with the lion (John), leaving Noah to be represented by the man (Matthew), perhaps because the entire human race had a new beginning in Noah.

53. Irenaeus elsewhere links the succession of covenants in Scripture to God's gradual perfecting of mankind: "He was manifested to men just as God willed, in order that by believing in him they might always make progress and might through the covenants make progress toward the perfection of salvation" (4.9.3); for more on man's progress, see 4.38.

ly consonant passages, is clear, both for the exegetical tradition that preceded Irenaeus, and for Irenaeus himself as he composed the analogies with the Gospels.

Now, the order in which the cherubim's faces are mentioned in Ezek 1:10 (man, lion, ox, eagle) using Irenaeus's identifications, would yield the Gospel order Matthew, John, Luke, and Mark. And this, as Skeat recognized in a well-known 1992 article,[54] turns out to be the so-called Western order of the Gospels. Skeat could also have noted a corollary of this, that is, if one rejects Irenaeus's correlations in favor of those later articulated by Jerome, the present canonical order, too, can be found in the order of the faces in Ezekiel: the man is Matthew, the lion is Mark, the ox is Luke, and the eagle is John. Both orders, in other words, can be derived from Ezekiel's vision.

These observations might be enough to make one wonder if it is possible that the codicological arrangement of the Gospels was in fact founded in some way upon, or ever justified by, the early Christian exegesis of the four living creatures of Ezekiel—or vice versa. Whenever it was that the four Gospels began to be copied, sewn together, and used in single codices, how did the creator(s) decide the order in which they would be placed? Hengel observes that four books in a collection have twenty-four possibilities of sequence.[55] Metzger finds only nine different sequences actually attested among literary and manuscript witnesses, most of them quite minimally.[56] The present canonical order dominates the tradition; only the Western order rivals it, and only in the early period.

The simplest and likeliest explanation for the origin of the present canonical order, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, is that it was based on a perceived chronology of their publication.[57] The

54. Skeat, "Irenaeus and the Four-Gospel Canon," 197–98, citing also Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, 2:370–71.

55. Hengel, "Four Gospels," 17.

56. Metzger, *Canon*, 296–97.

57. Clement of Alexandria was heir to a variant tradition which held that the Gospels with the genealogies were first, and that John was written last, giving the order Matthew, Luke (or Luke, Matthew), Mark, John (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.5–7).

early literary witnesses who mention the four Gospels in this order—the Muratorian Fragment;[58] Irenaeus in *Haer*. 3.1.1 (though, strictly speaking, he does not say that Mark was issued before Luke) and Origen in his *Comm. Matt*.[59] present them in what is *ostensibly* the order of their historical appearance.[60] The first material witnesses to the Gospels in this order, however, oddly enough, do not come until the fourth century in the pandect codices Vaticanus (B 03) and Sinaiticus (א 01), followed in the fifth century by Alexandrinus (A 02), and then nearly the entire Greek tradition thereafter. But partial evidence for this order may be claimed from P75 (most likely third-century), which holds Luke and John, in that order.[61]

The usual explanation for the origin of the Western order is given by Bruce Metzger: "This order seems to have arisen from a

58. Metzger, *Canon*, 296, believed the MF to be the first witness to this order. In my view, the Fragment is probably just later than Irenaeus and is quite possibly aware of Irenaeus's treatment in *Haer*. 3.1.1. The most recent critical edition is that of Rothschild, *Muratorian Fragment. Text*, who, however, takes a very different view of the dating of the MF.

59. Origen (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.4–5) also quite possibly familiar with Irenaeus's presentation in *Haer*. 3.1.1, writes, "as having learnt by tradition concerning the four Gospels, which alone are unquestionable in the Church of God under heaven, that first was written that according to Matthew, who was once a tax-collector but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, who published it for those who from Judaism came to believe, composed as it was in the Hebrew language. Secondly, that according to Mark, who wrote it in accordance with Peter's instructions, whom also Peter acknowledged as his son in the catholic epistle, speaking in these terms: 'She that is in Babylon, elect together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Mark my son.' And thirdly, that according to Luke, who wrote, for those who from the Gentiles [came to believe], the Gospel that was praised by Paul. After them all, that according to John."

60. Hengel ("Four Gospels," 18) explains the ultimate demise of the Western order: "The 'historical' order was stronger because it was older."

61. Some have thought that P75 would have had a companion volume with Matthew and Mark (Hengel, "Four Gospels," 17). Skeat proposed that P75 "is in fact the second half of a four-Gospel codex, since it consisted, when complete, of a single-quire codex of 72 leaves . . . If then P 75 was originally a four-Gospel codex, it must have consisted of two single-quire codices sewn together, the first containing Matthew and Mark, the second Luke and John;" after noting the papyrus's likely date in the early third century, Skeat remarked, "This, of course, must also have had ancestors" ("Origin," 80–81).

desire to give the two apostles a leading place. As for the two who were held to be associated with apostles, the greater length of Luke's Gospel takes precedence over Mark's Gospel."[62] There might be thought to be some basis for this when Tertullian in his treatise against Marcion (*Adv*. *Marc*. 4.2) chooses to treat the Gospels written by apostles first, before those written by their associates. But Tertullian's order of treatment was chosen for apologetic reasons, and it is actually John, Matthew, Luke, Mark. If Metzger's explanation is valid, then, it really must involve two principles: apostles first, and, with each pair, the longest Gospel first.

The appellation "Western" appears to have arisen from the fact that, while it now constitutes only a small minority of the Greek tradition, it is the order of the majority of Old Latin Gospel MSS (VL 5, VL 10, etc.).[63] And yet this order is apparently also represented in P45, the earliest surviving Greek copy of all four Gospels (plus Acts) in one codex, from the third century.[64] It is also found in two important fifth-century Greek manuscripts, Codex Bezae (D 05, a Greek/Latin diglot) and Codex Washingtoniensis (W 032).[65] And since the Old Latin manuscripts all seem to derive

62. Metzger, *Canon*, 296–97. See also Saydon, "Order," 191.

63. Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, 12. There are exceptions, however. Codex Bobiensis (VL 1), the oldest Latin Gospel book now extant (fourth century), has the peculiar order John, Luke, Mark, Matthew (*Latin New Testament*, 22). Another unusual order is present in the list added to Codex Claromontanus of the Pauline epistles (VL 75), which gives the order Matthew, John, Mark, Luke (*Latin New Testament*, 27).

64. On P45 having the Western order, see Skeat and McGing, "Notes," 21, and Skeat, "Codicological Analysis," 141–57 (esp. 146–47).

65. See also Patton, "Greek Catenae." Besides P45, D 05, and W 032, three more Greek majuscules, X 033 (catena), 055 (catena), and 073+084 exhibit this order, "four from the third to the sixth century and two from a later period" (Patton, "Greek Catenae," 117). There are no Greek minuscule MSS with the Western order (correcting the contrary claim of Metzger, *Canon*, 296), but Patton has recently identified five ninth-to-twelfth-century catena manuscripts in minuscule script, with abbreviated Biblical text, with this order. He does not believe, however, that the seven catena MSS adopted this order because the catenist used a Western order exemplar. This order is also represented in a work known as the *Speculum* or *Liber de diuinis scripturis* (PS-AU spe), falsely attributed to Augustine, compiled in Italy around 400 (Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, 39).

from "a single common original" copy,[66] this early copy, with little doubt, must have come from a particular Greek archetype which had the Gospels in the Western order.

Irenaeus's identifications of the lion with John and the eagle with Mark are followed in later Greek expositions of Revelation, in particular, in Victorinus of Pettau's third-century Latin *Commentary on Revelation*[67] and in the influential Greek commentary of Andrew of Caesarea in Cappadocia in the early seventh century.[68] But it never gained universal acceptance. Augustine, for instance, in his *Harmony of the Gospels* (written ca. 400) first gives the customary, historical order of the Gospels' appearance (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; *Cons*. 1.2.3), but when he comes to relate them to the living creatures of Revelation, he rejects what amounts to Irenaeus's identifications (he does not mention Jerome's), saying that it looks only to the books' beginnings, not to their wholes. He agrees rather with those "who have taken the lion to point to Matthew, the man to Mark, the calf to Luke, and the eagle to John" (*Cons*. 1.6.9). Augustine's familiarity with at least some aspect of the Ezekielian background is signified almost incidentally when in *Cons*. 1.7.10 he calls the Gospels "those sacred chariots of the Lord . . . in which He is borne throughout the earth and brings the peoples under His easy yoke and His light burden."[69] Augustine's correlations were followed by Bede in his *Exposition of the Apocalypse*.[70]

It is Jerome's correlations, and his justifications of them, that eventually won the day in the West, though this took some time. The first occurrence of these correlations in Jerome's writings comes in his treatise against Jovinian 1.26, written in 393. While

66. Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, 12.

67. Victorinus's own edition survives in three MSS found in the Vatican library, the main one being Ottobonian 3288B (fifteenth century); see Bruce, "Earliest Latin Commentary," 355. An English translation of Victorinus's original may be found in Weinrich, *Latin Commentaries*, 1–22. *ANF* (vol. 7) gives Jerome's revised edition.

68. For an English translation see Constantinou, *Guiding to a Blessed End*.

69. So too, Jerome's "team of four" *Ep*. 53.8, on which, see below.

70. For an English translation, see Weinrich, *Latin Commentaries*, 110–95.

expounding the virtues of John, the virgin apostle, he observes that John's Gospel

> is widely different from the rest. Matthew as though he were writing of a man begins thus: "The book of the Generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham:" Luke begins with the priesthood of Zacharias; Mark with a prophecy of the prophets Malachi and Isaiah. The first has the face of a man, on account of the genealogical table; the second, the face of a calf, on account of the priesthood; the third, the face of a lion, on account of the voice of one crying in the desert, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight." But John like an eagle soars aloft, and reaches the Father Himself, and says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God," and so on. The virgin writer expounded mysteries which the married could not . . .[71]

Jerome keeps to Irenaeus's practice of reading the character of the Gospels from the way they begin, and cites the very same portions of each Gospel, at or near their beginnings, that Irenaeus had cited as proof for the earlier identifications. But Jerome shows no hesitation at all in changing the lion from Mark to John, and the eagle from John to Mark. Even though his order of presentation here (Matthew, Luke, Mark, John) is neither that of Ezekiel nor that of Revelation, by mentioning the faces of each creature he shows the preeminent influence of Ezekiel.

Jerome's reliance upon Ezekiel is even more apparent in his *Ep*. 53.8 to Paulinus of Nola written the next year (394). Here his introduction to the four Gospels is purely Ezekielian, comparing them to Ezekiel's cherubim with a medley of allusions to Ezek 1:7–20:

> Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the Lord's team of four, the true cherubim or store of knowledge. With them the whole body is full of eyes [Ezek. 1:18],[72] they glitter as sparks [Ezek. 1:7], they run and return like lightning [Ezek. 1:14], their feet are straight feet [Ezek. 1:7], and lifted up, their backs also are winged, ready to fly in all directions [Ezek. 1:17]. They hold together each by each and are interwoven one

71. W. H. Freemantle's translation from *NPNF*^{2} 6:366.
72. This feature has a parallel in Rev 4:6, 8.

> with another [Ezek. 1:9]: like wheels they roll along and go whithersoever the breath of the Holy Spirit wafts them [Ezek. 1:12].[73]

Though he does not expressly say *which* Gospels are represented by *which* faces, his order of presentation is that of Ezekiel's vision, not of John's as Irenaeus had done. Here the metaphor probably aimed at but never verbally completed in Irenaeus is filled out: the Gospels *are* the true cherubim, "the Lord's team of four." As we saw above, only a few years later Augustine would extend the metaphor even further, calling the four Gospels "those sacred chariots of the Lord . . . in which He is borne throughout the earth and brings the peoples under His easy yoke and His light burden."

In the preface to his *Commentary on Matthew* of 398,[74] while clearly influenced by Irenaeus's presentation in *Haer*. 3.1.1, Jerome again specifically centers on Ezekiel and his description:[75]

> The book of Ezekiel also proves that these four Gospels had been predicted much earlier . . . The first face of a man signifies Matthew, who began his narrative as though about a man: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham." The second [face signifies] Mark in whom the voice of a lion roaring in the wilderness is heard: "A voice of one shouting in the desert: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight," The third [is the face] of the calf which prefigures (*praefigurat*) that the evangelist Luke began with Zachariah the priest. The fourth [face signifies] John the evangelist who, having taken up eagle's wings and hastening towards higher matters, discusses the Word of God.

Later in the same preface he turns to Revelation as a secondary witness:

> This also explains the words found in the Apocalypse of John . . . and the four living creatures full of eyes. Then it says: "The first living creature was like a lion and the second was like a calf and the third was like a man and the fourth was like a flying eagle." And a little bit later it says: "They were full of eyes and never ceased day and night . . ."

73. Freemantle's translation, *NPNF*^{2} 6:101.

74. In four books, hastily written in two weeks in March of 398 to provide Eusebius of Cremona with reading material for traveling! (Kelly, *Jerome*, 222).

75. Citations of the *Comm. Matt*. are from Scheck, *St. Jerome*, 55–56. The Latin is from CCSL 77.3–4.

> By all of these things it is plainly shown that only the four Gospels ought to be received, and all the lamentations of the Apocrypha should be sung by heretics, who, in fact, are dead, rather than by living members of the Church.

In this brief look at the Apocalypse, Jerome does not repeat his individual Gospel-living creatures identifications, but in his revision of Victorinus's *Commentary on the Apocalypse* produced earlier that same year (398),[76] he forges the identity realignments explicitly. Victorinus had followed Irenaeus's correlations,[77] and Jerome, while he kept virtually all Victorinus wrote about Matthew and Luke, boldly changed the lion to Mark and the eagle to John: "Mark, in whom is heard the voice of the lion roaring in the desert . . . John the evangelist, like to an eagle hastening on uplifted wings to greater heights, argues about the Word of God."

One thing that stands out in Jerome's treatments of the subject is the prominence of Ezekiel over Revelation. This is in keeping with the earlier tradition prior to Irenaeus, and with Irenaeus as well, despite his use of Revelation when he makes the Gospel-cherub correlations and his use of Revelation's order for the πραγματεία of the Son of God.

76. Jerome had read Victorinus's *Comm. Matt.* by at least 388 (see the preface to his translation of Origen's *Hom. Luke* to Paula and Eustochium); he also wrote about Victorinus in his *Vir. ill.* (392–393). His revised edition of Victorinus's *Comm. Rev.* appeared in 398 and is represented in seven MSS of the twelfth through fifteenth centuries (Bruce, "Earliest Latin Commentary," 354).

77. Victorinus then expanded these associations with another set of Christological comparisons: Christ was "proclaimed as a lion and a lion's whelp" (Gen 49:9); he became man for the salvation of humanity; he offered himself as a sacrifice to God for us, and so is called a calf, and having conquered death, he ascended to heaven "and held out his wings to cover his people," and so "he is called an eagle in flight. "And although there are four proclamations, yet there is really but one proclamation, because it proceeds from one mouth, just as the river in paradise was from one source yet was separated into four streams" (*Comm. Rev.* 4.4). The four streams flowing out of Eden had already by this time became a common metaphor for the four Gospels. Hippolytus (*Comm. Dan.* 1.17) writes, "Christ, himself being the river, is preached in the whole world through the fourfold Gospel"; Cyprian, in *Ep.* 73.10.3 (in 256), says, "and those trees she [i.e., the Church] waters by means of four rivers—that is, by the four Gospels."

Credit for realigning the lion with Mark and the eagle with John is usually given to Jerome. Watson suggests, however, that Jerome may have been influenced by Epiphanius, *On Weights and Measures* 35,[78] which was written in 392,[79] the year before Jerome's first recorded mention of it in his work against Jovinian. Epiphanius is treating the four measures (*xestai*) that he says were contained in the golden jar (*stamnos*) that held the manna (Exod 16:33), and lays out a series of other "fours." This series includes the "four spiritual creatures which were composed of four faces, which typify the coming of the Messiah." Connecting the creatures to "the coming of the Messiah" may seem reminiscent of Irenaeus's πραγματεία of the Son of God, and Epiphanius certainly had used Irenaeus for his earlier work, the *Panarion* (written in 374–377). But Epiphanius's exposition of the faces is in every case quite different from his predecessor's. Epiphanius mentions the "four faces," which comes from Ezekiel, and, like Jerome and unlike Irenaeus, he treats the spiritual creatures in Ezekiel's order (man, lion, ox, eagle), not John's. In fact, Epiphanius's treatment in *Mens*. seems to owe nothing to Revelation. This order, with the new identifications, results in the now traditional sequence of the Gospels.

> One had the face of a man, because the Messiah was born a man in Bethlehem, as Matthew teaches [Matt 2:1–12]. One had the face of a lion, as Mark proclaims him coming up from the Jordan, a lion king, as also somewhere it is written: "the Lord has come up as a lion from the Jordan" [cf. Jer 27:44 LXX; 49:19/50:44 MT]. One had the face of an ox, as Luke proclaims—not he alone, but also the other Evangelists—him who, at the appointed time of the ninth hour [Luke 23:44], like an ox in behalf of the world was offered up on the cross. One had the face of an eagle, as John proclaims the Word who came from heaven and was made flesh [John 1:14] and flew to heaven like an eagle after the resurrection with the Godhead.[80]

Epiphanius's exposition is so different from that of Irenaeus as to suggest that the former is completely independent of the latter. He

78. Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 571n46.
79. Dean, ed., *Epiphanius' Treatise*, 2.
80. *Mens*. 35 (Sect. 64d–65a; Dean, ed., *Epiphanius' Treatise*, 52).

uses none of Irenaeus's Scriptural proofs for the identifications but puts out entirely new ones. Could Epiphanius be witness to an older tradition which associated the four Gospels with the four faces of Ezekiel's cherubim?

Jerome knew and greatly respected Epiphanius,[81] but it is not at all obvious that when he wrote against Jovinian he was aware of his elder colleague's exposition in *Mens*. Jerome does not rely on Epiphanius's arguments or his Scriptural proofs but instead uses the very proofs Irenaeus had provided, only switching two of the identities.

The groundwork for the switch had been laid, however, in 384, eight years before Epiphanius even wrote *Mens*., when Jerome issued his new Latin edition of the Gospels. For this new edition, Jerome's "most obvious innovation," according to Hugh Houghton,[82] was to change the Old Latin order of the Gospels in the codices. In the preface to his revision, he tells bishop Damasus that the Gospels "are to be taken in the following order, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, as they have been revised by a comparison of the Greek manuscripts. Only early ones have been used."[83] Apparently, this is the sequence of the Gospels Jerome found in the Greek exemplars he used in Rome while working on his translation, though at least one Greek manuscript Jerome used had the Eusebian apparatus, and therefore, could not have been especially "early." Jeremiah Coogan suggests that Jerome's adoption of the new-old order might perhaps have been "to facilitate use of Eusebius's system."[84] What is interesting for our purposes is that the codicological switch from the Old Latin "Western" order to the "Old Greek/New Vulgate" order took place *first*, years before either Jerome or Epiphanius is on record with their (revised) Gospel-cherubim collations. It would thus appear that the change of

81. Jerome, acting probably as interpreter and personal advisor, had accompanied the man he calls "Papa Epiphanius" and Paulinus of Antioch in the summer of 382 on a trip to Rome from the east. The two bishops left the city in the spring of 383 but Jerome remained and was soon tasked by Pope Damasus with translating the Gospels (see Kelly, *Jerome*, 80–90).

82. Houghton, *Latin New Testament*, 32.

83. Freemantle's translation (*NPNF*^{2} 6:488).

84. Coogan, *Eusebius the Evangelist*, 126.

the lion to Mark and the eagle to John became necessary, at least for Jerome,[85] once he had restored the order of the Old Latin Gospels to that of the older Greek codices he used. And it suggests that the swapping of identities was determined more by antiquarian, codicological interests (and perhaps by a perception of the historical order of writing) than by a deep conviction about how the faces of the cherubim best matched the characters of the particular Gospels.

But this may not completely settle the matter of origins. Could the old, historical order represented in Jerome's time-worn Greek codices itself have been influenced by Ezekiel's vision? When he came to articulate the Gospels' associations with the heavenly beings, Jerome grounded them, just as Epiphanius did, on Ezekiel's vision (rather than on John's). Ezekiel's vision is foundational for both writers. The consistent presence of Ezekiel, passing through Irenaeus to the earlier second-century writers we considered earlier, suggests the possibility that when copyists began to bind the four together in the now traditional sequence, they might have been influenced not simply by a perceived literary history (which, as Clement of Alexandria's tradition attests, was not quite unanimous), but by an inspired, heavenly vision. But how early can we reasonably believe the four Gospels were being put together in physical codices?

85. As for Epiphanius, as a native of Palestine, educated in Egypt, and ministering in the East, he is less likely to have been as influenced by Jerome's new Latin Gospel copies as by Greek codices themselves. Epiphanius may simply have followed the order of Greek codices he knew. Epiphanius too had long used a four-Gospel codex, or codices, with the Eusebian apparatus. In his *Ancoratus* 50.6, written in 374, he says there are 1,162 κεφάλαια in the four Gospels; this presupposes his use of four-Gospel codices equipped with the Eusebian canons, as 1,162 is the total of all the Ammonian Sections of the Eusebian system (see Hill, *First Chapters*, 55). Coogan (*Eusebius the Evangelist*, 165) observes that Epiphanius's reference to the 1,162 chapters also assumes his Greek-speaking audience is familiar with the apparatus.

5. *Four-Gospel Codices*

By Jerome's day, of course, the Gospels were normally encountered as joined together in codices, and they had been for a long time. At least by the 260s, the church in Caesarea, Palestine, was using a single volume containing all the Gospels (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.15.4). That Jerome is even conscious of the codicological dimension when he thinks of the fourfold Gospel is indicated in some of his statements cited above. Among his descriptions of the four Gospels in his letter 53.9 to Paulinus is his assertion that the Gospels "hold together each by each and are interwoven one with another (*tenant se mutuo, sibique perplexi sunt*),"[86] words adapted from Ezek 1:9, "their wings touched each other";[87] or 1:11, "each of which touched the wing of another." What Ezek 1:9 and 11 said about the wings of the cherubim, that they touched or were "joined" (*junctaeque*; *iungebantur*) to each other, when applied to the four Gospels, would seem to refer to their being joined together, materially, in the formats in which late fourth-century readers would have been accustomed to seeing and using them.[88] This is

86. *PL* 22.548. Cf. the wings of the cherubim touching each other in the inner sanctuary of Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 6:27). In the same letter Jerome says that Ezra and Nehemiah are "united in a single book" (*in unum volume coarctantur*) (*PL* 22.548) and that the writings of the twelve prophets "are compressed within the narrow limits of a single volume" (*in unius voluminis angustias coarctati*) (PL 22.546).

87. The Hebrew is חֹבֶרֶת אִשָּׁה אֶל־אֲחוֹתָהּ כַּנְפֵיהֶם. These words were not in the LXX— at least they are not in B. Alexandrinus has a form of them but takes the "touching" to refer to the faces: εχομεναι ετερα της και τα προσωπα αυτων; Origen added εχομεναι ετερα της και αι πτερυγες αυτων under the asterisk in his Hexapla (Rahlfs, *Septuaginta*). Jerome restored the words for Latin readers in his new translation: *iunctaeque errant pinnae eorum alterius ad alterum*.

88. It seems quite likely that Jerome's words "interwoven one with another" might be alluding to the Eusebian sections and canons that Jerome had supplied with his translation. Eusebius's invention was a key feature of Jerome's new edition. As Coogan says, Jerome even "adapted part of Eusebius' *Epistle to Carpianus* for his dedicatory epistle to Pope Damasus, the *Novum opus*. Jerome's letter to Pope Damasus was used extensively as a Gospel preface and was absorbed into later pedagogical projects of Gospel introduction. As a result, the Eusebian canons and the questions of comparative Gospel reading that they

confirmed in Jerome's *Commentary on Ezekiel*, written perhaps twenty years later,[89] where he says explicitly that

> The Gospels are *joined* to each other, and they are rooted in each other (*Juncta sibi sunt Evangelia haerentique mutuo*),[90] and in their flight they run here and there throughout the whole world. And they do not have an end to their flight, nor are they ever defeated and fall back, but they always advance to higher places.[91]

Jerome wrote well after our present, material evidence demonstrates that four-Gospel codices were in use; Irenaeus, however, wrote some time before it. But this could simply be because our extant evidence is so scant.[92]

After the discovery of P45 (holding all four Gospels and Acts), which he dated to the first half of the third century, Frederick Kenyon remarked, "it is now possible to believe that he [Irenaeus] may have been accustomed to the sight of volumes in which all four were contained."[93] Skeat thought that Irenaeus not only knew four-Gospel codices, but that "he used a source which had the four Gospels in the so-called 'Western' order of Matthew, John, Luke, Mark, which implies that all four were in a codex."[94] As noted above, I am not at all convinced that we can say Irenaeus used such a source, but his knowledge of four-Gospel codices is still, I think, extremely likely.

imply became central to Gospel reading in Latin" (Coogan, *Eusebius the Evangelist*, 126).

89. Between 410 and 414 (*NPNF*^{2} 6:499).

90. He goes on to say, "they are all rooted in each other and are reckoned as a single corpus."

91. *PL* 25.24 (Scheck's translation [*St. Jerome*, 24–25]).

92. Even though the majority of papyrus Gospel fragments recovered are from single-Gospel codices, Skeat argued that these still presuppose a four-Gospel codex; otherwise, what would motivate a Christian reader to "abandon the practice of a lifetime and choose the codex" ("Origin," 83) over the roll as a means of carrying even a single Gospel? It is a simple but surprisingly compelling argument. Skeat neglected to consider the possibility, however, that a Pauline letter collection in codex form had already provided a model for a Gospel collection.

93. Kenyon, *Chester Beatty*, 13.

94. Skeat, "Origin," 80.

Now to a curious phrase of Irenaeus's, one that Skeat did not notice. In his description of the four living creatures in *Haer*. 3.11.8, Irenaeus says that Christ gave us "the Gospel as four-formed (τετράμορφον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) but held together (συνεχόμενον) by the one Spirit."[95] Now, if one wanted to claim the common inspiration of the four Gospels, one might speak, as the Muratorian Fragment does, of everything in them being "declared by the one sovereign (*principali*) Spirit" (lines 16–17). But why would Irenaeus say that the four-formed Gospel (singular) itself is "held together"[96] by the one Spirit? It sounds uncannily like Jerome's comment two centuries later, that the four Gospels are "joined together."[97] Irenaeus certainly believed in a spiritual unity of the four, but why speak of the Gospel, in four books, as "held together" at all unless, like Jerome, he is thinking of these books as being held together in a codex?[98]

95. My translation (φανερωθεὶς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἔδοκεν ἡμῖν τετράμορφον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, ἑνὶ δὲ Πνεύματι συνεχόμενον). The Latin translator has *declaratus hominibus, dedit nobis quadriforme Euangelium quod uno Spiritu continetur*. In the previous clause, Irenaeus has used the same word for "the Artificer of all things, the Logos, who sits upon the cherubim and holds all things together (ὁ . . . καὶ συνέχων τὰ πάντα)." Here, "holding all things together" fits well coming just after a reference to Christ the Word as the maker of all things (cf. *Haer*. 5.2.3; 5.18.3; Wis 1:7; Heb 1:2–3). But the four-formed Gospel being "held together" is different. Having just used the word, it springs again to Irenaeus's mind as he thinks of the physical form of the four Gospels.

96. The verb is used in a variety of ways in the LXX, but those instances that seem most relevant include Exod 26:3, where it is used for the curtains of the tabernacle being joined together (συνεχόμεναι); Exod 28:7; 36:11, 28, for the shoulder-pieces of the high priest's ephod being joined together (συνέχουσαι; συνεχούσας; συνεχομένους); and 1 Kgs 6:10, 15, where Solomon joined together (συνέσχεν) the partitions of the temple with cedar beams; and encompassed (συνεχόμενα) the inner parts of the temple with fir.

97. Irenaeus presumably would not have had Ezek 1:9 in his copy of the LXX, but he would have had 1:11.

98. Interestingly, the (probably only slightly later) Muratorian Fragment calls Luke "the third book of the Gospel (*tertium evangelii librum*)." This indicates a conception, much like that of Irenaeus, of the Gospel as one, in four books. And the phrase "third book of the Gospel" is quite compatible with—if it does not positively imply—the use of four-Gospel codices.

If Irenaeus did have a four-Gospel codex, it is not clear what sequence of the Gospels it had. Though he does (inadvertently) reveal the basis for the two main orders, he does not advocate for any order. And if he was working with a four-Gospel codex as he wrote *Against Heresies*, we should have to say it is most likely to have had Matthew first, then Luke, then Mark, and then John,[99] for he treats the Gospels' witness in this order on three occasions (*Haer*. 3.9.1–6; 3.11.7; 4.6.1). This would match the likeliest interpretation of Clement of Alexandria's tradition of the historical order of the Gospels' appearance (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl*. 6.14.5–7), and it is not necessarily incompatible with Irenaeus's historical listing in *Haer*. 3.1.1, where, although Mark is listed before Luke, the chronological priority is not definitively stated. In this passage Irenaeus began with the publication of Matthew's Gospel (in Hebrew) while Peter and Paul were preaching and laying the foundation of the church in Rome. Irenaeus then mentions Mark's Gospel before Luke's precisely because he had mentioned Peter before Paul in the previous sentence—Mark being the Gospel that hands down the preaching of Peter, and Luke the Gospel that preserves the preaching of Paul. I would judge that Irenaeus did not intend to state a definitive historical priority for Mark over Luke. But it does seem that later readers interpreted Irenaeus's words to mean just that.

6. *Concluding Summary*

Irenaeus found analogies for the fourfold Gospel in the four zones of the world, the four principal winds, and in the four living creatures of Ezekiel and Revelation. Viewed as logically necessary proofs for a "choice" of four and only four Gospels, his comparisons draw jeers. Understood as harmonizing ratifications

99. Commenting on the prevalence of this order in Irenaeus, Mutschler ("Irenäus und die Evangelien," 237) says "Am einfachsten liesse sich diese Reihenfolge dadurch erklaren, dass sie seinem Bibelexemplar in einem Kodex zugrunde lag" ("The easiest way to explain this order is that it was based on his copy of the Bible in a codex"), as indeed was proposed long ago by J. Hoh, *Die Lehre*, 18. Mutschler accepts the real possibility of a four-Gospel codex by Irenaeus's time, based largely on Skeat's opinions.

from nature and Scripture for an entity already known and accepted, they had a much different effect upon early Christian readers. If it was Irenaeus who gave the cherubim-Gospel comparison its first articulation, we can say that he leveraged in a very successful way a familiar Christological reading of an evocative Old Testament conception of God in order to defend the apostolic Gospel from those who, in his mind, attempted to subtract from it or add to it. Because it is Jesus Christ, the Son of God and divine Word, who sits enthroned above the cherubim, the cherubim's four faces can be seen as depicting aspects of the manifestation of the Christ, which David petitioned:[100] his humble, incarnate humanity; his royal deity; his priestly work; and his possession and dispensing of the prophetic Spirit. "Now the Gospels harmonize with these, on which Christ Jesus is enthroned," says Irenaeus, and the harmony may be seen to consist not merely in a parallel, fourfold unity but in an analogous Christological import and sacred function. And even if the specific correlations made by Irenaeus are disputed, and even changed, his analogy retains great value. First, in the same way in which each one of Ezekiel's four cherubim had all four faces, each Gospel teaches all four aspects of the working of Christ. So, it may be discussed which "face" of which Gospel depicts one of these aspects more perfectly, without losing the overall analogy of the four Gospels as harmonizing with what the living creatures symbolize about the Christ's manifestation. Second, simply from a reception history perspective, Irenaeus's expositions—whether praised or condemned—did deliver some of the earliest recorded insights into the literary-theological character of each Gospel. And these have never lost their interest.

The point at which the evolving technology of the codex could accommodate two or more complete Gospel books in the same codex was the point at which the order of the Gospels became an issue. At that point, no prescribed sequence seems to have existed (Irenaeus may have possessed a codex with the order Matthew, Luke, Mark, and John). The two most prominent sequences in the

100. *Mens*. 35, "four spiritual creatures which were composed of four faces, which typify the coming of the Messiah."

textual tradition can be said to be rooted either in historical (a perceived chronological order) or theological (a desire to place apostles first) concerns. And yet, both can also be linked to Ezekiel's vision by means of the two earliest and most prolific correlations Christian interpreters drew between the four Gospels and the four living creatures. Irenaeus did not advocate any order, but if copyists followed his correlations, they produced what we now know as the Western order. If they followed those later popularized by Epiphanius and more especially by Jerome, they produced the order that ultimately prevailed. Early Christian reflection on Ezek 1 (and related texts), predated all three writers, and probably predated the four-Gospel codex. This makes it hard to rule out the possibility that these correlations may have played a role in the rise of both the Western and the present canonical orders.

Jerome's words about the four Gospels being "joined" to each other has prompted a second look at Irenaeus's language about the fourfold Gospel being "held together" by the one Spirit. His use of this language most likely assumes the existence of four-Gospel codices, which would only add the missing physical dimension to his strong conception of the unity of the fourfold Gospel and his practice of sometimes citing simply "the Gospel" when citing any one of the four.[101]

Much of this, we can say, seems to have grown out of the early proclamation of Christ, the Word, as the one who sits enthroned upon the cherubim, whom David praised and Ezekiel beheld. For, as the Gospel itself teaches, no one has seen the Father at any time; it is the only-begotten God who has made him known.

101. E.g., *Haer*. 1.7.4; 4.20.6, and references to the singular Gospel written by plural apostles (3.5.1; 4.34.1).

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