

IRENÆUS 120 - 202

Last month, we considered some of the Apologists, who defended the truth of the Christian way against those who attacked and persecuted the church from outside.

But in the 2nd & 3rd centuries, the church faced as much threat to its message of truth from many false teachers of heresies, who were inside the church itself. Jesus had warned against such men and so did the Apostles.

While fighting against false teaching, the later church fathers also clarified the Christian thinking about God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, which forms the foundation of our theology today. Augustine said "The rejection of heretics brings into relief what God's church holds and what sound doctrine maintains."

Jesus proclaimed *"I am the way, the truth and the life"* Jn14.6

He warned *"watch out for false prophets. they come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will know them"* Matt 7.15

"watch out that no-one deceives you for many will come in my name, claiming 'I am the Christ' and will deceive many.....false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect- if that were possible. See I have told you ahead of time" Matt 24.5, 24

Peter testified to the reality of Jesus and warned against false teachers, who made up their own stories.

"We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ but we were eyewitness of his majesty".....there will be false teachers among you; they will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up" 2 Peter 1.16 & 2. 1-3a

Paul warned Timothy

"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction. For a time will come when they will not put up with sound doctrine; but instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers, who will say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths." 2 Timothy 2. 2-4

and the Christians in Colossae.

"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world, rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in Christ who is the head over every power and authority." Colossians 2. 8-10

The encouragement and warnings given in these texts is at the heart of the writing of **Irenaeus**. He was deeply concerned to fight against the Gnostic teachers, whose thinking had seeped into the church and to protect the believers from the Gnostics' man-made myths. We have met some of the Gnostic teaching already in the Docetists and Marcionites.

Our major aim is to understand the heritage we have received from Irenaeus, his concern for the truth of the Gospel and for the care of the people in the church. We do not intend to make a detailed study of Gnostic heresies that were rampant in 2nd & 3rd century within the Christian Church, but we do need to consider some aspects of their thinking in order to better understand

what the church was contending against.

In "**The Detection and Overthrow of the Pretended but False Gnosis**", commonly called '**Against Heresies**', Irenaeus attacks the Gnostics. In the process, he clarifies the beliefs of the church passed down by Jesus through the Apostles and earlier Christian believers. In doing so, he presents so many gems.

IRENÆUS

HIS LIFE

Irenaeus is a follower of "the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that he might bring us to be even what He is in Himself." bk5.Preface

Irenaeus was born in Asia Minor to Christian parents, sometime between AD 120 and 140, and raised in Smyrna. As a boy, he sat under the ministry of Polycarp, a bishop in Smyrna in Asia Minor. Polycarp had known the Apostle John.

An insight into his relation with Polycarp is given in **his letter to Florinus**

For when I was still a boy, I saw you in lower Asia in the company of Polycarp....I can tell you the very place where the blessed Polycarp used to sit as he discoursed, his goings out and his comings in, the character of his life, his bodily appearance, the discourses he would address to the people, how he told of his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord, how he remembered their words and what the things were which he had heard from them concerning the Lord, His mighty works and His teaching and how Polycarp, as having received them from the eye-witnesses of the Life of the Word, related everything in accordance with the Scriptures. To these things, I listened diligently even then, by the mercy of God, which was upon me, noting them down not on paper but in my heart. And by the grace of God, I constantly ruminate upon them faithfully..." The New Eusebius ed J Stevenson SPCKP125

Polycarp had been responsible for sending men into Gaul (modern France) to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. One of them was Pothinus, who set up the Christian community in Lyons. Irenaeus joined Pothinus there as a presbyter. In 177, under the Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, there was terrible persecution in Lyons, during which Pothinus was martyred. At that time, Irenaeus had been sent with letters to Rome. In Rome, he encountered two heresies - the bishop of Rome followed Montanism and an old friend had embraced the teaching of Valentinus, a well known Gnostic. We will look at in this study, as Irenaeus wrote against him. Montanists will come into the next study when we read about Tertullian.

On his return to Lyons, Irenaeus was made the local bishop, replacing the martyred Pothinus. He strengthened the church in Lyons and as well, he sent out evangelists to other parts of Gaul. He was disturbed to find that the heretical gnostic teachers, whom he had experienced elsewhere, also came to Lyons. In response to their teaching and in answer to a friend's enquiries, he wrote his large work "**The Detection and Overthrow of the Pretended but False Gnosis**", commonly called "**Against Heresies**", written between AD 182 and AD188.

Irenaeus also mediated in church differences. During his life, the issue of the observance of Easter threatened to split the church between the east and the west. The churches of Asia Minor, one of which Polycarp had led, celebrated Easter on the 14th Nisan, the same day as the Jews celebrated Passover, which could fall on any day of the week, and also the day on which John had written that Jesus was crucified. The church in Rome insisted that it should be celebrated on a Sunday, which represented the day that Jesus resurrected. The bishop of Rome insisted on uniformity throughout the church and threatened to break communion with the eastern churches in Asia Minor over the issue. Irenaeus mediated between the two groups, striving to keep the unity of the church, if not uniformity. Finally, the Council of Nicea in 325 ruled that the Easter should be celebrated "on the one day throughout the Christian world", observing the custom of the Roman church.

Irenaeus is believed to have died in Lyons in 202, during a massacre conducted in the reign of the Emperor Severus.

A brief background to Gnosticism.

As mentioned in the last study, Gnostic teaching took many forms. Gnosticism had been around the Mediterranean world before Christ. It was a syncretistic religion, drawing into its belief system ideas from other religions in Egypt, Eastern mystery religions of Persia and Babylonia, Greek philosophy, particularly Platonism, and even Judaism. So when Christianity came on the scene, it adapted Christ into its belief system, in different ways. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, and John, in his first letter, warn against their false teaching.

Their name was derived from the word 'Gnosis', which means '**knowledge**'. Members of Gnostic groups believed they were possessors of secret knowledge, to which only an exclusive few had access - the 'spiritual' ones among men. They usually had dualism in some form in their beliefs, in which they thought of things that differ as mutually exclusive. They thought that the 'spiritual' was good and the 'material', which they opposed to the spiritual, was therefore bad. They struggled with the presence of evil in the world and how a good God could make, or be associated with, evil. They also struggled with how to reconcile the infinite and the finite. To explain this they separated the creation of the material world from the good God who was high above all this. Their hope of redemption was for their spirits to be released from their material bodies to return to the their spiritual home. The ones who adapted Christ into their system thought that Christ had been sent to do this from the good god and that he was pure spirit.

They often combined special rituals and magic with their ideas.

In our reading of Irenaeus' **Against Heresies**, this sketch of Gnosticism is expanded somewhat.

Some of the Gnostic teachings may sound unusual to us today but they challenged the still young church to think out its understanding of God, the Father and His Son.

Walker describes Gnosticism as a real threat to Christianity

"The height of Gnostic influence was from 135 to 160, though it continued as a force long after that. It threatened to overwhelm the historic Christian faith and by so doing, brought the Christian Church its gravest crisis since the Pauline battle for freedom from law. Its spread and consequent peril were made possible by the relatively weakly organised and doctrinally undefined state of the church at its beginning. The Church overcame the danger and, in so doing, developed

a closely knit organisation and clearly defined creed, which contrasted with the more spontaneous and charismatic nature of the primitive Christianity....

The Gnostic views denied the real humanity and death of Christ. They were largely based on an attempt to explain a seeming contradiction between the Jesus of History and the Christ of faith....The earthly life of humiliation was so contrasted with the His pre-existent and post-existent glory that the simplest solution to the understanding of Christ may well have seemed to some, the denial of the reality of His earthly life altogether. Christ did indeed appear. He taught His disciples; but all the time as a heavenly being, not one of flesh and blood".

"It was dangerous for it cut out the historic foundations of Christianity. Its God is not the God of the OT, which is the work of an inferior or even evil being. Its Christ had no real incarnation, death or resurrection. Its salvation was for the few capable of spiritual enlightenment. Its danger was heightened in that its representatives were some of those of the keenest minds of the 2nd century"

A History of the Christian Church. Willeston Walker p51 & 53

In 'Against Heresies', Irenaeus deals with specific Gnostic teachers but devotes most time to a man called Valentinus.

Valentinus was born in Egypt, educated at Alexandria and had moved to Rome, using it as a central base from which to spread his teaching. He stayed there for 15 years but was expelled from the church and moved to Cyprus where he continued to teach until his death about 160. He developed a comprehensive body of teaching and was highly influential in his time. His movement spread throughout Europe, the Middle East and North Africa and even though the Catholic church, representing the teaching of the apostolic tradition, stood against it, the Valentinian school endured for over 600 years.

A summary of Irenaeus' examination of Valentinus and other Gnostics is given later in this paper.

Irenaeus' Work – "Against Heresies" or "The Detection and Overthrow of the Pretended but False Gnosis"

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/irenaeus.html>

For our purposes

1. Against Heresies is a very long work, in which Irenaeus details the beliefs of the various Gnostic heretics around at that time. I suggest you concentrate on last 3 books, especially Books III & V, which focus more on the scriptures.

2. Irenaeus' **concern was for the flock** that they would not be led astray.

Jesus had warned his disciples to watch out for false teachers – 'those who devour the flock'. Paul, John and James and Jude repeated Jesus' warnings about wolves in sheep's clothing and Satan, who was prowling around to destroy them. Irenaeus wanted to exhort the believers in Christ to "avoid such an abyss of madness and of blasphemy against Christ."

So he gives an exposition and defence of the Christian Faith, derived from the Apostolic witness.

3. His other concern was to bring a strong **critique of the many forms of Gnosticism** so that it would not be confused with Christianity nor take Christ into its syncretistic religious practices. He wanted to make it impossible for such a "monstrous system" to survive for the Gnostics came

in "like locusts to devour the harvest of the Gospel". He showed "how absurd and inconsistent with the truth are their statements"

He didn't do this as an intellectual exercise but because he and the Church were confronted by their attacks on the truth and had to answer them.

4. He instructs us about the 'rule of faith', which became the basis of the **creeds** or statements of belief for orthodox Christianity

5. He brought a **theological mind** to questions of
- the nature of God - the same one who is Creator of the World and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who made the heaven and the earth and the creatures, including man
 - to the three persons in the Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
 - the nature of Christ as God and man,
 - the atonement, particularly the recapitulation theory, which stressed that Jesus is a true man, the head of a new humanity, a new Adam, who triumphed over the Devil and the power of sin and death and redeems us who are united to him. He is the obedient man who reverses the disobedience of man to God.
 - and the nature of man himself.
 - the resurrection of the whole man

These beliefs may not have been systematically laid out as they may be today but Irenaeus provided the church with a plumb line of truth when it was hard pressed by false teachers, who watered down or changed Jesus' teaching, which had been handed down by the apostles.

6. He used as his guideline **the written word**, passed down from the apostolic witness and reinforced its authority. He also defended the integrity and unity of the revelation of the Old Testament with the new revelation given in Christ Jesus. His recognition of particular books gave an understanding about what later became the **canon** of scripture, those accepted as authoritative by the church as the 'rule to be followed'.

7. Like many church leaders before him, he stressed the importance of **obeying the elders and bishops** within the church. They gave stability to the church. We saw this with the Apostolic fathers, Clement of Rome and Ignatius.

8. He is one who stands in a line of our forebears in the church. He looks back as he makes reference to the apostles, some earlier church fathers and others, such as Justin Martyr, while establishing a base for us today.

A brief overview of his work

He divides his work into 5 books:

Book I He carefully describes the texts of the various heretical teachers with occasional brief remarks to show their absurdity and to confirm the truth of Christianity. In this Book he devotes much of his time to Valentinus and his disciple Ptolemaeus.

Book II He gives a thorough attack on the particular heresies he exposed, arguing against them on the grounds of reason.

Book III Irenaeus focuses his argument against the Gnostics on the authority of written words of the apostles, which were passed down to the bishops / leaders who succeeded them.

Book IV He shows that Jesus Christ confirmed these words, witnessed in the Old Testament as well as the revelation of Christ recorded by the apostles. His argument is that the message of the

OT and his 'scriptures', derived from the Apostles, is the same. He is partly aiming his argument at the Marconites, who denied the authority of the Old Testament in Christian belief.

Book V He concentrates on vindicating the resurrection and Last things against Gnostic attacks.

A BRIEF LOOK AT "AGAINST HERESIES"

BOOK 1

Ch 10 is worth reading in this book

His aim is to expose to the light the hidden mysteries of the Gnostics for

Certain men have set truth aside and bring in lying words and vain genealogies...and by means of their craftily constructed plausibilities draw away the mind of the inexperienced and take them captive I have felt constrained to compose a treatise in order to expose and counteract their machinations. These men falsify the oracles of God and...overthrow the faith of many by drawing them away under the pretence of superior knowledge from Him who founded and adorned the universe as if they had something more excellent and sublime to reveal than that God who created the heaven and the earth and all things that are therein" intro 1

"Error is never set forth in its naked deformity lest being thus exposed it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in as attractive dress so as, by its outward form to make it appear to the inexperienced (ridiculous as the expression may seem) more than truth itself.Lest therefore, through my neglect, some should be carried off, even as sheep are by wolves while they perceive not the character of these men because they are outwardly covered with sheep's clothing and because their language resembles ours while their sentiments are very different, - I have deemed it my duty to unfold to you these mysteries To exhort them to avoid such an abyss of madness and of blasphemy against Christ " Intro .2

After this stated aim in Book I, Irenaeus proceeds to give an overview of the teachings of some of the Gnostic teachers: "merely to describe such doctrines is to refute them."

In chapters 1-9 he deals with **Valentinus** [in Rome around 135 to 165].

Valentinus taught

- there is one God above all, Bythos, who is invisible and incomprehensible and perfect. This being is remote and has no part in creation.

- He gave rise to a series of emanations, spiritual beings, called 'aeons', making up the 'pleroma' or the fullness of the realm of the spirit. Valentinus had 30 aeons, which were made up of male and female pairs. They were separated from the material world, which was considered to be evil.

- This spiritual sphere was not known except to the special spiritual ones, because all are not capable of receiving it. They were those with special knowledge "gnosis".

- Outside of this spiritual realm was the Demiurge. He was lower in the order of beings for he was an inferior and imperfect being, for he was not derived from the high, good God. The Demiurge was the creator of all animal and material substances 1.V.2. There are 3 kinds of existence – matter, animal and spiritual. The Demiurge was incapable of recognising any spiritual element and so thought that He was God alone.

- The demiurge made man, who has an animal soul from the Demiurge. Man's body is from the earth, his fleshy part is from matter.

- Some men also are spiritual but these are not from the demiurge. They have a spiritual

spark which is trapped in a physical body, waiting to be released .1v6.

- Ordinary men are animal and therefore must of necessity perish for they do not have perfect knowledge, which the spiritual have by nature and therefore will be saved because they are spiritual by nature and cannot be corrupted. In one sense, then it does not matter what the spiritual ones do, even doing things that are forbidden, whereas the animal man will need to be established by his good works 1.VI 1&2.

- the perfect God [Bythus] took pity on men and sent the Christ who was not corrupted by the material and evil world. He was sent to save the spiritual men by releasing the divine spiritual element that had become imprisoned in the flesh and to lead it back to its true home, in the heavens above.

- To overcome the difficulty of having a spiritual Christ, living in a corruptible body, Valentinus presented the idea that either Jesus Christ was not real as man [he only appeared to be so] or that the Christ descended on Jesus at his baptism in the form of the dove and then left him at his crucifixion. The Christ and Jesus were separate beings.

- The God of the OT could not be the high God as the OT records that he created the visible world, which was material and evil, so he is aligned to the imperfect demiurge. [This was seen in the teaching of Marcion too.]

- As to the destinies of the 3 types of men [1.VI.5]:
 - the material goes into corruption;
 - the animal man has 2 different destinies depending on his choice and good works
- if it is for the better, he will find repose in an intermediate state and if for the worse he will pass into destruction;
- the spiritual will be disciplined and nourished here and will attain perfection

- Jesus passed on his secret teachings to an in-group of disciples, who were truly spiritual and had a high level of intuitive and true knowledge of God. Ordinary people could attain salvation by good works and faith but the mass, the material ones, did not have any hope of salvation.

Irenaeus was angry at how the Valentinians misused the prophets and scriptures and adapted them for their own 'baseless fictions' 1.VIII and distorted the truth about Jesus.

Such then is their system which neither the prophets announced, nor the Lord taught nor the apostles delivered but of which they boast beyond all others that they have perfect knowledge. They gather their views from other sources than the scriptures and .. strive to weave ropes of sand" 1.8.1

** Bk1.10 .1 Therefore Irenaeus declares the unity of faith of the church in his statement of faith – sometimes described as the 'rule of faith', which the church taught and handed down and which formed the basis of later formalised creeds. He declared that although the church may be scattered throughout the world and 'had different languages yet the import of the tradition is one and the same'. No-one whether a great scholar, king or even one who is less intelligent, should change the subject-matter. He used the expression of 'Catholic Church,' a unified universal church. [as distinct from the title 'Roman Catholic' church used today by one of the denominations.]

"The church throughout the world has received from the apostles this faith. She is unified in her beliefs and teaching –

She believes in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them;

and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation;

*and in the Holy Spirit who proclaimed through the prophets
the dispensations of God
and the advents,
and the birth from the virgin,
and the passion and the resurrection from the dead
and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord
and His future manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father 'to gather all things in one'
and raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord and
God and Saviour and King, according to the will of the invisible Father every knee shall bow of things in
heaven and things on the earth
and that every tongue should confess to him;
and that He should execute just judgment towards all;
that He may send 'spiritual wickedness and the angels who transgressed and became apos-
tates, together with the ungodly and unrighteous and wicked and profane among men into everlasting
fire;*

*but may in the exercise of His grace, confer immortality on the righteous and holy and those
who have kept His commandments and have persevered in His love, some from the beginning of their
Christian course and others from the date of their repentance and may surround them with everlasting
glory." Bk1.10 .1*

In this declaration of faith he emphasizes truths, which are repeated throughout his work-

- the three persons in the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- The same God, the Father, was Maker of Heaven and earth
- and that Jesus was a man, incarnate, made flesh, born of a virgin; died and resurrected
- the Holy Spirit's work of proclaiming the truths of Jesus which were proclaimed by the OT prophets
- of Jesus' future glory and
- future judgment
- the rewards for those who obey, as compared to those who have secret knowledge

It also marked an appeal to universal Christian belief throughout the Christian world rather than local independence.

[Such an outline of basic Christian belief was also contained in the baptismal liturgy in **The Apostolic Tradition** ascribed to **Hippolytus**, 170-235, which had a marked similarity to the later Apostles' creed. Its threefold questioning of the person to be baptised was:

Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?

Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Virgin Mary by the operation of the Holy Spirit, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, died and was buried, rose again the third day, alive from among the dead, ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father, from whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead?

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, and in the holy Church, and in the resurrection of the flesh?]

In Against Heresies, Book I, Irenaeus continued to examine other heretics – some of whom practised magic alongside their false teachings

Marcus [Bk1.13 to 21] he practised "magic arts". – To Irenaeus, Marcus was more in line with the Anti-Christ for he drew people to himself by a show of power, claiming to possess "the greatest

knowledge and perfection power from the invisible and ineffable regions above". Irenaeus thought he had a demon that enabled him to prophesy and women were particularly vulnerable to him, even being encouraged to prophesy themselves and then be seduced by him. Marcus claimed that he received special revelation from the Father, given in a series of letters and numbers, which were connected with the origin of all things. Marcus taught that Jesus Himself announced another Father, who was unknown before Christ's coming and was different from the Creator and maker of the world. Redemption for them took various forms, some based on different baptismal rites or just simply of having acquired knowledge .

[In Book 2. Ch's 24 -25 Irenaeus points out the '*untenable and perverse nature*' of their *fictional man made system* of numbers and letters.]

The next Gnostic he considers is **Simon Magus** 1.21

Both Irenaeus and Justin Martyr refer to Simon Magus, the magician believed to be the same man that was rebuked by Peter in Acts 8, when they visited Samaria. Simon had practised magic there, by which he had astonished the people, who thought he had great power from God. When Peter and John had laid hands on new believers to receive the Holy Spirit, Simon had offered them money to purchase the same power for himself, only to be strongly refused. According to Irenaeus, after the rebuke from the Apostles, '*he set himself to contend with the apostles and applied himself with even greater zeal to study the whole magic art so that he might bewilder and overpower multitudes of men.*' Simon so impressed the Emperor Claudius that he built a statue to him. Many thought he was a god and he taught that he himself appeared as the Son and the father and the Holy Spirit in different contexts, '*conferring salvation on men by making himself known to them.*' His disciple was Menander, also a magician.

[In Book 2. 32. 3&4 Irenaeus contrasts the works of Simon Magus with Christians. In doing so, he gives an insight into the gifts and works done through prayer in the name of Jesus within the church at that time, such as healings, raising people from the dead. He emphasises it is not done for money as the magician's works were.

In Book 1. 22.1 Irenaeus asserted

The rule of truth, which we hold is that there is one God Almighty, who made all things by His Word, and fashioned and formed out of that which had no existence all things which exist....whether visible or invisible objects of sense or of intelligence , temporal ..or eternal things, He did not make by angels or by any power separate from Himself. For God needs none of these things but is He who by His word and Spirit makes, and disposes and governs all things and commands all into existence,- he who formed the world , He who fashioned man- He who is the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, above whom there is no other God nor initial principle, nor power nor pleroma – He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Bk 1. 24, Irenaeus writes that **Saturninus** laid down that '*the Saviour was without birth, without body and without figure but was by supposition visible*'. Many of his followers abstained from animal food and from marriage and generation.

Basilides, taught in Alexandria about 130 that the world was made through angels and that there were over 365 levels and therefore steps to take to reach heaven. He refers to Christ, who was sent by the perfect father to deliver those who believed in him. To Basilides, Christ appeared as a man to the nations and did miracles but he did not suffer death. Instead Simon of Cyrene, who

carried the cross, was crucified in his place. Jesus transfigured himself and ascended to the father [the good god] who sent him and was invisible to all.

Carpocrates (in ch 25) taught that Jesus was a son of Joseph and was just like any other man but he was so pure that the Father's power descended on him so that he was able to escape the powers of the creator of this world and ascend. His followers practised magic and lived licentious lives saying they needed to experience all things in life.

He also said that Jesus taught his disciples mysteries privately and they had permission to hand these things down to others who should be worthy and believing.

[In Book 2. 32. 1&2 Irenaeus attacks such reasoning about experience. and in Bk 3.2 the idea that the disciples were given special secret knowledge.]

Cerinthus, in Ch 26, also thought that Jesus was not born of a virgin but rather as an ordinary man on whom the Christ descended at his baptism and departed from Jesus, who then suffered and rose again. The Christ was incapable of suffering or feeling pain as he was a spiritual being.

Irenaeus tells the story, passed onto him by Polycarp that related to the Apostle John who was a contemporary of Cerinthus. On seeing Cerinthus in the local bathhouse, John had cried out "Let us flee, lest the building fall down; for Cerinthus the enemy of truth is inside"

Irenaeus also outlined teachings of the Ebionites; Nicolaitans 26; Marcion 27; and others 28-31

BOOK II

Chapters 26-28 & 30 are worth reading

Irenaeus attacks the reasoning and logic of the thinking of the various Gnostic teachers he has written about in his first book.

He deals more specifically with *"God the Creator, who of his own freewill created all things since He is the only God, the only Lord, the only Creator, the only Father, alone containing all things and Himself commanding all things into existence"* II. 1.

Irenaeus' understanding is that those who know God, know truly.

He refutes the teaching of the Gnostics that some other eons or angels or demiurge, who are thought to be separate from God, unknown to Him and ignorant of Him, created the world. Some Gnostic teachers separated the idea in God's mind of a world from the actual making of the world, which is the fruit of defect, matter being evil. This would mean that God is ignorant or powerless and that there is another god above the God who created the world. Because the Gnostics separated God from creation, Irenaeus is at pains to show that God is the Creator; there is no-one or nothing between his idea of created world and the actual creation and that He is in control of the world.

"God's own Word is both suitable and sufficient for the formation of all things"

Irenaeus quotes John, Moses and Paul

In Bk2, chapters 26-28 are interesting. Irenaeus discusses the pursuit of **knowledge saying it is better to believe in God and continue in His love than to be puffed up, thinking we know more than God himself, who made us. The Gnostics prided themselves on having secret knowledge. But Irenaeus says some things are mysteries only known by God the Father and cannot be understood in this present life. So those questions must submissively be left in the hands of God

and he warns that if we cannot find the answers in Scripture we should not, therefore, seek them in other gods. He cites as mysteries such examples as the begetting of Jesus, the time of judgment, the actual substance of matter and why when all creatures are made by God, certain ones have sinned and rebelled against God.

**In chapter 30, Irenaeus challenges the Gnostics to show their works and he gives a comprehensive and glorious summary of the works of the only God, the Creator and Father 30.9. He is the creator of all things in heaven and earth, including man; He is good; the God of the OT; the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ; revealed through His Word, who is His Son. *Those only know Him to whom the Son has revealed Him... the Son eternally co-existing with the Father from .. the beginning*

BOOK III

Book III has a different tone to the first two books; for Irenaeus uses Scripture as his basis of proof against the Gnostic beliefs.

He wants men to *'faithfully and strenuously resist them in defence of the only true and life-giving faith which the church has received from the apostles and imparted to her sons. For the Lord of all gave to His apostles the power of the Gospel, through whom also we have known the truth, that is the doctrine of the Son of God, to whom also did the Lord declare: 'He that hears you, hears Me and he that despises you despises Me and Him who sent me''* Luke 10.16 - bk 3.preface.

He appeals to **the authority of the apostolic scriptures** and lists the books that the apostles, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, wrote. They declare there is one God, the creator of heaven and earth, announced by the law and the prophets and one Christ, the Son of God. Here we see the early church's recognition of the authority of certain books for building faith of believers.

The heretics did not follow apostolic scripture nor tradition, based on apostolic authority.

He shows that the **apostles knew nothing of secret knowledge, as heretics claimed**.. They wrote nothin of it and would surely have passed it onto the bishops that followed them; but the apostles did not pass on any secrets to the bishops. He names the various bishops in the church who have succeeded each other since the apostles. Since then, some in the church have drawn the understanding of apostolic succession from this. The Roman Catholic church claims an 'apostolic authority' based on tracing an unbroken line back to Peter, passed down by the laying of hands on its line of leaders, the Popes. This is succession based more on a physical passing on rather than a spiritually based one.

To Irenaeus, truth is only found within the authority of the **Catholic Church. It is the sole repository of apostolic teaching.**

"It is within the power of all therefore in every church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles, manifested throughout the whole world; and we are in a position to reckon up those who were instituted bishops by the apostles and to demonstrate the succession of these men to our own times; those who neither taught nor knew anything like what these heretics rave about. For if the apostles had known hidden mysteries, which they were in the habit of imparting to 'the perfect' apart and privately from the rest, they would have delivered them especially to those to whom they were also committing the Churches themselves. For they were desirous that these men should be very perfect and blameless in all things, whom they were leaving behind as their successors
1.3.1

The apostles, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament all acknowledge the one true God and Lord of all, the Maker of heaven and earth [3.5-8,] as do the gospel writers, Matthew,

Mark and Luke and John [3.9-12.]

In 3.11.8, Irenaeus asserts **the importance of having 4 Gospels**, for they witness to the different aspects of the Son of God, Jesus and give a full picture of him, the Word of God, who became incarnate and lived in the flesh. He was a real man.

"John relates His original effectual and glorious generation from the Father - the gospel is full of confidence.... Luke takes up his priestly character; ... Matthew relates his generation as a man. This is a gospel of his humanity; the character of a humble and meek man; ... Mark commences with a prophetic spirit coming down from on high to men" 3.11.8

The heretics just picked bits that suited them and did not consider the whole of scripture.

Irenaeus shows that the **OT is important to God's revelation and he links OT books with the writings of the apostles as the Scriptures** – indicating that by this time in church history the writings of the apostles were highly regarded and, at the same time, validating the OT, which the Marcionites had denigrated.

"Peter and John preached this plain message of glad tidings that the promise which God had made to the fathers had been fulfilled by Jesus; not proclaiming another god but the Son of God who was made man and suffered; thus leading Israel into knowledge and through Jesus preaching the resurrection of the dead and showing that whatever the prophets had proclaimed as to the suffering of Christ these God had fulfilled" 3.12.3

He argues against other Gnostic ideas -

- Paul was not the only apostle, who knew truth [as the Marcionites claimed] 3.13 -15
- To speak of Jesus and the Christ was to understand the one and same person. He was the only begotten Son of God, perfect man and perfect God. The Christ did not descend on Jesus. It was the Holy Spirit that descended on him at his baptism 3.16-18; and the Christ did not leave him to suffer and die – He was the one and the same Jesus Christ
- Those that say that Jesus only seemed to be a man (docetists) and did not die are views of those people, who are still held by sin and the old condemnation.

"He passed through every stage of life, restoring to all, communion with God..... He was also truly a man, not just in the appearance of one. The Word who had existed in the beginning with God by whom all things were made and who was always present with mankind, was in these last days .. united to His workmanship in as much as he became a man liable to suffering...

"when He became incarnate and was made man, he commenced afresh the long line of human beings and furnished us in a brief, comprehensive manner, with salvation; so that what we had lost in Adam – namely to be according to the image and likeness of God - that we might recover in Christ Jesus... For it was not possible that the man who had once for all been conquered and who had been destroyed through disobedience, could reform himself and obtain the prize of victory; and it is also impossible that he could attain to salvation who had fallen under the power of sin – the Son effected both these things, being the Word of God, descending from the Father, becoming incarnate, stooping low, even to death and consummating the arranged plan of our salvation 3.18.1&2

he caused man (human nature) to cleave to and become one with God. For unless man had overcome the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been legitimately vanquished. And again unless it had been God who had freely given salvation, we could never have possessed it securely. And unless man had been joined to God, he could never have become a partaker of incorruptibility. For it was incumbent upon the Mediator between God and men, by His relationship to both, to bring friendship and concord and present man to God, while He revealed God to man. For in what way could we be par-

takers of the adoption of sons unless we had received from Him through the Son that fellowship which refers to Himself unless His Word having been made flesh had entered into communion with us? Those who assert He only appeared as if flesh and was neither born in the flesh nor truly made man are as yet under the old condemnation and under bondage to sin. What He did appear that He also was: God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify[give life to]man and therefore His works are true" 3.18.7

This formed the basis of the theological doctrine of the '**recapitulation theory of the Atonement**'. Recapitulation means 'to place under a new head'. Jesus is a true man, the head of a new humanity, a new Adam, who triumphed over the Devil and the power of sin and death and redeems us who are united to him. He is the obedient man who reverses the disobedience of man to God. Irenaeus also deals with this in Book 5. Irenaeus' emphasis is a response to the Gnostic theories that Jesus only seemed to be a man. His manhood is essential to our salvation for what he did not become he could not redeem.

In 3.19, he stresses the importance of the two natures of Jesus – of God and of man. *Jesus was very God, begotten of the Father most High and very man, born of the virgin Mary* 3.19 . Both are important for the salvation of man.

In 3.19 – 22, Irenaeus stresses 'the Jesus' and 'the Christ' are one and the same person and that he was born of the virgin Mary and that he suffered. He was not a 'mere' man but begotten of the Father. The first Adam will also partake of the salvation in Christ Jesus.

In 3. 24 -25, Irenaeus summarises the position of the heretics, while speaking of the nature of God as one of justice and mercy. He closes with a prayer for the heretics that they may be converted to the church of God.

BOOK IV

Irenaeus continues against the heretics

He objects strongly to the way the Gnostics separate God from the Maker of the world and all things; and that they also divide Jesus from the Christ, from the Saviour, from the Word and from the only begotten of the Father.

He asserts there is **one God and Father**, who is eternal. This is testified to by the apostles, by Moses, the prophets and by Christ.

He reiterates that Knowledge of God is given through the Word, who is the Son. This is true whether to men in the Old Testament times or when Christ came. There is no other way to know the Father but through the Word, the Son. *No-one can know the Father except through the Son that is unless by the Son revealing him neither can he have knowledge of the son unless through the good pleasure of the Father* 4.6.3. Those who think otherwise are ignorant.

Irenaeus spends much of the book arguing for **the continuity of the Old Testament revelation with the new covenant**. He shows that there is a continuity of revelation and authorship between the old covenant of the Old Testament and the new. Abraham and the prophets spoke in unity about God the Creator and about the coming of the Son of God, for there is one author, God. 4. 7-13 This continuity even applies to the Christ and the Law, which Christ fulfils 13-19

4.20 In regard to his greatness, God may be impossible to measure but as to His love we can know that He made the earth and men. He did not need angels or any other agency to do what He decided to do in making men. He made them by the agency of the Son and Holy Spirit. His works do reveal Him and the Word that makes him known to us.

Christ saves those who fear and love Him through all time. Abraham is an example.

The Gentiles did not have the ancient scriptures to assist them in understanding about God's creation and the coming of His word, the Son, so it was harder to preach to them.

4. 26 Irenaeus points out that not all grasp the predictions in the Scriptures as pertaining to Christ but those who do, the Christians, understand that Christ is like a treasure hidden in a field and is glorious. So he encourages the Christians to '**obey the presbyters, who are in the Church – those who possess the succession from the apostles. who have received the certain gift of truth**'. He warns against those who have 'depart from the primitive succession' either as heretics or schismatics or those who seek money. Similar to others we have read, Irenaeus has a very high view of the place and respect that should be shown to elders as well as the required conduct of the presbyters/leaders in the church.

27- He speaks of the character of God - **His justice and His mercy**, seen in the old times when men were held responsible for their deeds and were punished. God still judges the senseless. So he warns them to be circumspect about the way they live.

In the middle of this 29 - 33, he gives several arguments against specific points of the **Marcionites**, while maintaining that the God of the Old Testament is consistent with the new and will judge those who teach heresy.

From 37- 41, Irenaeus continues to stress that **man has free will and faith to choose** to follow God's commandments or not, so it is not true as the Gnostics claim, that some are bad by nature while others are good. God will judge man - the reprobate will be punished, the elect rewarded.

BOOK V

In this book, Irenaeus asserts **Christ's coming as a man who revealed the things of God** to us. He stresses that he was an actual man, taking flesh in the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, not merely an appearance of a man as the Valentinians held, nor just a man, but the Son of God, the union of God and man. Only Christ Jesus teaches of God and redeems and saves man and the Holy Spirit renovates man.

For Irenaeus, it is important to grasp that Jesus was in the "flesh". *He did not truly redeem us by His blood if He did not really become man, restoring to His own handiwork what was said of it in the beginning that man was made after the image of God....[God was in Christ] taking possession of His own"*2.1

He has a number of arguments for the **resurrection of the whole man** -

a) God first made man from the dust of the earth by His great power, which was an incredible work to do. So He is able to remake man and grant him life. In man's weakness is God's power seen.

b) the raising up of ancients such as Enoch and Elijah show that God can raise up bodies to eternal life. 5.5

c) Salvation is for the whole man - body, soul and spirit. Not just parts such as soul or spirit. Evidenced in Christ rising bodily from the dead. 6-7

d) He answers the objection that "flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God" pointing out that the fleshy man is the one who does not have the Holy Spirit in him, he is the one who will not inherit. The fleshy / carnal man lives according to his own lusts. Irenaeus compares the works of the flesh and fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5.

The flesh therefore when destitute of the Spirit of God is dead, not having life and cannot pos-

sess the kingdom of God.9.3 The Holy Spirit is the Christians' inheritance and he gives life to those who receive Him and lay aside the lusts of the flesh 12. 2,3.

e) Jesus healed bodies and raised people from the dead e.g Lazarus so his words about resurrection may also be believed for Jesus declared "the hour shall come when all the dead in the tombs shall hear the voice of the Son of Man and shall come forth'. 12. -13

f) Paul also writes of the mortal putting on immortality and the corruptible, incorruption, speaking in 1 Corinthians of the body of flesh rising as Christ rose. 13.4

g) OT prophets, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah testify to the resurrection

h) Christ would not have taken flesh, which is the same as ours, if it could not be saved nor would we be reconciled to him if he did not take the same flesh as ours and redeem it.16.1

i) he gives a compelling argument at the end of the book in 31.

As the Lord died, was three days "in the place of the dead" and rose, so will his disciples "it is manifest that the soul of His disciples, upon whose account the Lord underwent these things (death and resurrection), shall go away into the invisible place allotted to them by God and there remain until the resurrection awaiting that event; then receiving their bodies and rising in entirety, that is bodily, just as the Lord arose, they shall thus come into the presence of God 31.2

There is another theme which runs through this book, which relates to **Christ's work of "recapitulation"**. He touched on this in Book3 .18. As we have seen before, recapitulation means 'to place under a new head'. Jesus is a true man, the head of a new humanity, a new Adam, who triumphed over the Devil and the power of sin and death and redeems us who are united to him. He is the obedient man who reverses the disobedience of man to God.

He makes these points:

- "The Lord took flesh and blood recapitulating in himself not a certain other but the original handiwork of the Father, seeking out the thing that had perished.

ye have been reconciled because righteous flesh has reconciled that flesh which was being kept under bondage in sin and brought into friendship with God." 14.2.

- God made man after his own image. Christ, the Word of God was made man. In doing so. he showed what the image truly was and because of man resembled Christ, man might become precious to the Father. Christ was obedient to the Father, unlike the first Adam.

- Jesus obedience unto 'death' on a tree /cross takes away the effect of man's disobedience and we, who are believers in Christ, are therefore reconciled and obedient. 16 and our sins are forgiven as Jesus declared.17 This was by the Creator's and the Word's design and power.

- Jesus birth as a man by the virgin Mary balanced the work of Eve, "virginal disobedience having been balanced by virginal obedience" 19.1

- He uses the analogy of Eve's seeking of knowledge in the garden of Eden to those who seek false knowledge and so must be avoided. He proclaims that the Lord has introduced those who obey his call into the Paradise, (the church is the garden) for he sums up all things in Himself. The Lord 'recapitulates' these things by uniting man to the Spirit, causing the Spirit to dwell in man; he is Himself the head of the Spirit and gives the Spirit to the head of man. 20.2

- Another part of his work of recapitulation of summing up all things is to wage war on our enemy and crush him who had at the beginning led us away captives in Adam. 21.1 He resisted the devil at his temptation by using the word of God which Adam and Eve failed to do when the snake /satan tempted them to eat from the tree saying they would not die for the devil is a liar. He caused them to die. but By summing up in Himself the whole human race from the beginning to the end He also summed up its death ...He suffered death in obedience to the Father upon that day on which Adam died while he disobeyed God and ate.

The Lord therefore recapitulating in Himself .. underwent His sufferings .. thus granting a sec-

and creation by means of His passion. 23.2

- As Jesus died and rose from the dead so will his disciples 31

Irenaeus goes onto look at the further lie that the devil told in saying that "all things are delivered unto me and to whom so ever I give them" Earthly power has been appointed by God, the Antichrist, predicted by Daniel, wishes to be king but his power comes from the devil.

In the last days -

The Father will judge and separate the believers in the Son from the unbelievers. All people have a choice and a 'free understanding' To the believer God grants communion with Him of light and life. To those who choose to depart from God separation will bring death and darkness and the loss of "all benefits" 27-30

The righteous will rise first and will receive a reward. Then there will be judgment after. this is testified to in the OT prophets and *a new heaven and earth in which a new man shall remain continually holding fresh converse with God* 36.1