

"CHARISMA VERITATIS CERTUM": IRENAEUS, *ADVERSUS  
HAERESSES* 4, 26, 2

Theologians have returned regularly to the explanation of the haunting phrase that entitles this note,<sup>1</sup> not least because the First and Second Vatican Councils have deliberately taken up its terminology to articulate their teaching on the episcopal and papal magisterium.<sup>2</sup> The Irenaean context of the phrase reads:

Quapropter eis qui in ecclesia sunt presbyteris obaudire oportet, his qui successionem habent ab apostolis, sicut ostendimus, qui cum episcopatus successione charisma veritatis certum secundum placitum Patris acceperunt, reliquos vero qui absistunt a principali successione et quocumque loco colligunt suspectos habere. . . . Omnes autem hi deciderunt a veritate.<sup>3</sup>

The Greek text of *AH* has not survived at this point. What has been transmitted is a Christian Latin version that dates from between 200 and 400 A.D.<sup>4</sup> The fact that the oldest surviving witness here is in Christian Latin<sup>5</sup> has implications that remain to be exploited. According to Chris-

<sup>1</sup> Particularly influential have been the studies of K. Müller, "Das Charisma veritatis und der Episkopat bei Irenaeus," *ZNW* 23 (1924) 216-22; N. Brox, "Charisma veritatis certum," *ZKG* 75 (1964) 327-31; L. Ligier, "Le Charisma veritatis certum des évêques: Ses attaches liturgiques, patristiques, et bibliques," in *L'Homme devant Dieu* 1 (Paris: Aubier, 1963) 247-68; not to mention E. Molland, "Irenaeus of Lugdunum and the Apostolic Succession," *JEH* 1 (1950) 12-28, taken up by H. von Campenhausen, *Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1953) 188; qualified by A. Ehrhardt, *The Apostolic Succession* (London: Lutterworth, 1953) 107-31, esp. 113-14, 117, 119-20, and R. M. Grant, "Early Episcopal Succession," *Studia patristica* 11 (ed. F. L. Cross; Berlin: Akademie, 1972) 181. When Y. Congar turned to the phrase in *Tradition and Traditions* (New York: Macmillan, 1967) 177, 179, 329-30, he stressed "the objective deposit of truth"; when he returned to it in *RSPT* 60 (1976) 85, he suggested that it could designate an objective gift of the truth or a charism for action (function). J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (5th ed.; London: Black, 1977) 37, says that on Irenaeus' view "the Church's bishops are . . . Spirit-endowed men who have been vouchsafed 'an infallible charism of truth.'" The U.S. Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue has addressed itself to the question in the recent discussions of infallibility (cf. n. 19 below).

<sup>2</sup> *DS* 3071 and *Dei verbum*, no. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Adversus haereses* 4, 26, 2 (cited hereafter as *AH*; in the W. Harvey edition, 2.236. References to this edition will follow each citation of *AH*). The text quoted is that of A. Rousseau, *Contre les hérésies* 4 (SC 100/2; Paris: Cerf, 1965) 718. Citations below will also use this edition where available. For translations, see ANF 1.497 and E. Molland (n. 1 above) 17.

<sup>4</sup> B. Altaner, *Patrology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961) 150-52, for references to the studies. In a private communication Dr. Christine Mohrmann noted (Dec. 16, 1977) that her Nijmegen seminar on the Latin of *AH* came up with no conclusive evidence for a date, except that A.D. 200 was too early.

<sup>5</sup> The Armenian version of Books 4-5 dates from 500-550; on this, as well as the Syriac fragments, see Rousseau, SC 100/1, 88-104. Of the Latin version he simply observes that it was from before A.D. 422. On the fragments of the original Greek for *AH* 4, cf. pp. 51-87 (L. Doutreleau).

tine Mohrmann, the Christian Latin practice was to transliterate Greek terms into the Latin language in order to name tangible Christian institutions and concrete things, as well as actual persons with specifically Christian roles.<sup>6</sup> In the quotation cited above, five such Christian Latin transplants have been underscored. Apart from *charisma*, all fit precisely the description that Mohrmann has offered. Without evidence to the contrary, one presumes that the translator of Irenaeus put *charisma* here into Latin as a technical term to designate a manifest and palpable divine gift that in his opinion had passed into Latin Christian life and could still be pointed to.

Do the other uses of *charisma* in the Latin version of Irenaeus bear out this presumption? One first notes that the translator did not automatically transplant every occurrence of *charisma* in the Greek text into his Latin version, as AH 2, 28, 7 and 32, 4 (Harvey 1.356, 375) illustrate.<sup>7</sup> Of the eleven occurrences of *charisma* in AH, eight are in the plural, and the influence of 1 Cor 12:4-5, 28-31 on the meaning can be seen at 3, 11, 9; the second occurrence in 4, 20, 6; 4, 20, 7, as well as 4, 33, 8 (Harvey 2.51, 218, 263), where the *munus dilectionis* is *reliquis charismatibus supereminentiis*.<sup>8</sup> The concrete phenomena that this Latin version of Irenaeus designated as *charismata* were particularly the prophetic gifts, i.e., those possessed by the persons who transmitted the word of God to men.<sup>9</sup> In AH 5, 22, 2 (Harvey 2.385) the singular form is again used (cf n.

<sup>6</sup> For the basis for this observation and the following, consult the magisterial studies of Christine A. Mohrmann, *Etudes sur le latin des chrétiennes* (Rome: Ediz. d. Storia, 1958-65) 1.116-18; 3.115-16, 130-33, 140-41. Ehrhardt, *Apostolic Succession* 123 n. 1, has observed that the Latin translator of Irenaeus regularly used *seniores* for Jewish elders.

<sup>7</sup> These and the following references are from Bruno Reynders, *Lexique comparé . . . de l'AH* (CSCO 141; Louvain: Durbecq, 1954) s.v. In both loci cited here, the translator has rendered the Greek *charismatōn* with *gratiarum*, in the former instance translating 1 Cor 12:4, in the latter referring to the miraculous gifts that God bestows through certain believers who exorcise or prophesy or heal by imposing hands (cf. n. 22 below).

<sup>8</sup> The use of *munus* here illustrates the principle that the more impalpable the divine gift being designated, the more likely was a native Latin term to be employed (Mohrmann, *Etudes* 1.117). It was only in translating 1 Cor 12:31 that Vg transplanted *charismata* into Latin, perhaps because the Montanists had appropriated the term (Mohrmann) and, according to a linguistic Gresham's law, the debased terminological currency eventually drove out the good. Cf. Tertullian, *Adv. Valent.* 4, 4: "revelationem statim appellat praesumptionem et charisma ingenium." The term *charisma* had practically disappeared from Christian Latin by the time of Ambrose and Augustine, except in liturgical usage (Mohrmann), a point that may further corroborate the meaning for *charisma* to be proposed below.

<sup>9</sup> AH 3, 11, 9; 4, 20, 4 (singular), 6; 4, 27, 2; 5, 6, 1 (Harvey 2.51, 215, 218, 241, 334); cf. also his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* (ET, J. P. Smith, ACW 16, Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1952) #7, 9, 99 with the notes, pp. 144-45, 147. The remaining use in the plural is AH 4, 26, 5 (Harvey 2.238), which, because of its parallels with 4, 26, 2 (Harvey 2.236), must be cited. Irenaeus, describing the worthy presbyter, has just adduced 1 Cor 12:28 on the apostles, prophets, and teachers that God has given to the Church. To this passage he

9) in the phrase *universi charismatis*, which designates not only good works but also an eminent ministry (*ministratiois supereminentia*).<sup>10</sup>

The one remaining use of *charisma* in the singular is in the phrase under study, where Irenaeus asserts that the presbyters of the Church have accepted along with their succession from the apostles "charisma veritatis certum." On the principle noted above and in accord with the other uses of *charisma* in this Christian Latin translation, one asks, what precisely did the Latin *charisma* point to? What was the manifest reality, the concrete institution, even the person with a specifically Christian task that the translator here took for granted as part of Latin Christian life? The other occurrences of the term would lead one to infer that the reality, the institution, the person belonged within the prophetic cadre and among the *charismata* that Paul discussed in 1 Cor 12. The mention of presbyters and their episcopate in the immediate context and the linking of *presbyter* and 1 Cor 12:28 with *charismata* at AH 4, 26, 5 (Harvey 2.238)<sup>11</sup> make it probable that the Latin translator of Irenaeus used *charisma* here to designate that manifest, palpable gift by which the succession from the apostles was realized among the presbyters and bishops of his own day. In a word, *charisma* for this translator denoted the sacramental ordination of the presbyter-bishop, who by that act became one of the prophetic order. He understood Irenaeus to be speaking of an episcopal succession to the apostolic teaching, which in turn was to be seen in conjunction with the manifest act by which God gave the presbyter-bishops a prophetic ministry for the Church.

Was this understanding conceivable in the Latin West between A.D. 200–400? An OL version of 1 Tim 4:14 wrote: "noli negligere quod in te est charisma" of Timothy's receiving with prophetic intervention (cf. 1 Tim 1:18) the presbyteral imposition of hands. Still further confirmation comes from Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition*, which may well document the sacramentary of the Roman Church into the last decades of the second century.<sup>12</sup> After a preface with its difficult reference to *charismata*,<sup>13</sup> this archaic *ordo* opens with the prescriptions for the ordinations

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subjoined: "ubi igitur charismata Dei posita sunt, ibi discere oportet veritatem, apud quos et ea quae est ab apostolis ecclesiae successio et id quod est sanum et irreprobabile conversationis et inadulteratum et incorruptibile sermonis constat."

<sup>10</sup> Cf. the translation of the *diareseis diakoniōn* of 1 Cor 12:4 by *divisiones ministeriorum* in AH 4, 20, 6; cf. 7: *ministeria sua* (Harvey 2.218).

<sup>11</sup> Cited in n. 9 above.

<sup>12</sup> Hilary, *Super Ps. 118: Vau*, #5 (CSEL 22, 413–14), for the OL. See Gregory Dix and Henry Chadwick, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome* (London: SPCK, 1968) xxxix–xl, for the dating around A.D. 180. The new, annotated version by G. J. Cuming, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students* (Bramcote, Notts: Grove, 1976) has been used in this article.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Cuming, *Hippolytus* #1 with #14, where a person who has a *charisma* for healing

of bishop and presbyter, which in important respects coincide.<sup>14</sup> The ordination prayer for both is emphatically a prayer for the Spirit. The prayer for the presbyter takes up the language of 1 Cor 12:28 as it asks for “the spirit of grace and counsel of the presbyterate” for the one who has just received the imposition of hands, “that he may help and govern”<sup>15</sup> God’s people. This in turn reminds the one who prays of the precedent in salvation history for the gift now sought, the narrative of the seventy elders (LXX: *presbyteroi*) in Num 11:16–17, 24–30 who received the prophetic Spirit.<sup>16</sup> Of the deacon, on the contrary, the *Apostolic Tradition* observes, “... he does not receive the common spirit of seniority (*praesbyterii*) in which the presbyters share. . . .”<sup>17</sup> For this *ordo*, the presbyter upon whom hands have been imposed has visibly received a prophetic gift and function.<sup>18</sup> In Christian Latin (as the OL of 1 Tim 4:14

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is not to receive the imposition of hands, “for the facts themselves will show whether he has spoken the truth.” Thus the visibility of the ordination rite has importance for revealing what is not so manifest.

<sup>14</sup> Cuming #2–3, 7. See n. 22 below for Irenaeus.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *antilempseis* and *kybernēseis* in the list of *charismata* in 1 Cor 12:28 with the *tou antilambanesthai kai kybernan* of *Constitutiones apostolorum* 8, 16, 4 and the phrasing of Hippolytus: “impart the Spirit of grace and counsel of the presbyterate, that he may help and govern your people with a pure heart” (Cuming #7). In Cuming #8: “on a presbyter the presbyters alone shall lay hands, because of the common and like spirit of their order.”

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Didache* 15, 1–2, where bishops and deacons perform “the ministry (*leitourgian*) of prophets and teachers.” Note also how the incident from Numbers has kept its place in the Roman Pontifical for presbyteral ordination (cf. C. Vogel, *Le pontifical romano-germanique du dixième siècle* [Vatican City, 1963] 33).—Irenaeus, after describing the presbyters who have the *charisma veritatis certum*, contrasts them with heretical teachers, who are compared (among others) to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num 16:1–35). Again, in his résumé at 4, 26, 4 (Harvey 2.237) he writes: “Ab omnibus igitur talibus [haereticis] abstinere oportet, adhaerere vero his qui et apostolorum, sicut praediximus, doctrinam custodiunt et cum presbyterii ordine sermonem sanum et conversationem sine offensa praestant ad conformationem et correctionem reliquorum.” The resemblances to the concept of the prophetic role in 1 Cor 14:3 are notable, as is the subjoined quotation of Num 16:15. On the hypothesis submitted here, *charisma . . . certum* would correspond to *cum presbyterii ordine* (cf. n. 22 below for P. van Beneditin), and *veritatis* to the *apostolorum . . . doctrinam*.

<sup>17</sup> Cuming #8. For the translation of *praesbyterii* here, see D. Powell, “*Ordo presbyterii*,” *JTS* 26 (1975) 290–328, esp. 308–11.

<sup>18</sup> The Roman Pontifical (n. 16 above, p. 35) prays “Deus . . . munus tuae benedictionis effunde” over the presbyters being ordained, and the sense of *munus* is here much closer to *charisma* (cf. n. 8 above) than to its classical sense of office (contrast *ad presbiterii* [sic] *munus* with *perpetuam muneris tui largitatem* in the same Pontifical, p. 32).—In the Greek Fathers, note that Epiphanius writes of *ta charismata tēs hierōsynēs* (*Adversus haereses* 48, 9 [PG 41, 868D]), and Basil speaks of those who have ordination (*cheirotonias*) and *dia tēs epitheseōs tōn cheirōn . . . to charisma to pneumatikon* (*Letter 188*, can. 1 [LCL 3, 16–17]).—In the *Constitutiones apostolorum*, Book 8 is titled *Peri charismatōn kai cheirotoniōn . . .*, and in 8, 1, 21–22 the document maintains that becoming an apostle or a bishop pertains to the God who grants the *charismata*. Hippolytus’ work was titled *Peri*

illustrates) that ordination to a prophetic ministry was itself designated by *charisma*.

To what does the remainder of the phrase refer? The term *veritas* here is, for all practical purposes, equivalent to revelation or the faith as a deposit and trust that can be transmitted or abandoned. The presbyter-bishops have the power from God to do the former; the heretics have done the latter ("hi deciderunt a veritate").<sup>19</sup> In the Irenaean phrase, the genitive *veritatis* specifies the object of the *charisma*. Presbyteral ordination has given the prophetic task of transmitting and teaching the divine revelation. That presbyteral prophetic gift is then qualified as *certum*, i.e., exact, secure, sure,<sup>20</sup> in its communicating that truth.

Thus the Christian Latin version of AH 4, 26, 2 (Harvey 2.236) really supplies a very ancient, Western explanation of a Greek text that has vanished. The translator understood the presbyterate/episcopate of his day as endowed through ordination with a prophetic gift that made their teaching of revelation certain. But was that the meaning of the lost Irenaean original? The answer demands still another study that will reconstruct the lost text<sup>21</sup> and interpret it with due caution.<sup>22</sup>

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*charismatōn apostolikē paradosis* on the base of his statue (CIG 8613A; Cuming, *Hippolytus*, p. 4).

<sup>19</sup> Also cf. AH 4, 26, 5, cited in n. 9 above. The sense of *veritas* here is quite parallel to the use of *alētheia* in the Pastoral Epistles (cf. "On the Terminology for Faith, Truth, Teaching, and the Spirit in the Pastoral Epistles" in the forthcoming *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue*, Vol. 6). Cf. also the citation from Tertullian in n. 8 above.

<sup>20</sup> Rousseau, SC 100/2, 719, proposes that *certum* translated *asphales* in the lost original, as the *certissime* of AH 3, 12, 2 (Harvey 2.54) = *asphalōs* of Acts 2:36 and the *certius* (in a context of prophecy) of 5, 30, 2 (Harvey 2.408) = *asphalesteron* of the extant Greek. Yet, just as often a form of *akribos* has been rendered with *pro certo* (AH 1, 13, 4 [Harvey 1.120] —*akribōs*, in reference to prophecy) or, in the context of the phrase here under study, at 4, 26, 1 (Harvey 2.235) Irenaeus writes that "When the right time has come and that which has been prophesied has occurred, then one attains the most exact explanation (*tēs akribestatēs epetychen exēgēseōs*)" of the OT prophecies. Here the Latin translated the Greek superlative with *liquidam et certam expositionem*.—If *certum* translated *asphales*, the emphasis would fall on the sureness and security given by the prophetic *charisma* to those who received the revelation. If it translated *akribes*, the stress would fall on the exact precision of the knowledge of revelation that came to the one who had received that *charisma*. In either case the prophetic contexts in which forms of *certum* occur signal again that the *charisma* in this phrase must be linked in some way with the role of the prophet.

<sup>21</sup> Thus the Armenian version of 4, 26, 2 (Harvey 2.236) apparently read a Greek original, *kata tēn alētheian* (SC 100/2, 718–19).

<sup>22</sup> The texts of 1 Tim 4:14 and 2 Tim 1:6 link the *charisma* that comes through the imposition of hands not only with the apostle himself but also with the presbyterate and with prophecies (cf. 1 Tim 1:18). Yet neither of these texts has been cited in any Christian literature through Tertullian (cf. *Biblia patristica* [Paris: Centre National de la Recherche

Scientifique, 1975] 513, 515), not to mention Irenaeus, who only notes the imposition of hands in connection with the *charisma* of healing (AH 2, 32, 4; cf. 1, 23, 1 [Harvey 1.375, 190] and n. 7 above). For later Greek texts, see n. 18 above. Yet in the light of Hippolytus' *ordo* it is most probable that such a mode of conferring the presbyteral-episcopal ministry was in vogue in the West before A.D. 200. It is, of course, quite possible that at this time a single ordination sufficed for all presbyters, including those who were elected bishops. Irenaeus was certainly a presbyter; he may not have received another sacramental ordination on his election to succeed the ninety-year-old martyr Pothinus. Neither of these men is called or calls himself *episkopos* in the contemporary sources, though Pothinus has *tēn diakonian tēs episkopēs* (Eusebius, HE 5, 1, 29). See F. D. Gilliard, "The Apostolicity of Gallic Churches," HTR 68 (1975) 17-33; D. Powell, n. 17 above; and P. van Beneditin, *Aux origines d'une terminologie sacramentelle: ordo, ordinare, ordinatio . . . avant 313* (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum, 1974) 15-16, 22 n. 36 on Irenaeus, as well as his final summary on 163-64.