Irenaeus

First great theologian of the Church

Born: c 130 AD
Died: c 202 AD
Feast Day:
28 June

DERRY DIOCESAN CATECHETICAL CENTRE

Irenaeus was a Greek bishop noted for his role in guiding and expanding Christian communities in the southern regions of present-day France and, more widely, for the development of Christian theology by combating heresy and defining orthodoxy. He emerges as the first great Church theologian who created systematic theology.

Irenaeus was from Polycarp's hometown of Smyrna in Asia Minor, now İzmir, Turkey. He was born during the first half of the 2nd century. He was brought up in a Christian family. He lived close to the time of the apostles and, according to tradition, his theology was shaped by the preaching of Polycarp, who was himself a disciple of the Apostle John.

He was chosen as bishop and his best- known work is *Against Heresies*. In this work Irenaeus argued against the doctrines of the gnostic* sects who claimed secret wisdom. He did this in three ways through the scriptures; the tradition handed down from the apostles; and the teaching of the apostles' successors. Irenaeus regarded all 4 gospels as being essential.

Irenaeus is a crucially important source for establishing the existence of belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist among the earliest Christians. "*The Eucharist*," Irenaeus writes, consists of "*two realities, earthly and heavenly*." He describes Christ as the "*perfect bread*". (Against Heresies Book 4: 18:5)

There is a tradition of Irenaeus being martyred under Septimus Severus.

*Gnosticism is a heresy which came in many shapes and sizes and denied many Christian doctrines, from the goodness of creation to the full divinity of Christ. It was the first heresy the Christian world confronted.