

Irenaeus

A Biography and Introduction

- Born in mid 140's AD probably in or around Smyrna
- Considered to be a sub-apostolic, third generation disciple of Jesus Christ
 - Jesus » Apostles (Peter, Paul, etc) » Apostolic Fathers (Polycarp, Ignatius, etc) » Sub-Apostolic Fathers
- Influenced by many notable Christians
 - Student of Polycarp as a young man/young boy for probably an extended period of time
 - Influenced by the apologist Justin Martyr while living in Rome
- During the 160's AD moved to Lyons in southern Gaul (modern day France)
 - Geographically Lyons is separated from the city of Rome by the Alps (map)
 - Cultural context of Lyons was a Roman colony with a lot of Celtic migration
 - Irenaeus was a Greek speaking Christian, in a Latin colony of the Roman Empire, surrounded by Celtic barbarians on the fringes of civilization
- Around 174 AD was sent by his church to deliver a letter to the church in Rome out of an increasing concern for heresy
 - In Rome, two shocking discoveries were made:
 - First, the bishop of Rome, Eleutherus, had embraced the heresy of Montanism
 - Second, a friend and fellow student of Polycarp had embraced the heresy of Gnosticism
 - These two experiences probably served as the initial inspiration for a life spent refuting heresy
- In the year 177 AD during his absence a severe localized persecution broke out in Lyons and Vienne under Emperor Marcus Aurelius
 - Returning to Lyons, he discovers bishop Pothinus has been martyred and he is appointed the new bishop

- During the years of 189-198 AD he lived up to his name Irenaeus (“peacemaker”) in the Paschal Controversy
 - Debate with the Roman church over the date of Pascha (Passover/Easter) and the nature of fasting with it
 - Anicetus (Rome) and Polycarp (Smyrna) had left the issue unresolved in the previous generation
 - The new bishop of Rome, Victor, was not willing to compromise
 - The church in Rome was rebuked and peace was established in large part due to Irenaeus’ influence
- Shortly after this victory another persecution breaks out under Emperor Severus in which thousands (?) of Irenaeus’ community are martyred
- Dies around 202 AD...though probably not martyred

Contributions to the Church

- Considered the most important theologian of the 2nd century
 1. Represents movement from apologetic focus outside the Church to theological focus within the Church
 2. Brought biblical clarity where there was speculative confusion through the witness of the apostles
 3. Provides an effective model for approaching heresy used by later Christians
 4. Perspective that all of redemptive history concludes in Jesus Christ
 5. Presents a theology which is very approachable (in contrast to someone like Augustine)
- Written Works
 - Two surviving written works:
 - *Detection and Overthrow of the Knowledge Falsely So-Called*
 - Shorter title: *Against Heresies*
 - *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*
 - Shorter title: *On the Apostolic Preaching*
 - Six Lost Works (that we know of)