

# Untying Knots: A New Interpretation of Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3.22.4\*

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## ■ Abstract

*Adversus haereses* 3.22.4 is one of the key texts for Irenaeus' views about the virgin Mary's role in the "economy" of salvation. Among the many interpretative riddles of this passage, this paper discusses the function of the metaphor of the knots in Irenaeus' argument. A close analysis suggests that the lines in question are not the conclusion of the preceding section (as implied by the Latin version—and modern interpreters), but the opening of a concluding development that sums up the role of the New Adam and the New Eve. As a result, the metaphor of knots should not be understood in exclusive connection with Mary: it applies to both Christ and her—though it is particularly fitting for expressing Mary's role as New (and Anti-) Eve.

## ■ Keywords

Irenaeus, Mary, Eve, soteriology

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## ■ Introduction

Among the most frequently cited passages of the *Adversus haereses*<sup>1</sup> is that of Book 3, where Irenaeus contrasts Eve, “cause of death” (*causa mortis*) of the human race for having disobeyed God, with Mary, “cause of salvation” (*causa salutis*) for having obeyed Him (22.4.56–58).<sup>2</sup> The passage is deservedly well known, since it represents one of the most important texts for the development of theological reflection on the virgin Mary from the early centuries of Christianity. Never, to my knowledge, had a Christian author so clearly identified Mary as occupying a moral role in the accomplishment of salvation:

Mary the virgin is found obedient, saying, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin. And even as she, having indeed a husband, Adam, but being nevertheless as yet a virgin, . . . having become disobedient, was made the cause of death, both to herself and to the entire human race; so also did Mary, having a man betrothed [to her], and being nevertheless a virgin, by yielding obedience, become the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race. And on this account does the Law term a woman betrothed to a man, the wife of him who had betrothed her, although she is as yet a virgin; thus indicating the back-reference from Mary to Eve.<sup>3</sup>

Although less well known and less studied, the lines that follow this passage, in which Irenaeus develops the image of a knot being tied and untied (72–77), are also important for the study of the author’s Marian doctrine, and in particular for delineating the respective roles of the New Adam and New Eve.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The text of Book 3 of Irenaeus’s *Adversus haereses* is quoted here from the edition *Contre les hérésies. Livre III* (ed. and trans. Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau; 2 vols.; 2nd ed.; SC 210–11; Paris: Cerf, 2002); I refer to the volumes of this edition as SC 210 (Introduction and notes) and SC 211 (Latin text, Greek back-translation, critical apparatus, and French translation).

<sup>2</sup> The parallel between Eve and Mary had already been set out by Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 100.4–6; Irenaeus himself has it again at *Haer.* 5.19 and *Epid.* 33.

<sup>3</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.22.4, lines 56–72, slightly modified from the ANF translation (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers* [ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 10 vols.; 1885–1887; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994] 1:455). Latin text: “*Maria Virgo obaudiens inuenitur dicens: Ecce ancilla tua, Domine, fiat mihi secundum uerbum tuum. Eua uero inobaudiens: non obaudiuit enim adhuc cum esset uirgo. Quemadmodum illa uirum quidem habens Adam, uirgo tamen adhuc existens, . . . inobaudiens facta, et sibi et uniuerso generi humano causa facta est mortis, sic et Maria habens praedestinatum uirum, et tamen uirgo, obaudiens, et sibi et uniuerso generi humano causa facta est salutis. Et propter hoc lex eam quae desponsata erat uiro, licet uirgo sit adhuc, uxorem eius qui desponsauerat uocat, eam quae est a Maria in Euam recirculationem significans.*”

<sup>4</sup> The bibliography on Irenaeus’s Marian doctrine (or specific aspects of it) is substantial; see, e.g., José Antonio de Aldama, *Maria en la patrística de los siglos I y II* (BAC 300; Madrid: Editorial Católica, 1970); Jean Plagnieux, “La doctrine mariale de saint Irénée,” *RevScRel* 44 (1970) 179–89; Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought* (trans. Thomas Buffer; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999) 51–58. Mary’s role in the process of recapitulation has been discussed by several scholars in the past fifteen years; see, e.g., M. C. Steenberg, “The Role of Mary as Co-recapitulator in St Irenaeus of Lyons,” *VC* 58 (2004) 117–37;

The aim of this article is to examine afresh the structure and division of *Adversus haereses* 3.22.4. This will entail studying the meaning of the knot image, analyzing the logical connection between it and the preceding and following lines, as well as trying to understand the overall structure of the section. The analysis will involve tackling a problem of syntax that has not received much attention—even though it shapes our understanding of the structure of the section as a whole—as well as questioning the accuracy of the Latin translation: is *quia* (because) at line 72, whose logical function in the context is difficult to grasp, an apt translation of the original Greek text? The conclusions reached on these issues will allow me to propose a new interpretation of the composition of the second part of the paragraph. In the conclusion, I outline the implications of this analysis for Irenaeus's Marian doctrine.

Since discussion of the Latin translator's *quia* is central to this study, philological and theological issues will inevitably intertwine. In this case—as in many others—the study of Irenaeus's theology is hampered by the textual evidence, since the original Greek text is lost, and our knowledge of it depends on an ancient translation, namely the Latin version of the *Adversus haereses*. This raises methodological issues because the available evidence (the Latin translation) merely reflects the object that we are trying to study (Irenaeus's original Greek text). To employ a metaphor from the world of art, it is like studying a long-lost painting from a copy made by one of the painter's disciples. It should be stressed, of course, that the Latin and Armenian versions of the *Adversus haereses* are generally faithful and often literal. Their reflection of the original Greek text usually serves as a good basis for the analysis of Irenaeus's thinking.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, no translation is ever completely faithful, if only because differences in syntax prevent exact correspondences between the translated and the original text. The semantic fields of words in the source and target languages will not, moreover, always overlap. Translators can also make wrong (or merely unhappy) choices, especially if they do not grasp the overall meaning of the text in all its subtlety. This can happen easily as translators naturally work on small textual units, one after another, thus losing sight of the overall picture. Sometimes, translators simply misunderstand the source text.<sup>6</sup> These issues encourage a critical approach to the evidence provided by the ancient versions. In difficult or obscure passages, and when we lack Greek textual witnesses, we should not simply base our interpretation on the Latin version without trying to assess how accurately it

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Benjamin H. Dunning, "Virgin Earth, Virgin Birth: Creation, Sexual Difference, and Recapitulation in Irenaeus of Lyons," *JR* 89 (2009) 57–88; Maria Del Fiat Miola, "Mary as Un-tier and Tier of Knots: Irenaeus Reinterpreted," *J ECS* 24 (2016) 337–61.

<sup>5</sup> I will not consider this aspect here, but it should be remembered that, beside problems of translation, an ancient version reflects a particular state of the text, since the translator uses a particular manuscript and thus depends on the faithfulness of the preceding textual transmission.

<sup>6</sup> On errors in ancient Latin translations of Greek Fathers, see Sven Lundström, *Übersetzungstechnische Untersuchungen auf dem Gebiete der christlichen Latinität* (LUÅ N.F. Avd. 1 51.3; Lund: Gleerup, 1955).

reflects the underlying Greek. This is why philology is an essential auxiliary to any theological interpretation of Irenaeus.

Among other philological tools, back translation proves useful. Although results obtained with this method must remain conjectural, back translation is not merely an exercise in guesswork. Study of translation technique<sup>7</sup> and/or the equivalences between Greek and Latin words attested in parts of the work that do survive in Greek<sup>8</sup> provide a solid basis for assessing competing back translations. If used with due caution, attempts at back translation can make a valuable contribution to the analysis of Irenaeus and, in some cases, shed new light on old issues of interpretation. Much work has already been done in this field, especially by Rousseau and Doutreleau in the *Sources chrétiennes* edition of the last three books of *Adversus haereses*.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, even in this part of the treatise, there remain instances where the work can be revised or extended. *Adversus haereses* 3.22.4 is one such case.

### ■ *Adversus haereses* 3.22.4.68–77: Interpretative Problems

The central section of 22.4 (lines 68–77) poses several interpretive problems, one of which is complicated by a textual uncertainty in the Latin version. Although I cannot examine all these problems in depth, it will help to outline them briefly here, since they add to the abstruseness of the passage:

- (1) To which verse of the Pentateuch is Irenaeus referring in lines 68–70 when he mentions a text of the Law suggesting a connection between Eve and Mary?
- (2) At line 71, the term to describe this connection differs across the manuscripts, which hesitate between *recircumlatio* and *recirculatio*. What exactly does the Latin word mean and what Greek term does it translate? (These questions are important regardless of which Latin word one privileges.)
- (3) What is the relationship between the image of the knot at lines 72–77 and the *recircu(m)latio* that links Mary and Eve?
- (4) Is the image linked to the text that precedes it? Or rather what follows? How?
- (5) What does the image mean?

In the following pages I will focus on those problems that relate to the image of the knot in lines 72–77, namely the last two points from the list above. Since the first three are less directly linked to the question of the knot's significance, I

<sup>7</sup> On this aspect, a systematic study is still lacking, but one can consult Sven Lundström, *Studien zur lateinischen Irenäusübersetzung* (Lund: Gleerup, 1943) and idem, *Neue Studien zur lateinischen Irenäusübersetzung* (LUÅ N.F. Avd. 1 44.8; Lund: Gleerup, 1948).

<sup>8</sup> On this point, the lexicon compiled by Bruno Reynders (*Lexique comparé du texte grec et des versions latine, arménienne et syriaque de l'Adversus haereses de Saint Irénée* [2 vols.; CSCO 141–42, Subsidia 5–6; Leuven: Durbecq, 1954]) is indispensable.

<sup>9</sup> The volumes containing these books (SC 211 [2002<sup>2</sup>], 100\*\* [1965], and 153 [1969], respectively) include a back translation of the parts of the text no longer extant in Greek.

limit myself here to some brief comments. Concerning the first issue, I am inclined to read, together with Nautin and Rousseau and Doutreleau,<sup>10</sup> a reference to Deut 22:23–24.<sup>11</sup> The textual and interpretative problems surrounding *recircu(m)latio* (rendered as “back-reference” in the translation quoted above) would require a study of its own. In my opinion, the textual problem in the Latin version has not received sufficient attention. *Recirculatio* seems, at least to a degree, to be the *lectio facilior*. I favor, therefore, the reading *recircumlatio* of the CV manuscripts (which would render the otherwise unattested ἀναπεριφορά, a term that probably describes a metaphorical movement linking Mary back to Eve<sup>12</sup>), although *recirculatio* has been adopted by all modern editors, with the exception of Sagnard.<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, the latter term contains the idea of a circle, and thus seems suited to the image of the knot that Irenaeus goes on to develop (lines 72–77). This connection is less clear-cut, however, than we might first imagine, if only because a circle is not a knot, and a knot, even if it is made up of circular loops, is not a circle. It would, therefore, be rash to base a textual choice or interpretation of the passage on the questionable link between knots and circles. It seems safer to examine the issue free from such a premise. Accordingly, I will disregard it in my analysis. Nevertheless, this study will confirm, on a different basis, that there is no reason to link *recircu(m)latio* to the image of the knot.

## ■ The Image of the Knot: Problems with the Standard Interpretation

Here is the Latin text of lines 72–77 with a provisional, literal translation:

- (1) Quia non aliter quod colligatum est solueretur, nisi ipsae compagine adligationis reflectantur retrorsus  
 (2a) uti primae coniunctiones soluantur per secundas,  
 (2b) secundae rursus liberent primas,<sup>14</sup>  
 (3a) et euenit primam quidem compaginem a secunda colligatione solui,  
 (3b) secundam uero colligationem primae solutionis habere locum.<sup>15</sup>
- (1) Because that which has been tied cannot be undone  
 unless we repeat in reverse order the intertwinings of the binding

<sup>10</sup> The edition of book 3 by Rousseau and Doutreleau (SC 210–11) has replaced that of François Sagnard (Irenaeus of Lyons, *Contre les hérésies. Mise en lumière et réputation de la prétendue “connaissance”, livre III. Texte latin, fragments grecs, introduction, traduction et notes* [ed. and trans. François Sagnard; SC 34; Paris: Cerf, 1952]) in the Sources chrétiennes series.

<sup>11</sup> See Pierre Nautin, “L’*Adversus haereses* d’Irénee, livre III. Notes d’exégèse,” *RTAM* 20 (1953) 185–202, at 197; cf. SC 210: 373–76.

<sup>12</sup> Strangely enough, ἀναπεριφορά was proposed as a translation for *recirculatio* (see *Sancti Irenaei Episcopi Lugdunensis Libros Quinque Adversus Haereses* [ed. W. Wigan Harvey; 2 vols.; Cambridge: Typis academicis, 1857] 2:124 n. 1), but it suits *recircumlatio* even better; the same is true of “back-reference” as an English equivalent, which is a valid translation.

<sup>13</sup> See SC 34:380, line 10, and 456; see also Nautin, “L’*Adversus haereses*,” 197.

<sup>14</sup> A particle seems to be missing to connect this phrase with the preceding one. I have added it in the English translation.

<sup>15</sup> This typographical presentation is inspired by that of Miola, “Mary as Un-tier,” 343.

- (2a) such that the first loops are undone by the second ones,  
 (2b) <and> the second undo the first in reverse order,  
 (3a) and it happened that the first intertwining was undone by a second act  
 of tying  
 (3b) and that the second act of tying served as the undoing of the first.

These lines have been written with care. The three paired clauses exploit parallelism and chiasmus. But the passage, and its function in the context of 3.22.4, are far from transparent. It is not, therefore, surprising that these lines, and perhaps still more the difficulty in linking them to what precedes, have at times troubled scholars.<sup>16</sup> Massuet considered Irenaeus's argumentation to be unclear.<sup>17</sup> In a similar fashion, the translators of the *ANF* observed: "It is very difficult to follow the reasoning of Irenaeus in this passage."<sup>18</sup>

The first editor of Book 3 for the Sources chrétiennes, Sagnard, was more assured, but his translation<sup>19</sup> is imprecise. He took *compagines adligationis* in 1 to mean "l'assemblage des nœuds"—note the plural, though *adligationis* is singular—and he translated *primae coniunctiones* and *secundae* in 2a and 2b as "les premiers [i.e., nœuds]" and "les seconds," without trying to account for the difference between *adligationis* and *coniunctiones*. His translation of 3a and 3b is even less accurate, since *prima compages* and *secunda colligatio* are treated as plurals ("les premiers reseaux," "les seconds"). In other words, the complex array of terms—some plural, others singular—of the Latin translation are reduced to two or three concepts that seem to be more or less equivalent: "(assemblage des) nœuds," "réseaux." In Sagnard's understanding, Irenaeus has in mind Jesus's genealogy and does not refer to a knot with its various loops, but basically speaks of a series of knots (cf. "assemblage," "reseaux"). A note makes Sagnard's interpretation clear: Mary, as the new Eve, undoes knots at each generational step, working backwards until Eve.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The fact that many scholars, prior to Sagnard (see below), were silent on the issue is not easy to interpret: did they regard these lines as unproblematic? Did they simply avoid engaging with them? Unlike Massuet (see below), older editors such as Grabe (*S. Irenaei Episcopi Lugdunensis Contra Omnes Haereses Libri Quinque* [ed. Joann Ernst Grabe; Oxford: E Theatro Sheldoniano, 1702] 261) or Stieren (*Sancti Irenaei Episcopi Lugdunensis quae Supersunt Omnia* [ed. Adolph Stieren; 2 vols.; Leipzig: Weigel, 1853] 2:545) limit their notes to textual variants. As for Harvey, he provides only a back translation into Greek, without further explanation (*Adversus Haereses* [ed. Harvey], 2:124 n. 2).

<sup>17</sup> *Sancti Irenaei Episcopi Lugdunensis et Martyris, Detectionis et Eversionis Falso Cognominatae Agnitionis, seu Contra Haereses Libri Quinque* (ed. René Massuet; Paris: Coignard, 1710) 464 n. a (repr. PG 7:959–60 n. 78).

<sup>18</sup> *ANF* 1:455 n. 6.

<sup>19</sup> "Car on ne peut délier ce qui a été lié qu'en défaisant en sens inverse l'assemblage des nœuds, en sorte que les premiers soient déliés grâce aux seconds, ou qu'en d'autres termes les seconds libèrent les premiers. Il arrive donc que les premiers reseaux soient déliés par les seconds, et que les seconds servent à libérer les premiers" (SC 34:381).

<sup>20</sup> See SC 34:379 n. 1: "Marie, nouvelle Ève, remonte jusqu'à Ève (*recircumlatio*) en dénouant par son obéissance ces mêmes générations nouées par Ève."

This reading has rightly been criticized by Pierre Nautin, who, for the first time, elucidated major technical issues of the passage in a satisfactory manner.<sup>21</sup> In particular, Nautin argued that there is only one knot, and rejected Sagnard's idea of Mary working back through every generation as extraneous to Irenaeus's text. Indeed, Jesus's genealogy has nothing to do with the image of the knot: his genealogy was the subject of 22.3 and Irenaeus will return to it later (lines 85–87), but it is not the subject of these lines, which concern rather the disobedience of Adam and Eve and how that was cancelled out. In my opinion, Nautin perceived the true logic of the complex image of the knot and its loops, in the end a simple one: the untying of a knot takes place when the very same movements that produced the knot are reversed. The tying and untying of the knot is thus a zero-sum game: at the end of the process, there is no more knot. The way Irenaeus re-uses the image at the end of 22.4 (lines 88–91), speaking of *one* knot (*nodus*, in the singular), confirms this conclusion:

Sic autem et Euae inobaudientiae nodus solutionem accepit per obaudientiam Mariae. Quod enim adligavit uirgo Eua per incredulitatem, hoc uirgo Maria soluit per fidem.

In this way too, the knot of Eve's disobedience was undone thanks to the obedience of Mary, because that which the virgin Eve tied up with her lack of belief, the virgin Mary untied with her faith.

The question that remains is: what, exactly, does the knot represent? This second knot image seems to have exerted a strong influence on the interpretation of lines 72–77. Nautin's explanation sets out what, today, is essentially an undisputed reading of the lines: the knot to be undone stands for Eve's disobedience, and its

<sup>21</sup> "Le P. Sagnard a compris à tort qu'il y avait plusieurs nœuds à défaire, comme si Irénée voulait dire que le retour de Marie en Ève se fait à travers toutes les générations intermédiaires, et que Marie délie au passage chacune de ces générations. . . . En réalité, Irénée parle d'un seul nœud. . . . Quel est cet unique nœud dont parle Irénée ? Il le dit lui-même en clair un peu plus loin : *Sic autem et EVAE INOBAUDIENIAE NODUS solutionem accepit per obaudientiam Mariae* [lines 88–89]. Le nœud à délier, c'est donc le péché d'Ève (en vertu de la comparaison courante du péché avec un nœud). Pour défaire un nœud, observe Irénée, il faut replier les brins sur eux-mêmes, refaire les mêmes boucles et le même tressage en sens inverse, comme si on faisait le même nœud à l'envers. Ce second nœud, inverse du premier et qui lui sert de dénouement, c'est celui de l'obéissance de Marie. . . . Irénée n'a pas dans l'esprit l'image d'une 'remontée' de Marie jusqu'à Ève à travers toutes les générations, qu'elle délierait l'une après l'autre. C'est à la phrase précédente qu'il a décrit le retour de Marie en Ève. . . . Maintenant, par la comparaison du nœud, il cherche seulement à nous expliquer pourquoi il était nécessaire que Marie fût ainsi reportée dans la situation d'Ève: de même que pour défaire un nœud il faut un nouveau nœud qui soit inverse du premier, de même pour réparer la désobéissance d'Ève il fallait une nouvelle Ève qui fût inverse de la première, c'est-à-dire obéissante" (Nautin, "L'Adversus haereses," 198–99). Recently, our passage has been the object of an in-depth study by Miola, "Mary as Un-tier." In particular, she has sought to place the image of knots in the cultural context of Irenaeus's time, since knots were much more present in everyday life and symbolically significant than they are today. However, although that article has many useful insights, its main conclusions are doubtful, since they are based on conjectural connections with *realia*. Since Irenaeus does not indicate that he has a precise kind of knot in mind (and, if so, which), it seems risky to interpret the image beyond the general symbolism of tying and untying.



untying symbolizes Mary's obedience. The context of the passage has undoubtedly played an important role too: the fact that lines 72–77, which begin with the word *quia*, follow a discussion involving Mary and Eve, strongly supports Nautin's interpretation.

Two counter-observations, however, warrant consideration. First, Irenaeus does not explain the meaning of the knot image when he first introduces it. It is only at the end of the passage, in the lines I have just quoted (lines 88–91), that the image is explicitly applied to Eve and Mary. Second, although the prevailing understanding of the passage both tallies with the preceding lines (also an Eve/Mary contrast) and finds support in this later section of the passage, it is less serviceable when we try to link lines 72–77 to their immediate context, be it to the lines preceding or those coming after: Irenaeus has just claimed that the Law can call a woman a wife even if she is only betrothed, and that, in doing so, the Law reveals a connection between Mary and Eve;<sup>22</sup> how, then, does the clause that begins with *quia* and states that one cannot untie a knot unless one redoes the loops in reverse order explain the way the Law speaks or the connection that it establishes between Mary and Eve?<sup>23</sup> It is difficult to see what causal relationship with the preceding lines *quia* is supposed to convey. At any rate, the clause that begins with *quia* is not attached to that which precedes it in any clear manner; despite *quia*, we have to assume a rather loose logical relationship, if any. If we look forward, we face a similar problem: accepting the standard interpretation, one struggles to explain the connection with the words of Jesus concerning “the first” and “the last” that directly follow lines 72–77, together with the other biblical references. And yet, in this case, Irenaeus explicitly presupposes a logical link, since the following sentence begins with *et propter hoc* (and for this reason).<sup>24</sup> That being the case, we might legitimately ask if the standard interpretation is as solid as it appears, and whether it is not possible to offer a reading of lines 72–77 that sits more easily with the immediate context and thus results in a better flow.

<sup>22</sup> This is true regardless of which verse of the Pentateuch Irenaeus has in mind, and irrespective of whether one opts for *recirculatio* or *recircumlatio*, the underlying Greek term, and its meaning.

<sup>23</sup> At first sight, one might consider solving this issue by regarding lines 68–72 as a parenthesis and connecting the clause that begins with *quia* directly with the Eve–Mary parallel, but this would be no more than a desperate solution. Besides being rather unconvincing in itself, it would leave the problem of the connection with the following lines (see hereinafter) unresolved.

<sup>24</sup> According to the standard interpretation, having stated that the second knot (which would represent Mary's obedience) has served as the undoing of the first (which would represent Eve's disobedience), Irenaeus would claim that this is why (*et propter hoc*, line 78) the Lord said that the first would be the last, and the last, the first (Matt 19:30). Since he hardly thought that Jesus was speaking about knots, one might consider that Irenaeus did not pay much attention to the fact that *primi* and *nouissimi* are plural and interpreted the reversal of position in Jesus's saying as applying to Mary and Eve. But this would not solve the problem, rather it would merely displace it: the logical link between Jesus's saying and the following biblical quotation (Ps 44:17: *pro patribus nati sunt tibi filii*, line 80–81) would be incomprehensible, since Irenaeus states that the Psalmist says the “same thing” (*hoc idem*, line 80) as Jesus.



## ■ The Choices of the Latin Translator

The standard interpretation depends on the notion that the lines introduced by *quia* are syntactically connected to that which precedes them. This might, however, be no more than a deceptive appearance, because this syntactical connection is imposed by the Latin.<sup>25</sup> This is not necessarily the case if we consider what might have been the underlying Greek. I will concentrate here on three specific problems.

First, what does *quia* translate? Reynders's lexicon of Irenaeus's *Adversus haereses* suggests three options: ὅτι, ἐπεί, or διὰ τό.<sup>26</sup> We can immediately eliminate the first, since *quia* translates ὅτι only in cases of reported speech (mostly biblical citations). The editors of the Sources chrétiennes edition chose διὰ τό for their back-translation, but their Greek phrase does not express all the nuances of the Latin. If, as Rousseau and Doutrelau assume, the Greek model had διὰ τό μὴ ἄλλως . . . λυεσθαι, why did the translator write *quia non aliter . . . solueretur* and not simply *quia non aliter . . . soluitur*? Nothing in Rousseau and Doutrelau's back-translation dictates a subjunctive. The Latin translator's decision suggests rather that he read ἐπεί in the original, accompanied by a verbal form with a conditional meaning.

Second, how are we to understand *et euenit*—most likely a form of the verb συμβαίνο?<sup>27</sup> In Latin, the tense of *euenit* is either present or perfect. This gives three options in the Greek, namely present, aorist, or perfect. The difference in tense between *solueretur* and *euenit* suggests that these two verbs were not on the same plane and therefore not connected. Accordingly, we must also take two possible constructions into account: either the clause that begins with *et euenit* was an independent sentence, or it was the main proposition on which the causal clause depended.

Third, what does *solui* translate? Undoubtedly, the verb used in Greek was λύω, since this translation is found in many cases and no other equivalence is attested.<sup>28</sup> But *solui* does not necessarily translate a present infinitive (λυεσθαι) as we read in the back-translation of the Sources chrétiennes; the present Latin infinitive can just as easily translate an aorist infinitive (λυθῆναι).

Διὰ τό followed by an infinitive could hardly be the beginning of a sentence, particularly without a particle. The situation is different if *quia* translates ἐπεί.

<sup>25</sup> As for the Latin text, the only open question is whether the clause that begins with *et euenit* is part of the subordinate clause (as the punctuation in SC 211 suggests) or forms an independent sentence that expresses the same idea (as Sagnard, Nautin [*"L'Adversus haereses,"* 198], the translation in the same SC volume, and Miola [*"Mary as Un-tier,"* 343] all imply).

<sup>26</sup> Reynders, *Lexique comparé*, 2:268.

<sup>27</sup> Like Rousseau and Doutrelau (who have chosen this verb in their back translation), I regard it as very likely that the underlying Greek verb was συμβαίνο. Admittedly, *euenio* can translate a variety of Greek verbs, but if one looks closely at the few cases in which the Greek text is available, it appears that only two provide the same construction as in our passage (*euenio* with an infinitive): one with γίγνομαι (1.3.5, line 86 = Greek fragment 1, l. 337), the other with συμβαίνο. The closest parallel is the latter, while the former is somewhat different (ἐμοὶ . . . μὴ γένοτο [Gal 6:14] rendered as *mihī . . . non eueniat*).

<sup>28</sup> See Reynders, *Lexique comparé*, 2:307.

Indeed, in the preserved Greek fragments of Irenaeus, almost half of the instances of ἐπεὶ occur at the beginning of a sentence—starting with the first sentence of the prologue in Book 1.<sup>29</sup> In addition, there are cases where ἐπεὶ appears at the beginning of a sentence and is not accompanied by a particle.<sup>30</sup> So, if we admit that the Greek sentence indeed started with ἐπεὶ, nothing forces us to connect lines 72–77 to what comes before. On the contrary, the absence of a satisfactory link to the preceding lines suggests that the sentence starting with *quia/ἐπεὶ* was the beginning of a new sentence. This being the case, we can turn to the two options concerning the relationship of the phrase that begins with *et euenit* to the preceding lines: 1) to take the clause that begins with *et euenit* as an independent sentence and to assume that Irenaeus was using ἐπεὶ as an equivalent of γάρ (not an unattested usage);<sup>31</sup> 2) to take the καί that came before the verb translated with *euenit* not in the sense of “and,” but rather in what we might call an emphatic or limiting sense, where καί means something along the lines of “actually.”<sup>32</sup> I prefer this second option, which gives a cleaner and clearer text.

In any case, the clause that begins with *et euenit* makes full sense only if we read *euenit* as a perfect. If the verb is present,<sup>33</sup> the clause merely repeats unnecessarily—and moreover in two different forms—what the preceding lines say: repeating, in reverse, the movements that made the knot can unmake it. On the contrary, if the Greek verb is an aorist or a perfect, the sentence is endowed with rich and precise theological import: the fact expressed by the image of the knot has been fulfilled in the history of salvation. The knot of disobedience has indeed been undone.

We can, therefore, amend the translation suggested above in the following way (I adopt the second of the two options mentioned above by making *et euenit* a main clause):

- (1) Since that which has been tied cannot be undone  
unless we repeat in reverse order the intertwinings of the binding
- (2a) such that the first loops are undone by the second ones,
- (2b) <and> the second undo the first in reverse order,

<sup>29</sup> *Haer.* 1.pr.1: Ἐπεὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν παραπεμπόμενοι τινες . . .

<sup>30</sup> *Haer.* 3.22.2 (Greek fragment 34, line 2) (slightly uncertain, since the preceding lines of the Greek text are missing); 4.20.5, end (= Greek fragment 10, lines 11–14).

<sup>31</sup> See the similar case at the end of 4.20.5 (= Greek fragment 10, lines 11–14). See also, shortly before the passage under examination, 3.22.2, l. 28, which is comparable from the point of view of the syntax, but where ἐπεὶ means “for otherwise” (see LSJ s.v. ἐπεὶ, B.1). The Latin translator has, incidentally, rendered ἐπεὶ there as *ceterum*.

<sup>32</sup> See John D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1954) 316–21; Jean Humbert, *Syntaxe grecque* (3rd ed.; Collection de philologie classique 2; Paris: Klincksieck, 1960) 414 (§ 728); see also Christophe Guignard, *La lettre de Julius Africanus à Aristide sur la généalogie du Christ. Analyse de la tradition textuelle, édition, traduction et étude critique* (TUGAL 167; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011) 390 n. 11.

<sup>33</sup> Or, in Greek, a perfect with a present sense. This was probably Rousseau and Doutreleau’s understanding, since they print συμβέβηκε in their back-translation, but translate it as a present (“il se trouve que”), likely inspired by the fact that *euenit* (as a present) is attested as a rendering of συμβέβηκεν at 1.21.1 (line 2/856).

(3a) it happened actually that the first intertwining was undone by a second act of tying

(3b) and that the second act of tying served as the undoing of the first.

### ■ Toward a New Interpretation of *Adversus haereses* 3.22.4.72–91

We can now attempt a new interpretation of the passage. The whole set of biblical arguments in lines 78–87 is worthy of interest, but a detailed analysis would exceed the scope of this study. I will, therefore, concentrate on the relationship between lines 72–77, reinterpreted in the manner above, and the first of the biblical references given by Irenaeus in the lines that follow.

“That is why” (*et propter hoc*), Irenaeus argues, “the Lord said that the first would be the last, and the last the first (Matt 19:30)” (lines 78–79). As mentioned above, *et propter hoc* suggests a close link to the preceding words, but this link is not immediately clear to the modern reader, who tends to understand “the first” and “the last” as representing large categories of people. Yet in the present context, it is likely that Irenaeus gives the words of Jesus a precise theological meaning. Who, then, are “the first” and “the last”? First, it should be observed that the opposition between the first and the last clearly echoes the pair of first/last knots (or ties) that the preceding lines emphasize. This confirms that there is a close link to the preceding discussion. Another clue to understanding the identity of “the first” and “the last” is provided by the following biblical reference: according to Irenaeus, “the prophet, too, indicates the same (*hoc idem*) [as Jesus], saying, ‘Instead of fathers (*pro patribus*), children (*fili*) have been born to you’” (lines 79–81, quoting Ps 44:17).<sup>34</sup> Surprising as it may sound, this implies that, in Irenaeus’s understanding, Jesus’s declaration about “the first” and “the last” has to do with relations between ancestors and descendants. In the same way, the following lines refer to the “ancient fathers” (*pristinos patres*, line 82) and more specifically to Adam as the “beginning of those who die” (*initium morientium*, line 84) and as the endpoint in Jesus’s genealogy according to Luke (line 86). In light of these references to Adam and the overall context of the parallel between Adam and Jesus (21.10–22.3) as well as between Eve and Mary (22.4), it is clear that “fathers” and the “children” are respectively Adam and Eve, and Jesus and Mary. By implication, the same must hold true for Matt 19:30: the “first” are Adam and Eve, while the “last” are Jesus and Mary.

In quoting this saying, then, Irenaeus is not simply recalling a Gospel principle that would illustrate, in an abstract manner, the same logic of reversal as the image of the knot; he is rather contrasting the primordial disobedience and its reversal, stressing that salvation gives precedence to what (chronologically) comes second.<sup>35</sup> From this perspective, the *et propter hoc* of line 78 takes on all its meaning, and the link between the biblical argument that it introduces and the metaphorical argument

<sup>34</sup> Translation from *ANF* 1:455 (slightly modified).

<sup>35</sup> Or, as Miola, “Mary as Un-tier,” 340 succinctly puts it in the context of Irenaeus’s “recapitulative typology”: “those who are chronologically last have ontological priority.”

of the knot is indeed cogent. Understood in this way, Matt 19:30 and Ps 44:17 perfectly sum up the logic of reversal that characterizes the attainment of salvation.

It thus becomes clear that lines 72–77 are closely connected with what follows rather than with what precedes, although the *quia* of the Latin version misleadingly suggests otherwise. And we can note in passing that, if the passage is understood in this way, there is no longer any reason to connect the image of the knot to the *recircu(m)latio*.

This interpretation clearly diverges from that which reduces the theological significance of the image of the knot to a contrast between Eve's disobedience and its undoing by Mary. If *quia non aliter* (line 72) is the beginning of a new sentence, that standard way of reading the passage no longer imposes itself. The passage specifically dedicated to Mary and Eve ends at line 72, while the rest of section 22.4 forms a separate, but coherent, whole. After considering the relationship between Jesus and Adam from the perspective of recapitulation (21.10–22.3),<sup>36</sup> and then the relationship—which results from the former<sup>37</sup>—between Eve and Mary (22.4, until line 72), Irenaeus goes on to associate the New Adam and the New Eve (22.4, lines 72–91).

That the second half of 22.4 (lines 72–91) forms a new section is confirmed by its ring structure, whereby the first and last lines both develop the image of the knot. This division is further confirmed by the fact that the first part of 22.4 (lines 56–72) is marked off by another echo: the result is a coherent and clearly delineated argument, which begins by contrasting Mary and Eve (lines 56–72) and ends with the *recircu(m)latio* of Mary to Eve. Finally, a last echo between the beginning of the first section and the end of the second (obedience of Mary–disobedience of Eve) shows that the two sections of 22.4 are linked: they both define Mary's role in the attainment of salvation, first by situating it in opposition to that of Eve, and then by showing how it is connected to that of the Lord. It is therefore better to consider the three sections identified above (21.10–22.3; 22.4, l. 56–72; 22.4, l. 72–91) not as a triptych, but rather as an extended commentary on the recapitulation of Adam (21.10–22.3), to which is added the bipartite argument that connects also Eve and Mary to the recapitulation (22.4).<sup>38</sup>

I return now to the image of the knot at lines 72–77 and its revival at the end of § 4 (lines 88–91). As soon as we recognize that Irenaeus is thinking in the first passage of both Christ and Mary, the second instance becomes no longer a mere repetition of the earlier one. In his argument, Irenaeus exploits the image of the knot again, but now applies it specifically to the connection between Mary and Eve. This occurs after a succession of biblical citations (Matt 19:30; Ps 44:17;

<sup>36</sup> As Rousseau, SC 210, 362 (n. 2 on p. 427) rightly observes, this section (which in my opinion includes 22.3) is essentially about the recapitulation of Adam; see n. 46 below.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *consequenter*, line 56.

<sup>38</sup> But still without using the word “recapitulation” to describe the relationship between Mary and Eve; only later, at *Epid.* 33, will Irenaeus explicitly include Mary in the recapitulative process, though in a rather indirect way; see n. 51 below.

Col 1:18; Lk 3:23–38) that, from the second onward, progressively focus on the Lord and highlight his regenerative role vis-à-vis his ancestors, reaching back to Adam,<sup>39</sup> but leaving Mary in the shadows.<sup>40</sup> Much more attention is paid to the place occupied by the New Adam, who is at the center of a rich biblical argument, than to the New Eve, where an elegant yet rapid revival of the image of the knot suffices. Undoubtedly it would have been difficult to find other biblical references linking Mary and Eve, beyond those already cited by Irenaeus in the first part of 22.4.<sup>41</sup>

However, there seems to me to be a more important reason: the image of the knot, made and then unmade, represented for Irenaeus the perfect image of Mary's role in the attainment of salvation, namely the cancelling out of Eve's disobedience. It is, in this way, that Mary becomes *causa salutis* for all of humanity, herself included. The attainment of salvation is clearly the work of her son, which, in the eyes of Irenaeus, goes beyond the mere cancellation of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. As Jean Daniélou has pointed out, Irenaeus's conceptualization of the recapitulation has two aspects, namely cancellation of the original sin and the accomplishment of perfection: "We are concerned with a new beginning (κεφαλή) which is a resumption of the first, while at the same time it both restores the broken harmony (here we have the idea of reparation for sin) and surpasses the original work (the aspect of accomplishment)."<sup>42</sup> And yet, this notion of leading to perfection is alien to the image of the knot, which is a zero-sum game. The knot is undone and, if the act of untying is in some way an act of tying, it is only so inasmuch as it cancels out the first knot.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the image of untying the knot seems particularly significant: it expresses an important part of the history of salvation, namely the cancellation of the original act of disobedience, not only by the New Adam, who obeys where the first disobeyed (beginning of 21.10), but also by the New Eve, who does likewise (beginning of 22.4). In the second part of 22.4, in order to define

<sup>39</sup> The emphasis that Irenaeus puts on the fact that Adam himself is among those regenerated (cf. 22.3, in a different context, i.e., that of recapitulation) aims to prepare the reader for the following account of Adam's salvation (23).

<sup>40</sup> As stated above, the first quotation (Matt 19:30) still concerns Jesus and Mary, as opposed to Adam and Eve. As for the second (Ps 44:17), Irenaeus says that it conveys the same message (*hoc idem significat*), yet the Psalmist's saying is specifically addressed to the Lord (cf. *tibi*). It thus has a transitional function, while the last two biblical references concern only the Lord.

<sup>41</sup> I.e., the parallel between Eve's temptation and the Annunciation to Mary and a passage of the Pentateuch (probably Deut 22:23–24).

<sup>42</sup> Jean Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality. Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers* (trans. Wulstan Hibberd; London: Burns & Oates, 1960) 30. French original: "Il s'agit d'un nouveau commencement (κεφαλή) qui est une reprise du premier, à la fois en tant qu'il rétablit l'ordre violé (c'est l'aspect de réparation du péché) et qu'il dépasse l'ébauche commencée (c'est l'aspect d'accomplissement)" (Jean Daniélou, *Sacramentum futuri. Étude sur les origines de la typologie biblique* [Études de théologie historique; Paris: Beauchesne, 1950] 21).

<sup>43</sup> As Irenaeus states, "the second act of tying served as the undoing of the first (*secundam . . . colligationem primae solutionis habere locum*)."<sup>43</sup> Therefore, it consists only in untying, without being a knot in its own right. There is no reason to regard it as a true act of tying, as Miola, "Mary as Un-tier," 345 does—although she rightly observes that "the end result is a slack, knotless rope."

the role of Christ, Irenaeus uses this image as a starting point, connecting it to Jesus's saying about the first and the last (Matt 19:30), implying an interpretation of it that also encompasses Mary; but he then focuses on the Lord and broadens the perspective by introducing the theme of regeneration via additional biblical citations. The role of Jesus, as a "principle of the living" (cf. Col 1:18), is to bring justice and life to men who have died because of Adam's disobedience (21.10, lines 216–220). Therefore, it is possible to apply the image of the knot both to the New Adam and the New Eve, but while it sums up perfectly the role of the latter, it can only partially express that of the former.

This difference seems to me to be essential for fully appreciating the role that Irenaeus attributes to Mary in the salvation of humanity,<sup>44</sup> a crucial but inevitably limited one, since Mary's role is essentially a counterpart to Eve's. Mary releases humanity from the consequences of the latter's disobedience,<sup>45</sup> but her role does not extend as far as Adam's fundamental disobedience and its consequences. Readings that go beyond the role sketched above seem, to my mind, to stretch too far the possibilities of Irenaeus's Marian doctrine.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, although Eve's disobedience led to Adam's, Irenaeus maintains, in accordance with the teaching of Paul (Rom 5:12), that it is Adam's disobedience that brought humanity into sin and death: "For as by one man's disobedience sin entered, and death obtained [a place] through sin; so also by the obedience of one man, righteousness having been introduced, shall cause life to fructify in those persons who in times past were dead."<sup>47</sup> It is

<sup>44</sup> That is, her personal and moral role prior to—and in some respect independently of—the virgin birth, which is what she *does*, and in which she also takes on an essential role thanks to what she *is*, both as a virgin and as a descendant of Adam (see 21.10–22.1).

<sup>45</sup> Irenaeus will express the same idea, even more clearly, at 5.19.1 with a formula that seems to be inspired by the image of tying and untying: "quemadmodum adstrictum est morti genus humanum per virginem, solutum est per virginem" (lines 15–16).

<sup>46</sup> This could include, for example, the interpretation of Sagnard that was rightly criticized by Nautin (see the excerpt quoted above in n. 21) or, along similar lines, that of Orbe, who sees the *recirculatio* as a stream of life (or of salvation) originating from Mary and extending back through the generations *secundum carnem* (according to the flesh) (Antonio Orbe, "La 'recirculación' de la Virgen María en san Ireneo (*Adv. Haer.* III,22,4,71)," in *La mariologia nella catechesi dei Padri (età prenicena). Convegno di studio e aggiornamento, Facoltà di Lettere Cristiane e Classiche (Pontificium Institutum Altioris Latinitatis), Roma, 18–19 marzo 1988* [ed. Sergio Felici; Biblioteca di scienze religiose 88; Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1989] 101–20, esp. 106). To my mind, Miola also goes too far when, in her recent article, she claims that "Mary is not only part of the 'omnia' that Christ restores in the fullness of time, to put it in Pauline terms, but *she herself also recapitulates all things in Christ in the fullness of time*" (Miola, "Mary as Un-tier," 341 [italics mine]; cf. 360). We should recall that at *Haer.* 3.22.4, Irenaeus does not speak (and possibly avoids speaking) of recapitulation when Mary's role vis-à-vis Eve is the issue, and that, when he eventually does so in *Epid.* 33, Mary's part in the recapitulation does not stretch beyond the recapitulation of Eve: "It was necessary / fitting that Adam be recapitulated in Christ, 'so that mortality might be swallowed up by immortality,' and Eve [be recapitulated] in Mary, so that the virgin might become the advocate of a virgin and untie virginal disobedience with virginal obedience" (quoted by Miola, *ibid.*; italics added).

<sup>47</sup> "Quia quemadmodum per inobaudientiam unius hominis introitum peccatum habuit et per peccatum mors obtinuit, sic et per obaudientiam unius hominis iustitia introducta uitam fructificat

through the death of Christ on the cross that Adam's disobedience will be cancelled out. As Irenaeus maintains in the same book of *Adversus haereses*, through his sufferings, "[the Lord] fought and conquered; for He was man contending for the fathers, and through obedience doing away with disobedience completely: for He bound the strong man, and set free the weak, and endowed His own handiwork with salvation, by destroying sin."<sup>48</sup> The ultimate victory is won by Christ, on the cross. How could it have been otherwise? Irenaeus insists on the fact that salvation is not within reach of human beings, but that it can only be realized by a man united with God through the Incarnation (*Haer.* 3.18.7).

As might be expected, there is here an irreducible dissymmetry between Christ and his mother: Mary herself could not bring about the salvation of humanity and counts among those saved by Christ.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, with her obedience—which opens the way to the Incarnation—she creates the conditions necessary for the realization of salvation and thus becomes *causa salutis*.

Some years later, Irenaeus would express very similar views in his *Epideixis*, gathering together the same themes into a more synthesized presentation, which is worth quoting as it tends to confirm the reading proposed in this study, bearing witness to a basic continuity in Irenaeus's theological thoughts about the respective roles of Christ and his mother in the history of salvation:<sup>50</sup>

*So the Word was made flesh* (John 1:14), in order that sin, destroyed by means of that same flesh through which it had gained the mastery and taken hold and lorded it, should no longer be in us; and therefore our Lord took up the same first formation for an Incarnation, that so He might join battle on behalf of His forefathers, and overcome through Adam what had stricken us through Adam. . . . And just as it was through a virgin who disobeyed that man was stricken and fell and died, so too it was through the virgin, who obeyed the word of God, that man resuscitated by life received life. . . . for Adam had necessarily to be restored<sup>51</sup> in Christ, that mortality be absorbed in immortality, and Eve in Mary, that a virgin, become the advocate of a virgin, should undo and destroy virginal disobedience by virginal obedience. And the sin

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his qui olim mortui erant hominibus" (*Haer.* 3.21.10, lines 216–218, trans. *ANF* 1:454). Irenaeus expressed a similar thought in *Epid.* 31; see below and n. 51.

<sup>48</sup> "Luctatus est enim et uicit; erat enim homo pro patribus certans et per obaudientiam inobaudientiam persoluens; adligauit autem fortem et soluit infirmos et salutem donauit plasmati suo, destruens peccatum" (3.18.6, lines 156–162, trans. *ANF* 1:447–48). In these lines, Irenaeus is opposing a docetic reading of the Passion.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. "et sibi et uniuerso generi humano causa facta est salutis" (*Haer.* 3.22.4, lines 67–68).

<sup>50</sup> For the parallel between Eve and Mary, see also *Haer.* 5.19.1, lines 3–5.

<sup>51</sup> Perhaps more precisely "recapitulated"; see the Latin translation of the Armenian text by Adelin Rousseau, (Irenaeus of Lyons, *Démonstration de la prédication apostolique* [ed. and trans. Adelin Rousseau; SC 406; Paris: Cerf, 1995] 130): "oportebat-et-conueniebat enim recapitulari (ἀνακεφαλαιόομαι) Adam in Christum." The recapitulative role conceded to Mary appears more clearly in his translation than in that of Smith: "Car il fallait qu'Adam fût récapitulé dans le Christ . . . et il fallait qu'Ève le fût aussi en Marie" (*ibid.*, 131; italics mine). The same is true of the translation in Miola, "Mary as Un-tier," 341, quoted in n. 46 above.



that was wrought through the tree was undone by the obedience of the tree, whereby the Son of man was nailed to the tree, destroying the knowledge of evil, and bringing and conferring knowledge of good (*Epid.* 31.33–34 [33]).<sup>52</sup>

## ■ Conclusion

That the structure and argument of *Haer.* 3.22.4, as it is has been handed down to us, are partly obscure is likely due to a misleading choice by the Latin translator, who rendered what seems to have been an ἐπεὶ in the original Greek as *quia* (line 72). Once this difficulty is removed, the way is open for a new understanding of lines 72–77 that gives the whole passage a coherent structure and makes Irenaeus’s argument clearer and more substantial.

This reinterpretation also results in a more precise understanding of Mary’s importance in Irenaeus’s theology, and makes it possible to perceive more clearly the moral role that he assigns her in the realization of salvation. This role should not, to be sure, be overestimated, and one must avoid interpreting it anachronistically in the light of much later developments in Western Mariology—most notably speculations about Mary as “Co-Redemptrix.”<sup>53</sup> We should not lose sight of the fact that Mary’s role consists precisely in cancelling Eve’s disobedience; accordingly, in no way does it extend to the realization of salvation itself, which remains Christ’s prerogative. Nor should Mary’s moral role be underestimated, however, since for Irenaeus she has her own part to play in the process of recapitulation: inasmuch as her obedience cancels Eve’s disobedience, she can rightly be called “cause of salvation,” even if salvation itself will be brought about by her son’s obedience on the cross.

<sup>52</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Proof of The Apostolic Preaching* (trans. Joseph P. Smith; ACW 16; Westminster, MD: Newman, 1952) 68–69.

<sup>53</sup> On this topic, see, e.g. Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald* (trans. Henry Taylor; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002) 306.