

Saint Irenaeus

- Feastday: June 28
- Patron Saint of: apologists and catechists
- Birth: c. 140
- Death: c. 202
- Doctor of the Church



"The business of the Christian is nothing else but to be ever preparing for death"

"The glory of God is man fully alive."



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Saint Irenaeus was born in Smyrna, probably around the year 140. As a young man, he heard the preaching of the early bishop (and eventual martyr) Saint Polycarp, who had been personally instructed by the Apostle John. Irenaeus eventually became a priest during a difficult period in the late 170s. During this time of state persecution and doctrinal controversy, Irenaeus became the second bishop of Lyons, France. In the course of his work as a pastor and evangelist, he came up against various heretical doctrines and movements, many of which sounded a common note in their insistence that the material world was evil and not part of God's original plan. The proponents of these ideas often claimed to be more deeply "enlightened" or "spiritual" than ordinary Christians, on account of their supposed secret knowledge (or "gnosis").

Irenaeus recognized this movement, in all its forms, as a direct attack on the Catholic faith. The Gnostics' disdain for the physical world was irreconcilable with the Biblical doctrine of creation, which stated that God had made all things according to his good purpose. Gnostics, by contrast, saw the material world as the work of an evil power, crediting God only with the creation of a higher and purely spiritual realm.

In keeping with its false view of creation, Gnosticism also distorted the concept of redemption. The Church knew Christ as the savior of the world: redeeming believers' bodies and souls, and investing creation with a sacramental holiness. Gnostics, meanwhile, saw Jesus merely as saving souls from the physical world in which they were trapped. Irenaeus refuted the Gnostic errors in his lengthy book "Against Heresies," which is still studied today for its historical value and theological insights. Several of his other works are now lost, but a collection of fragments from them has been compiled and translated. St. Irenaeus' earthly life ended around 202 – possibly through martyrdom, though this is not definitively known.