

Irenaeus' emphasis on the unity of God is reflected in his corresponding emphasis on the unity of salvation history. He repeatedly insists that God created the world and has been overseeing it ever since. Everything that has happened is part of his plan for humanity. The essence of this plan is maturation: Irenaeus believes that humanity was created immature, and God intended his creation to take a long time to grow into his likeness. Thus, Adam and Eve were created as children. Their fall was thus not a full-blown rebellion but a childish spat, a desire to grow up before their time and have everything now.

Everything that has happened since, has therefore been planned by God, to help humanity overcome this and grow up. The world has been designed by God as a difficult place, where human beings are forced to make moral decisions— only in this way can they mature. Irenaeus likens death to the whale that swallowed Jonah: it was only in the depths of the whale's body that Jonah could turn to God and do His Will. Similarly, death and suffering appear evil, but without them we could never come to know God.

The high point in salvation history is Jesus. Irenaeus believes that Christ would always have been sent, even if humanity had never sinned, but the fact that they did sin determines his role as a savior. He sees Christ as the new Adam, who systematically undoes what Adam did: thus, where Adam was disobedient about the fruit of a tree, Christ was obedient even to death on the wood of a tree. Irenaeus is the first to draw comparisons between Eve and Mary, contrasting the faithlessness of the former with the faithfulness of the later. In addition to reversing the wrongs done by Adam, Irenaeus thinks of Christ as "recapitulating" or "summing up" human life. This means that Christ goes through every stage of human life, and simply by living it, sanctifies it with his divinity...



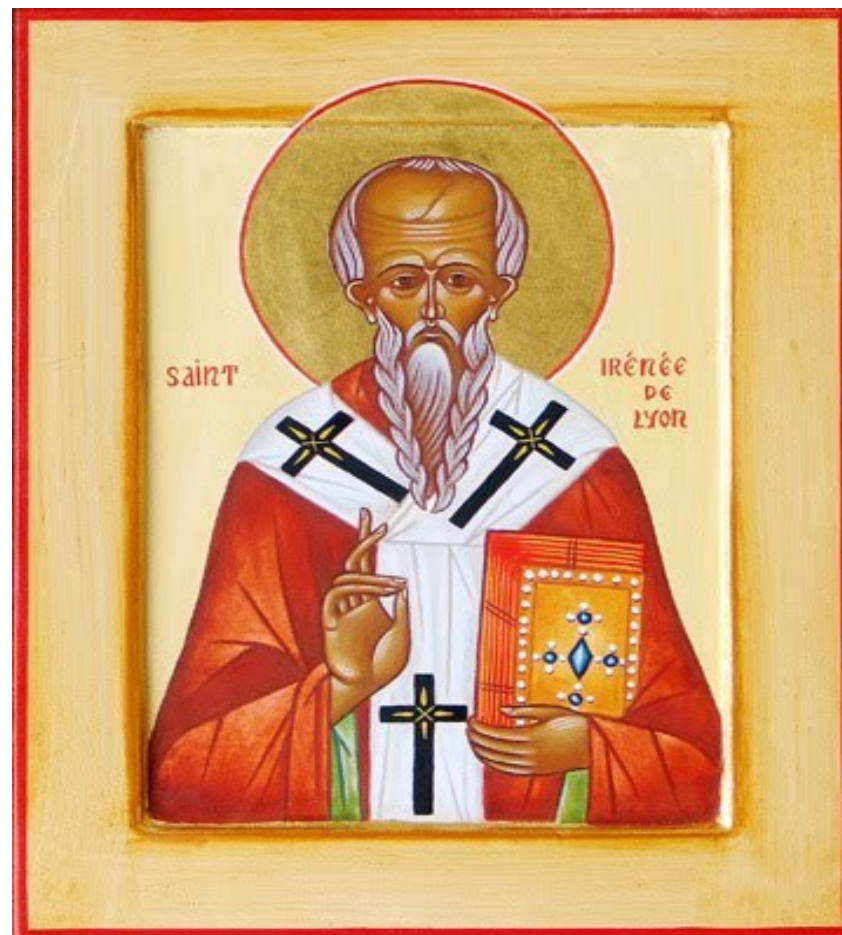
Irenaeus thus thinks that our salvation comes about, essentially, through the incarnation of God as man. He characterizes the penalty for sin as death and corruption. God, however, is immortal and incorruptible, and simply by becoming united to human nature in Christ he conveys those qualities to us, as it were, like a benign infection. Irenaeus therefore understands the atonement of Christ as happening through His incarnation rather than his crucifixion, although the latter is an integral part of the former.

*(excerpted from: www.religionfacts.com; www.catholicculture.org)

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Saint Irenaeus of Lyons

Feast Day: July 3



Prayer to Saint Irenaeus of Lyons

***Father, give perfection to beginners,
understanding to the little ones,
and help to those who are running their course.
Give sorrow to the negligent, fervor to the lukewarm,
and a good consummation to the perfect.***

Saint Irenaeus of Lyons

*Saint Irenaeus was born in c. 115 AD., in Smyrna, which is located in Asia Minor, which was connected in many ways with the Church of Gaul. He was bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul, which is now Lyons, France. He was a disciple of Saint Polycarp, who himself was a disciple of John the Evangelist. He is recognized as a saint by both the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church, and his writings were formative in the early development of Christian theology. His most famous work is *Against Heresies*, a lengthy description and refutation of Gnosticism. He is the most important witness to ecclesiastical tradition before Eusebius. He died in 202 AD., at Lyons, Gaul (France).

Little is known about the early life of Irenaeus. We do know that his parents, who were Christians, placed him while still young under the care of the great Saint Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna. It was in this holy school that he learned the sacred science which later made him a great ornament of the Church and the terror of her enemies. In order to confound the heresies of his age, Polycarp personally acquainted Irenaeus with the conceits of the pagan philosophers, and thereby became qualified to trace every error to its source and set it in its full light. By his writings, he was already known to Tertullian, Theodoret, and Saint Epiphanius, who speak of him as a luminous torch of truth in the darkness of those times.

Irenaeus wrote a number of books, but the most important that survives is the five-volume *On the Detection and Overthrow of the So-Called Knowledge*, normally referred to as *Adversus Haereses* (*Against Heresies*). Only fragments in the original Greek exist, but a complete copy exists in a wooden Latin translation, made shortly after its publication in Greek, and Books IV and V are present in a literal American translation.

The great work of Irenaeus is unfortunately no longer extant in the original. It has come down to us only in an ancient Latin version, with the exception of the greater part of the first book, which has been preserved in the original Greek, through means of copious quotations

made by Hippolytus and Epiphanius. The text, both Latin and Greek, is often most uncertain. Only three manuscripts of the work *Against Heresies* are at present known to exist. Others, however, were used in the earliest printed editions put forth by Erasmus. These codices were more ancient than any that are now available, and it is greatly regretted that they have disappeared or perished.

The purpose of *Against Heresies* is to refute the teachings of various gnostic groups. Until the discovery of the Library of Nag Hammadi in 1945, *Against Heresies* was the best surviving description of Gnosticism. Irenaeus cites from most of the New Testament canon, as well as from non canonical works 1. *Clement and The Shepherd of Hermes*, however, he makes no reference to Philemon, 2. Peter, 3. John and Jude. Irenaeus was the first Christian writer to list the four canonical Gospels as being divinely inspired, possibly in reaction to Marcion's edited version of the Gospel of Luke, which he asserted was the one and only true gospel. Irenaeus works' were published in English in the Ante-Nicene Fathers collection.

Irenaeus had clearly taken great pains to understand the various heretical systems which he describes. His mode of exposing and refuting these is generally very effective. It is plain that he possessed a good share of learning, and that he had a firm grasp of the doctrines of Scripture. Not infrequently, he indulges in a kind of sarcastic humor, while inveighing against the folly and impiety of the heretics.

A central point of Irenaeus' theology is the unity of God, in opposition to the Gnostics' division of God into a number of divine "Aeons", and their distinction between the "High God" and the wicked "Demiurge" who created the world. Irenaeus uses the Logos theology he inherited from Justin Martyr, but prefers to speak of the Son and the Spirit as the "hands of God." Christ, for him, is the invisible Father made visible.